Generational Conflicts in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry

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Résumé:

Ce papier explore les conflits générationnels dans l'ouvrage de Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun, publié en 1959. En effet, dans cette pièce de théâtre, l'auteur met en scène une famille Africaine Américaine tenaillée par des tensions qui trouvent leur soubassement dans des divergences d'opinions et de croyances. Ces dernières sont dans l'attente d'un chèque d'assurance-vie qui doit leur permettre de réaliser leurs rêves respectifs. Les questions soulevées portent essentielles sur la portée de ces divergences et leur impact dans les rapports au sein de la famille Younger. En se basant sur les approches historique, postmoderniste and déconstructionniste, notre analyse débouche sur les disparités entre les rêves, leur caractère inaccessible pour les Noirs Américains dans un contexte de ségrégation raciale, le relativisme des valeurs prônées par les uns et les autres, ainsi qu'une capacité insoupçonnée à transcender ces différences pour faire montre d'une dignité retrouvée autour de l'unité familiale.
Mots-clés : *Conflits, rêves, ségrégation raciale, déconstruction, relativisme, identité, dignité*

Abstract :

This paper explores the generational conflicts in the book A Raisin in the Sun published in 1959 by Lorraine Hansberry. In fact, the author stages in the play, an African American family torn by some tensions caused by the differences of opinions and beliefs. They all look forward to receiving an insurance cheque that should enable them to achieve their respective dreams. The issues raised are centered around the extent of those divergences and their impact on the relationships between the members of the family. Based on the historical, postmodernist and deconstructionist approaches, our analysis result in the showcase of the disparities of the dreams nurtured by the Youngers, their elusiveness for Black Americans within the framework of racial segregation, the relativism of values, as well as un unsuspected

capacity to transcend the differences and display dignity and preserve the family unity.
Keywords: *Conflicts, dreams, racial segregation, deconstruction, relativism, identity, dignity*

Introduction

A Raisin in the Sun is a play by Lorraine Hansberry published in 1959 on the eve of the 1960s civil rights activism and in the heat of America's notorious racial segregation. In fact, after centuries of slavery, Black people were freed in the wake of the Civil War (1861-1865). However, after the Reconstruction Period, the white establishment managed to devise a new form or institutionalized racial discrimination known as the Jim Crow Laws. Those laws were passed between 1874 and 1975 in the American South to separate Whites from Blacks. Public schools, public transportations, public facilities, drinking fountains, toilets…were targeted by those laws. Things were not much better in the North where Whites strove to preserve their privileges over the black population. In the state of Chicago, a racially restrictive covenant prevented Blacks from living in the same sought-after districts as Whites. Lorraine Hansberry's father bought a house in the South Park neighborhood of Chicago, which was protected by such a covenant, *"which legally prevented ownership or occupancy of property by blacks. The covenant was enforced, the Hansberry family was evicted and Carl Hansberry sued. The case made it to the United States Supreme Court; Hansberry v. Lee*" (Chenelle, Fisch). Little wonder to notice that housing discrimination is the main theme in the play.

Yet, against the backdrop of this important theme, we have the unfolding of existential generational conflicts that plague the relationship between Lena Younger and her two children, Walter and Beneatha. To start with, they have different dreams. How diverging are their dreams? How does it shed light

on their moral bearings? More importantly, how does it shape their identity(ies) in a period when DuBois's notion of double consciousness was so vivid? And finally, can they manage to work out their differences and transcend their disagreements?

Many African American writers of the time dealt with the plight of Black people. DuBois first warned that the problem of the twentieth century would be that of the "color line", underlining the importance of race. Marcus Garvey advocated the return back to Africa; whereas in her poem "Heritage", Countee Cullen wonders "What is Africa to me?", highlighting the importance of her African roots as well as the remoteness caused by three centuries of slavery. Writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison focused on trying to expose and make sense of the plight of African Americans. Even though the critic Harold Cruse defines Hansberry's play as "a piece of glorified soap opera", she brilliantly brings her contribution to the artistic representational debate of the existence of Black Americans in the U.S. Bigsby praises both her dramatic techniques and her capacity to "transcend" history.

Based on the postmodern, historical and deconstructionist approaches, we will first assess the status of Black people regarding the ideal of the American Dream. The historical approach enables the understanding of the second-class citizenship of Black Americans legally conferred by the Jim Crow Laws. The postmodern approach helps us shed light on the questioning of the truths and principles of Lena Younger by her children, which increases their misunderstandings. The deconstructionist approach, also used by poststructuralists and postmodernists, theorized by Jacques Derrida will be used to find out some important hidden layers of meanings conveyed in the play.

The study is divided into three main chapters. The first one explores the possibilities and limits of Black Americans to achieve their dreams in a segregated society. The second one

examines the relativism of values, another key feature of postmodernism, which enables to grasp the main sources of the generational conflicts, and the last chapter addresses the quest for identity and dignity through African rootedness and the complexities of blackness in America.

Chapter 1: Blackness and the American dream

The first chapter addresses the relevance of the American Dream in relation with the black Americans. The dream, defined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book, *The Epic of America* as *"that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement."* (Adams, 1931:404). In this chapter, we can notice how diverging the Youngers' dreams are and the extent to which they are elusive.

1.1. Different dreams

The Younger family is composed of Lena/Mama, her two children, Walter and Beneatha, Walter's wife, Ruth and their son, Travis. They all look forward to receiving the insurance cheque that is supposed to change their lives. The first important remark is how different their dreams are. To begin with, Lena Younger has a lifelong dream that has been deferred for a long time: to buy a house and gather all her family so as to live in a decent place. She confesses to Ruth: *"…But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had 'bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back"* (Hansberry, 1959:45)

Lena Younger talks about her dream with nostalgia and a tinge of disappointment to see it slide away from her over the years. Walter Lee Younger is the prototypical frustrated Black American during segregation. He lives in his mother's apartment with his wife and son in spite of a job that barely enables him to

cater for the bare necessities of his family. As a result, he is persuaded that his social success depends on his ability to financially make it. Therefore, he makes up his mind to invest in a liquor store with his friends Willy and Bobo. The investment requires a great amount of money and all his hopes rely on the insurance cheque. He explains his project to his wife to try to convince her to talk her mother into giving him the money: "*You see, this liquor store we got in mind cost seventy-five-thousand and we figured the initial investment on the place be 'bout thirty thousand, see. That be ten thousand each."* (Hansberry, 1959:33)

Besides, Walter's dream makes Mama in a very difficult position, because the insurance money amounts to ten thousand dollars. Lena Younger faces a very delicate conundrum all the more so as her daughter, Beneatha, has a big and noble dream of becoming a doctor. Medical schools are expensive. Still, the fulfillment of her daughter's dream is very important for Mama and she lets Ruth understand that her part of the money has to be taken aside to fund her medical studies: *"Some of it got to be put away for Beneatha and her schoolin' – and ain't nothing going to take that part of it."* (Hansberry, 1959:44)

How is Mama going to reconcile her dream of buying a house with the ones of Walter and Beneatha? Additionally, she sees her son gradually turn distant, sad and gloom to the extent of rebuking his wife. He seems completely obsessed with that money he sees as his outlet and the main means of his social climbing. His desire for success is obsessional, almost tragic. His plea to his mother tells it all: *"Mama – I want so many things"* (Hansberry, 1959:73)

Mama's response to these conflicting dreams is one to scrutinize and the second section clearly highlights the elusiveness of most of these dreams given the context, means and social barriers.

1.2. The elusiveness of the dreams for the Younger family

After the fashion of most Black Americans during segregation, the main protagonists of the Younger family have to cope with the difficulty to see their dreams shattered. In a society that institutionally assumed its blatant racism, white privilege was a reality and the system was devised to prevent Blacks from fulfilling their dreams. It was in that context that many African American writers took up their pens to depict what Gordon calls the "Aesthetics of segregation", which "*broadly describes a consciously black artistic approach to black experience under Jim Crow in the post-Depression US*". According to Gordon, the latter has four main attributes: "*evidence of systemic exploitation and its human costs; prophecy of explosive black rage; demonstration of black resistance to the dehumanizing effects of segregation; and the presence or awareness of the violence that maintains color lines and social inequality."* (Gordon, 2008:126).

Hansberry perfectly illustrates this systemic exploitation and rage through the character of Walter Younger who is obsessed with money because of his inability to achieve his goals and improve the living conditions of his wife and child. At thirty-five years and in spite of working hard, he still struggles to make both ends meet and still lives in his mother's apartment. His level of frustration is heightened by the realization of the ease with which white people get rich while it is denied to black people. He confesses to his wife: "*I am thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room – (Very, very quietly) – and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live."* (Hansberry, 1959:34)

Walter thereby wants to justify how critical it is for him to have the required money he needs to invest in his liquor store project so as to finally break the curse. It is worth noting that even his parents saw their dreams deferred. Lena was very ambitious growing up and dreamed of buying a house with a

back garden. Big Walter worked himself to death to provide his family with better living conditions, only to realize the elusiveness of dreams for his community: *"Seem 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 worth while"* (Hansberry, 1959: 45-45). In his prominent work *Between the World and Me* published in 2015, Ta-Nehesi Coates draws the same conclusion regarding the black man's predicament: *"perhaps being named "black" was just someone's name for being at the bottom, a human turned to object, object turned to pariah"* (Coates, 2015:55)

In fact, the history of African Americans has been one of many sufferings. From slavery to systemic racism, in passing with racial segregation, America's social stratification has safeguarded the Blacks' status at the bottom of the social ladder. In the introduction of his famous 1985 play, *Fences,* set in 1957 in the backyard of a house in Pittsburgh, August Wilson mirrors the same unfair and discriminatory social stratification:

> *The city grew, It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true. The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation.* (Wilson, 1985: XVII)

At least, Big Walter was able to work hard and bless his family with a valuable insurance cheque to help them fund their projects. Unfortunately for Walter Younger, he is ripped off his money by his crook friend Willy, who was supposed to be his business partner with Bobo. To make things worse, he gave Willy the share of Beneatha he was supposed to deposit at the bank for her medical school. By doing so, he also shattered

Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor. Therefore, the Youngers' expectations come up short but there is Asagai who reminds Beneatha of a very important aspect when the latter mourns her fate after her brother's misdeed*: "Then isn't there something wrong in a house – in a world – where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?..."* (Hansberry, 1959:135)

This timely reminder by Asagai helps put things into perspectives. The moral values have to be taken into account but they can be in conflict with their relativistic dimension and the generational cleavage.

Chapter 2: The relativism of values

Lena Younger grew up at a time when freedom and housing property were a luxury. Black Americans had their hands full trying to stay alive and dealing with the need to satisfy their hunger. The improvements of their living conditions over time favored a shift of focus. This chapter analyzes the relativism of the values incarnated by the different members of the Younger family and how it affects their family interactions.

2.1. The importance of freedom and family and God for Lena Younger

One of the most prominent issues of *A Raisin in the Sun* is the differences in terms of values, perspectives and visions of life of the different members of the Younger family. In fact, the play stages characters who deal with many difficulties. Lena Younger, the mother, Walter and Beneatha all have dreams they nurture. This situation brings about increased tensions and a certain level of misunderstandings that fester and create disharmony in the family. Beyond the elusiveness of dreams,

this situation heavily weighs on Lena Younger who dearly values family unity and harmony. She laments:

> No – there's something come down between me and them that don't let us understand each other and I don't know what it is. One done almost lost his mind thinking 'bout money all the time and the other done commence to talk about things I can't seem to understand or fashion. What is it that's changing, Ruth? (Hansberry, 1959:52)

For Mama/Lena Younger, the expectation of the insurance cheque only intensifies that feeling as the stakes become higher. Walter tries to move heaven and earth to justify the relevance of giving him the money for his investment, whereas Beneatha is more and more absorbed by her questioning of the metanarratives that constitute the basis of her mother's life, like the existence of God or her own identity. As a result, the quarrels between the two siblings worsen as Walter plays down Beneatha's educational ambitions and disregards her feminist assumed stance. To add fuel to the flames, Mama sees the growing distance between her son and his wife Ruth, still because of the obsession of Walter to achieve material success. To bring her family together, Mama decides to go on and buy a house. She justifies her decision:

> MAMA Son – you – you understand what I done, don't you? (WALTER is silent and sullen) I – I just seen my family falling apart today … just falling to pieces in front of my eyes … We couldn't of gone on like we was today. We was going backwards 'stead of forwards – talking 'bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead …When it gets like that in life – you just got

> to do something different, push on out and do something bigger … (She waits) I wish you say something, son … I wish you'd say how deep inside you you think I done the right thing –"
> WALTER …So you butchered up a dream of mine – you – who always talking 'bout your children's dreams …(Hansberry, 1959:94- 95)

Lena's decision to buy the house was motivated by her desire to bring her family together and salvage its unity. She knew the decision would infuriate Walter, but she is convinced it is for the interest of the whole family. Lena's family approach always favors togetherness, love and unity. She is very close to Walter's wife, Ruth and expects her son to assume his manhood and responsibly be the head of the family under some conditions. Failing to meet those prerequisites, she is willing to make difficult choices for her family. When Ruth, pained by her husband lack of attention and the financial predicament of the family, threatens to abort after she gets pregnant, Lena urges her son to man up and dissuade her: *"I'm waiting to hear how you be your father's son. Be the man he was… (Pause. The silence shouts) Your wife say she going to destroy your child. And I am waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them"* (Hansberry, 1959: 75)

Indeed, Lena Younger is a strong-willed woman with die-hard convictions. She often discusses with her children and tries to understand them but she is unflinching with regard to some questions. The belief in God is one of them and when Beneatha holds a blasphemous position, she slaps her and threateningly tells her: *"Now –you say after me, in my mother's house there is still God."* (Hansberry, 1959:51). Let us now turn our attention on the perspectives of Walter and Beneatha.

2.2 Beneatha's deconstruction of religion and Walter's focus on money

Human beings try to pass down some values and principles from generation to generation. Yet, the task can prove extremely difficult at times because of the different influences and experiences that help shape the mindset of the following generations. Thus, we should not forget that the postmodern era was marked by many claims, but also the reconsideration of metanarratives. To illustrate, the place of God is unquestionable for Lena who believes in religious dogmas and does not allow anybody to banter with faith under her roof. Little wonder to see how shocked she is to hear her daughter express her disbelief in God. The latter, shaped by her advanced education, reflects the emerging trends of most postmodernist thinkers who profess the decline of grand theories like religion. She states:

> Mama, you don't understand. It's all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don't accept. It's not important. I am not going out and be immoral or commit crimes because I don't believe in God. I don't even think about it. It's just that I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God – there is only man and it is he who makes miracles! P.51

The reaction of Lena to her child's blasphemous comments with a harsh slap on her face illustrates how dumbfounded and ashamed she feels at the sight of such defiance from her daughter. She feels helpless seeing that the values she tried to instill in her children crumble before her very eyes. Her surprise is all the more obvious that she knows deep down her that her daughter truly believes what she says. As a

matter of fact, she is a reflection of a trending thought-process during that era that questions many conventionally-held beliefs and puts forward a sense of fragmentation. According to Sarah Upstone, in the postmodern context: *"fragmentation becomes translated into a celebration of difference."* (Upstone, 2017:124)

On the other hand, there is Walter Younger who is completely obsessed with money and earthly goods. His overemphasis on money stems from the evolution of the American society during the first half of the twentieth century, especially in the North. In the wake of the abolition of slavery and the so-called freedom of black people, the issue of social class became more and more important for the Blacks. Many saw economic achievements as an opportunity to move up on top of the social ladder. Therefore, the frustration to see the implementation of an institutional and structural racism that prevents the fulfillment of those dreams heightens the level of despair. On top of that, black men see the ease with which white people make it in the American society and have privileges that seem out of reach for them. Walter tries to make her mother understand this unpleasant feeling*: "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"*. (Hansberry, 1959:73)

The main source of conflict between Walter and Mama is due to the shift of focus over time between the former generation and the new one. In Lena's time, Blacks' concerns revolved around freedom and survival. Walter, growing up in a period when those aspects are taken for granted, cares little about them; hence disregarding their values. Money and material

success are the only things that matter for him because he believes that they only can open the door for a brighter future for him and his family. Consequently, he gives full primacy to money over everything, putting him at loggerheads with his mother who feels grateful for her freedom and family. The following passage encapsulates the level of misunderstanding between the two of them:

> MAMA Son – how come you talk so much 'bout money?
> WALTER (*With immense 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 'bout 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. (Hansberry, 1959:74)

Lena's misunderstanding can be easily understood. She came from a long way with her husband to try to give their children better living opportunities. She expects no less than gratefulness and the perpetuation of their struggle. However, she does not try to see things from the perspectives of her children

and the latter do not make much efforts either in that regard. The last section explores how the quest for identity and dignity help them overcome their differences.

Chapter 3: The quest for identity and dignity

Conflicts can be useful sometimes in life. They can help work out some issues for a fresher start. In this chapter, we will show that the quest for identity is embodied mainly by Beneatha whose hatred of assimilationism incites her to seek for identity roots thanks mainly to the character of Asagai. It is also embodied by Walter who looks lost at first before eventually understanding the true meaning of manhood. Those journeys end up indicating the most important thing for the younger family, the preservation of their dignity.

3.1 African rootedness and the criticism of assimilationism

One of the most important themes of *A Raisin in the Sun* is the quest for African rootedness. The latter is embodied by Beneatha and the anchor is Asagai. Hansberry stages a complex love circle composed of three persons who play a very important role. George Murchison is officially in couple with Beneatha and Asagai woos Beneatha. George is from a very rich African American family. Yet, Beneatha regards the relationship with him as a fleeting and platonic one. She specifies: "*I just mean I couldn't ever really be serious about George. He's – he's so shallow."* (Hansberry, 1959:48). Conversely, she feels a deeper connection with Asagai. She provides the first indication: *"Asagai doesn't care how houses look, Mama – he's an intellectual."* (Hansberry, 1959:56)

Beyond their intellectual characteristics, George and Asagai epitomize two different ideals. The first one embodies assimilationism, whereas the second one symbolizes African rootedness. In an era when debates have been raging about the

black Americans' identity and fate, Hansberry gives a stance regarding the debate through the character of Beneatha. The latter confesses her abhorrence of assimilationists as she denigrates the Murchisons, whom she thinks are even worse than the condescending rich white people: *"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."* (Hansberry, 1959:49-50)

Beneatha clearly expresses her criticism of what the Murchisons stand for. She thinks little of them and condemns their superficiality. Moreover, Beneatha sees assimilationists as traitors. She is convinced that the white man's domination enterprise would not succeed if there were no Uncle Toms to facilitate their success from within the black community. By yielding their own culture and identity to embrace the white man's oppressive mainstream culture, they unconsciously favor the demise of black identity. The following conversation between Ruth, Beneatha and George reflects the heated debate about assimilationism and Beneatha's unflinching stance:

> 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-who-ever 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! (Hansberry, 1959:81)

Beneatha sides with great thinkers like William DuBois. To put it bluntly, she craves for a quest for her identity and George can be of no use for her. As a result, she holds Asagai in much higher esteem as she thinks that he can be or provide the answer for some of her existential aspirations. Asagai warns of the danger of assimilationism within the black community: *"Assimilationism is so popular in your country"* (Hansberry, 1959:63). Beneatha is aware of her African origins and is willing to deconstruct the false narratives put forward about Africa. She believes that a deeper connection and understanding of Africa can help her find out and shape her own identity: "*Mr ASAGAI – I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity!"*

It might be argued that Hansberry tries to reconcile the black Americans' need to rediscover their origins with the realization of the complexity of their American identity. Walter is overwhelmed by the daily struggles of the Blacks in a racialized society without paying much attention to his African rootedness, whereas Beneatha's aspirations transcend material wealth while Lena Younger conveys the legacy of the Black's struggle in a society that have always treated them unfairly, but which is still their homeland. DuBois's notion of "double consciousness" developed in *The Souls of Black Folk* finds its perfect echoes in the saga of the Youngers family. It is also a way for Hansberry to underline the necessity to reconcile the two conflicting identities: a Black, an American. Lloyd W. Brown highlights that prowess achieved by Hansberry in her play:

> …it is not really an exaggeration of her dramatic

> insights to assume that the romanticization of Africa, in the person of Asagai, goes hand in hand with the emphasis on the Youngers' American commitment. Indeed, Hansberry's ironic grasp of the Black American's duality enables her to portray (rather than merely succumb to) the African nostalgia which has been nurtured by the Youngers' dreams but which remains realistically counterbalanced by the inexorable facts of the Youngers' American identity. (Brown, 1974:240-241)

It is true that Hansberry uses a form of realism that enables to understand the need for the African American to explore his African roots, but also the recognition of his unique identity as a Black American of African descent; hence the characters of Lena and Walter who are absorbed by the experience of Blacks in America who counterbalance the idealism and romanticization of Africa by Beneatha and Asagai. Gordon underlines that realism: "*Equally concerned with present truth and future possibility, Hansberry's genuine realism rejects the deterministic impulses of naturalism; her genuine realism relies instead on what she considered an imperative, but in no way naive, idealism."* (Gordon, 2008:122)

The outcome of the realism is artistically woven in an epilogue that enables the Younger family to recover their sense of dignity.

3.2 The triumph of pride

The themes of housing discrimination, assimilationism and materialism are very important ones addressed by Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun.* However, it all boils down to the same ultimate recurring burning issue for black people who cope with

the white men's oppression and injustices: the preservation of their dignity. In *A Lesson before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines, Miss Emma, Jefferson's godmother, asks Grant Wiggins to teach his godson, Jefferson, unfairly sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit, to die as a man. Jefferson's lawyer compares him to a hog so as to try to spare him death penalty in court. Despite the injustice and terrible sentence, Miss Emma and Grant's struggle solely focus on Jefferson's demonstration of pride and dignity.

By trying to move to Clybourne Park, the Youngers face different obstacles from threats to attempts of bribery. To start with, the white community assigns the President of their "welcoming committee", Karl Lindner to lay down the different options to the Youngers. The latter displays a paternalistic and condescending attitude through a speech that clearly expresses their opposition to the Youngers' desire to join them in Clybourne Park. He goes as far as pretending to know what is best for them:

> But you've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. 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 concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities". (Hansberry, 1959:117-118)

This illustrates the white man's consistent schemes to set

themselves apart from black people and their endeavor to provide justifications for their misdeeds. Karl Lindner purports to act to the best interests of all. He claims the right to know what is good for the Youngers and falsely attempts to disregard race prejudice. Far from being content to talk down on them, he also proposes to buy the house on behalf of the white community of Clybourne Park by outbidding the initial purchase price: *"Our association is prepared, through the collective effort of our people, to buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family."* (Hansberry, 1959:1180

Thus, there is a combination of a racist rhetoric under the guise of polite talks and subtle bribery devised by the white community in order to convince or compel Blacks from moving in their neighborhood. At first shocked by the indecent proposal, the disappearance of Willy changed the whole picture and Walter, like a desperate man, threatens to accept the proposal of Lindner. His mother tries to talk to him out of doing it:

> 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." (Hansberry, 1959:143)

Still dumbfounded by Willy's treachery, ashamed of his credulity and humiliated by his failure, Walter puts forward the rationale of "takers" and "taken from" in life to justify any acceptance of the offer. Walter shows that a desperate man might indeed be a dangerous man. When he gets down on his knees and acts the way he would accept the offer impersonating those

submissive disgraceful black people in front of the Whites, Beneatha admits to her mother how shocked she is to see her brother willing to relinquish any sense of pride. The first great reaction stems from Lena who asks Beneatha to still show love to her brother, all the more so because he feels down. To cap it all, the ultimate display of pride comes from Walter who finally breaks down the Youngers' final decision to Karl Lindner:

> …we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it for us brick by brick. (*MAMA has her eyes closed and is rocking back and forth as though she were in church, with her head nodding the Amen yes*) We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. And that's *all* we got to say about that. (*He looks the man absolutely in the eyes*) We don't want your money. (*He turns and walks away*)". (Hansberry, 1959:148)

Walter shows the white man that the Youngers' dignity is not for sale. Despite the financial difficulties and the ins and outs of life, they still are able to clamp to a rich heritage of proud men who, through thick and thin, have always salvaged their dignity in face of oppression. The feeling of relief and pride from Mama cannot be hidden when she adopts the rocking position as though in a church to better appreciate the value of his son's words, filled with joy, gratefulness and pride. His son Walter, eventually comes up to her moral standards and demonstrates that he can at last be the man of the house. She proudly lets out her feeling to Ruth: *"He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain."* The latter does not think less of her husband and her elation is also contagious:

"*RUTH (Biting her lip lest her own pride explode in front of MAMA) Yes, Lena."* (Hansberry, 1959:151)

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that *A Raisin in the Sun* embraces many of the realities that Black people had to cope with during segregation. It first lays bare the elusiveness of dreams for many African Americans. In the play, Lena Younger is the only one who sees her dream fulfilled, with the purchase of the house in Clybourne Park. Yet, the achievement of her dream goes along with the great fear to see the family being bullied by the white community. The ending of the play opens many possibilities in that regard.

The second important finding is the relativism of values, which is the main source of the conflicts between Mama and her children. Lena Younger is a proud African American woman who believes in God and has a strong sense of family. The preservation of the unity and harmony of the family is her main purpose. On the other hand, Beneatha completely rejects the idea of God, has a strong sense of feminist and Pan-African activism; whereas Walter is convinced that material wealth is the most important asset that Blacks can use to prevail in the American society.

The ultimate finding of this study is the capacity of the Youngers to transcend and overcome their conflicts and disagreements. Hansberry uses the character of Asagai to convey powerful messages and help Beneatha find her bearings. He helps her understand that people should not rely on dead people's inheritance to fulfill their dreams. It is also a criticism of American materialism that somehow objectify human beings. In the same vein, Walter eventually realizes that dignity outweighs money and he must not let down his family and flout their pride. Still through the wisdom of Asagai, the readers are

invited to fight for freedom, equality and justice and be ready for the ultimate sacrifice. At last, this paper further demonstrates the importance of preserving one's dignity at all costs. It is the most important thing that human beings have and it rests on noble principles that we should never flout.

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