

## DECLARATION REGARDING PLAGIARISM

NAME: NIRESHA SINGH  
STUDENT NUMBER: 39579808  
ASSIGNMENT TOPIC: A RAISIN IN THE SUN  
ASSIGNMENT NUMBER 2  
UNIQUE ASSIGNMENT NUMBER 704361

I declare that this assignment is my own original work. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source or from the internet), this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the department's policy in this regard. I have not allowed anyone else to borrow or copy my work

Signature



Date:

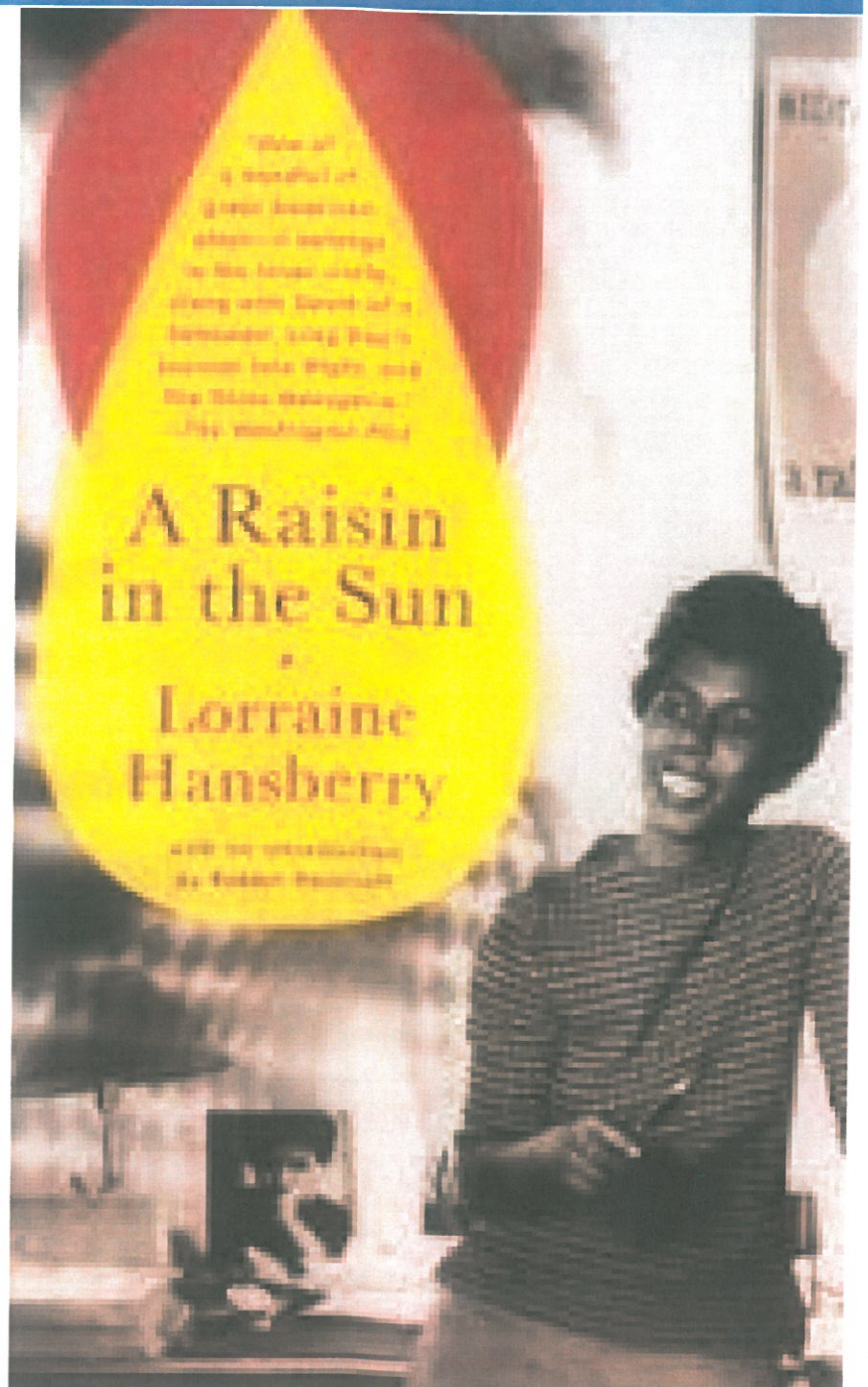
12 APRIL 2017



**Niresha Singh**  
**Unique No.: 704361**  
**Student No.: 39579808**

# Assignment 2 - ENG2603

## A Raisin in the Sun



## A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Vivian Hansberry

This essay will look at the play, "*A Raisin in the Sun*", by Lorraine Hansberry. It will firstly inform you on the writer of the play, Lorraine Vivian Hansberry. Thereafter we will look at the Younger Family and how the power of wealth, dreams and goals are impacted by racism and gender biased.

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry was born on the 19 May 1930 to Carl A. Hansberry, a banker and property investor and Nannie Perry Hansberry a University graduate from Chicago, Illinois. Lorraine Hansberry attended the Englewood High School and she excelled in both English and History (Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Facts, 2017). Her father Carl died in Mexico City in 1946 and this was the family's final home. Lorraine further studied at the University of Wisconsin. A play by Sean O'Casey's, "Juno and the Paycock", inspired Lorraine to write the play "*A Raisin in the Sun*". The title however comes directly from a line in the Langston Hughes' poem about deferred dreams. She married Robert Nemiroff an immigrant of Russian Jewish origins, during the time that inter-racial marriages were still illegal in 30 US states in 1952 (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). She studied African History at the Jefferson School for Social Science and taught at the Fredrick Douglas School. Lorraine's play premiered in the New Haven Philadelphia, Chicago on the 11 March 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Broadway. She beat renowned white male candidates for example, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O' Neill and Archibald Macleish, to win The New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, for Best Play of the Year, "*A Raisin in the Sun*" and became the first youngest black recipient between 1952-1953. In 1963, Lorraine Hansberry was diagnosed with duodenal cancer and a year later divorces Nemiroff in Mexico. Lorraine Vivian Hansberry died on the 12 January 1965 at the age of 34 years, 4 months before her 35<sup>th</sup> birthday (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011).

The play takes place in Chicago's South Side during the mid-twentieth Century. It revolves around the lives of the Youngers, their dreams, the racial tension and the gender issues that plague the family; the genre in this respect is a realistic drama. The head of the family has passed away 'Big Walter', and he has left a sum of \$10,000 for his wife. The money is 'the root of all evil', as it seems to be the only way the members in the family believe that their dreams would be recognised. Mama's dream is to own her own house and this was a dream

she shared with her late husband but due to poverty and racism it was not possible (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011).

Beneatha (Mama's youngest child, who is around 20 years old) wants to attend medical school and become a doctor; it is a challenge for a woman let alone an African-American woman to aspire to be anything in a male dominated field. Brother or Walter Lee (Mama's Eldest son, who is around 30 years old), feels because his sister is educated then she is better than him. He feels his mother will give Beneatha the money to study and become a doctor and he comes through as a misogynist. Walter wants his dream of owning his own Liquor Store, believing in, 'a quick-buck', will make everything alright, but Mama and Ruth disapprove of this idea. Ruth (Walter Lee's wife and mother to Travis) worries about Walter and his so called friends, which she refers to as "...a bunch of crazy good-for-nothing clowns..." (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). She also worries about the family and their future, she and Mama share more or less the same hopes and dreams. When the cheque is delivered, Ruth comes to know that she is pregnant and she questions whether they will be able to afford another mouth to feed. Beneatha finds out Ruth is pregnant and without thinking says, "*It is my business – where is he going to live, on the roof?*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). Mama becomes aware of Ruth wanting to abort the baby and pleads with Walter to persuade his wife to keep the baby. Walter doesn't do this because his interest lies in the money and his liquor store and he leaves without talking to his wife.

Mama's family is 'falling apart', she decides to go and purchase the house in a white neighbourhood, Clybourne Park in an attempt to bring her family together. Walter Lee on the other hand after hearing of his mother's purchase becomes further depressed and feels his dream is never going to be accomplished. Ruth sees Mama's move as a stepping stone in the right direction, her hopes and dreams of her family having a home where they can have a better, happier and prosperous family life is finally achievable. Walter's downward spiral affects Mama and she decides to transfer control of the household and the remaining insurance money in his name, hoping that this would result in him becoming the man she knows he can be. Mama asks Walter to put aside \$3 000 for Beneatha's schooling. This makes Walter more positive and lifts up his spirits.

It is a week later and the whole Younger Family are happily preparing to move when a white man, Karl Lindner arrives and he informs the Younger's that the community of Clybourne

Park would like to offer them an amount of money to discourage them from moving into the white neighbourhood. Walter and his family refuse the offer by Mr. Lindner and send him on his way (Dr. S. Dambe et. al.2013). Bobo makes an appearance when he realises that Willy Harris has absconded with the liquor store investment. Walter disappoints Mama and loses the respect of the family because he has dashed the family's dreams including his own.

This tragedy has broken the family and their hopes of a better life has been flushed down the drain so to speak. Walter disappears and comes back later on to inform everybody that he has accepted Mr. Lindner's offer. The rest of the Younger Family is devastated because Walter is prepared to demean himself to get what he wants to provide for his family. Mama shows her disappointment by stating, *"Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. (Raising her eyes and looking at him) We ain't never been that – dead inside"* (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). Ruth asks Travis to leave the house when Mr. Lindner comes over again but Mama wants him to stay. She wants Walter Lee to do what he said he was going to do in front of his son. Walter cannot stoop so low in front of Travis and he refuses Mr. Lindner's offer and regains some of his dignity and respect. *"What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this is – this is my son, who makes the sixth generation of our family in this country, and that we have all thought about your offer and we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it... We don't want your money"* (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011).

At the beginning we notice 'poverty' as one of the factors that contribute to the Youngers not being able to achieve their dream. They live in a small apartment and this is shown by ten year old Travis who sleeps on the living room couch. Houses that were built for coloured people, were built so far out and were so expensive that people saw it as a economical move to live together,. The Youngers' had to share the bathroom with 3 other families. Poverty was a huge thing for many African Americans who were immigrants. They were restricted to the southern Chicago area known as the 'Black Belt'(Wikipedia, 2017). Where approximately 268 000 blacks resided during 1940-1944. The poverty with the Youngers' household is further emphasized by Ruth's comment, "Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often. All pretences but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room".

In 1959 the United States was 'de facto segregated' meaning **that** racial segregation still existed in education, employment, and housing even though the Supreme Court had overturned it deeming it unconstitutional (Wikipedia, 2017). Hansberry's play draws on stories from the writer's own life, such as her father purchasing a house in a white residential area in 1938 and due to the family enduring legal battles and physical threats from his white neighbours it led to them being evicted. With support from, 'The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People' (NAACP), which was established in 1909, Lorraine's father, Carl takes the case to the Supreme Court and receives a victory in 1943 (Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Facts, 2017). In the play there is references made to the 'bombs' that go off, eg. Mrs Johnson says, "Negroes invade Clybourne Park- Bombed!". Karl Lindner informs the Youngers that the Clybourne Park Improvement Association which he represents has sent him to talk to the Youngers and convince them not to move into the neighbourhood. Mr. Lindner refers to the Youngers as "you people" and in a way threatens them by saying, "*What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighbourhood where you just aren't wanted and where some elements- well- people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened.*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). They used intimidation tactics to stop any African American families from moving into their neighbourhood.

Hansberry also looks at internal racism, the idea that black people in America have become so accustomed to the treatments they receive from white society that they treat members of their own community the same way. We see this when George (Beneatha's so called boyfriend) comes to the apartment in Scene 1 Act 2 and Beneatha tries to express her interest in her African heritage, George ridicules her by saying, "*Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). Although George himself is an African American, he feels he is of a higher status with his wealthy background. He has lost his roots by trying to be like the white man.

George Murchison is a wealthy man from a wealthy black family. George is dating Beneatha and comes across as somewhat as conceited and shallow minded not shying away from his family's social status. We notice Beneatha drifts away from him because her interest in him isn't very strong from the beginning and gradually fades away during the play. Beneatha declares that she "*hates assimilationist Negroes*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011), assimilationist Negroes, are coloured people who wanted to behave and resort to the white lifestyle, selling

their people and culture out, eg. Stepin Fetchit who was a comedian in the 1920's and 30's, some people saw his works as demeaning while others stated he was doing what he had to, to get by (tribunedigital-chicagotribune, 2017).

Also we can look at Walter's behaviour towards George. Walter resents the fact that George comes from money and also that he is educated (Dr. S. Dambe et. al.2013). We see more internal racism as they are getting ready to move and Mrs. Johnson walks in. She is insensitive, nosy and envious of the Youngers' and this is apparent when she says, "*I'm telling you the Youngers' is really getting ready to 'move on up a little higher!' -Bless God*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). Mama doubts this sincerity in what Mrs. Johnson says and Mama's doubts are confirmed when Mrs. Johnson makes up a headline that says, "*NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK-BOMBED!*", and again when she insults them by saying, "*You sure are one proud-acting bunch of coloured folks*". She refers to white people as 'crackers' and her own people as 'niggers'. "*Why if we left it up to these here crackers, the poor niggers wouldn't have nothing*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). She shows no respect to her own people, and degrades them, and she does this in Mama's home, knowing full well Mama does not condone such language in her house.

In this play Hansberry looks at controversial issues like the value of marriage, abortion which was illegal in 1959 (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011), and changes in the gender roles for women and men. Beneatha who Hansberry based on herself, is more modernised in her thinking by pursuing her dream to become a doctor which at that point was a male – dominated profession. She also states to Mama and to Ruth's shock that she does not intend to get married. Walter criticizes his sister in regards to her becoming a doctor and sees it as a waste of money. He prefers that Beneatha marry, but Beneatha seems strongly set on what her role as a Black American woman entails. In Act 2 Scene 2- after coming back from their date George and Beneatha sit on the couch, and George tries to kiss her, Beneatha who pulls away tries to converse with him. George tells Beneatha to cut out "*the moody stuff*" and "*not spoil the evening*" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011). He says that she is "*a nice looking girl*" and that he doesn't date her "*to hear all about your thoughts*". We can see that George's love for Beneatha is for her outer appearance and not for her witty intelligent mind. He undermines her as a woman and places the age old thought that a woman is only good for one thing and that is to be in the kitchen barefoot and pregnant. However Joseph Asagai (a Nigerian student and

and friend of Beneatha's, who is later introduced as her love interest) shares Beneatha's beliefs and brings her back to her roots.

Big Walter was described by Mama as being "hard headed, mean and wild with women" (Lorraine Hansberry, 2011) this shows us that Mama also faced a great deal in her life. Mama loses little Claude due to the fact that she was stressed because of the struggles they were going through. Mama prides herself on being a 'Christian woman', so she would not look at Ruth's thoughts of an abortion as being a Christian thing to do. Mama and Ruth share similar beliefs on marriage and a woman's role. Both of them work as domestic servants, one of the few jobs that African American women were privy to. Walter Lee has similar views when it comes to gender and his ability to fulfil his responsibilities as a man, which results in a negative effect in regards to his self-esteem as he believes being a man he is always supposed to have the upper hand. He feels his position as a white man's chauffeur diminishes this. Walter believes his mother standing as head of the family further diminishes his role as the man of the house and belittles him. When Mama gives the money finally to Walter, she, in a way is handing him control of his family's future and now allowing him to be a responsible adult and the 'Man' of the house.

Hansberry uses many symbolisms, examples of these are; Mama's plant which symbolises her dream to own her own house with a garden someday, the little ray of sunlight that comes through the kitchen window symbolises hope, life and faith. "Eat your eggs", represents the lack of support Ruth has for Walter because he uses the eggs that he gets everyday to eat to describe how a woman, his wife Ruth, discourages him and believes that she does not want to see him grow and she is holding him down. Beneatha's hair represents her embracing her African American heritage, her identity and culture and this is pointed out to Beneatha by Joseph Asagai (Dr. S. Dambe et. al.2013), "You wear it well...very well...mutilated hair and all. The new house symbolises courage, hope and growth. A new beginning and new dreams with an uncertain future, but the Younger's take a leap of faith and move to Clybourne Park.

In conclusion this essay has addressed, "*A Raisin in the Sun*", main themes of racism, poverty, gender inequality and hope which are all tied together in this play. At the beginning of the play money seems to play a focal point, creating the chaotic moods of everybody involved but the Younger Family comes to terms with all of these issues and they make their lives a little bit better by looking to the future.



## References

- 1) Wikipedia. 2017. *History of African Americans in Chicago - Wikipedia*. [ONLINE] Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_African\\_Americans\\_in\\_Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_African_Americans_in_Chicago). [Accessed 08 April 2017].
- 2) tribunedigital-chicagotribune. 2017. *Dissecting Stepin Fetchit: Comedic sellout or survivor? - tribunedigital-chicagotribune*. [ONLINE] Available at: [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-02-06/entertainment/0402060428\\_1\\_stepin-fetchit-coons-pickett](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-02-06/entertainment/0402060428_1_stepin-fetchit-coons-pickett). [Accessed 09 April 2017].
- 3) Lorraine Hansberry, 2011. *Raisin in the Sun (Student Editions)*. Edition. Methuen Publishing.
- 4) Dr. S. Dambe; Ms.B. Janari; Dr. S. Maithufi; Prof. K. Masemola; Prof. J. Murray; Dr. A. Musvoto; Prof. S Raditlhalo; Prof. M. Vambe, ., 2013. *Colonial and Postcolonial - African Literature*. 1st ed. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- 5) Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Facts. 2017. *Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Facts*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/lorraine-vivian-hansberry>. [Accessed 10 April 2017].