

The Racial Tensions Depicted in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

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Abstract

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is considered to be one of the significant dramas written by an African American. This play depicts the racial tensions that happened on micro and macro levels during the 1950s and 1960s in the Black American community. In this regard, this paper investigates the different layers of racism and ways how the characters fit into the concept of affluent domesticity in a local and national sense. The study reveals that racism happens at the micro-level because of other members of African American community. Based on the analysis George and Asagai became the oppressor of other characters in the story. Although both of them represent two different extremes – assimilation and Afrocentrism, their actions and values in life still resorted to the oppression of other members of the black community. Moreover, the racism at the macro level revolves around segregation in housing and job opportunities. These social issues are some of the main reasons why black Americans suffered greatly in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the pursuit of American identity and the American dream is also highlighted in the drama through the aspirations of the main characters in the play.

Introduction

The drama titled "*A Raisin in the Sun*" written by Lorraine Hansberry depicts the lives of African Americans living in Chicago. This play is about the Younger family who strives to improve their social life and financial circumstances. Furthermore, the story revolves around the four main characters of the drama – Lena, Ruth, Beneatha, and Walter. Each character embodies different roles and ideologies of people in the Black American community. Additionally, this drama plays a pivotal role in highlighting racism and social changes that transpired in the lives of African Americans. Through the characters of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry was able to manifest issues and problems of African Americans living in the United States.

In addition, this drama could be considered Lorraine Hansberry's semi-autobiographical play (DeLaRosa) mainly because there are several situations in the story that happened in Lorraine's life. Similar to the Younger family, Lorraine Hansberry was born and raised in Chicago and experienced the atrocities of segregation policies that existed in the real estate market, which is also depicted in the drama (DeLaRosa). Lorraine's family wanted to live a better life and move to a house in a white neighborhood; however, because of the segregation policy, it became difficult for them to move. Hence, *A Raisin in the Sun* could be considered Hansberry's semi-autobiographical play.

To better understand the issues and tensions depicted in the drama, I am going to discuss first the problems of segregation and race relations among African Americans in the United States. In the article titled *"Through the Decades 1950s"*, which was written in the University of California Berkley, the issue of racial discrimination in public schools was highlighted when "Boalt Hall was caught up in a controversy concerning the role of racism in the admission of minority law students" (Through the Decades 1950s 1). During that time, African Americans were not given equal opportunities to pursue law school because of racial discrimination. In this regard, Wesley A. Struges, the Dean of Yale Law School, presented a resolution in December 1950 at the meeting of the Association of American Law Schools addressing this issue (Through the Decades 1950s). Moreover, Semuels discussed in her article how segregation in the South started and changed over the years. She stated that racial segregation is more apparent today than during the late 19th century. Additionally, Semuels cited racial tensions happening in Charlotte due to the shooting of black men by white policemen to substantiate her arguments.

Furthermore, Bundles traced back the history of African Americans to better understand racism in the United States. She discussed how the lives of African Americans transformed and improved over the years. Also, she gave President Barack Obama as an example to underscore her arguments that the lives of African Americans have changed dramatically. Likewise, Solly discussed the historical context, systemic inequality, anti-black violence, and intersectionality in her article titled *"158 Resources to Understand Racism in America"*. Similar to Bundles, Solly discussed comprehensively the African Americans' historical context and issues to have a clear picture of how racism started and perpetuated in the United States. Additionally, in the article titled *"Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty, Inequality, and Discrimination – A National Perspective"*, five key themes are cited as primary causes of perpetuation and increase of racism in the United States: (1) crisis in leadership; (2) media portrayal of existing tensions; (3) deficiencies in the educational system; (4) disparities on the criminal justice system; and (5) growing economic inequality. These themes may help in understanding the tensions presented in the drama.

In addition, there are some studies that zero in on the issues of racism and segregation depicted in *"A Raisin in the Sun"*. DeLaRosa highlighted in her paper the migration patterns of freed blacks and their descendants, the history of Harlem and African Americans in Chicago, the great migration and its impact on the South side of Chicago, and real estate policies in the first half of the twentieth century. These topics discussed in DeLaRosa's paper underscore the social and racial issues that the Younger family experienced in the play. Likewise, Hama examined how people of color become oppressors in their own communities. Specifically, the researcher investigated how each character becomes the oppressor of other characters in the play. Findings revealed that there are different types of oppression depicted in the drama – male to female intra-racism, female to female intra-racism, and female to male intra-racism. Similarly, Kousar and Sarfraz investigated the black consciousness in *"A Raisin in the Sun"*. The researchers focused on an awareness of and pride in one's identity as a black person, and they examined three aspects of the drama: the sense of pride in black culture and identity, the struggle against Apartheid, and Black's resolution to accept the challenges of White Community. Findings show that characters in the drama manifest a sense of pride in black identity and culture and showed how African Americans accepted the challenges of the whites.

In addition, Brady discussed in her article the juxtaposition of some characters in the drama – (1) Beneatha and Ruth; (2) George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. She stated that, “Ruth values economic success while Beneatha values identity and character” (32). Moreover, Brady emphasized that Hansberry was able “to demonstrate the vexing African American struggle to find a distinct identity in one of two unattainable extremes” (32). The first extreme is George, who symbolizes assimilation; on the other hand, Asagai symbolizes Afrocentrism. Brady concluded that George and Asagai played a pivotal role in Beneatha’s struggle for identity. Furthermore, Saber highlighted in her article the distinction between integration and assimilation based on Lorraine Hansberry’s “*A Raisin in the Sun*”. According to her, “integration was not to be equated with accommodationist paradigms or cultural assimilation. Accommodation embraced all negative implications of resigning to whites and erasing racial pride. Assimilation implied a fusion that entailed a profound and irremediable loss of one’s ethnic identity. In assimilation, the marginalized group identity dissolved into the culture of the dominant larger group: white America” (452). Also, she gave George as the perfect example of the definition of assimilation. Overall, the cited articles and studies could help in enriching the discussion on the racial tensions in the 1950s and 1960s depicted in the drama.

This study seeks to analyze racism at micro and macro levels as shown in the play. In addition, this paper examines how Black Americans fit into the concept of affluent domesticity, or of belonging, in a local and a national sense as manifested by the main characters in “*A Raisin in the Sun*”. Specifically, this paper attempts to answer the following questions.

1. What are the different types of racism at micro and macro levels depicted in the drama?
2. How did the characters fit into the concept of affluent domesticity in a local and a national sense?

Theoretical Framework

In order to address the research questions of this study, critical social theory is utilized. According to Ngwenyama, the main objective of critical social theory is the improvement of the human condition. Likewise, it focuses on general theoretical and concrete problems of contemporary social organization. Furthermore, this theory is grounded on five fundamental assumptions (Ngwenyama): (1) people have the power to change their world; (2) knowledge of the social world is value-laden; (3) reason and critique are inseparable; (4) theory and practice must be interconnected; and (5) reason and critique must be reflexive in practice. Drawing from critical social theory, the issues of racism at micro and macro levels depicted in the drama are analyzed and examined. More so, the ways how the characters of the drama fit into the concept of affluent domesticity in a local and a national sense are investigated.

Types of Racism in Micro and Macro Levels Depicted in the Drama

Racism on Micro Level

Class Tensions Within the Black Community

In this paper, I argue that there are class tensions that happen at the micro-level as shown in the drama. Generally, people would think that racism only happens between the insider and outsider of a particular group. For instance, you are a minority in a community where you are dominated by other races. In this situation, there is a tendency that you might feel that you are

segregated, or worst-case scenario, you may experience racism. On the other hand, racism does not only occur in communities where minorities are living with a dominant race. Racism could also happen within the same community and this is shown in the drama. This type of racism is called intra-racism or internalized racism. According to Hama, “intra-racism or internalized racism is a term used to talk about the violence which is performed among the members of the same group who are oppressed by others or another group” (933). In Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, class tension within the black community is manifested through George Murchison, Beneatha’s rich boyfriend. When Beneatha was having a conversation with her mother and sister-in-law, she told them that she did not want to have a serious relationship with George because aside from being shallow he was also rich. This can be seen in the given excerpt below.

Beneatha: As for George. Well. George looks good – he’s got a beautiful car and he takes me to nice places and, as my sister-in-law says, he is probably the richest boy I will ever get to know and I even like him sometimes – but if the Youngers are sitting around waiting to see if their little Bennie is going to tie up the family with Murchisons, they are wasting their time.

Ruth: You mean you wouldn’t marry George Murchisons if he asked you someday? That pretty, rich thing? Honey, I knew you was odd –

Beneatha: No I would not marry him if all I felt for him was what I feel now. Besides, George’s family wouldn’t really like it.

Mama: Why not?

Beneatha: Oh, Mama – The Murchisons are honest-to-God-real-live-rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people. I thought everybody knew that. I’ve met Mrs. Murchison. She’s a scene!

Mama: You must not dislike people ‘cause they well off, honey.

Beneatha: Why not? It makes just as much sense as disliking people ‘cause they are poor, and lots of people do that.

Ruth: [a wisdom-of-the-ages manner. To mama] Well, she’ll get over some of this –

In this conversation, Beneatha emphasizes that the reason why she does not want to marry George is because of his social status in life. George’s social standing in life is a big deal for Beneatha mainly because they are more snobbish than rich white people. Additionally, this scenario shows that Beneatha, being an intellectual and educated woman, is aware of the division between the two Black families. Even though they belong to the same ethnicity, they are divided because of their material wealth. This may suggest that social class distinction is apparent amongst African-Americans.

In addition, there is another scene in the drama that shows how George became an oppressor of other black people in the African-American community. This happened when George came to Beneatha’s house to pick her up for a date. They were arguing about Beneatha’s dress; eventually, they were talking about racial assimilation. This is shown in the excerpts below.

George: Oh, don’t be so proud of yourself, Bennie – just because you look eccentric.

Beneatha: How can something that’s natural be eccentric?

George: That's what being eccentric means – being natural. Get dressed.

Beneatha: I don't like that, George.

Ruth: Why must you and your brother make an argument out of everything people say?

Beneatha: Because I hate assimilationist Negroes!

Ruth: Will somebody please tell me what assimila-whoever means!

George: Oh, it's just a college girl's way of calling people Uncle Toms – but that isn't what it means at all.

Ruth: Well, what does it mean?

Beneatha: [cutting George off and staring at him as she replies to Ruth] It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case, oppressive culture!

As shown in the given excerpts, Beneatha was wearing clothes with the touch of African design paying tribute to their African heritage. She was proud of it because she believed that their heritage should be celebrated. In this scenario, it shows that Beneatha has a “sense of pride in black culture and identity” (Kousar and Sarfraz 65). She took pride in her roots and cultures. On the other hand, George did not like Beneatha's dress and asked her to change. Consequently, Beneatha was frustrated because of George's condescending and racist remarks. Then, she stated that she hated assimilationist negroes. This scenario clearly shows how George became the oppressor of other members of African American community. Their conversation indicates that George gave up his own culture and submerged himself in the dominant white American culture. Similarly, he did not show any sense of pride in black culture and identity. In this regard, he became the oppressor of other black people in the drama. According to Park, “the race problem has sometimes been described as a problem in assimilation” (606). He, then, stated in his article that racial assimilation tends to create segregation and racial tension within one's own group. Correspondingly, Saber gave a definition of assimilation in African American context. According to Saber, assimilation is “a fusion that entailed a profound and irremediable loss of one's ethnic identity. In assimilation, the marginalized group identity dissolved into the culture of the dominant larger group: white America” (452). Based on this statement, it shows that George embodies the definition of assimilation in African American context given by Saber. This may explain why George became the oppressor of other people in the black community. In addition, according to Brady, “Hansberry is trying to make George an unlikable pretentious character by emphasizing his contempt for Beneatha's choice to reclaim her African identity... By staging the process by which the Younger family rebuffs George's way of thinking, Hansberry shows her own rejection of assimilation” (33).

Another scenario that shows how George oppressed other characters in the play occurred when George and Walter were having a conversation. In the given excerpts below, George manifested dominance and power when he sarcastically called Walter *Prometheus*. George is an educated rich colored person, while Walter is just a driver. Since Walter does not have the same educational background as George, Walter does not know who Prometheus is, and in this situation,

Walter and Ruth are in a disadvantaged position. Hence, in this scenario, George used his educational background to oppress Walter and Ruth.

George: [Looking at him with distaste, a little above all] You're all wacked up with bitterness, man.

Walter: [intently, almost quietly, between the teeth, glaring at the boy] And you – ain't you bitter, man? Ain't you just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy? – You contented son-of-a-bitch – you happy? You got it made? Bitter/ Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? Here I am a giant – surrounded by ants! And who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about.

George: Well – hey, you look great.

Beneatha: Let's go, George. See you all later.

Ruth: Have a nice time.

George: Thanks. Good night. [to Walter sarcastically] Good night, Prometheus.

[Beneatha and George exit.]

Walter: [to Ruth] Who is Prometheus?

Ruth: I don't know. Don't worry about it.

Walter: [in fury, pointing after George] See there – they get to a point where they can't insult you man to man – they got to talk about something ain't nobody never heard of!

Ruth: How do you know it was an insult? [to humor him] Maybe Prometheus is a nice fellow.

Another character that serves as an instrument to manifest class tensions within the black community is Joseph Asagai. Unlike George, Asagai is presented favorably in the drama. Moreover, as stated in the article of Brady, Asagai is the representation of Afrocentrism. According to Early et al., “the Afrocentrism dreams of appropriating the high culture of classical civilization and disdains the low culture of gangster rap” (47). In the play, Asagai took pride in his black culture and identity contrary to George who represented assimilation. Nevertheless, even though Asagai is presented favorably in the drama, he indirectly oppressed another character in the story. Asagai's condescending and insensitive comments horrified and embarrassed Beneatha. This can be seen in the given excerpt below.

Beneatha: [stalling this particular conversation. Her hands pressed together, in a deliberately childish gesture] What did you bring me?

Asagai: [handling her the package] Open it and see.

Beneatha: [eagerly opening the package and drawing out some records and the colorful robes of a Nigerian woman] Oh, Asagai! ... You got them for me! ... How beautiful ... and the records too! [She lifts out the robes and runs to the mirror with them and holds the drapery up in front of herself.]

Asagai: [coming to her at the mirror] I shall have to teach you how to drape it properly. [He flings the material about her for a moment and stands back to look at her.] Ah – Oh-pay-gay-day, oh-ghah-mu-shay. [a Yoruba exclamation for admiration] You wear it well ... very well ... mutilated hair and all.

Beneatha: [turning suddenly] My hair – what’s wrong with my hair?

Asagai: [shrugging] Were you born with it like that?

Beneatha: [reaching up to touch it] No ... of course not. [She turns back to the mirror, disturbed.]

Asagai: [smiling] How then?

Beneatha: You know perfectly well how As crinkly as yours ... that’s how.

Asagai: And it is ugly to you that way?

Beneatha: [quickly] Oh, no – not ugly ... [more slowly, apologetically] But it’s so hard to manage when it’s, well – raw.

Asagai: And so to accommodate that you – you mutilate it every week?

Beneatha: It’s not mutilation!

As shown in the given excerpts above, Asagai described Beneatha’s hair as mutilated. Because of this insensitive remark, Beneatha got frustrated. Indeed, Asagai came directly from Africa; hence, he has a different perspective of American culture. According to Brady, Asagai’s “embodiment of African culture distances him from American ideals and causes him to make insensitive remarks to Beneatha throughout the play, showing that an emotional rift between African American people and culture can be problematic” (33). Asagai did not intentionally oppress Beneatha; however, because of his Afrocentric views, he tends to oppress Beneatha. Thus, even though he represents Afrocentrism, he appears to be an oppressor of other members of the black community.

Overall, the analysis shows that there are class tensions within the black community as depicted in the drama. I argue that these class tensions within the black community are considered racism at the micro-level because the oppression happens between the members of the African American community. Likewise, this type of racism is manifested through the class tensions created by George and Asagai. George represents assimilation, while Asagai symbolizes Afrocentrism (Brady). The condescending racist remarks of George and the insensitive remarks of Asagai resorted to the oppression of other characters in the drama.

Racism in Marco Level

Segregation in Housing

One of the major social issues that African Americans faced during the 1950s and 1960s is the segregation regulation in real estate that “can be traced back to the Plessy v. Ferguson case in 1896” (DeLaRosa 8). Moreover, this segregation policy prohibits minority families to buy real estates in white community or neighborhood. This issue is clearly depicted in Hansberry’s drama.

Linder: Well – you see our community is made up of people who’ve worked hard as the dickens for years to build the little community. They’re not rich and fancy people; just 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. Now, I don’t say we are perfect and there is a lot wrong in some of the things they want. But you’ve got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn’t enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all the concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities.

Beneatha: This, friends, is the Welcoming Committee!

Walter: Is this what you came marching all the way over here to tell us?

Linder: Well, now we’ve been having a fin conversation. I hope you’ll hear me all the way through.

Walter: Go ahead, man.

Linder: You see – in the face of all things I have said, we are prepared to make your family a very generous offer...

Beneatha: Thirty pieces and not a coin less!

Walter: Yeah?

Linder: Our association is prepared, through the collective effort of our people, to buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family.

As can be seen in the given conversation above, Linder, the white man, visited the Younger family’s house to give them a very generous offer, so that the Youngers would not move to their neighborhood. He also underscored that “*Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities*”. This scenario clearly captures the segregation regulation in real estate that impedes black families or minorities to move into a white neighborhood. Likewise, this segregation policy appeared to be the result of “Jim Crow laws and limitations set by white Americans that made African Americans isolated to limited space in society. They lived in an isolated and underprivileged neighborhood. The term that has been used for that area is ghetto. Ghettoization for blacks was a reality that lasted over a century” (Vareli 19). This only shows that during the 1950s and 1960s segregation in housing was one of the major racial issues at the macro-level experienced by African American community. Additionally, even the likes of George Murchison who belongs to the upper-class society of the Black American community could not purchase a house in places where rich white Americans live. It only shows that even the black elites were not exempted from this racist policy (Valeri). Moreover, because of this unfair treatment of black Americans, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was enacted to support integration and to give African Americans equal opportunity in housing (DeLaRosa). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 “prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin or sex” (Fair Housing Act). This act is significant to black Americans because during that

time there was a need for them to go out from the ghettos to have a comfortable life, a better place with low crime rates, good schools, and bigger houses (Vareli).

In addition, as stated in the article of DeLaRosa, the play *A Raisin in the Sun* could be considered to be Lorraine Hansberry's semi-autobiographical play because there are many similar issues in her life that depicted in the drama one of which is the segregation in housing. According to Vareli, Mister Hansberry, Lorraine's father, "attempted to get away from the ghetto of Chicago: he purchased a brick building at 6140 South Rhodes Avenue, near the University of Chicago in an all-white neighborhood. Then, Carl Hansberry was about to go to jail because he challenged Chicago real estate covenants, which legally enforced housing discrimination" (21). Although this scenario did not happen in the play, it still shows that Lorraine Hansberry tried to encapsulate her experiences and racial tensions that happened at the macro-level during the 1950s and 1960s in her drama.

Segregation in Job Opportunities

Another apparent form of racism on the macro-level depicted in the drama is the segregation in job opportunities. Many African Americans during that time were living under poor conditions because of limited job chances. This limited access to employment is connected to the housing segregation policy because it influenced job inequality in those areas (Turner).

Mama: I'm looking at you. You a good-looking boy. You got a job, a nice wife, a fine boy and –

Walter: A Job. [looks at her] Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, "Yes, sir; no sir, very good sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?" Mama, that ain't no kind of job... that ain't nothing at all. [very quietly] Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand.

Mama: Understand what, baby?

Walter: Sometimes it's like I can see the future stretched out in front of me – just a plain day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me – a big, looming blank space – full of nothing. Just waiting for me. Mama – sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things ... sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars ... sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me –

Mama: Son – how come you talk so much about money?

Walter: [with intense passion] Because it is life, Mama!

Mama: [quietly] Oh – [very quietly] So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life – now it's money. I guess the world really do change...

Walter: No – it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it.

Mama: No... something has changed. [She looks at him.] You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too ... Now here come you and Beneatha – talking about things we ain't never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown;

that you don't have to ride to work on the back of nobody's streetcar – You my children – but how different we done become.

The given conversation above shows how segregation in job opportunities affected the lives of black Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Walter did not consider his job a real job because it did not give him hope to have a better life. He even compared his situation to white American boys who were making multi-million dollar deals in a fancy restaurant. Self-pity and envy are evident in his statements. Moreover, this conversation shows huge generation gaps between Walter, Beneatha, and Lena. According to Lena, during their time, they were “*worried about not being lynched and getting to the North and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too*”. They did not really think about money because their main goal is to survive. On the other hand, Walter and Beneatha are totally different because they focus on money and career. Walter wanted to have a decent job, and Beneatha wanted to be a doctor. Unfortunately, because of segregation in job opportunities, people like Walter who did not have good education could not land a good job. Hence, those minorities, who did not have an education, landed low-paying occupations.

In addition, another concern related to job inequality is gender issues. According to Vareli, “it is demonstrated in the character of an African American woman, who wishes to become a doctor. At that time, women were still confined to the domestic sphere. They were defined clearly as housewives and mothers. Due to poverty, many African American women had to seek work for their families. In this case, the discussion about the position of women in society had risen” (24). A good example of this is Beneatha, Ruth, and Lena. Beneatha studied hard to be a doctor, whereas Ruth and Lena were domestic workers. Because of lack of education, women like Ruth and Lena had no choice but to perform housekeeping jobs for white people. Additionally, due to the growing protest against segregation in job opportunities, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 were enacted. These acts are “a labor law legislation that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and by facilities that served the general public” (A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States).

Indeed, Lorraine Hansberry was able to illustrate the forms of racism at the macro-level during the 1950s and 1960s in her drama. Being part of the black community and having experienced those forms of racism, Hansberry was able to manifest segregation in housing and job opportunities through the experiences of her characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Additionally, the oppression of black Americans during those decades paved the way for the enactment of The Fair Housing Act of 1968 and The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968. In this regard, members of the African American community are given fair chances to have better job opportunities, education, housing, and life condition (Bundles).

Ways How the Characters Fit into the Concept of Affluent Domesticity on a Local and a National Sense

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* depicts not only racism but also the aspirations of the members of African American community to fit into the concept of affluent domesticity in a local and a national sense. These aspirations are demonstrated by the characters of the drama. For instance, Lena wants to buy a bigger house for her family; Walter wants to use the money from insurance to put up his own business, and Beneatha studies hard to be a doctor.

Lena buys a house in the white American community

The given conversation below shows how Lena wants to fit into the affluent domesticity. She is aware of the fact that Clybourne Park is only for white people, and moving into that neighborhood would cause some issues because of the racist real estate policy. When Ruth said “*Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain’t no colored people living in Clybourne Park*”, it indicates that they may encounter some problems once they move there. Nevertheless, Lena still decides to buy a house in Clybourne Park. Lena said, “*Well, I guess there’s going to be some now*”. This statement only indicates that she wants to live in an area where they could have a better life even though that place is only for white Americans. In this regard, she could fulfill her aspiration of fitting into the white neighborhood.

Mama: [still to his back, fingering things on the table] ‘Course I don’t want to make it sound fancier than it is ... It’s just a plain little old house – but it’s made good and solid – and it will be ours. Walter Lee – it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him..

Ruth: Where is it?

Mama: [frightened at this telling] Well – well – it’s out there in Clybourne Park –

Ruth: Where?

Mama: [matter-of-factly] Four or six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park.

Ruth: Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain’t no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

Mama: [almost idiotically] Well, I guess there’s going to be some now.

Walter’s investment

The conversation between Walter and Travis shows Walter’s aspiration to have his own business and a better life for his family. He wants to use the money from insurance to put up his own liquor store. Then, he envisions himself running his own company, going home tired from the conferences, and driving luxurious cars. These aspirations are an example of the American dream.

Walter: You know what, Travis? In seven years you going to be seventeen years old. And things are going to be very different with us in seven years, Travis ... One day when you are seventeen I’ll come home – home from my office downtown somewhere –

Travis: You don’t work in no office, Daddy?

Walter: No – but after tonight. After what your daddy gonna do tonight, there’s going to be offices – a whole lot of offices...

Travis: What you gonna do tonight, Daddy?

Walter: You wouldn’t understand yet, son, but your daddy’s gonna make a transaction ... a business transaction that’s going to change our lives... That’s how come one day when you ‘bout seventeen years old I’ll come home and I’ll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do ... ‘cause an executive’s life is hell, man. All I’ll pull the car u on the drive way ... just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white

walls – no – black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy ... though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth – maybe a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in...

According to Ali and Rasheed, “the American Dream is an idealistic dream which urges everyone in America to succeed through the successful business” (1). Based on the given definition, Walter’s aspirations are the manifestation of the American Dream. Many people like Walter would like to earn a huge amount of money and amass material wealth so that they could fit into the affluent life of white Americans. Walter wants to take a risk and invest the money from insurance in a liquor store business. His desire to realize his American Dream urges him to do everything even though he would be taking a huge risk and sacrifice the money allotted for the house and Beneatha’s education.

Beneatha’s dream to be a Doctor

Another character that exemplifies the aspiration to fit into the affluent life at a national level is Beneatha. She is the sister of Walter and the daughter of Lena. Unlike the other members of the family, Beneatha is the only one who is able to have a good education because she wants to be a doctor. Moreover, Lorraine Hansberry’s description sets Beneatha apart from the other members of the Younger family. This can be seen in the given excerpt below.

She is about twenty, as slim and intense as her brother. She is not as pretty as her sister-in-law, but her lean almost intellectual face has a handsomeness of its own. She wears a bright-red flannel nightie, and her thick hair stands wildly about her head. Her speech is a mixture of many things; it is different from the rest of the family’s insofar as education has permeated her sense of English – and perhaps the Midwest rather than the South has finally – at last – won out in her inflection; but not altogether, because over all of it is a soft slurring and transformed use of vowels which is the decided influence of the Southside.

Based on the given description, it shows that Beneatha works hard to improve herself and achieve her goals in life. Similarly, Beneatha appears to be the embodiment of Lorraine Hansberry. Similar to Beneatha, Lorraine worked hard to be a successful dramatist (DeLaRosa; Vareli). Likewise, her aspirations in life characterize the concept of the American Dream.

In addition, the analysis revealed that each character has different ways of fitting into the concept of affluent domesticity in a local and a national sense. Lena wants to live in an area where they could have a better life even though that place is only for white Americans. Moreover, Walter wants to use the money from insurance to put up his own liquor store. Furthermore, Beneatha wants to be a doctor. Based on the analysis of Lena’s, Walter’s, and Beneatha’s aspirations, it shows that they embody the concept of the American Dream. According to Ali and Rasheed, “the American Dream grants the rights for every individual that has objectives in the life to pursue his aspiration and achieve satisfaction. The objectives associated with the American Dream are to get a better life in terms of power, money better education, and life” (2). The experiences, ideologies, and actions of the characters show their burning desire to improve their financial and social standing not just in African American community, but also in the entire nation. This desire to fit into the concept of affluent domesticity and of belonging in a local and national sense has been clearly depicted in the drama, thus recapturing the concepts of American Identity and the American Dream, which were prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the present study reveal that Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* depicts different layers of racism that happened in the black American community during the 1950s and 1960s. These layers of racism happened at the micro and macro level – class tensions within the African American community and segregation in housing and job opportunities. Similarly, the analysis shows that the main characters embody the concept of the American Dream. Their aspirations to fit into the concept of affluent domesticity and American identity in a local and national sense motivate them to strive and take up space in society.

In addition, the present study shows that Lorraine Hansberry was able to encapsulate the racial tensions that happened in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, this play could give readers a clear picture of the issues and social changes that happened in the lives of African Americans and may help people better understand the contribution of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* to the American drama.

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