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**A Proposal to Research Community and Relationships in Lorraine Hansberry’s ‘A Raisin in the Sun’ and During the 1950’s**

**Introduction**

The script for Lorraine Hansberry’s play A Raisin in the Sun is neatly bound, and includes newspaper clippings that describe and praise her play. The point these clippings focused on was the that the play accurately represented what it was like to be African American in the 1950’s. These clippings made me curious about the type of community, culture, and relationships during the that time in history. The document also got me interested in the type of relations that went on between people of the same community and race, and the intersections of these social and ethnic groups. In this play by Lorraine Hansberry we see a family receive a large sum of money that they must decide what to do with, which poses a conflict within the family. Once the money is spent on a house in a white neighborhood we see a conflict in the community. During this time in history there was still a lot of segregation even though it was illegal, and Lorraine Hansberry does a great job of expressing these conflicts and tense relationships in her work. This exhibit will explore how preconceived notions affected interactions, and created conflict on the community level.

**Statement of Purpose**

Preconceived notions about different races in the 1950’s stemmed from the unwillingness to learn about and explore different cultures. These notions greatly affected relationships between people of different races and even the same race in many communities. In A Raisin in the Sun, we see tense relationships between family members, and difficult situations in a Chicago community. We see an African American family being not so gently pressured to move out of a white neighborhood (Hansberry, 119). Lorraine Hansberry addressed these conflicts in a way that we could not only see what went on in these communities, but understand the harmful effects these relationships were having on people. These issues did not just happen in Chicago, but Lorraine Hansberry’s work accurately reflects some of the broken relationships of a black community stemming from assumptions about race at that time, and can be related to many other communities.

**Objective**

This exhibition will focus on examining the broken relationships in Lorraine Hansberry’s play, A Raisin in the Sun. At the time of the play, the 1950’s, there was still segregation, and many people still showed prejudice against the African American community. These stereotypes were the cause of broken relationships between two couples, a mother and her son, and between the Young family and a community in the Raisin in the Sun. In the play we see tension between couples due to an unexpected surprise and mixed feelings, a son who wants to be the head of the family, and a community that is not welcoming of the Young family. This exhibit will examine these stereotypes and how they caused conflict in relationships so that readers will both understand how this happened, and so that readers will not make the same mistakes.

**Plan of Action**

In order for readers to understand the impact that preconceived notions about the African American community had on relationships, this exhibit will explore a play, book, and journalism from the 1950’s. Each of these sources give details about the type of personal and community relationships that occurred in the 1950’s. Plays and books from the 1950’s can provide stories accounts of life in the 1950’s, and journalism from the 1950’s can provide real accounts of things that went on, and may even provide criticism of of theses works from that time. I will use secondary sources to back up information about events during this time even though primary accounts of events from that time are much more credible. Lorraine Hansberry’s play A Raisin in the Sun provides a story about a family living in Chicago in the 1950’s and is based on events from her life. In the play A Raisin in the Sun, before an African American family moved into a predominantly white neighborhood, the son states “We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors,” which shows that there were concerns over their family moving into the predominantly white neighborhood (Hansberry, 148). In to Be Young, Gifted, and Black in the chapter about Chicago Hansberry explains that as a child she was taught never to betray “the family and the race” (Nemiroff, 18). This statement shows that relationships between your family were most important at that time, and could have influenced both personal and community relationships.

**Annotated Bibliography**

Beck, Joan. "Teens Tell Views on School Segregation." Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963): 2. Dec 20 1956. ProQuest. Web. 7 Oct. 2016 .

This newspaper article provides statistics about teens views on desegregating schools. Beck states that by 1954 after the Supreme Court decision to abolish segregation 58 percent of teens nation-wide agreed that segregation would be a good thing, compared to only 41 percent in 1956 (Beck, 1956). This shows that many people were in favor of desegregation, but when it came down to actually desegregating schools many changed their minds. I will use this source to show how views of segregation changed over time, and how these views were different in the north compared to the south.

Carter, Robert L. "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation: A Social Science Statement." *The Journal of Negro Education* 22.1 (1953): 68-76. JSTOR. 30 Sept. 2016.

This article examines the effects segregation can have on children. In the article Carter explains some of the social effects segregation can have, and even some of the behavioral effects. For example children, like Travis in *A Raisin in the Sun,* who are segregated often feel inferior which could cause anti-social behavior (Carter, 496). This shows that segregation had an effect on the way people were treated and the way people acted in the 1950’s. This article can be used to show some of the reasons people acted like they did in the 1950’s, and can also show how segregation may have played a role in some of the broken relationships during this time. For example, there is a there is a conflict within the Young family about whether to fight segregation and move into a white neighborhood, or take a bribe and ignore the issue.

Carter, Steven R. *Hansberry's Drama : Commitment amid Complexity*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1991. Print.

*Hansberry’s Drama: Commitment and Complexity* includes information about Lorraine Hansberry's work, and how her plays encouraged change. This book shows some of the issues that were prevalent during the time of *A Raisin in the Sun* and how Lorraine Hansberry reacted to these problems. For example Hansberry’s play, *A Raisin in the Sun,* addressed the issue of segregation during the 1950’s, and encouraged change by portraying the Young family as strong and firm in their decision to move into a white neighborhood. Carter’s book can be used to show that Hansberry’s play *A Raisin in the Sun* was not only a play, but a way to inform the public of issues in the community at that time in history. It can also be used to show that Hansberry was trying to change some of the broken relationships of this time, through each of the characters’ growth throughout the play.

Farley, Reynolds, and William H. Frey. "Changes in the Segregation of Whites from Blacks During the 1980s: Small Steps Toward a More Integrated Society." *American Sociological Review* 59.1 (1994): 23-45. JSTOR. 30 Sept. 2016.

“Changes in the Segregation of Whites from Blacks During the 1980s” provides information about segregation between African Americans and whites. Farley and Frey provide information about laws that were put into place about segregation, how these laws were fought, and where these issues took place. This article does not just provide information from the 1980s, but includes information about segregation leading up to this time. This is important because it gives us context for some of the struggles during the 1950’s. This article could be used to verify ideas presented about segregation in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Five Men and Women with Strike Signs in Front of Fifth Avenue Hospital. 5 June. 1955. Robert Langmuir African American Photographs, Rose Library, Atlanta.

This photograph shows five African American men and women striking the hospital for better pay. Their sights read “Can’t Live on 38 cents a week.” This will help my exhibit because it shows that there were differences in pay between races in the 1950’s which was causing conflict within communities. This can also help show that African Americans were fighting for their rights, like Walter did at the end of *A Raisin in the Sun*, not just sitting back and dealing with it.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: New American Library, 1966. Print. Signet Book ; AE3746.

*A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry is a play about a family living in the suburbs of Chicago. The play focuses on this family and issues with relationships between the family members, and between the family and the community. This play will be used to provide examples of events that occurred within families and in communities during the 1950’s. It can be used to show broken relationships, and also some of the ways these relationships were fought for. For example in this play a man is living with his, wife, son, sister, and mother. This living situation is not very conducive to a healthy family dynamic, but they are forced to resolve their issues in order to keep their family together.

Nemiroff, Robert., Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Louise Alone Thompson Patterson, and Thomas H. Wirth. *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black : Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969. Print.

This book by Lorraine Hansberry’s husband, Robert Nemiroff, provides a collection of her works, and also includes comments about her work from other playwrights and activists at that time. This is important because it shows that Lorraine Hansberry was not the only one thinking and feeling the things about segregation and discrimination presented in her plays, and that these issues were very prominent at this time. This book will be used to provide accounts of Hansberry’s life to show some of the broken social relationships due to discrimination of African Americans in the 1950’s. Also, comments from other writers and activists will be used to verify these issues.

Rev. John W. Williams, Rosa Parks and Another African American Woman with March on Washington for Jobs & Freedom Pins on. 27 Aug. 1959. Robert Langmuir African American Photographs, Rose Library, Atlanta.

This photograph shows prominent figures in the civil rights movement wearing March on Washington for jobs and freedom pins. This will help with my exhibit because it shows that there were still issues with racism in the 1950’s. The photograph also shows unity among activists working toward a common goal, and can be used as an example of a good relationship during that time.

United States Commission on Civil Rights. The 50 States Report Submitted to the Commission on Civil Rights by the State Advisory Committees, 1961. Washington: United States Commission on Civil Rights : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961. Print. Legal Classics Library.

The report for Illinois in 1961 shows that they were fighting for civil rights in the areas of employment, education, and just in general. This report also mentions how Chicago is working to integrate Puerto Ricans, and that this should show hope for African Americans. This will be useful in my exhibit to show how it was said that people were fighting for civil rights, but not much was actually being done in the community. Having the facade of fighting for civil rights, but not actually doing anything could be a cause for some of the tensions between races in the 1950’s along with segregation itself.