The Rep
MILWAUKEE

March 12 – April 14, 2013

Play Guide

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

By Lorraine Hansberry • Directed by Ron OJ Parson

Associate Producers: James and Mary Braza, Judy Hansen, Connie and John Kordsmeier, Jacqueline Herd-Barber and Michael Barber

A Raisin In the Sun
PLAY GUIDE

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Written by
Leda Hoffmann
Education Coordinator

with contributions from
Hannah Barbeau
Education Intern

Amanda Garrigan
Education Intern

•

Play Guide edited by
JC Clementz
Literary Assistant

Jenny Kostreva
Education Director

Lisa Fulton
Director of Marketing

•

Graphic Design by
Eric Reda

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www.MilwaukeeRep.com

Mark Clements
Artistic Director

Milwaukee Repertory Theater
108 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI • 53202

Milwaukee Repertory Theater presents

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

By Lorraine Hansberry
Directed by Ron OJ Parson
March 12 – April 14
Quadracci Powerhouse

MARK'S TAKE:

"*A Raisin In the Sun* is one of the greatest and most important American plays ever written—and even though that writing was over 50 years ago, it still contains great resonance today. It's one of those theatrical giants that everyone needs to see at some point, and takes you on a wonderful journey that will leave you feeling a multitude of emotions as you root for the Younger family to achieve their dream of a better life."

-Mark Clements, Artistic Director

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SYNOPSIS

ACT I

In the 1950s, on the South Side of Chicago, the Younger family lives in an apartment far too small for its five members. The recent death of Walter Younger, Sr. leaves the matriarch of the family, Lena (Mama) Younger, awaiting a $10,000 check from Mr. Younger's life insurance. Lena's son, Walter Lee, dreams of investing the money in a liquor store venture with two of his friends, but Mama morally objects. Ruth, Walter's overworked wife, also thinks the proposition foolish. Beneatha, Walter Lee's sister, needs part of the money for medical school. Ruth finds out she is pregnant and considers terminating the pregnancy.

ACT II

Later the same day, Beneatha talks about Africa and her Nigerian suitor Asagai, while Ruth and Walter address their difficult relationship. Mama returns and announces she placed a large deposit on a house in the all white neighborhood of Clybourne Park. Although Ruth finally feels free, Walter is disappointed that the money is gone and tells Mama she "butchered his dream." Later, seeing how this affects Walter, Mama asks Walter to deposit $3,000 of the money in a savings account for Beneatha's schooling and gives him the remaining amount to manage. Each member of the family's dreams begins to fall in place. Later, with the house full of packing boxes, Karl Lindner from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association arrives and makes a sizable offer to purchase the Youngers' new home to keep them from moving to Clybourne Park. The Younger family rejects his offer. Soon after, Bobo – one of Walter's friends – arrives to tell Walter that their other partner, Willy Harris, ran off with all the money, including Beneatha's medical school tuition. With their dreams crushed, both Mama and Walter explode with feelings of loss, anger, helplessness, and grief.

ACT III

Beneatha considers giving up medical school to get married. Mama contemplates giving up the house. Ruth wanders listlessly. Walter stares into space, but then attempts a solution. He decides to accept Mr. Lindner's offer. When Mr. Lindner arrives, Walter, faced with destroying his family's pride, changes his mind. Walter informs Mr. Lindner that his family will move to Clybourne Park.

Mildred Marie Langford, Chiké Johnson and Ericka Ratcliff.

Braylen Stevens and Chiké Johnson.

Mildred Marie Langford, Greta Oglesby, Chiké Johnson, Braylen Stevens and Ericka Ratcliff.

Mildred Marie Langford and Greta Oglesby. Photos by Michael Brosilow.

THE CHARACTERS

Walter Younger, Sr.
His death before the events of the play leaves the family with $10,000 in life insurance money.

PARENTS OF

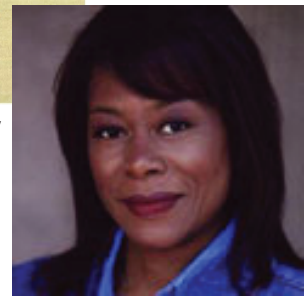
Walter Lee Younger
35 year old son of Walter, Sr. and Lena. He dreams of opening a liquor store.

MARRIED

Chiké Johnson

FRIEND

Lena Younger (Mama)
Head of the family.



Greta Oglesby

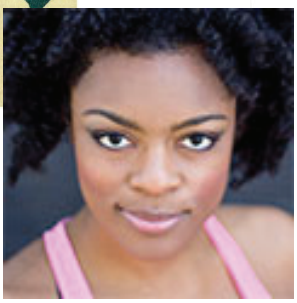
FRIENDS

Beneatha Younger
20 years old. In college, she wants to become a doctor.

Mildred Marie Langford

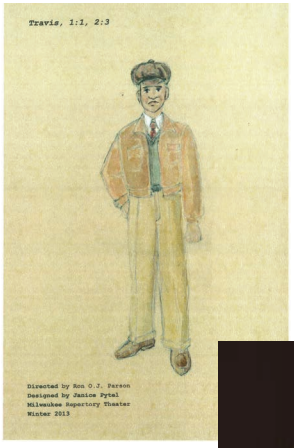
Costume Sketches by Janice Pytel

Ruth Younger
Walter's wife.



Ericka Ratcliff

SON



Travis Younger
10 year old son of Walter Lee and Ruth.

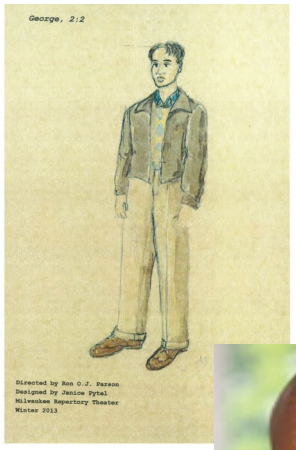
Braylen Stevens

Karl Lindner
A representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association.

James Pickering

Bobo
A friend of Walter's.

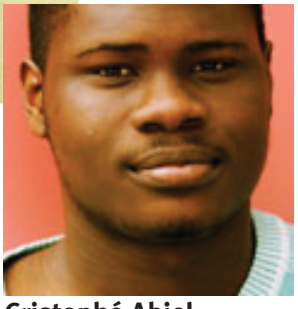
Trequon Tate



George Murchison
One of Beneatha's suitors.

Gavin Lawrence

Joseph Asagai
Beneatha's friend from college, Nigerian.



Cristophé Abiel

Moving Men

Lamar Jefferson

Tyrone Phillips

LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Lorraine Hansberry.

When *A Raisin In the Sun* opened on Broadway in 1959, Lorraine Hansberry became the first African-American female playwright to have a play on Broadway. At 29, she became the youngest American playwright to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play. *A Raisin In the Sun* transformed American theater by sharing, for the first time on a Broadway stage, the story of an ordinary black family.

In *A Raisin In the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry wrote about the people she saw growing up on the South Side of Chicago, as well as her first-hand experience moving from a black neighborhood to an all-white neighborhood.

Hansberry, the youngest of four children, was born in 1930. Her parents, Carl and Nanny Hansberry, a successful real estate broker and a schoolteacher, instilled in their children a deep sense of pride in their racial identity. At the time, laws required hospitals to list the race of newborn babies on birth certificates. Lorraine Hansberry's read "Negro," but her parents crossed out the word and wrote, "Black." As an adult, Hansberry commented that "both of [her] parents were strong-minded, civic-minded, exceptionally race-minded people who made enormous sacrifices on behalf of the struggle for civil rights throughout their lifetimes."

> "I think you could find the tempo of my people on their back porches. The honesty of their living is there in the shabbiness. Scrubbed porches that sag and look their danger. Dirty gray wood steps. And always a line of white and pink clothes scrubbed so well, waving in the dirty wind of the city.
>
> My people are poor. And they are tired. And they are determined to live.
>
> Our South Side is a place apart: each piece of our living is a protest."
>
> Excerpt from "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" by Lorraine Hansberry

Hansberry witnessed the poverty of her community during the Great Depression, but grew up in relative economic stability. By the standards of most black residents of Chicago, the Hansberrys were wealthy. Never comfortable with her "rich girl" status, Hansberry identified with her poorer classmates. Many of her classmates wore house keys around their necks, symbols of their status as "latchkey children," who would spend much of their time at home alone. Hansberry decided to also wear keys around her neck – any key she could find – to fit in with the rest of her classmates. Though Hansberry lived on the South Side of Chicago in the Woodlawn neighborhood, her family never struggled for money like the Youngers in *A Raisin In the Sun*. Still, she wrote about the experiences she knew from those growing up around her.

When Hansberry was eight years old, her parents bought a house in Washington Park, an all-white neighborhood to the west of Woodlawn. While her father fought a legal battle against a racially restrictive covenant that attempted to prohibit African-American families from buying homes in that neighborhood, Hansberry experienced what she would later call a "hellishly hostile" environment in her new neighborhood and her mostly-white public school.

A brick, hurled through a window by angry white members of the neighborhood,

nearly killed eight-year-old Hansberry. Many times, her mother would stand at the front of the house with a loaded gun in order to protect her family from racist attacks. Hansberry's father won his legal battle, taking the case, *Hansberry v. Lee,* all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Hansberry spent her middle and high school years in the house her parents fought for the right to own.

After finishing high school in Chicago, Hansberry broke from the family tradition of attending historically black universities and began studying art at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Seeing a performance of the play *Juno and the Paycock* inspired Hansberry to write plays. She left university after two years to pursue playwriting. Moving to New York, Hansberry joined the staff of Paul Robeson's independent, radical, black magazine, *Freedom*, and worked as a cashier and waitress while writing. Hansberry met Jewish songwriter Robert Nemiroff on a picket line protesting discrimination at New York University. They married in 1953.

In 1956, Hansberry quit her part-time jobs as a waitress and a cashier to focus exclusively on writing. During this time, she wrote *The Crystal Stair*, later renamed *A Raisin In the Sun* after a line from the Langston Hughes poem, "Harlem". *A Raisin In the Sun* opened on Broadway on March 11, 1959 to critical acclaim and ran for 530 performances. A film adaptation in 1961 starred Sydney Poitier and most of the original Broadway cast.

After the success of *A Raisin In the Sun*, Hansberry continued both writing and working in social activism. She moved with her husband to Croton-on-Hudson, but returned to New York for rehearsals of her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, which opened to poor reviews. Hansberry suffered from pancreatic cancer while writing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and passed away on the final night of the Broadway run, January 12th, 1965. Her career cut short at the age of 34, she left behind three unfinished plays and an unfinished semi-autobiographical novel.

> "The play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the South Side of Chicago at the present time ... That is Miss Hansberry's personal contribution to an explosive situation in which simple honesty is the most difficult thing in the world. And also the most illuminating."
>
> Brook Atkinson in the *New York Times* review of the 1959 production of *A Raisin In the Sun*.

At the time of her death, Martin Luther King, Jr., described Hansberry as "a woman whose creative ability and profound grasp of the deep social issues confronting the world would remain an inspiration to generations yet unborn."

Robert Nemiroff, who continued to work with Hansberry after their amicable divorce in 1962, devoted his career to making her works widely known. Throughout her illness, Nemiroff and other supporters kept *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* running, despite cool critical reception. After Hansberry's death, he created a play, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, based on Hansberry's letters, essays, speeches, and writings. He continued her work by finishing her play *Les Blancs*, which had a short run on Broadway in 1970.

HANSBERRY V. LEE


28 PAGES 10c AND WORTH IT

THE Chicago Defender WORLD'S GREATEST WEEKLY

CITY EDITION

Vol. XXXVI, No. 30 CHICAGO, ILL., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1940

WIFE OF BISHOP J. A. GREGG STRICKEN

HANSBERRY DECISION OPENS 500 NEW HOMES TO RACE

Promoted

HOLD YOUTH, 20 FOR MURDER IN GANG ROW

STRATEGY BOARD IN HANSBERRY RESTRICTIVE COVENANT CASE

COURT HOLDS COVENANTS NON EXISTENT

Headline from the *Hansberry v. Lee* decision.

Hansberry's play drew inspiration from her own childhood growing up on Chicago's South Side and moving into an entirely white neighborhood at a young age. Many neighborhoods had racially restrictive covenants, agreements written into property deeds binding the owners to not sell or rent their property to specific minority groups.

Hansberry's father, a realtor active in the NAACP, bought a house in an all white neighborhood to challenge these covenants. The specific covenant in that neighborhood, stated, "no part of said premises shall in no manner be used or occupied directly by a negro or negroes." The covenant did specify that African-Americans could be chauffeurs or house servants, as long as they did not own the house. When the Hansberrys bought the house, the Kenwood Improvement Association filed a mandatory injunction for the family to vacate the property. With support of the NAACP, Hansberry challenged the injunction and took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. *Hansberry v. Lee*, a landmark decision in 1940, ruled that the covenant could not represent the views of all members of the neighborhood since only 54% of the neighborhood landowners supported the restrictive covenant.

Since the court rejected the specific covenant impacting the Hansberry family, Carl Hansberry's lawyers won the case. However, they did not achieve a ruling on the constitutionality of restrictive residential covenants. It would be eight years before the Supreme Court would rule racially restrictive covenants a violation of the fourteenth amendment in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, in which an African-American couple argued their right to purchase a home in a restricted all-white neighborhood in St. Louis.

The property in dispute in the *Hansberry vs. Lee* case. It now has landmark status as the Lorraine Hansberry House.

"My father was typical of a generation of Negroes who believed that the 'American way' could successfully be made to work to democratize the United States. Thus, twenty-five years ago, he spent a small personal fortune, his considerable talents, and many years of his life fighting, in association with NAACP attorneys, Chicago's "restrictive covenants" in one of this nation's ugliest ghettos.

That fight also required our family to occupy disputed property in a hellishly hostile 'white neighborhood' in which, literally, howling mobs surrounded our house. One of their missiles almost took the life of the then eight-year-old signer of this letter. My memories of this 'correct' way of fighting white supremacy in America included being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school. And I also remember my desperate and courageous mother, patrolling our house all night with a loaded German Luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while my father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court."

Lorraine Hansberry, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, April 23, 1964

"HARLEM" AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Lorraine Hansberry titled her play *A Raisin In the Sun*, a phrase taken directly from Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem." Hughes published "Harlem" in a collection of poetry entitled *Montage of a Dream Deferred* in 1951.

The poem begins with the question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" Hughes examines the impact of generations of African-Americans having their dreams pushed aside. Hansberry's play, *A Raisin In the Sun*, responds to Hughes' question and examines the effect of dreams deferred through the Younger family.

HARLEM
By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Duke Ellington with his band.

Harlem Renaissance

A period in the 1920s of innovative cultural activity among African-Americans, the Harlem Renaissance grew out of an established African-American community in Harlem, a neigborhood in New York City in which new African-American artists created landmark works in literature, dance, art, and music. When racial barriers to education decreased (especially in places like Harlem, in the North) in the decades following the Civil War, many African-Americans took advantage of educational opportunities and founded dozens of colleges and universities with writers and lecturers such as W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson taking strong public roles. The North cultivated these artists as African-Americans migrated out of the South. Among the New York neighborhoods flooded with upcoming intellectuals, Harlem grabbed national attention for its innovative young African-American writers, painters, and musicians. Building on the foundation laid by the Harlem Renaissance, Lorraine Hansberry shared the reality of the black experience in America with a theater audience unfamiliar with those stories.

Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes played an important role in the Harlem Renaissance through his contribution of poetry, novels, short stories, plays and song lyrics. Hughes used his writing to promote equality and celebrate the culture, humor, and spirituality of the African-American community. Originally, serious critics ignored his writing because of his focus on the lower and middle class African-American population. In his autobiography Hughes comments, "I didn't know the upper class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too." Known for his honest portrayal of African-American life, critics regard Hughes as one of the most important figures of the Harlem Renaissance.

THEMES

Chiké Johnson and Greta Oglesby. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

"Produced in 1959, the play presaged the revolution in black and women's consciousness – and the revolutionary ferment in Africa – that exploded in the years following the playwright's death in 1965 to alter ineradicably the social fabric and consciousness of the nation. It did so in a manner and to an extent, as so many have commented lately, that few could have foreseen."

- Robert Nemiroff, Lorraine Hansberry's ex-husband, in the preface to the 30th anniversary edition of *A Raisin In the Sun*

AFROCENTRISM

Afrocentrism challenges the standard of seeing everything through the lenses of Western European culture rather than African-centered thinking. Afrocentrism asks the question: "What would African people do if there were no white people?" Molefi Kete Asante, the author who first put the concept of Afrocentricity into writing, explains that people see history relative to themselves in terms of centers and margins, and the distance between the two. When thinking Afrocentrically, people begin to see themselves at the center of their own history, rather than at the margins of European. The Afrocentrist movement in America took off in the 1960s, a time when America experienced immense social and political change. Youths, intellectuals, and scholars began to recognize and appreciate the African roots of African-Americans, forming a "black perspective" from which to view the world.

In *A Raisin In the Sun*, Beneatha begins to see the world from an African perspective, learning from her Nigerian friend, Asagai.

Asagai: What does it matter? Assimilation is so popular in your country.

Beneatha: I am not an assimilationist!

George: Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!

Beneatha: Grass huts! See there... you are standing there in your splendid ignorance talking about people who were the first to smelt iron on the face of the earth!

Questions

- Asagai tells Beneatha that she "mutilates" her hair, arguing that it should be worn naturally. Is Beneatha's decision to wear her hair naturally an act of revolution again what she calls the "oppressive culture?"
- How do different members of the Younger family approach these new ideas from Africa? What does this suggest about the generational shift in celebrating one's African heritage?
- What perspective on the Younger family's struggles does Asagai bring with his stories of poverty and colonialism in Africa?

A DREAM DEFERRED

With Langston Hughes' poem, "Harlem," or "A Dream Deferred," as the preface to *A Raisin In the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry explores the consequences of generations of African-American parents, children, and individuals unable to achieve their dreams because of discrimination, racism, and lack of equal opportunities. In *A Raisin In the Sun*, every member of the Younger family strives for a better life and each one has a different dream of how to get there.

Big Walter used to say [. . .], "Seems like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams – but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile.
-MAMA

Questions

- How does a dream for a better life manifest itself in each member of the Younger family?
- How do Walter Sr.'s dreams for his family affect the ways in which each member of his family views his or her own dreams after his death?
- The impending arrival of $10,000 in life insurance money changes many of the characters' perspectives on their future. How do the members of the Younger family feel about the money? Do they all believe it will help them better achieve their dreams?

You see that? Man says to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, Baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say – I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, Baby! And his woman say – Your eggs is getting cold!
-WALTER

FEMINISM

From Beneatha's radical decision to become a doctor to Ruth's open consideration of an abortion, *A Raisin In the Sun* put women's issues on stage in ways not seen before. Writing as an African-American woman, a perspective not yet heard on the Broadway stage, Lorraine Hansberry gave voice to the different generational perspectives and ideas of three different African-American women.

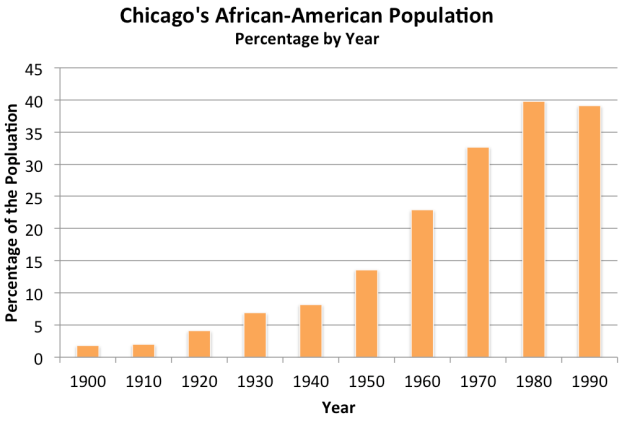
Get over it? What are you talking about, Ruth? Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet – if I ever get married.
-BENEATHA

Questions

- Beneatha wants to be a doctor first and says she might later get married. What do Mama and Ruth's reactions to this information suggest about different generational views on women?
- Hansberry includes the subject of abortion as a main thread through her play. What makes Ruth consider an abortion? What do the discussions about Ruth's pregnancy illuminate about women's roles at the time of the play?
- At one point, Walter Lee tells his sister to, "shut up and get married." What different perspectives do the men in *A Raisin In the Sun* have on the role of women? What do Walter Lee, Asagai, and George's thoughts on Beneatha have in common?

You're a nice looking girl – all over. That's all you need honey, forget the atmosphere. Guys aren't going to go for the atmosphere – they're going to go for what they see. Be glad for that. Beneatha, please drop the Garbo routine. It doesn't go with you. As for my self, I want a nice-simple-sophisticated girl – Not a poet – O.K.?
-GEORGE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE GREAT MIGRATION AND HOUSING



THE GREAT MIGRATION

The Great Migration, the largest internal migration in the history of the United Stages, took place between 1910 and 1960 and brought hundreds of thousands of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. By 1930, as many as two million African-Americans had moved from the South to northern cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit where they created churches, community organizations, great music and literature. In the second wave of the Great Migration (between 1940 and 1960), the black population of Chicago increased almost 300%, from 278,000 to 813,000.

Escaping a segregated education system, a poor agricultural economy, and increased violence against blacks during the era of Jim Crow laws, blacks moved to urban northern cities for the promise of good industrial jobs. With industry expanding in the buildup for World War I and then during World War II, Chicago offered higher wages than the South. A thriving black community on the South Side with many black-owned businesses and an African-American professional class also drew blacks from the South to Chicago. In the North, African-Americans could vote and run for office. One of the nation's largest black newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, circulated throughout the South, providing blacks in the South stories from Chicago and sometimes advertising for jobs in Chicago. Migrants from the Mississippi Delta could take the bus or train directly into Chicago. At one point 2,200 African-Americans arrived in Chicago on a daily basis.

THE GREAT MIGRATION IN MILWAUKEE

"When African-Americans moved from the rural South during the great migration, they were still in virtual slavery. The North offered job opportunities, especially sought-after union jobs. The African-American community in Milwaukee grew at a very rapid rate. In 1950 Milwaukee had about 20,000 African-American citizens, and in 1960 there were about 62,000. In 10 years, the African-American community tripled. But housing did not correspond to the growth. In the 1960s, African-Americans made up 12% of Milwaukee's population, living on 5% of Milwaukee's land. The population density in African-American neighborhoods was significantly higher than it was anywhere else."

-Peggy Rozga

For a complete interview about Milwaukee's housing crisis with Peggy Rozga, civil rights activist, see the play guide for *Clybourne Park*.
http://www.milwaukeerep.com/season/clybourne-playguide.html

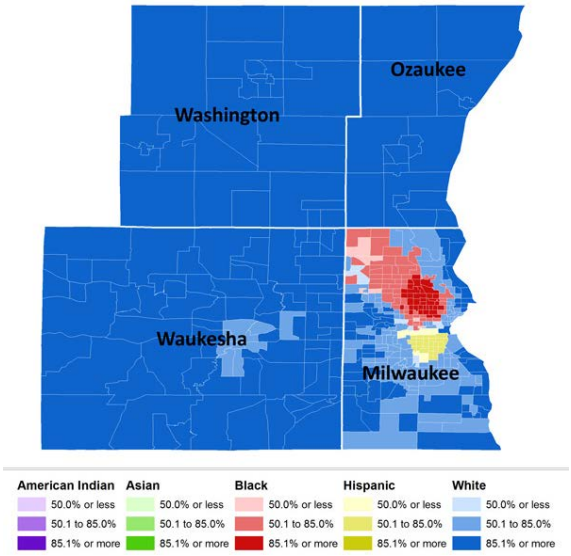
Apartment building in a black section of Chicago, 1941.

HOUSING IN CHICAGO

The influx of new migrants put great pressure on the overcrowded South Side of Chicago and other black neighborhoods in the city. In the 1920s, Illinois established racially restrictive housing covenants, a type of private restriction on housing integration. Many blacks, hoping to escape overcrowding in black neighborhoods, experienced the same discrimination they had in the South. At one point, 80% of Chicago was under restrictive covenants. With population increasing so rapidly, it became increasing difficult for blacks to find jobs and housing.

Landlords in black neighborhoods got rich subdividing apartments into poorly maintained one-room units that they rented at inflated prices. Real estate agents, looking to make a large profit, began to engage in "block busting," moving black families into white neighborhoods and then warning white families to sell their homes at rock bottom prices. Real estate agents then subdivided the houses or resold them to black families for a large profit. A neighborhood's racial make-up could change quickly. For example, Chicago Lawndale district changed from 13% black in 1950 to 91% black in 1960.

MILWAUKEE'S HOUSING DIVIDE



A map of the metropolitan Milwaukee area based on data from the 2010 Census.

The Hansberrys' move to an all-white neighborhood, when Lorraine Hansberry was eight-years-old, set in motion the legal battle to outlaw restrictive housing covenants and inspired the young writer to tell the stories of people stuck dreaming in small apartments, unable to escape the discrimination that accompanied their race. The fictional Younger family's move to the all-white Clybourne Park neighborhood stirred voices of protest against unfair housing and created a platform for the discussion of neighborhood's racial identities through to today, with productions of Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park*.

Racial divisions within neighborhoods continue to be problems faced by cities today. Named by *Time Magazine* in 2011 the "most segregated city" in America, Milwaukee has one of the most segregated metropolitan areas with a population of 500,000+ in the United States. Why is Milwaukee a city in which *Time Magazine* states, "90 percent of African-Americans live in the inner city?" According to Marc Levine, professor of history and economic development at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, "every place has had the zoning ordinances, then restrictive covenants, the practices of realtors—the standard history. What makes Milwaukee a little bit different than these other places, which explains why we're consistently in the top five and often number one in segregation? We have the lowest rate of African-American suburbanization of any of these larger cities."

FAIR HOUSING MARCHES

Many years after *Hansberry v. Lee*, and a few years after *A Raisin In the Sun*, Milwaukee, like many American cities, still had racially restrictive measures in place, making it difficult for African-Americans to find housing outside overcrowded black neighborhoods.

A confrontation between Milwaukee police and the NAACP Youth Council, ca. 1967-1968.

The most publicized marches during the Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee were the "Fair Housing Marches" of 1967-1968, in which a young priest, Father James Groppi, led marches from African-American neighborhoods into the white South Side. A 1968 Time Magazine article outlined the struggle:

> Few northern cities have more sharply segregated housing conditions than Milwaukee, where de facto barriers for years have walled Negroes into the inner core. And last summer and fall, few cities seemed less likely to do anything about the problem. For 200 days last year, black demonstrators led by the Rev. James Groppi, 37, a Milwaukee-born Italian-American, paraded from the ghetto into the Polish-occupied South Side and the city's other ethnic sections to demand a city open-housing ordinance.

The marches gathered national attention and for 200 days the NAACP Youth Council marched to secure a citywide open-housing ordinance that would give all citizens, regardless of race, the right to rent or own property anywhere in the city. As historian Patrick Jones points out, after angry mobs from the predominantly white South Side neighborhoods greeted the Youth Council with rocks, bottles, and racial epithets, some called Milwaukee, "The Selma of the North."

> For more information on the Fair Housing Marches, see the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Library's page "March on Milwaukee":
> **http://collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/march**

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

A Raisin In the Sun opened on Broadway on March 11, 1959, becoming an instant American classic. *The New York Times* review by Brook Atkinson wrote:

> In *A Raisin In the Sun* ... Lorraine Hansberry touches on some serious problems. No doubt, her feelings about them are as strong as anyone's. But she has not tipped her play to prove one thing or another. The play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the South Side of Chicago at the present time ... That is Miss Hansberry's personal contribution to an explosive situation in which simple honesty is the most difficult thing in the world. And also the most illuminating.

The then-unknown Lorriane Hansberry became the first African-American female playwright to have a play produced on Broadway and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play of 1958-59, in spite of competition from Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Eugene O'Neill's *A Touch of Poet*, and Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*

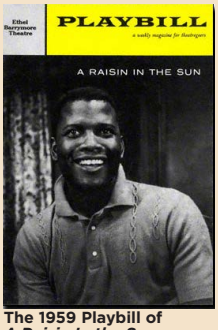
Since its premiere, *A Raisin In the Sun* has been translated into over thirty languages and produced across the globe, including China, the Czech Republic, France, and Russia. The play's success on Broadway with white and black audiences and warm reception around the world serves as testament to the universality of the themes in the story. Despite agreeing with the universality of these themes, Lorraine Hansberry argued that her play was, in fact, very specific. Hansberry explained:

> I don't think there is anything more universal in the world than man's oppression of man. This is what most great dramas have been about, no matter what the device of telling it is. We tend to think, because it is so immediate with us in the United States, that this is a unique human question where white people do not like black people ... but the fact of the matter is wherever there are men, there are oppressed people and ... to the extent that my work is successful piece of drama it makes it a reality of this oppression true.

Hansberry's play continues to be produced across the United States and the world. It remains relevant to today's society and very specific to its place in 1950's Chicago. As Hansberry noted, "one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from truthful identity of what is."

1959

A Raisin In the Sun premieres on Broadway, starring Sidney Poitier. The production runs for 530 performances and is the first show on Broadway written by an African-American woman and the first show on Broadway directed by an African-American (Lloyd Richards).



The 1959 Playbill of *A Raisin In the Sun*.


Scene from the 1961 film.

1961

Columbia Pictures produces a film version of the play, keeping most of the original Broadway cast. Lorraine Hansberry writes the screenplay.

1973

Broadway premiere of the musical *Raisin*, adapted from *A Raisin In the Sun*. It runs for 847 performances.


Scene from the 1973 musical, *Raisin*.

1974

Raisin wins a Tony Award for Best Musical.

1989

American Playhouse adapts *A Raisin In the Sun* into a TV movie starring Danny Glover. The TV adaptation receives 3 Emmy Award nominations.


Scene the from 2004 Broadway Revival.

2004

Audra McDonald and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs star in the Broadway Revival of *A Raisin In the Sun*, running for 88 performances.

2008

Audra McDonald and Sean Combs star in a second *A Raisin In the Sun* TV movie.

2010

Clybourne Park, a new play by Bruce Norris, is written in response to *A Raisin In the Sun*.

2011

Clybourne Park wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

2012

Clybourne Park wins Tony Award for "Best Play."


Bruce Norris Accepting Best Play Tony Award.

CREATING THE REP PRODUCTION

The set includes both the Youngers apartment and glimpses of Chicago around it. "El" tracks make the set distinctly Chicagoian.

All of the lights on the set are practical so the light board in the booth that controls the rest of the lighting also controls the lamps.

The perspective of the walls and ceiling makes the apartment feel small, while opening the play to the audience.

The actors pack most of the apartment in moving boxes over the course of the play. The crew must unpack all the boxes after every show to prepare for the next performance.

The kitchen stove is a functional gas stove. Ruth cooks actual breakfast for her family at the beginning of the play.

Production Photo by Michael Brosilow

The Youngers' apartment is full of everything a family has where they live. This includes clothes, jewelry, coats and hats, and purses. The wardrobe staff makes sure that everything is where it needs to be in the apartment before each performance.

The apartment buzzer sound comes from a real working bell controlled by the actors. When the postman rings the bell, but does not appear onstage, a crew member "plays" the postman.

Throughout the play, many props have business logos on them that are accurate to 1950's Chicago. For example, the check that arrives is from an insurance company that existed in Chicago at the time of the play.

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. In the central rotunda is a large staircase which leads to The Rep's Quadracci Powerhouse theater and lobby.

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