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RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN A RAISIN IN THE SUN BY LORRAINE HANSBERRY

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Abstract

Racism springs from the lie that certain human beings are less than fully human. It is a self – centred falsehood that corrupts our minds into believing we are right to treat others as we would not want to be treated. Racial discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of their race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin or immigrant status. This paper deals with the racial segregation by Lorraine Hansberry in A Raisin in the Sun.

*"No Human Race is Superior; no
Religious faith is Inferior. All
Collective judgements are wrong. Only
Racists make them."*

- Eliezer Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor.

Lorraine Hansberry, African American playwright, was born on May 19, 1930 and died of Pancreatic Cancer on January 12, 1965 at the early age of 34. Lorraine Hansberry took the title of *A Raisin in the Sun* from a line in Langston Hughes's famous 1951 poem "Harlem". Langston Hughes was one of the brightest lights of the Harlem Renaissance and his poems and essays celebrate black culture, creativity and strength.

A Raisin in the Sun (1959) is addressing such grave issues as identity, male chauvinism and racial segregation looms large in the play. There are four main types of race discrimination. They are Direct discrimination, Indirect discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation.

In this play Hansberry used the direct discrimination concept using the characters. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a revolutionary work of art for its time. Hansberry shows an entire black family in a realistic light, one that is unflattering and far from comedic. She uses black vernacular throughout the play and broaches important issues and conflicts such as Poverty, Discrimination and the construction of African – American racial identity.

A Raisin in the Sun has only three Acts. It explores not only the tension between the White and

Black society and also the strain within the Black community over how to react to an oppressive White community. Many characters are introduced in the play and they suffered a lot of problems and each had a separate dreams.

There are three main feminine characters are in the play. Many famous writers have created ideal women who embody motherly love and affection. Lorraine Hansberry's Mama is one such mother. The entire family is waiting for the insurance money Ten Thousand dollars of Big Walter.

Mama had a dream to buy a large house in the fashionable White colony of Clybourne Park. She paid three thousand five hundred dollars for it. She set apart three thousand five hundred dollars for her daughter Benetha's medical education. And the remaining three thousand dollars is handed over to the drunkard son Walter who was the protagonist and antagonist too. He wants to take risks and climb up the social ladder. Walter had a traditional wife Ruth and a boy Travis.

The character of Mr. Linder makes the theme of racial discrimination prominent in the plots as an issue that the Youngers cannot avoid. The governing body of the Youngers new neighbourhood, the Clybourne Park Improvement Association sends Mr. Linder to persuade them not to move into the all – White Clybourne Park neighbourhood.

Mr. Linder and the people he represents can only see the colour of the Younger family's skin and his offer to bribe the Younger to keep them from moving

threatens to tear apart the Younger family and the values for which it stands. Ultimately, the Youngers respond to this discrimination with defiance and strength.

The play powerfully demonstrates that the way to deal with discrimination is to stand up to it and reassert one's dignity in the face of it rather than allow it to pass unchecked. The Youngers also struggled socially and economically throughout the play.

Mama strongly believes in the importance of family as she tries to teach the value of the family as she struggles to keep them together and functioning. Walter and Benetha learn the lesson about the importance of the family at the end of the play. Even though the entire family had Socio – Economic problem, they come together to reject Mr. Linder's racist overtures. They are still strong individuals, but they are individuals who function as a part of a family.

There is also a female submissiveness versus male domination. Mama and her deceased husband are projected as a self – effacing couple, each living for the other. Mama recalls how her husband worked and worked in order to provide the family with all necessary comforts. He died before fulfilling his dream of buying a spacious house for the growing family.

Mama fulfils the dream by buying a large house by using the insurance money bequeathed by her husband. Ruth is the other submissive wife in the play. She does everything in her power to keep her family intact. After she finishes all the backbreaking household chores.

She goes and works in other houses as a kitchen maid in order to augment her drunkard husband's slender income. Never does she think in terms of divorcing her irresponsible husband, as a modern wife would do.

There is also a concept of search for identity in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Mama's daughter Benetha had a

problem of identity. Benetha had two suitors Millionaire George Murchison and the Nigerian Pseudo – intellectual Joseph Asagai who tried to corrupt Benetha's mind and finally rescued by her brother Walter. At the end of both Ruth and Benetha allow themselves to be governed and controlled by the domineering Walter.

The raisins dried up in the sun do not lose their taste. On the other hand, their taste increases all the more. This is used by Lorraine as a symbol of suffering enhancing the value of suffers. Hansberry's reference to Hughes's poem in her play's title highlights the importance of dreams in *A Raisin in the Sun* and the struggle that her character face to realize their individual dreams, a struggle inextricably tied to the more fundamental black dreams of equality in America.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry raises many issues of race, gender, family values, religion and ethics. The play poses many more problems that it resolves or even attempts to resolve therein lies the complexity and the realism of drama.

Lorraine Hansberry dealt with the many theme and issues in this play. Finally, the play ends with a note of reconciliation and the strong individualism and fight against the racial discrimination and win over the White man Mr. Linder and settle down in the White dominated Clybourne Park.

The play concludes with the optimistic note and shows the will power of the Africans. This play gave a strong power to each and every African who is fighting against the racial discrimination in the society.

Work Cited

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