

# I Have a Dream\*—Racial Discrimination in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

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**Abstract**—Racism is a major issue that has affected the United States of America since its infancy. Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) deals with the impact of racism on the life of the Younger, a poor black family living in the South Side of Chicago. As the play demonstrates, the Younger suffer from racial discrimination in housing industry, living space, and employment. Their attempt to challenge the racist policies takes the form of buying a house in a predominantly white neighborhood. The importance of the play is twofold. Firstly, it was the first play by an Afro-American woman to be presented on Broadway; and secondly, it foreshadows many of issues which the American society experience in the 1960s.

**Index Terms**—racism, racial discrimination, Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, housing industry

According to Nicole King (2002), "Race is a word and a category that can simultaneously denote a "person's color, caste, culture, and capacities, oftentimes depending on what historical, political, or social forces are at work" (p.214).

From the sociological point of view, the concept of "Race" describes a "group of people with the same physical characteristics and with notable cultural and social similarities" (Vorster, 2002, p.296). In view of this description, racism can be defined as "an attitude of prejudice, bias and intolerance between various racial groups" (Ibid.). In the same vein, The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination defines Racism as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (qtd. in Fugazza, 2003, p. 507)

To fully understand the contemporary use of the concept of racism, M. N. Marger believes that rather than an attitude, racism should be seen as a "belief system, or ideology," structured around three basic ideas. They are 1-Humans are divided naturally into different physical types; 2-Such physical traits as they display are intrinsically related to their culture, personality, and intelligence; and 3-On the basis of their genetic inheritance, some groups are innately superior to others (In Vorster, 2002, p.296). Thus racism is the belief that humans are subdivided into hereditary groups that are innately different in their social behavior and capacities, which, therefore, can be ranked as "superior" or "inferior." These judgments, Vorster (2002) points out, are subsequently used to "legitimize the unequal distribution of the society's resources, specifically, various forms of wealth, prestige, and power"(p.297).

As an ideology or belief system, racism seeks to provide a rationale to justify racial discrimination, and, as history has shown, may even seek to divide and rule society and even the world along racial lines (Racism and the Church, 1994, p.16). More important than this, racist thought seek to justify "self-aggrandizement, cruelty, paternalism in favor of the 'superior' group and to inflict low self-image, subservience, deprivation, loss of equal privileges, and even slavery upon 'inferior' group" (Ibid., p.11).

In America and throughout the world, the idea of 'race' is inescapably knotted with visible markers such as hair and skin color. Color, in this case black, stands in metonymic relation to a vast complex of stories, images, mythologies, emotions, scientific discourses and genomic sequences of what we know and define as race (Erler, 2010, p. 1).

In relation to racism, White domination in America is often rationalized by the belief that the inferiority or superiority of a group's abilities, values, and culture, are linked to physical characteristics such as skin color (Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p.4). Derald Wing Sue (2003) points out the danger of such viewpoint. He asserts that judging the blacks as different, and therefore, inferior because of their color encourages the white-dominated society to systematically subordinate the black people to their own values and perspectives. Accordingly, racism is "a systemic exercise of real power to deny minorities equal access and opportunity, while maintaining the benefits and advantages of white American"(p.30). The subordination of persons of color, i.e., Black, in the United States, Sue adds, occurs not just on an individual level but also in the activities and procedures of the American institutions, corporations, and social systems (Ibid., p.31).

Types of racism vary according to the domain in which racism is practiced. However, the most important type of racism is the institutional, which is defined as Any institutional policy, practice, or structure in governments, businesses,

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\* "I Have a Dream" is a seventeen minute public speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., in which he called for racial equality and an end to discrimination. King's delivery of the speech on August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, was a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement.

unions, schools, churches, courts, and law enforcement entities by which decisions are made as to unfairly subordinate persons of color while allowing other groups to profit from such actions. (Ibid., p.33)

Stokely Carmichael is credited for coining the phrase of institutional racism in the late sixties. He defined it as "the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin" (Racism, 2007, p.4). Accordingly, Racism is more than just a personal attitude; it is the institutionalized form of that attitude" (Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p.3). Examples of this type of racism include:

Housing patterns, segregated schools, discriminatory employment and promotion policies, racial profiling and inequalities in health care, segregated churches, and educational curricula that ignore or distort the history of minorities. (Sue, 2003, p.33)

As an American phenomenon, historians generally agree, the origins of racial prejudice based on biological considerations were closely tied to the practice of slavery and colonial expansion (Racism and the Church, 1994, p.17). Europeans promoted racism on the New Continent in the form of slavery shortly after embarking on their voyages of discovery. As they saw it, Van Den Berghe asserts, "slavery was a matter of economic expediency, if not necessity" (qtd. in Ibid.).

Gus Hall (1985) remarks that as a system, slavery covers up the real nature of class exploitation, an exploitation motivated solely by a drive for maximum profits for the richest corporate owners in the capitalist societies. In other words, it covers up the fact that the roots of racism are embedded in the system of capitalist exploitation and that the patron promoter of racism is the capitalist class (pp.3-4).

Targeted as being inferior, subhuman, and destined for servitude, black people were the main victims of slavery in America. In *Race Relations*, H. H. L. Kitano indicates that the experience of slavery left inedible mark in the collective consciousness of the black people (in Coleman, 2003, p. 46). Stanley R. Coleman (2003) sheds light on the economic and social implications of the slavery system. According to him, this system denied black men and women power and identity. It is also responsible for the emergence of the phenomenon of black matriarchy, as a result of subverting gender roles within the black family system (p.46). Doris Wilkinson and Ronald Taylor well summed up this dilemma. They point out that through...systemic denial of an opportunity to work for black men, white America thrust the black women in to the role of family provider. This pattern of female-headed families was reinforced by the marginal economic position of the black male. (qtd. in Ibid., p.47)

Therefore, slavery, it is claimed, is responsible to a significant extent for many of the contemporary problems that plague the black community, such as- poverty, crime, unemployment, family instability, female-headed families, lack of educational and occupational achievement, and low labor force participation (Starkey, 2003, p.2).

After the abolition of slavery in the mid-Nineteenth century, little has changed for the black people. The whites in power in the American South reacted to the growing political power of the newly emancipated Blacks by passing segregation, or "Jim Crow," laws. These laws severely restricted the interactions between blacks and whites, as well as limiting the private and public spaces allowed to Blacks. Andrea Moon (2004) points out that though the facilities by law were supposed to be "separate but equal," in reality, blacks were viewed and treated as "second-class citizens, were disenfranchised from the political process and were not afforded the same protection under the law as white citizens"(p.1). These laws lasted until the Civil Rights Movement challenged them in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, many blacks moved north to escape economic hardships and racism in the South. They were looking for an improved way of life: higher wages, adequate housing, better schools, and a greater share of justice, freedom and dignity. However, once in the North, most blacks were forced to reside in crowded houses and apartments, with the demand for housing often resulting in inflated rents. This results in the emergence of separate black cities within the major northern cities (Maitino and Peck, 1996, p.140).

These patterns of discrimination result in the emergence of several chronic problems such as the establishment of segregated districts in the new urban regions. As a system, "segregation is the dividing up of racial groups in daily life. This can occur in housing, entertainment, public transportation, schools, etc." (Moon, 2004, p. 1). The Black Belt districts in Chicago are a case in point here. These districts, Brandon Coles (2006) observes, consisted of "overprized, overcrowded, and poorly-maintained apartments and homes" (p.1). The emergence of these districts in the 1920s gives a new meaning to the term "ghetto." In the ghettos, crime rates were often high and public services were limited. Most blacks living in the ghetto had hopes of leaving to better suburban neighborhoods, but segregated housing policies kept them stuck in the ghetto (Ibid.).

In addition to charging black families high prices for low quality housing which limits blacks' opportunities to move to better neighborhoods, the National Association of Real Estate Boards in Chicago decides that it would be "unethical for its members to facilitate the sale of home in white neighborhoods to members of minority groups," in this case, black, assuming that such a sale would decrease property values to those who remained in the neighborhood (Domina, 1998, p.24). So, even if a homeowner is willing to sell to a minority family, he or she would be unable to complete the sale because of this segregationist policy. Neighborhoods became racially 'restrictive covenants,' which are "contractual agreements among property owners that prohibit the purchase, lease, or occupation of their premises by a particular group of people, usually, blacks" (A Raisin: The Ghetto, 2006, p.2). In this sense, the real Estate industry literally trapped the black family in the ghetto.

Another outcome of racial discrimination is the Redlining policy which is the "practice of arbitrarily denying or

limiting financial services to specific neighborhoods, generally because its residents are people of color or are poor" (Ibid., p.4) Like other forms of discrimination, redlining had pernicious and damaging effects. Without bank loans and insurance, redlined areas lacked the capital essential for investment and redevelopment. As a result, after Second World War, suburban areas received preference for residential investment at the expense of poor and minority neighborhoods in cities like Chicago. The relative lack of investment in new housing, rehabilitation, and home improvement contributed significantly to the deteriorating living conditions, a strong sense of exasperation and compounded Chicago's decline in relation to its suburbs (Ibid.).

The blacks staunchly believe that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto system. The 1968 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, a mostly white group of prominent Americans appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the ghetto riots of the 1960s, concluded: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white- separate and unequal" (qtd. in Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p.6). In fact, the first pages of the commission's final report minced no words about whites' responsibility for the condition of black Americans:

Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life.... White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it. White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II. (Ibid.)

Naturally, racially discriminated attitudes towards the blacks negatively affect their public image. Terry H. Anderson (1996) notes the popularity of racial slurs and "nigger jokes" throughout America. Whites might refer to the balcony as "nigger heaven" or Brazil nuts as "nigger toes"; they might respond to a generous act with "mighty white of you." Racism even followed the black man into the grave for when he died a benevolent white might pay a compliment by writing in the obituary column, "He was a black man, but he had a white heart" (pp.27-28).

Yet slurs, Anderson asserts, were minor compared with the problem of making a living, for being black was being poor (Ibid., p.29). Anderson supports his argument with a number of factual evidence that clearly show the prevalence of racial discrimination in the American institutions. In 1960 the department of Labor reported that the average black worker made less than 60 percent of his white counterparts. Moreover, blacks held the worst jobs; jobs which most whites would find demeaning. Fewer than 7 percent of them had professional or managerial positions, about a fourth of the figure for whites, while about half of black men were unskilled workers or laborers. In New York City, a third of black women were domestic servants. Those who became educated also found wage discrimination; in the South, black College graduates earned about half of white graduates, and in the north about two-thirds (Ibid.). Commenting on this, Michael Harrington wrote,

If all the discriminatory laws in the United States were immediately repealed, race would still remain as one of the most pressing moral and political problems in the nation. Negroes and other minorities are not simply the victims of a series of iniquitous statutes. The American economy, the American society, and the American unconscious are all racist. (qtd. in Ibid., p.29)

To sum up, "being black in America," in the words of Marian Wright Edelman, "is utterly exhausting- physically, mentally, and emotionally.... There is no respite or escape from your badge of color" (qtd. in Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p.3). Racial discrimination in America, in fact, must be understood as a daily living experience. It caused black people to hate themselves and their culture. They are torn apart between maintaining their racial and cultural identity or surrendering to the dictates of the white-dominated society.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) (henceforth *A Raisin*) is an attempt to examine the impact of racial discrimination on the life of an ordinary black family. It is also a testament of this family struggling to cope with racism and poverty in Chicago. The play centers on the coming of a life insurance check and the problems and complications that arise around and because of it. Each of the characters in the play attempts to achieve a meaningful life within a struggle against racial impediments, and an analysis of the character's responses to racism will reveal the nature of their heroic qualities.

As a black woman and artist born in 1930 and dying in 1965, Hansberry is clearly aware of the significance of racism in the United States of America and she includes racial bigotry as an important element in her play. The play, in fact, is a response to the urban segregation her family had fought for so long, and, the capitalist system from which segregation grew. It directly engages segregation struggles in Chicago as a "penultimate symbol of black oppression and resistance" (Gordon, 2008, p.126). In doing so, Hansberry brought local and individual struggles of blacks against segregation, ghettoization, and capitalist exploitation to the national stage (Ibid.).

The Youngers live in a segregated neighborhood in a city that remains one of the most segregated areas in the United States. Virtually every act they perform is affected by their race. When the play premiered in 1959, Blacks and Whites were still segregated, and they usually had no contact with each other apart from work. Lena, the matriarch head of the family as well as her daughter –in-law, Ruth were maids for white women and the latter's husband, Walter, was the chauffeur of a white man. Walter's description of his job as dull and monotonous and depressing reveals that his "job suppresses any sense of individuality or desire for initiative, that it positions him as utterly powerless" (Domina, 1998, p.21). As the play demonstrates, the status of "rich white" people depends in part on their ability to employ men and women like Walter, Ruth, and Mama as their servants (Ibid.). Moreover, because they have low paying jobs and also because absentee landlords often do not maintain their properties, the Youngers are limited to their poorly maintained

apartment.

The epigraph of the play consists of several lines from one of Langston Hughes's most famous poems, "Montage of a Dream Deferred." The play's title is taken from this epigraph. In the first part of the poem, Hughes questions the outcome of deferring one's dreams. He asks whether or not these postponed dreams will "dry up/ Like a raisin in the sun?" (Hansberry, 1960, p.101)(All subsequent quotations are from this edition). The tragic consequences when dreams are not realized are stated in the last stanza: May be it just sags/ Like a heavy load/ Or does it explode? On the thematic correspondence between the epigraph and the events of the play, Domina (1998) explains that "Although many writers choose to use epigraphs, not all of them are as thematically significant to the work as the one Hansberry has chosen"(p.1). Hansberry's epigraph asks a question that the play attempts to answer- and the answers vary from character to character. Especially after Walter Younger loses the insurance money, some characters seem dangerously close to losing hope, whereas others seem to smolder, waiting for a spark to ignite their barely repressed anger.

Each of the major characters has a dream, and these dreams urge the plot forward. Mama's dream to own home with a yard big enough for a garden is one that she has nurtured for years- and that has been deferred for years. She remembers moving into the apartment where the play takes place with her husband when they believed the residence would only be temporary. Yet she lived her entire married life there, and it is only through her husband's death that her dream has a chance of being realized because of the life insurance payment. However, it turns out that the house she chooses to buy is in a white-dominated neighborhood.

Unlike his mother, Walter wants to invest in a liquor store. Commenting on the nature of their dreams, Harry J. Elam and David Krasner (2001) observe that both characters seem to be pursuing the American dream of upward mobility—property and money—when, in fact, Hansberry is using their aspirations as metaphors for the dream of freedom and the right to be respected as not only a citizen but as a human being. (p.40)

A Raisin, in fact, is deeply rooted in the personal experience of Hansberry; an experience which turned on her racial identity. She experienced many of the situations she placed the Younger family in at first hand. When she eight years old, she and her family lived in a black neighborhood in Chicago South Side where segregation- the enforced separation of whites and blacks- was still legal and wide spread. Determined to battle racial discrimination in housing industry, Hansberry's father, Carl, moved his family into a predominantly white neighborhood at the opposition of its white residents. As Bigsby (2004) points out, it is clear that for Hansberry, the play rests if not on the fact of race, then on the meaning ascribed to it. In doing so, she created a play which accurately reflected the mood and strategy of the Civil Rights Movement for which the desegregation of housing, along with the desegregation of education, transportation, and all public services was a major objective. (pp.278-279)

In their new house, the Hansberry withstood daily assaults by racist whites who hurled bricks and bottles through their windows. Hansberry's memories of this painful experience which shaped her life and writings include "being spat at, cursed, and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school." She also remembers her desperate and courageous mother, patrolling the house all night with a loaded German luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while [Lorraine's] father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington Supreme Court. (qtd. in Gordon, 2008,p. 124)

The family was eventually evicted from their home by the Illinois Court, but Hansberry's father and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People took the case to the United States Supreme Court and won. This case became a landmark civil right ruling banning racially restrictive covenants in housing contracts.

The Supreme Court decree in the case of Hansberry vs. Lee, begins by insisting: "There is no right more elemental nor any liberty more fundamental in a democracy than freedom to move where and when you please." The decree connects mobility and housing to the rights and privileges of citizenship in a democracy (Gershun Avilez, 2008, p.135)

In locating the Younger family in Chicago's South Side, Hansberry, Gordon (2008) points out, directly engages "crises produced by ghetto economics, and dehumanizing living conditions... and explosive encounters along urban color lines" (p.124). The Younger live in a place that had to "accommodate the living of too many people for too many years"(p.105;1,1). Husband and wife share one room, while mother and daughter share another. The son sleeps in the living room, which also serves as a dining room and is also part of the tiny kitchen. It is evident that this family is not well off. Many tensions arise throughout the course of the play and it becomes clear that the conflicts in the family relationships are rooted in the economical problems that the Younger family faces.

At the beginning of *A Raisin*, Lorraine states that "the action of the play is set in Chicago's South Side, sometimes between World War II and the present"(p.104;1,1). Stephen Grant Meyer identifies this period, from World War II to roughly 1960, as America's most intensely violent period of upheaval over race and housing. Chicago, Meyer notes, was the most violent city of all. It is a city rocked with bombs in and around black homes and businesses (in Gordon, 2008, p.132).

Several factors contribute to this. By mid-century, Chicago's South Side had become one of the most densely crowded ghettos in America, where two generations of Hansberry's had waged, with lawyers and guns, local and national campaigns against racial segregation, terrorism, and injustice. Like the Youngers, 64% of black women and 34% of black men in Chicago worked as domestic servants. Like Mama Younger, some 80% of Chicago's interwar residents had migrated to Chicago from the South, seeking employment, education, the vote, and freedom from anti-black violence (Ibid., p.130). But black unemployment in the city doubled that of whites; the majority of black

taxpayers' children, like Hansberry herself, attended overcrowded, under-funded schools on half-day shifts (Ibid., 124). In one of her last public appearances, Hansberry spoke of segregation's debilitating effects in personal and broad sociopolitical terms:

I was given, during the grade school years, one-half the amount of education prescribed by the Board of Education of my city.... I am a product of [Chicago's segregated school] system and one result is that- to this day- I can not count properly...[or] make even simple change in a grocery store....This is what is meant when we speak of the scars, the marks that the ghettoized child carries through life. To be imprisoned in the ghetto is to be forgotten- or deliberately cheated of one's birthright-at best. (qtd. in Ibid., p.132)

Therefore, the Hansberry, and later on, their literary counterpart, the Younger, were determined to come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams, as Mama says, but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction to us that the average American Negro has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average white. (Ibid., p.121)

This explains Ruth's hilarious reaction when Mama announces she has bought a house in Claybourne Park. In spite of her distress at the prospect of living amid Chicago's hostile whites, Ruth laughs joyously and encourages Mama to go on in her plan. Weighing the danger of the ghetto against those posed by anti-black terrorism, Ruth determines that she will "work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago...and scrub all the floors in America...if I have to...but we got to MOVE... We got to get out of here" (pp.195-196; 3). Gordon (2008) believes that the imperative to move to Claybourne Park refers to both "the Younger family's physical departure from Chicago's ghetto and to what Hansberry saw as necessary mass movement to reconstruct the social order." (p.133)

Housing segregation is not the only problem the Younger are facing. In his seminal study, "A Raisin in the Sun: The Ghetto Trap," Brandon Coles (2006) sheds light on the role played by government, religious, leaders, and average Americans in supporting the segregated housing environment of Chicago.

The housing industry was the greatest cause of segregated housing in Chicago. Within this industry, Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt observed that "Real estate agencies play the largest role in maintaining segregated communities" (qtd. in Colas, 2006, p.26). Real estate agents made enormous profits by manipulating white fears of integration and black desires to escape the ghetto. Many blacks, like the Younger family in *A Raisin*, were discouraged from fulfilling their dreams of home ownership outside of traditionally black neighborhoods for better and more affordable housing. Lena's experience with Karl Lindner, the representative of the white community, and his attempted buy-out bring to the forefront the exploitation that was happening in these communities. This brings out the importance of introducing the character of Mama in the play. In portraying Mama as a strong black woman who is able to say 'no' to the threats of Lindner and fulfill her dream, Hansberry has two purposes. Firstly, Mama's character represents a challenge to the stereotypical representation of black women on the American stage; and secondly, she wants her white audience to realize the danger of maintaining the racist policies in the American institutions.

In insisting on fulfilling her dream of moving to their new house, Mama's main aim is to improve her family's living conditions. When Ruth observes that "We've put enough [money] in this rat trap to pay for four houses by now," (p.152; 2,1) she is not making an idle statement considering the unreasonably high costs of ghetto housing. Like most blacks in the Chicago ghettos, the Younger family lives in a "tired," run-down, "rat-trap" apartment (p.124;1,2). Neighborhood games further reveal poverty: Travis chases and kills a cat "as big as a cat," with his friends (p.171;2,3). The Younger's house is roach-infested, and a Saturday morning chore consists of "spraying insecticide into the cracks in the walls" (p.131;1,2). Like the "rat trap" of the Younger, living conditions for blacks in the ghetto were poor.

Thus, there is, Bigsby (2004) remarks, a parallel between the exhausted apartment of the family and those who inhabit it. A single small window provides the sole natural light which fights its way through the little window; it is parallel to the hope which has never quite been extinguished in their hearts, a hope which makes, "their later decision to move to another house equally a decision to remake those who inhabit it. (pp.277-278)

In fact, what Hansberry presents as the "indestructible contradictions to this state of being- the rats, roaches, worn furniture, over-crowded conditions, and anti-integration bombs-" Gordon (2008) asserts, "not only set the stage for the dramatic action in *A Raisin*, but also serve as evidence of Chicago's political and economic infrastructures of deliberate segregation" (p.128). She uses the bloody demise of a "rat....Big as a cat, honest!" to establish a pervasive reality of ghetto life early in the play. Where there is little or no municipal sanitation service or landlord upkeep, rats and roaches thrive. The rat, therefore, addresses the callous neglect and economic exploitation of ghettoized communities. Such substandard living conditions and negligence, Hansberry suggests, are criminal, particularly in their endangerment of ghettoized children, who remain the most likely victims of such environmental hazards, including rat bites (Ibid.).

The problem of the government which held blacks in the ghetto and which the Hansberry family experienced is implied in *A Raisin*. Walter plans to chop through the government's forest of red tape to gain a liquor license by bribing a city official. He explains his reasoning to Ruth, his wife, saying, "don't nothing happen for you in this world: less you pay somebody off!" (p.114;1,1). According to Colas (2006), a government where graft is common is a government slow to respond to its people's needs. Despite the poverty that the Younger family lives in, there is no mention of help or any sort of aid from the government, even to fumigate their house for healthier living conditions (pp.2-3).

Initially, the opening scene seems to reveal a typically chaotic morning in a family where too many people have to be up and out in too short a time. But within a few lines of dialogue, Walter asks about the forthcoming life insurance

check and also refers to a newspaper story about a bomb (p.107;1,1). The relationship between these two questions—how to invest the life insurance money for the greatest good of the entire family, and how to live in a city and country where bombs are set off in the homes of blacks who move into white neighborhood—forms the heart of the play.

Hansberry has been careful in the opening scene to have the characters interact in such a way that their conflicts with each other are immediately revealed. Ruth criticizes Walter for entertaining his friends the night before in the living room that serves as Travis's bedroom, a comment that serves "the purpose of revealing crowded conditions of the apartment as well as Ruth's disapproval of Walter's friends" (Domina, 1998, p.6).

Many comments demonstrating the characters' frustration early in the play illustrates the effects of segregation before that topic is addressed directly. In Act One, Scene One, Walter reveals his disappointment: "I got a boy who sleeps in the living room...and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live" (p.115;1,1). Class parallels race, Walter implies, so even if he were to become wealthy, he'd never live in the luxury of "rich white people." Other characters also rely on the phrase "rich white," indicating that to them "rich" can not be separated from "white." Urging Mama to buy herself a trip to Europe or South America, Ruth says, "rich white women do it all the time" (p.123;1,1). As the play demonstrates, how "white people live is closely related to where they are able to live" (Domina, 1998, p.21).

Walter sees affluence around him, especially in his job as a chauffeur for rich white man. He has to be rich if he wants to get a slice of the American dream. Therefore, he finds himself compelled to model himself after the white community that he encounters daily and to accept American values. Commenting on this, Julius Lester writes that Walter has been taught that he should want the world, but because he is black he has been denied the possibility of ever having it. And that only makes the pain of the desire that much more hurting. (qtd. in Maitino and Peck, 1996, p.135)

Walter believes that money brings with it power and freedom. As a black man in a dead-end job, he feels that the American dream is out of his reach. If he can become a successful businessman by investing the insurance money in a liquor store, he thinks he will be able to hand his son the world—the American dream. This explains the reason behind Mama's decision to give Walter some of the Family's money in part because she witnesses how his failed dreams have begun to crush him. Rather than let go of them, he internalizes his dreams until they consume his spirit. In other words, he falls victim to the materialistic dictates of his society.

Besides the housing industry and government, white religious leaders from all areas of the United States contribute to segregated housing. Noteworthy, in this regard, is the play's allusion to an actual event that took place in 1959. In that year, in a growing neighborhood outside Chicago, Progress Development Corporation planned to sell ten to twelve homes to blacks. When the all-white neighborhood of Deerfield discovered this, they were furious. The Reverend Parker of Deerfield, Bob Danning, explained his feeling and the feelings of his neighbors when he points out, "We're not bigots. We do not go around calling people names. And I do not think we want to deny Negroes or anybody else the right to decent home, just as good as ours. But not next door." (qtd. in Colas, 2006, p.1)

Here Hansberry analyses northern racism, as expressed by the Reverend Parker of Deerfield who used Christian terminology to further buttress segregation. For example, he told his parishioners that as a Christian, he must approve of integration. But he undercut his statement by stating he did not approve of Progress Development Corporation's method to "bring integration to Deerfield" (David Rosen qtd. in Colas, 2006, p.3).

Karl Lindner is the literary counterpart of Bob Danning. He is the Chairman of Calybourne Park Improvement Association, aimed at improving the living conditions for the people of Claybourne Park. He comes to the Youngers' apartment with concerns about the new house they have just purchased. He tells Walter that the people of Claybourne believe that "People get along better...when they share a common background" (p.178;2,3). Lindner offers Walter money not to move into the new house, which he turns down. Joyce Moss states, "The racism faced by the play's characters is rarely of the overt kind. Lindner is pleasant, and claims not to be prejudiced" (Free Essays: A Raisin, 2008, p.1). This quote is not true, Hansberry believes, because there are no forms of pleasant racism. Racism can never be considered pleasant for "racism represents hatred and there is no form of pleasant hatred" (Ibid.).

The characterization of Lindner is a scathing commentary on white northern racism on the personal level. He is dressed professionally, appears innocuous, "quiet-looking," "middle-aged," and "a gentle man" (pp.175-176;2,3). He speaks to the Youngers in a pious tone saying "most of the trouble [between whites and blacks] exists because people just don't sit down and talk to each other" (p.177;2,3). To his remark, Ruth replies, "You can say that again mister," while "nodding as she might in church" (Ibid.). Hansberry shows further textual evidence that Lindner represents religious leadership as Beneatha tells Mama about Lindner's offer to their family. She says, "He talked [about] Brotherhood. He said everybody ought to learn how to sit down and hate each other with good Christian fellowship" (p.180;2,3). Lindner even sounds like the Reverend Parker of Deerfield when he states, "You've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way" (p.177;2,3). Both men gently justify segregation in a religious manner. Lindner is calm, patient, and "almost sadly," warns the Youngers that they will be in physical danger if they move into Claybourne Park (p.179; 2,3). He reminds them of the terrible "incidents which have happened in various parts of the city when colored people have moved into certain areas" (p.176;2,3). In this sense, Lindner is a forerunner of the hostility and potential violence that the Youngers will experience in their new neighborhood (Maitino and Peck, 1996, p.138).

He does not want to be viewed as a bomb-throwing, crossburning racist; rather, he perceives himself as logical, courteous, and just—after all, he is willing to reimburse the Youngers for their investment by purchasing the house from

them. However, by desiring to keep the Youngers away from Clybourne Park, Lindner is implying to them as Mama says, "[They] aren't fit to walk the earth" (p.170;2,2). Like Bob Danning, Lindner says, "I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter it... Our negro families are happier when they live in their own communities" (p.178;2,3). Unwittingly he has reversed his vocabulary, for he represents white families who believe they will be happier if they can live "in their own communities." In other words, Lindner is uncomfortable with overt racism but even more uncomfortable with integration when it applies to his own neighborhood (Domina, 1998, pp.21-22).

Hansberry employs Mr. Lindner to demonstrate the seemingly benign ways that northern whites deny racial discrimination. To dissuade the Youngers from moving into Clybourne Park, Mr. Lindner draws on a paternalistic language of rights to protect the "hard-working, honest people who don't really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in... You've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way" (p.177;2,3).

Mr. Lindner's speech represents only one rhetorical maneuver by which Housing Improvement Associations defended segregation in the urban North. According to Gordon (2008), their paternalism was accompanied by two other rhetorical strategies: a battle language of victimization and terrorism, on the one hand, and a language of miscegenation and degeneration, on the other hand. With its talk of "Negro invasions" and "them bombs and things [whites] keep setting off," *A Raisin* engages both the language and the violence of Chicago's housing segregation (p.127).

The character of Lindner symbolizes the mass of white people who are uncomfortable with their own prejudice and therefore deny it. He could satirically be called a "good" bigot. That is, he does not overtly advocate throwing bombs or committing other types of violence, but he nevertheless does have a distinct idea about whom he will call his neighbor. He will be reasonable as long as other people accept his reasoning. When the Youngers refuse his logic and his offer to reimburse them if they will relinquish their new house, Lindner essentially warns them that they've had their chance for a peaceful solution. In doing so, he implicitly threatens them with a more violent response when they move (Domina, 1998, pp.10-11).

Moreover, Thomas J. Sugrue points out that, in the North, in spite of its language of property rights, "Neighborhood defense became more than a struggle for turf; it was a battle for the preservation of white womanhood" (qtd. in Gordon, 2008, p.128). While Walter, Ruth, and Beneatha discuss Mr. Lindner's visit, Hansberry cuts to the heart of white Americans' fear of integration:

Beneatha: What they think we going to do—eat 'em?

Ruth: No, honey, marry 'era. (p.180; 2, 3)

Hansberry and Ruth understand that the specter of miscegenation activates a matrix of violence and anxiety. Much like their southern counterparts, northern supremacist wielded a language of black barbarism and absolute separation to impose the terror of miscegenation: "It won't be long now," workers claimed in Chicago taverns in the wake of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, "and negroes and whites inter-marrying will be a common thing and the white race will go downhill" (Arnold Hirsch qtd. in Gordon, 2008, p.128).

After losing the insurance money, Walter invited Lindner to return, and he intends to accept Lindner's offer to repurchase the house from the Youngers against the will of the rest of his family. Here the play again implies, Domina (1998) remarks, that although a century has passed since the Civil War, little has changed; the question remains the same: Is a dark-skinned person as human as a light-skinned person? (p.12) In surrendering to Lindner's offer, Walter has psychologically become his society's prey. When Lindner arrives, however, and Mama insists that Travis witness the surrender of his father, Walter rediscovers his dignity. Even though their impending move may be financially as well as psychologically challenging, the Younger choose to accept the risks that dignity demands. "In making this decision," writes Steven A Carter, "Walter acknowledges his links not only to his family, but also to his race through past, present, and future generations and identifies with their mutual struggle against racist restrictions" (qtd. in Maitino and Peck, 1996, p.136). The play ends with the arrival of the moving trucks. The Younger will move into the white neighborhood not with the goal of merely challenging the white community, but because they need, want this house, and they can afford it. "Their move is not only practical but it is also based on human dignity" (Ibid.).

For Hansberry, the economic exploitation, anti-integration bombs, and organizing activities of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association are absolutely central to the project of *A Raisin*. Throughout the play, the Younger exhibit more than what Theophilus Lewis describes as "sensitivity" to the "economic pressures" of ghetto life, or a deficient understanding "that they are engaged in a sociological race war" (qtd in Gordon, 2008, p.128). In buying the house in Clybourne Park, Mama asserts her family's right to refute the economic exploitation of Chicago housing industry.

Racial discrimination remains a major social and economic issue even in the countries that have tried to address it explicitly and systematically in their public policy programs. In her letters, plays, and autobiographies, Hansberry documented the nature of this issue in the the 1950s, a time when America was reeling from the atrocities of a world war and beginning to realize that she had another war inside her border, i.e., racism. In fact, the hatred and prejudice toward blacks that had existed since the infancy of America was beginning to increase. Blacks, no longer content with the second-class citizenship status that America has forced upon them through segregation and Jim Crow Laws, began their epic battle for freedom and civil rights. Hansberry depicts this period in her semi-autobiographical play, *A Raisin*. In this play, she articulates a world where each family member's life is dependent upon the choice he/she makes to postpone or actualize dreams. The characters are experiencing the same problems that many blacks were encountering

during that period. However, her portrayal of Chicago's segregated housing market is particularly poignant because of her accurate observation that Chicago's segregated housing market existed mainly because of racism within the housing industry, the government, religious leaders, and the individual American.

The relationship to white racial discrimination was addressed in many forms in the play. The visit of Karl Lindner to convince the Younger not to move to Claybourne Park, the dominant feeling among the blacks that they are trapped in low-paying jobs and subsequently in the ghettos and, the negligence of housing maintenance in the ghettos are but few examples that elucidate the destructive impact of racism on the lives of black people. Consequently, the decision to resist racial discrimination is not a choice; it is a duty that blacks must carry out if they want to live in dignity in their own land. Hansberry staunchly holds the view that Negroes must concern themselves with every single means of struggle: legal, illegal, passive, active, violent and non-violent. That they must harness, debate, petition, give money to court strugglers, sitting, lie-down, strike, boycott, sing hymns, pray on steps and shoot from windows when the racist come cruising through their communities. The acceptance of our present condition is the only form of extremism which discredits us before our children. (Hansberry: A Short Biography, 2000, p.1)

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