

THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN THE SUPREME COURT CASE OF HANSBERRY

V. LEE AND LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S A RAISIN IN THE SUN

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ABSTRACT

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THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN THE SUPREME COURT CASE OF HANSBERRY V. LEE AND LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

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This research study examines the rhetoric of protest in the legal case involving Carl Hansberry and his struggle to keep the home he had purchased for his family in a previously all-White neighborhood in Chicago. He filed a lawsuit when his family was going to be evicted from the home because the area was covered by a restrictive covenant. Restrictive covenants were agreements signed by property owners in neighborhoods that stated that the property could not be sold or rented to African Americans. The courts upheld these agreements as legally binding. Carl Hansberry had to purchase the home through a Caucasian liaison.

The court case was argued in several lower courts before culminating in an appeal to the United States Supreme Court in 1940. Carl Hansberry won the right to stay in the home on a technical premise called *res judicata* because he had not been a part of the original class suit. Carl Hansberry filing a lawsuit was an act of protest. Protest rhetoric can take many forms including legal cases and classic dramas. In 1959 Carl Hansberry's daughter, Lorraine Hansberry, debuted her play *A Raisin in the Sun*, which was inspired by her experiences moving into the subdivision and the animosity she was exposed to as her family lived in the neighborhood. This study examines her play and other selected public statements in terms of the rhetoric of protest contained in them.

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CHAPTER I

RHETORIC, PROTEST, AND THE HANSBERRYS

I like to think I wrote the play out of a specific intellectual point of view. I'm aware of the existence of Anouilh, Beckett, Dürrenmatt, and Brecht, but I believe, with O'Casey, that real drama has to do with audience involvement and achieving the emotional transformation of people on the stage. I believe that ideas *can* be transmitted emotionally.

Lorraine Hansberry, 1959

Protest rhetoric can take many different forms; and it includes speeches, marches, songs, and chants as well as literature and legal cases. Protest literature creates a “revolutionary language and a renewed vision of the possible. It gives distinctive shape to long-accumulating grievances, claims old rights, and demands new ones,” according to scholar Zoe Trodd (xix). Two works that illustrate this definition are the United States Supreme Court case brought by Carl Hansberry and the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, by his daughter, Lorraine Hansberry. Trodd writes that literature of protest “creates space for argument, introduces doubt, deepens perception, and shatters the accepted limits of belief” (xix). Researchers can see examples of the deepening of perceptions in the relationships depicted in the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*, a drama in which an African American family is shown struggling to attain the aspects of the American dream that any other family might hope for—a nice house in a safe and pleasant neighborhood.

Another clear example of protest is the legal case that Carl Hansberry brought fighting against the previously accepted practice of restrictive covenants which barred minorities from moving into White neighborhoods.

In order to examine the rhetoric of protest exemplified in these two works, it is necessary to establish a definition of the terms. Charles Morris and Stephen H. Browne ask the question of why one would study the rhetoric of social protest and answer that it is of vital importance because “in the unfolding dramas of history can be found a remarkable range of voices striving to make the world over again” (1). This is a similar theme to the one explained by Trodd in terms of protest literature. Morris and Browne explain how answers connected to the study of protest rhetoric can be found in the past but are also clearly visible in the present when they write, “Our own age is being shaped decisively by people coming together, debating, designing, and otherwise mobilizing symbolic resources for social change” (1). This topic is especially relevant during this time when the news chronicles how a contemporary protest movement started and grew, not only in America but across the world proclaiming the demand for racial justice.

Morris and Browne describe the intersection between the study of rhetoric and social protest. They write that students of rhetorical movements and social protest “understand that words are deeds, that language has force and effect in the world. To study the rhetoric of social protest is to study how symbols—words, signs, images, music, even bodies—shape our perceptions of reality and invite us to act accordingly” (Morris and Browne 1). This study examines the way that both Carl and Lorraine Hansberry used language as a powerful tool to bring about change. The lawsuit was a form of protest by its very nature of a minority man suing the established majority and asking the legal system to enforce the fact that he had the right to buy a home for his family wherever he wished.

In his essay, "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," Richard B. Gregg writes that the rhetoric of protest would logically seem to be aimed at those in power or positions of authority who appear responsible for the conditions being protested" (47). Gregg's statement is applicable to the content of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lorraine Hansberry chose to include dialogue in the play that focused on getting the attention of those in power. The White property owners are the example in the play. But the dynamic she exposed could apply in any number of places where racial inequality was or is present.

The scholar, Edward P.J. Corbett posed the question: Is there a rhetoric of protest and what were its characteristics? He wrote, "Even a casual review of history reveals that whenever and wherever men have enjoyed a measure of freedom to express their ideas, opinions, and feelings, there have been scolds, nay-sayers, and gadflies" (4). He explained that examples of the voices could be found in literature from "Martin Luther to Martin Luther King" and that a common thread between them all was that they used language to make their protest (4). Lorraine Hansberry's play meets Corbett's definition of the characteristics of the rhetoric of protest. Examples of the "naysayers" Corbett describes are the property owners' association that sends over a representative to offer the Youngers money not to move in, and also in the very beginning of the play when Walter is reading the paper and talks about the violence in the city when he reads that another bomb has been set off.

The fight for nondiscrimination in housing was at times violent such as when Mrs. Johnson comes over to tell the Youngers about a Black family who was bombed out of their house in a White neighborhood. Corbett describes the kind of arbitrary orders that

included the restrictive housing covenants when he writes, “There have been places and times when those voices of protest have been stilled by fiat, but when the tyrannies were overthrown, the protestors have once again mounted their pulpits, their podiums” (4). In the case of Carl Hansberry, the protest platform was the courtroom; and later the theater was the venue of protest for his daughter Lorraine.

Corbett wrote about the questions surrounding the rhetoric of protest as part of the more traditional forms of rhetoric when he described the protest of the 1960s:

Much of the social and political protest of the 1960s avoided or rejected appeals to reason. The classical rhetoricians spoke of three means of persuasion—the rational, the emotional, and the ethical—and judging by the amount of space they devoted to these three means in their rhetoric texts, the means that they seemed to regard as paramount was the appeal to listeners’ reason. (4)

Although the acceptance of the rhetoric of protest was debated at the time of Corbett’s writing, the scholar concluded that modern rhetoricians should consider Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric, the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion and include the more modern modes of communication.

The scholars John Stauffer and Howard Zinn write in the foreword to *American Protest Literature*, that they define protest literature as “the uses of language to transform the self and change society” (xii). They expand their definition and add that protest literature “functions as a catalyst, guide, or mirror for social change. It not only critiques some aspect of society, but also suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, a solution to society’s ills” (Stauffer and Zinn xii). This study analyzes examples from the play that

show the author's intent to show the audience some of the racial problems in society and act as a mirror for social change. The court case functioned as a guide to future minority citizens who wanted to exercise their right to choose where they wanted to live.

The rhetoric of protest is one way to learn about the past, as well as to deepen understanding of present and future events. There are any number of examples of readers being transformed by literature. For example, Stauffer and Zinn describe the way that Upton Sinclair was "so inspired" by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that he used it as a model to protest the working conditions in the meatpacking industry in his novel *The Jungle* (xii). There are many examples of literature that has transformed readers. Novels such as *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and *Jubilee* by Margaret Walker are other examples of inspirational and transformative literary works. However, Stauffer and Zinn write that the difference between "literature and protest literature is that while the former empowers and transforms individuals, the latter strives to give voice to a collective consciousness, uniting isolated and inchoate discontent" (xii).

Protest literature "taps into an ideological view of dissent and announces to people that they are not alone in their frustrations" (Stauffer and Zinn xii). Examining the work of Lorraine Hansberry, alongside the court case of her father Carl, provides a clear example of this type of research. Protests against the status quo are rhetorical by nature because "they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal" (Morris and Browne 1). This dissertation analyzes the rhetorical strategies at work in the literature of the Hansberrys including the arguments

and appeals used to attempt to “make over” the world by legal action or drama. As Morris and Browne point out, that the topics discussed in this dissertation such as, “persuasion, contingency, public life, argument, and appeal are concepts definitive of rhetoric itself” (1).

Lorraine Hansberry’s comments about transmitting ideas emotionally were made in 1959 just a few weeks after the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway. They highlight her authorial intention for the play. This dissertation examines the rhetorical strategies that Hansberry used in the play to influence the audience, and it also examines and analyzes the Supreme Court case brought by her father which served as a prequel.

According to Stauffer and Zinn:

Protest literature employs three rhetorical strategies in the quest to convert audiences. The first two are empathy and shock value. Empathy is central to humanitarian reform, and protest literature encourages its readers to participate in the experiences of the victims, to “feel their pain.” Shock value inspires outrage, agitation, and a desire to correct social ills. The third characteristic of protest literature is “symbolic action,” to borrow a term from Kenneth Burke. Symbolic action implies indeterminacy of meaning, rich ambiguity, and open-endedness in the text. (xiii)

Examples of the relevant connection between Stauffer and Zinn’s argument and Lorraine Hansberry’s play can be seen in the content of the drama. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another’s position and the audience may be able to relate to the Younger family’s struggles because they are not only the hurdles faced by a Black family living in

a poor neighborhood, but those of anyone that ever wanted something better for themselves or their family. A similar example can be seen in Carl Hansberry's testimony in court about buying the house in the White neighborhood because he wanted his children to have access to better schools.

A Raisin in the Sun is an ideal example for a rhetorical analysis because Lorraine Hansberry clearly shows her rhetorical intent to change society by showcasing the story of a family fighting for their right to live in a house they wanted and had paid for. In a similar way, Lorraine Hansberry's father Carl set out to change society by waging a legal battle for his family to live in their chosen home in a neighborhood that to that point was an all-White neighborhood. Both family members contributed to the rhetoric of protest in impactful ways in American society. The play is a classic of modern drama, and the court case is taught in law schools in civil procedure to teach that res judicata does not apply to a plaintiff who had no opportunity to be represented in earlier civil action.

In testimony to the Supreme Court of the United States, Carl Hansberry explained why he wanted to move into the neighborhood of his choice. He described one of the reasons he was urging society to change with his court case:

I was interested in getting in the area where I now live so that my children could go to Sexton School. I moved from 4418 South Parkway because the school was crowded and the children could not go to school all day and all the schools in that immediate vicinity permitted kids to go to school only a half day and I wanted my children to go to school all day. That is why I moved there. (Dickerson et al. 174)

Carl Hansberry's desire to move into a neighborhood where his children would have access equal to that afforded White children for education would have seemed feasible given his constitutional rights set out by the Fourteenth Amendment.

However, restrictive covenants were routinely upheld until after his court victory. The victory at the culmination of his three-year legal battle was a precursor to an increased demand for human rights by minority groups in the decades that followed. Restrictive covenants are described by Robert Graettinger in his article, "*A Raisin in the Sun* as Commentary on *Hansberry v. Lee*" as "a legal device that was designed to prevent Blacks from owning property in certain areas. These documents typically included a list of the notarized signatures of the property owners in the restricted area and were filed with the Recorder of Deeds" (1).

One of the reasons that these covenants were perceived by property owners to be needed was the "huge wave of migration of Blacks from the South to Chicago which began in earnest during World War I when the demand for labor increased with the needs of war production while the supply was limited by the number of men serving in the military" (Graettinger 2). Millions of African Americans moved from the South to the North in what is called the Great Migration. At the beginning of the twentieth century, 90% of Black Americans lived in the South. By 1970 nearly half of all African Americans lived in Northern cities.

Several reasons fueled the waves of African Americans moving both before and after the Great Depression. Many people were looking for better social and economic opportunities than the South seemed able to afford them. According to the scholar Alan

DeSantis in his research article about the Great Migration, “Selling the American Dream Myth to Black Southerners: The Chicago *Defender* and the Great Migration of 1915 to 1919,” many African Americans in the South looked towards the north as place where they could find prosperity and happiness after ideas planted during the reconstruction era never came to fruition (475). The *Defender* was a Black newspaper that was distributed along the rail line and provided many Black Southerners with their first glimpses of what a better life might look like in Chicago. DeSantis writes that for many in the rural South, regardless of where their journey began, “the Mecca was Chicago” (475).

However, the mass exodus from the South did not place the movers often in a trouble-free or welcoming environment. Although there had been stories in the *Defender* about new integrated high schools with indoor plumbing and advertisements for new kinds of beauty products and cars in a “public relations campaign for the city of Chicago” (481), dreams of enjoying these items did not come to pass. In 1919 the campaign came to an abrupt end when race riots broke out throughout the city. Clearly Chicago was not the “mecca” that some had thought it would be. One of the problems was that of adequate housing. African Americans who came to the city were all restricted to one area, or ghetto.

These ghettos were discussed by Graettinger in his account of the world that the Hansberry family may have lived in prior to the home purchase. He writes that, “large numbers of Blacks moved north to Chicago landing in an increasingly crowded area between 12th Street and 79th Street and Wentworth Avenue and Cottage Grove Avenue that came to be known as the ‘Black Belt’” (Graettinger 2). Carl Hansberry wanted to

move his family out of the segregated area for African Americans and live in a part of the city where his children would have access to better schools and a full day schedule. The move changed the lives of his family and influenced his daughter's later writing.

The family history may help explain the plot of Lorraine Hansberry's play. While the main characters were members of a family that lived in one of these ghettos previously described, the Hansberry family was a bit different. They were a part of the Great Migration, but their lives did not follow the path of many African American families during this time. Carl and Nannie, Lorraine's mother, moved to Chicago during World War I. According to the biography by Patricia and Frederick McKissack, *Young, Black, and Determined*, "the two of them met at a social function and after a brief courtship, married. Working together, the Hansberrys had been able to build a thriving real estate business, buying apartment buildings and dividing them into kitchenettes" (6). This style of apartment is similar to what are now called efficiency apartments.

Even though Lorraine was born at the beginning of the Great Depression, her birth presented no financial strain for the family because, "by the time Lorraine was born, Carl Hansberry was one of the largest landlords on the South Side, prosperous and influential" (McKissack and McKissack 6). The Hansberrys were involved in politics and used their status to raise awareness about segregation. They were active members of the NAACP, and several NAACP lawyers were friends with Carl Hansberry. "Lorraine grew up listening to NAACP lawyers planning legal strategies in her living room. During the Roosevelt administration more liberal judges were appointed to the Supreme Court, so the NAACP took this as a signal to step up its attack on segregation" (McKissack and

McKissack 22). During this period, more civil rights decisions than ever were argued and won, including *Hansberry v. Lee*.

There was a pressing need for better housing for minorities because of the finite “Black Belt” area that all minorities were forced to live in. Carl Hansberry was a successful realtor and could witness first-hand the discriminatory practices in the industry that kept African Americans in substandard housing. The biographers, Patricia and Frederick McKissack, described the area in Illinois where almost 90% of minorities were forced to live, regardless of where they worked or their income. The Hansberrys were an upper middle-class family and could have afforded to live elsewhere but because they were Black and the restrictive covenants were in place to exclude African Americans from owning property in White neighborhoods, they had to live in an area referred to as the Black Belt. The authors describe it this way:

The Black Belt was boxed in and unable to expand geographically, even though the increased population desperately needed additional housing. What resulted was a much more densely populated area in which the strains of overcrowding were affecting the quality of life for everyone. In 1937 Carl Hansberry and a team of NAACP lawyers found a loophole that gave them a legal means to strike at housing discrimination indirectly. (McKissack and McKissack 23)

Carl Hansberry, with the help of Harry Pace and several White realtors, purchased the property at 6140 Rhodes Avenue and kept his identity secret until after the sale was completed. Soon after the family moved in, a class action lawsuit was started on behalf of the Woodlawn Property Owners’ Association by Anna M. Lee. The original case found

in favor of the association. The NAACP attorneys had argued that the proper percentage, 95%, of the homeowners had not actually signed the restrictive covenant agreement and therefore it was invalid. Only 54% of them had signed.

However, a prior case, *Burke v. Kleinman* (1933) had already been heard by the courts concerning the same restrictive covenant. “In that case, Isaac and Sam Kleinman violated the Woodlawn Property Owners’ Association covenant by renting property to a Black man named Hall” (McKissack and McKissack 24). In that case the attorneys argued that the covenant was legal and that 95% of the property owners had signed it. This is the legal loophole the NAACP attorneys focused on. The court ruled in that case that the covenant was valid based on the attorney’s statements. The Kleinmans were ordered to stop renting to African Americans and Hall was forced to move out (McKissack and McKissack 24).

When the *Hansberry v. Lee* case was originally brought to court the judge ruled against Carl Hansberry because of the concept of res judicata. “The Circuit Court of Cook County accepted Lee’s argument that the entire issue had been disposed of in the Burke case” (McKissack and McKissack 25). The Hansberry family was ordered to move out of their home. Carl Hansberry immediately filed an appeal, and the family did not move.

All was not quiet while they waited to appeal the case, however. According to the McKissack and McKissack biography, Lorraine Hansberry remembered that one day while her father was at the state capitol preparing for the appeal, an angry mob of White people gathered outside the house yelling and making threats. A brick was thrown

through the window, narrowly missing Lorraine's head. Her mother and a family friend stayed up all night watching out for any more trouble. "It wasn't until the family friend went out on the porch and stood there with a shotgun in his hand that the crowd disbanded" (McKissack and McKissack 25).

However, nineteen years before her triumphant Broadway debut about this violent time, another member of her family contributed to the history of the legality of racial segregation in housing. This issue was another of the factors that would be at the forefront of the Civil Rights movement. The Hansberry family lived in Chicago. Early in 1937 Carl Augustus Hansberry purchased a home for himself and his family in the Washington Park area of Chicago.

In his article, "Fighting for Home: The Roots of *A Raisin in the Sun*," Sam Lasman addresses Carl Hansberry's bold action. By purchasing this home, "he directly confronted one of the most entrenched realities of urban segregation: restrictive covenants. These agreements, signed by the property holders of Chicago's White neighborhoods, stipulated the exclusion of all Black residents" (Lasman). The exceptions to the restrictions were allowed only for domestic servants or janitors. In 1937 the area was called the Washington Park Subdivision and covered an area of about 27 blocks according to court records. "The terms of the restrictive covenant prohibited the sale or lease of any of a group of 500 homes in the area to Blacks unless they were employed as janitors, drivers, or cooks. The covenant contained an execution provision that required that it be signed by 95 percent of the owners of the property frontage described in the agreement" (Graettinger 2).

This practice shows the prevalence of segregation during this period, and Graettinger describes the issues taken up in the court case and how the Illinois courts ruled in favor of the racially restrictive covenants. The court documents indicate that James Joseph Burke, who was a former president of the Woodlawn Property Association, had conspired with Hansberry to violate the covenant “by negotiating the sale of property at 6140 Rhodes Avenue to J.B. Crook, who was White, who then sold the property to the Hansberrys” (Graettinger 2).

The local property owners filed suit to force the family to move. The state court decided that the matter had already been decided and that the Hansberry family should be removed from the premises. Carl Hansberry fought back and secured his own legal team to appeal the case. After years of court cases, the matter was argued in front of the Supreme Court in October 1940. The primary holding of the case was that “If a party is not adequately represented in a class action, the judgment in the case is not binding on that party” (Supreme Court 311 U.S. 32).

The racism fueled housing troubles did not end with the Supreme Court ruling though. After the legal barriers were removed, Black families were kept out of White residential areas in other ways when they succeeded in buying a house outside the “Black Belt.” There were often “threats and sometimes worse. That was the case in *A Raisin in the Sun* when a representative from what was ironically referred to as the welcoming committee of the neighborhood improvement association approached the Youngers with an offer to buy their house at a price greater than they had paid” (Graettinger 3). In the

play, the Younger family turns down the offer, deciding to follow their dream of a better life rather than set it aside for money.

The victory did represent a step towards change for the family because after years of fighting, the family could stay in the previously all-White neighborhood. However, Hansberry's daughter Lorraine would later explain that the victory had come at the cost paid by her father of a "small personal fortune, his considerable talents, and many years of his life" (Lasman). The Hansberry family's time to enjoy the victory was brief. Sam Lasman writes that Carl Hansberry died six years later, "in Mexico while searching for a place to relocate his family, convinced that US racism was so pervasive it could only be evaded, not defeated" (Lasman). Lorraine Hansberry described the cost of the court cases in terms of the emotional turmoil the family went through. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* dated April 23, 1964, she wrote that he had fought for years alongside NAACP lawyers against the restrictive covenants, but that he died an "embittered exile in a foreign country" (McKissack and McKissack 32). Her words summarize a tragic situation that influenced her later writing. In the play, Beneatha's friend is from Africa and wants to take her back there. The scene may be referencing the idea of African Americans having to go to another country, like her father did, to achieve racial equality and be treated fairly.

Carl Hansberry's case illustrates the principles of classical judicial rhetoric in use in a modern court. The arguments used to persuade in court settings were described by Aristotle when he wrote about three rhetorical settings: deliberative, epideictic, and forensic. Deliberative rhetoric focuses on the future and is typically used in political

settings where a speaker might address an audience about the way to use resources to solve a problem faced by the group. According to James Herrick, “deliberative rhetoric involved weighing evidence for and against a policy or plan. It was oriented toward the future and influenced judgments about what should be done” (91). Epideictic rhetoric is ceremonial in nature and deals with matters in the present. It dealt with “issues of praise (epainos) and blame (psogos), seeking as its goal to demonstrate what is honorable (kalon)” (Herrick 91). There are several examples of this kind of speech, “Martin Luther King’s famous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech is another example of epideictic oratory, one in which King upholds the values of justice, harmony, and peace” (Herrick 92).

Forensic or judicial rhetoric reconstructs the past, and its “main concern is deciding questions of justice (dikaion)” (Herrick 92). Judicial rhetoric requires that the speaker be skilled in ways to convince a jury or judge that the evidence he or she is presenting supports the hypothesis. Herrick writes, “Questions of what is right or just come up frequently outside of the formal courtroom setting, but the reasoning employed to argue these questions is similar. Evidence is sifted to support an evaluation of a past action, a standard of justice is applied, and the action is judged to be either just or unjust” (93). In addition to the work of Aristotle, the works of Cicero and Quintilian help illustrate the classical foundations of judicial rhetoric. Cicero’s contribution of the five canons of rhetoric —invention-arrangement-expression-memory-delivery —expanded on Aristotle’s writing and highlighted what he called the “stasis” system for thinking through a judicial case. According to Herrick, students “studying a stasis system learned to think through a legal case by following the points at which disagreements were likely

to arise. Points of stasis divided a complex case into its component questions” (112). Quintilian produced another system of teaching judicial rhetoric that expanded on Cicero’s work and the five parts of a judicial speech: the exordium or introduction, the narratio or the statement of the facts in the case, the confirmatio or proofs offered, followed by the confutatio “or refutation in which counterarguments were answered,” and the peroratio or conclusion (123). An analysis of the Hansberry lawsuit shows the methods that were used and places them in the context of classical rhetoric to show how Carl Hansberry used the practice of judicial rhetoric to secure a place for his family and by extension to other families.

The case can be seen as a precursor to the Civil Rights movement overall and to his daughter’s play specifically. Another strategy from classical rhetoric which can be applied to both Carl Hansberry’s and Lorraine Hansberry’s work includes the Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. These appeals form the artistic proofs. According to Richard Toye, rhetoric was “not simply about creating beautiful phrases, but about reading situations and seeing how elements of them could be deployed most effectively in order to win over an audience” (13).

In *Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction*, Richard Toye explains how Aristotle distinguishes among three types of proof that a speech might contain: ‘the first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or the apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself’ (qtd in Toye 14). These are the appeals to ethos (character),

pathos (emotion or the emotional character of the audience), and logos (logic or discourse; Toye 14).

Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg discuss these appeals in their text, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, in which they write that the arguments that one invents “should appeal to reason (logos), emotion about the subject under discussion (pathos), and trust in the speaker’s character (ethos)” (31). Aristotle advanced the idea of rhetoric as an art and provided concepts in his writings about how to give speeches and the points speeches have to contain. For example, he described the types of appeals that a person would make in a speech as ethos, pathos, and logos. While these principles originally applied to speech, they can be applied to drama or other genres of literature as well as documented court case arguments. The appeals are central tools in the rhetoric of protest.

Ethos appeals are related to ethics and show the audience the good reputation and authority the speaker has and that they have the authority to speak on a subject. Appeals to emotion are pathos and require that the speaker consider what kinds of things will move the audience emotionally. A speaker must know who is in the audience to know what to say to strike an emotional chord with them. M. J. Killingsworth discusses the nature of appeals and how they can be seen in a variety of settings. He writes, “to appeal to an audience—whether to plead or to please—means to promote agreement or harmony, to smooth the waters between author and audience or any two positions” (253). Lorraine Hansberry’s play is an example of this kind of appeal made to an audience.

Aristotle defined rhetoric as the “faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,” and Cicero defined rhetoric as “speech designed to

persuade” (Eidenmuller). Rhetoric is defined by Bizzell and Herzberg as the practice of effective speaking and writing, “it still means teaching the strategies for effective discourse, and it still resides in the public sphere” (1199). Both Carl Hansberry’s legal fight and Lorraine Hansberry’s creative work are part of the public sphere and use rhetoric to persuade.

The scholars, Bizzell and Herzberg acknowledge that those allowed to participate in the rhetorical conversation began to become diverse in the nineteenth century when women and minorities voices started to be heard more openly. However, “women of color have always labored under a double burden of racial and sexual oppression in their attempts to claim a public voice” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1201). Lorraine Hansberry’s creative work is all the more remarkable because of the oppression she faced. Despite obstacles, Hansberry’s play is a central text in the literature of protest.

The most well-known of Hansberry’s plays, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is considered an integral part of the canon of modern drama. A careful analysis of the drama as an example of work that was intended to bring about a change in society leads to an unpacking of the rich rhetorical strategies Lorraine Hansberry used which were rooted in classical rhetoric. An examination of the Supreme Court case brought by Carl Hansberry, examined through the lens of judicial rhetoric as described by classical rhetoricians Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, shows its similar place as a part of the rhetoric of protest. Those interested in diversity and rhetoric and seeking a deeper understanding of protest rhetoric may find this work useful.

Lorraine Hansberry was a playwright and activist. She was born on May 19, 1930, and died January 12, 1965. She was the youngest of four children and was born into an affluent African American family. Her father was successful in real estate. Her uncle was also influential in her life. William Leo Hansberry taught African history at Howard University. His students included the first president of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikwe. According to scholars Hugh Short and Katherine Lederer, while Lorraine Hansberry was growing up, “she was frequently exposed to the perspectives of young African students who were invited to family dinners, and this exposure helped to shape many of the attitudes later found in her plays” (Short and Lederer). There are several scenes in *A Raisin in the Sun* that feature Lena’s younger daughter discussing the future with a young man from Africa. The interactions between Beneatha and Asagai provide some of the most poignant symbols of the past and the future of African Americans. Clearly Lorraine Hansberry drew upon her youthful memories to develop the relationships in her drama.

Hansberry studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin for two years before transferring to school in New York where she began to write for magazines. She was a reporter and eventually an associate editor of *Freedom* magazine.

Hansberry was the first African American female author to have a play performed on Broadway. That play was *A Raisin in the Sun*, which ran for more than 500 performances from its first performance in March 1959. It also won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award (Short and Lederer). The play was inspired by her reading Langston Hughes’ poem “Harlem.” The play depicts the struggles, both internal and external,

facing an African American family in Chicago seeking to move into a predominantly White neighborhood and to improve their living situation.

Even the title of the play is a significant type of protest. *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry takes its name from a poem by Langston Hughes called “Harlem” in which he asks what happens to a “dream deferred.” Deferred implies that the dream or hope has been set aside or put off to a later time. He may have been referring to African American dreams being put off and not acted upon to judge by the poverty and inequitable living conditions that African Americans had to struggle against. In order to understand the title, a reader may refer to the poem. Critics have pointed out the categories of what can happen to dreams in Hughes’ poem, “Does it dry up; Like a Raisin in the sun?—Dried up is what Walter Lee and Ruth’s marriage had become because their respective dreams have been deferred. When Mama Lena and Beneatha are felled by news of Walter Lee’s weakness and dishonesty, their life’s will—the desired greening of their humanity—is defoliated” (Baraka 16). The title of the play is related to protest because it calls attention to the idea that many African Americans in families similar to the Youngers often were exposed to these same types of discrimination.

A Raisin in the Sun focuses on the events of a few days in the lives of the Younger family, a poor African American family living in a Chicago ghetto. The main characters are Lena, the mother; her daughter Beneatha, her son Walter Lee and his wife Ruth; and their son Travis. The central plot revolves around what they should do with the late father’s life insurance money. Lena receives ten thousand dollars from the insurance

company, and although it is a fortune to them and makes them happy at first, the family cannot agree on how to spend the money.

Lena is the head of the family; and, without consulting her son, she takes a third of the money and uses it for a down payment on a house in a White neighborhood, away from the ghetto they have been living in. She would like to use another third of the money to pay for Beneatha to go to medical school so she can realize her dreams of becoming a doctor. The money seems to be the catalyst for all of the family members to achieve their dreams. However, after an argument with her son, Lena realizes that her son has never been allowed to make decisions as a man because of finances and discrimination. Because she sees her behavior as the family leader as part of the problem, she gives Walter Lee all the rest of the money to take care of for the family. She asks him to set aside a third of the money in a savings account for Beneatha but leaves it to him to do it. He should use the final third as he sees fit. Walter Lee has no experience in dealing with large sums of money and has deep rooted frustration with his life. He hates his job and dreams of setting himself up in business as a liquor store owner with his friends. He gives all the money to his friend to invest in the liquor store and soon learns that his friend has disappeared with the money.

Earlier in the play a representative from the neighborhood “welcoming” committee, Mr. Lindner, contacts the Younger family about repurchasing the house because the committee does not want African Americans to move there. Walter Lee refuses the offer immediately the first time the representative asks, but he is so devastated by his foolish action of giving away all the rest of the money that he has a crisis and calls

the man to come back and discuss the offer. Lena and the rest of the family are horrified and ashamed at the depth that Walter Lee seems to have sunk to. It is a dark moment in the play, and it appears that Walter Lee is willing to sacrifice what is left of his self-respect. However, when he is forced to make a decision about it and tell the representative his answer, in front of his own son Travis, he rejects the offer and tells him that they will be moving to the neighborhood because his father had already earned it.

Revisiting the play highlights for readers that Walter Lee's father worked all his life for something that his family would only experience after his death. At this point in the play, the audience can see that although Walter Lee has faults, there is heroic virtue still in him. Hansberry deliberately shows her characters as having both positive and negative traits rather than as stereotypes. The scholars Hugh Short and Katherine Lederer write in their essay "Lorraine Hansberry" that the author "reminds her audience of the common needs and aspirations of all humanity" (Short and Lederer.). She does not even describe Lindner as particularly unsavory, but just as a person. Hansberry said that she "treated Mr. Lindner as a human being merely because he is one; that does not make the meaning of his call less malignant, less sick'. Here is the point at which Hansberry calls her audience to action. She reminds the audience of what it is to be human and enjoins them to respect the dignity of all their fellows" (Short and Lederer).

Hansberry's play is often considered in terms of political and social contexts because of the time period when it debuted and its content. Hansberry's skillfully written play calls attention to many of the issues that would be central to the Civil Rights movement. According to the scholar Charles Stewart, "Social movements must persuade

a significant number of people that the generally accepted view of reality—past, present, and future—is erroneous and that major changes are warranted to bring about a more perfect society, a reality that matches expectations” (515). Readers can see how the play is situated in the context of the social movement when examining it according to this definition.

Lorraine Hansberry’s work has been examined in terms of social justice, dialogue, and feminist criticism. The play also lends itself to an analysis in terms of African American rhetoric. It is about an African American family and was written by an African American writer. However, there has been a lack of research on the works of the Hansberry family and the rhetoric of protest. The lawsuit of Carl Hansberry and the drama of Lorraine Hansberry are prime examples of rhetoric as protest and deserve study.

Examining the rhetorical strategies that Lorraine Hansberry used in the play alongside the rhetoric of Carl Hansberry’s lawsuit demonstrates how the case was a prequel to the play and how both Hansberrys used rhetoric to achieve their goals and bring changes in society.

The first part of the study serves as an introduction and provides background on the lawsuit and the play and explains the rhetorical strategies that are explored. The second chapter is a close analysis of the lawsuit and the use of judicial rhetoric. The third chapter examines the play and provides textual examples of the rhetorical strategies in use. The final chapter includes a summation of the research findings and discussion of Lorraine Hansberry’s authorial goals and her father’s legal goals and show how they achieved them. Research on this topic is useful for those interested in how classical

rhetoric can influence modern audiences as a form of protest. It provides two historical examples of the use of rhetoric by members of a minority group who relied on ancient rhetorical strategies to accomplish modern goals and alter patterns of the past.

CHAPTER II

RHETORIC, PROTEST, AND *HANSBERRY V. LEE*

Carl Augustus Hansberry was born on April 30, 1895, in Mississippi and died on March 7, 1946, in Mexico. In 1916 he moved to Chicago. The move was part of an historical movement called the Great Migration. During the Great Migration many African Americans left the South and moved North in hopes of a better life and more economic opportunity. In order to develop a more complete picture of the *Hansberry v. Lee* lawsuit, an examination of the circumstances leading up to the case is required. Placing the legal case in historical context helps to illustrate how Carl Hansberry used rhetoric to bring about change in society and how his court case was an act of protest.

An analysis of the rhetoric of legal arguments can be performed from a variety of perspectives. This chapter examines Carl Hansberry's legal fight in terms of classical rhetorical strategies going back to the work of Aristotle, more modern rhetorical theories such as rhetorical hermeneutics, and as an example of the rhetoric of protest. An examination of these strategies in terms of the famous Supreme Court case, *Hansberry v. Lee* helps to illustrate how minorities can use rhetoric to protest social injustice.

An understanding of the nature of African American rhetoric helps to clarify the statement of protest that Carl Hansberry was making by filing the lawsuit. The term African American rhetoric is very broad, but for purposes of analysis the following definitions are appropriate.

In his book, *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, the scholar Adam Banks provides several encompassing definitions. He writes that African American rhetoric is “used by individuals and groups of African Americans towards of the ends of full participation in American society on their own terms. These traditions and practices have both public and private dimensions and embrace communicative efforts directed at African Americans and at other groups in the society” (Banks 2).

There are other definitions that illustrate African American rhetoric. Banks includes Keith Gilyard’s definition of African American rhetoric as well. He writes, “the major means by which people of African descent in the American colonies and subsequent republic have asserted their collective humanity in the face of an enduring White supremacy and have tried to persuade, cajole, and gain acceptance for ideas relative to Black survival and Black liberation” (qtd. in Banks 156). This definition is applicable in the discussion of Carl Hansberry’s lawsuits because his purchase of a home and refusal to accept the order to move out, was an attempt to give his family an opportunity to survive and thrive in a White dominated society.

In their book, *Understanding African American Rhetoric*, Ronald Jackson and Elaine Richardson provide a concise definition applicable to the analysis in this study. They define African American rhetoric as the “study of culturally and discursively produced knowledge forms, communication practices, and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles of people of African ancestry in America” (Jackson and Richardson xiii). Although Carl Hansberry and his daughter Lorraine Hansberry used

different communicative media, there is a similar thread towards the same goal of equal treatment for African Americans in the United States.

Jacqueline Jones Royster describes the overall nature of African American rhetorical practices when she writes:

They acknowledge persuasion as the abiding purpose of interactive engagement within and across communities, and they make clear that the mandate that is quite compelling in these discursive forms is tied unequivocally to struggles for freedom among this group. What's more, they present this view as part of knowledge making processes, rather than as simply expressive traditions, suggesting that there are consequences for language use in terms of the ways that we think, act and consider ourselves in the world. (qtd in Banks 157)

Royster makes the argument that the overall goal of African American rhetorical practices is interwoven with their struggle to be free. An example of the type of freedom that African Americans might be fighting for is the right to exercise their ability to purchase a property and live where they want. Such was the case with Carl Hansberry's lawsuit.

Historical Context of *Hansberry v. Lee*

The time period that Carl Hansberry moved to Chicago is significant because it happened during an historical time period when many African Americans were moving to Chicago in search of a better life than the one they had in the South. One of the major factors in the decision to venture north for many African Americans during this period was a column in the *Chicago Defender* called "Legal Helps." The column's author was

Richard Westbrook, an African American man who was professionally trained in law and had a career that spanned more than 30 years. At the beginning of his career, in 1914, he formed the Cook County Bar Association for African Americans trained in law because they were ineligible for membership in the Chicago Bar Association on the basis of their race. During that same year he began working on the *Chicago Defender* and launched a campaign for racial and social equality that would become tremendously influential in the minority community in Chicago.

In the article, “A Theory of African American Citizenship: Richard Westbrook, The Great Migration, and the Chicago Defender’s ‘Legal Helps,’ Column the scholar Joel E. Black discusses Westbrook’s work when he writes, “In the column, Westbrook would define citizenship for a vast population of migrating African Americans—who in many cases were new to Chicago and its legal institutions” (897). The column was a vital source of information for the new Chicago citizens and answered questions on topics from rental contracts to domestic issues and many in between. The tone of the column implied a level of equality that many were not used to, but Westbrook used his legal training to explain matters of everyday life that would go on both inside and outside the courtroom.

The idea that readers of the Legal Helps column should view themselves as equal to others despite racial discrimination was evident in the more than 130 questions Westbrook answered in the first two years of the column’s publication. Black writes, “Legal Helps would make law an important mechanism in the struggle for racial equality, particularly among readers who were new to urban life. In the column, Westbrook

answered questions that allowed him to convey individual practices of citizenship” (899). Because of its saturation in the minority community and along the rail line from the deep South to Chicago, this is the kind of newspaper that may have influenced Carl Hansberry and a column that many African Americans in the city read.

Questions about commercial transactions were often answered in the column. Westbrook advised readers to keep a copy of any contract they signed so that they would know their rights in the event they were violated. He explained that written agreements often carried more authority than verbal ones (Black 900). Westbrook’s column answered readers’ questions, but it also served another purpose. It functioned as a teaching tool about social and legal interaction. Black writes, “in teaching his readers the rules of commercial exchange, he also taught them to think of themselves as equal parties in commercial transactions—to think of themselves as citizens” (901). Carl Hansberry showed a similar way of thinking of himself as an equal when he purchased his home and later when he filed the lawsuit so his family would not have to move.

The changing concepts of how African Americans may have thought about themselves and chose to react had been developing over a long period of time. Twenty years before the Supreme Court ruling that allowed Carl Hansberry and his family to live in the house he had purchased, Chicago was besieged by the event known as the “red summer.” In 1919 a riot was triggered by the death of a Black youth on July 27. He had been swimming in Lake Michigan and had drifted into an area reserved for whites; they began to throw rocks at him, and he shortly drowned. When police refused to arrest the White man whom Black observers held responsible for the incident, crowds began to

gather on the beach, and the disturbance began. Distorted rumors swept the city as sporadic fighting broke out between gangs and mobs of both races. Violence escalated with each incident, and for 13 days Chicago was without law and order despite the fact that the state militia had been called out on the fourth day. By the end, 38 were dead (23 Black people, 15 White people), 537 injured, and 1,000 Black families were left without homes. Order was eventually restored, but a new way of segregating Blacks and Whites became more prevalent—the restrictive covenant.

It is becoming increasingly prevalent in our society to hear of hate crimes, violence and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, or even immigration status. The idea that prejudice would dissipate in modern times does not appear to be happening. Suzette Malveaux, in the article “The Modern Class Action Rule: Its Civil Rights Roots and Relevance Today” published in the *Kansas Law Review*, provides an overview of the history of the legal battle.

Recent protest marches have been met with a substantial police presence, while other protests went unchecked and resulted in sustained violence during the American political process. It is as though some prejudices that had been quieted were not extinguished but were suppressed and waiting to explode. The Supreme Court decision in *Hansberry v. Lee* rested on a concept of *res judicata*. Malveaux explains what this legal term means: “Central to aggregate litigation is the extent to which a collective action will bind others and preclude them from bringing their own actions. Of particular concern over the modern class action rule’s development was the *res judicata* effect of a class judgment and whether it would unfairly capture individual class members” (342). It

is not accurate to explain solely the case in terms of classes being determined and whether or not cases had already been ruled on. The issue of race is at the core of the covenant because that is the only reason mentioned as to why people of color could not occupy homes in that area. There is no mention, for example of the ability to pay for the house. Lorraine Hansberry stated later that her family was what was considered middle class and money was not at issue in their purchasing the home. Malveaux alludes to this idea when she writes, “Other factors were at work in *Hansberry*” (342).

Hansberry v. Lee is the Supreme Court decision upon which the award-winning *A Raisin in the Sun* was inspired. Lorraine Hansberry was the youngest child of an African American family who purchased property in an all-White neighborhood in Chicago. Their effort to live in the neighborhood was obstructed by Anna M. Lee and other White neighbors, who brought an action in the Circuit Court of Cook County, on behalf of themselves and other landowners, to enforce a racially restrictive covenant and enjoin the Hansberry family from moving into the neighborhood. The covenant, entered into by about 500 landowners, stipulated both that “for a specified period no part of the land should be ‘sold, leased to or permitted to be occupied by any person of the colored race,’” and that 95% of the landowners had to have signed the agreement for it to be valid (Malveaux 344).

Lorraine Hansberry’s father, Carl Augustus Hansberry, had purchased land from an owner who had signed the agreement, leading White plaintiffs to bring a class action alleging breach of the covenant and seeking an injunction. However, the Hansberry family and other defendants contended that the agreement was invalid because it had not

been signed by the requisite 95%. There were several arguments made by Carl Hansberry's legal team, but the issue of equality under the Fourteenth Amendment was not the first point they mention in their court filing.

Plaintiffs contended that the validity of the covenant had been determined in a prior Illinois state court action, *Burke v. Kleiman*, and therefore the issue was res judicata in this case. The defendants further argued that binding them to the prior judgment in *Burke v. Kleinman* would deny them due process under the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Circuit Court concluded that res judicata applied to the Hansberrys, even after finding on the merits that only 54% of the owners had signed the agreement and that the 95% figure had been the result of a "false and fraudulent stipulation" (344). The Supreme Court of Illinois affirmed, concluding that the prior *Burke v. Kleiman* case was a class or representative action, and that the Hansberrys were members of that plaintiff class seeking to enforce the covenant and were thus bound by its decree. It is not clear how the family could have been considered a part of a class action in a neighborhood they were not allowed to live in.

Carl Hansberry's legal team appealed this ruling to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court made clear its role in protection of constitutional due process. *Hansberry* established that "although one is not bound by a judgment in a case in which he is not a party, the significant exception to that rule is a class or representative action. Where a party shares the same interests as a non-party and the former adequately represents the latter's interest, a judgment in a class action comports with due process and may have res judicata effect" (Malveaux 344). Using these parameters for interpretation,

the Court concluded that the Hansberrys were not members of the plaintiff class in *Burke v. Kleiman* who sought to enforce the covenant. The Supreme Court did not rule on the legality of the racially restrictive covenant or the Fourteenth Amendment rights of minorities to not be discriminated against in terms of housing.

The Supreme Court ruling allowed the Hansberry family to stay in the house Carl Hansberry had purchased but the Court did not state that the covenant was racist, only that the defendants in *Burke v. Kleiman* had not been designated as a class of landowners. This made the covenant not binding the Hansberry family. Malveaux examined the timing of the law concerning class actions changes to reflect the way these cases are handled in modern courts. She examined the 1962 Deskbook and explained that the Hansberry case was a good reminder that the impact of class judgments was not a foregone conclusion, but a statement of public policy:

While the class action should look toward a binding adjudication as the norm, this result cannot be assured in the action itself; for the question of binding effect can only come up for effective decision in a later action. Moreover, the question of res judicata may be materially influenced by what has occurred between the time of judgment and the time the question arises for decision. For example, suppose a class action by Negro plaintiffs asserting civil rights in one or another context. The action may satisfy the requirements for a class action with, presumptively, binding effect on the class. Suppose the judgment is for the defendant. Manifestly, if the condition of law changes favorably to the asserted

civil rights, the judgment will not preclude a later action by members of the class for the same relief earlier claimed. Speaking more generally, *res judicata* is merely the expression of on public policy, and “as the embodiment of a public policy, [it] must, at times, be weighed against competing interests, and must, on occasion, yield to other policies. (Malveaux 345)

It is interesting to note how the laws concerning class actions were changing as the struggle for civil rights was becoming more intense. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is considered the landmark civil rights legislation in the United States. It outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, required equal access to public places and employment, and enforced desegregation of schools and the right to vote.

The Civil Rights movement had preliminary victories as it gained momentum. One such victory was that of Carl Hansberry in the *Hansberry v. Lee* Supreme Court case. There are several perspectives from which to examine the lawsuit in terms of rhetoric including classical legal rhetoric and contemporary rhetorical theory.

Classical Legal Rhetoric

In order to examine how classical rhetorical strategies work in a modern legal setting it is necessary to understand what these original principles were, how they changed over time, and how they relate to modern rhetorical practices. The scholar Michael Frost in his book titled *Introduction to Classical Legal Rhetoric: A Lost Heritage*, explains that during the early classical times, if “an ordinary Greek citizen of the educated class had a legal dispute with another citizen, he usually appeared and

argued his own case before other Greek citizens and did so without the advice or help of a lawyer” (1). A man of the upper class in ancient Greece would have been formally educated in the art of rhetoric and that education would prepare him to argue his own case. There were also people skilled in the art of composing speeches for litigants called *logographoi* that could be hired to assist the Greek citizen in preparing his legal case. Rhetoric was a vital part of the ancient classical curriculum. According to Frost, rhetoric featured the most “adaptable and practical analysis of legal discourse ever created” (2).

Although the concepts associated with the term rhetoric have moved away from legal reasoning to other areas such as communication and writing, classical rhetoric remains adaptable. Frost writes, that with accommodations for modern legal procedures allowed, “Greco-Roman rhetorical principles can be applied to modern legal discourse as readily as they have been to legal discourse in any other period” (2). For example, the Aristotelian proofs are one way to analyze the legal documents filed in the Hansberry lawsuit.

Aristotle

One of the most influential ancient Greek rhetoricians was Aristotle. In the article, “The Audience for Aristotle’s Rhetoric,” Edward Clayton describes the general principle that the understanding of Aristotle’s work is enhanced by knowledge of who his intended audience was. He writes that Aristotle “frequently points to the importance of having the correct audience if any kind of teaching in these areas is to be effective. He is clearly aware of the importance of tailoring one’s message to the audience that will be receiving it so that they can properly understand it” (Clayton 184). Specific references to the

importance of the audience are located in Rhetoric, “Rhetoric I.8 lists and briefly discusses the types of political constitution that exist so that the speaker will know how to appear persuasive to an audience in any city. Rhetoric II.12–17 offers advice on appealing to audiences who are young, middle-aged, or old, wellborn or not, rich or poor, powerful or powerless. Each type of audience must be addressed differently if one is to be persuasive” (Clayton 185). Clayton writes about the endoxa, or commonly held beliefs of a community, that help a rhetorician know how to convince the audience:

In rhetoric, however, the same endoxa have a different role because while philosophy aims at truth, rhetoric aims at persuasion. The speaker uses the endoxa not primarily to advance the truth but in order to present an effective argument to the audience based on what they already believe to be true. He learns the facts about a particular legal or political situation and then chooses the endoxa that will most effectively (not necessarily truthfully) present the facts so as to lead the audience to the conclusion he wants. (Clayton 193)

An example from the current discussion of the Hansberry legal battle that relates to the concept of endoxa may be the commonly held belief of arguably some of the White property owners since they signed the covenant, was the African Americans living in their neighborhood would have a negative impact on their property value or neighborhood culture.

Three of the most important rhetoricians from the classical era are Aristotle, Marcus Tullius Cicero, and Marcus Fabius Quintilian. Frost writes, “the treatises of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian form the intellectual core of classical forensic rhetoric and it is their

work that is most often relied on when discussing the topic,” (2) and classical forensic rhetoric is relied on in the analysis of the Hansberry lawsuit.

In order to place the analysis of the court case in context, it is helpful to understand the historical background of rhetoric. In the classical era, rhetorical education was a central part of the education of Roman citizens. Frost writes, “A student’s rhetorical education prepared him to meet all his public speaking obligations, especially his legal obligations” (3). Some of the content of a rhetorical education would have involved study of the fundamental features of classical rhetoric such as the Canon.

The Canon forms the basis of legal discourse. The Canon’s five parts are: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Cicero explained what the five tenets of rhetoric were in his work, *De Inventione*. It was Cicero who defined rhetoric as a great art that was comprised of five lesser arts. These five have come to be known as the Canons of rhetoric. In English the Canons are Invention, Style, Arrangement, Memory, and Delivery. Cicero would have displayed these arts in his public addresses. Invention is the point at which a rhetor thinks of what to write.

According to Frost, “classical rhetoricians focused on systematic methods for discovering or inventing all the available legal arguments in a given case” (4). In order to discover all the potential arguments, rhetoricians could consult the *topoi*. The *topoi* were the commonly used lines of argument such as cause and effect or comparison. Style would encompass the word choice or how to say it. Arrangement could involve the manner in which the speech was arranged, such as beginning with an introduction, laying

out one's case, and then using a conclusion to tie together one's speech. Memory and delivery are primarily used in oral arguments.

Cicero was a product of the patronage system. In the ancient Roman patronage system, wealthy people of high social status looked for the brightest young people to mentor. When the young person went on to do great things, it brought prestige to the patron.

Cicero became wealthy after he won an infamous court case and married a wealthy lady of high social status. He was the youngest person to be appointed consul and had a wealthy lifestyle until turbulent political times proved to lead to his demise. He had a part in Caesar's assassination and was later killed when the person he sided with was thrown out of power. Cicero's rhetoric was about public display and winning over an audience. Earlier in his career he gave two orations against Cataline which were instrumental in the senate's decision to have the conspirators sent away from Roman and later executed. His influence on rhetoric was broad and lasting. These concepts are still taught and used in contemporary society such as in legal discourse.

An essential point of Cicero's rhetoric was persuasion, but he also had to keep a delicate balance with what he said because of the political climate. There were two wars during the time Cicero was writing and speaking in Rome. There was a geographic war which resulted in changes in the expanse of Rome and there was also a social war because people on the outskirts of the Roman empire still had to pay taxes and fight in the wars, but they did not have the same rights as a Roman citizen. Cicero's rhetoric taught

the virtues of winning over an audience in order to gain wealth and fame. In a legal case, the audience to be won over would be the jurors or the judges.

Frost discusses the importance of audience awareness in his book, *An Introduction to Classical Legal Rhetoric: A Lost Heritage*, when he writes, “modern trial advocacy handbooks, practice manuals, and even some recent law review articles repeatedly testify to the enduring importance of pathos and ethos in legal discourse. These articles and treatises also demonstrate that audience awareness is as important to modern trial lawyers as it was to Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian” (70). There are many examples of this principle in contemporary society such as a contemporary case where the media report daily of the number of jurors who have been selected for the trial of a police officer charged with the killing of an African American man in an event that triggered a national and worldwide protest in 2020.

The particular attention that is paid to the selection of the jury, the people the lawyers will argue in front of, shows the importance of the “audience” in legal discourse. Frost explains, “Because modern trial lawyers argue their cases before lay juries, their general approach to advocacy is similar to the classical approach” (Frost 70). Many contemporary law professionals use classical persuasion techniques. Frost stresses the importance of an attorneys’ shaping their argument to have the maximum effectiveness in front of a specific judge and jury and that the lawyer should take the time to find out as much as he or she can about the judge’s professional experience.

An interesting correlation between classical and contemporary legal practices is found in the examination of a lawyer’s credibility or projection of credibility. The

majority of modern lists of credibility factors are similar to the Greco-Roman lists of those 'virtues' from the classical period that contribute to an advocate's ethos. Cicero, for example, found it "very helpful to display the tokens of good-nature, kindness, calmness, loyalty and a disposition that is pleasing and not grasping or covetous, and all the qualities belonging to men who are upright, unassuming" (Frost 72). These qualities are still those that modern trial lawyers are advised to strive for.

Carl Hansberry's case illustrates the principles of classical Judicial rhetoric in use in a modern court. The arguments used to persuade in court settings were described by Aristotle when he wrote about three rhetorical settings: deliberative, epideictic, and forensic. Deliberative rhetoric focuses on the future and is typically used in political settings where a speaker might address an audience about the way to use resources to solve a problem faced by the group.

According to James Herrick, "deliberative rhetoric involved weighing evidence for and against a policy or plan. It was oriented toward the future and influenced judgments about what should be done. Epideictic rhetoric is ceremonial in nature and deals with matters in the present. It dealt with "issues of praise (epainos) and blame (psogos), seeking as its goal to demonstrate what is honorable (kalon)" (91). There are several examples of this kind of speech, "Martin Luther King's famous 'I Have a Dream' speech is another example of epideictic oratory, one in which King upholds the values of justice, harmony, and peace" (Herrick 92).

Forensic or Judicial rhetoric reconstructs the past and its "main concern is deciding questions of justice (dikaion)" (Herrick 92). Judicial rhetoric requires that

speakers be skilled in ways to convince a jury or judge that the evidence they are presenting supports their hypothesis.

Herrick writes, “Questions of what is right or just come up frequently outside of the formal courtroom setting but the reasoning employed to argue these questions is similar. Evidence is sifted to support an evaluation of a past action, a standard of justice is applied, and the action is judged to be either just or unjust” (93).

In addition to the work of Aristotle, the works of Cicero and Quintilian help illustrate the classical foundations of Judicial rhetoric. Cicero’s contribution of the five Canons of rhetoric, invention, arrangement, expression, memory, and delivery, expanded on Aristotle’s writing and highlighted what he called the “stasis” system for thinking through a judicial case. Quintilian was a product of the patronage system as well. He lived in even more turbulent times than Cicero. Nero, who is remembered historically as violent and unstable, was the ruler during the time Quintilian was writing. It would seem that Quintilian would have had to be very careful about what he said and wrote during this period.

Quintilian’s *Institutes* were books written as a treatise to educate an orator. They trace the route, beginning with a child’s first entry into the study of rhetoric. Subsequent books discuss technical training and methods for teaching style and delivery. The work is twelve volumes and includes specific curriculum for the child to begin learning. Quintilian even mentions that the child’s nurse has a part in his training from infancy because he will learn to speak partly by imitating her. The nurse should use proper

techniques when teaching a child to speak. Other people who surround the child should do this also.

According to Herrick students “studying a stasis system learned to think through a legal case by following the points at which disagreements were likely to arise. Points of stasis divided a complex case into its component questions” (Herrick 112). Quintilian produced another system of teaching judicial rhetoric that expanded on Cicero’s work and the five parts of a judicial speech: the exordium or introduction, the narratio or the statement of the facts in the case, the confirmatio or proofs offered, followed by the confutatio “or refutation in which counterarguments were answered,” and the peroratio or conclusion (Herrick 123).

An analysis of the Hansberry lawsuit shows the methods that were used and place them in context of classical rhetoric and show how Carl Hansberry used the practice of judicial rhetoric to secure a place for his family.

The Aristotelian appeals are studied in contemporary law classes as well. In his article, “The DNA of an Argument: A Case Study in Legal Logos,” Colin Starger, analyzes the position of classical appeals in contemporary legal reasoning. He writes, “from the original Greek, the word logos may be translated as “discourse,” “speech,” “word,” or “reason.” As a rhetorical term of art, logos, is a mode of proof understood as rational argument or appeal based on reason” (Starger 1055).

The Aristotelian appeal logos originally referred to the actual content of a speech. That would be the “text” part of a communication triangle. Starger explains, “Logos concerns how reason proves arguments in discourse. As the translations of logos suggest,

the primary discourse of logos is speech and word. While symbolic or mathematical logic may be thought of as a very specialized subset of logos, the more central meaning of logos is reason-based proof in natural language” (Starger 1055). An example of this concept in a legal setting may occur when the lawyer makes a final appeal to a jury. He or she may rely on connecting with the jury on an emotional level, but much of the argument will be based on reason.

Starger examines the three proofs Aristotle provided in Rhetoric. These three proofs are powerful tools that the lawyer can use to win the acceptance of their argument by an audience. Proof by ethos persuades an audience by building up the character of the speaker and showing their credibility to speak on this subject and the consequent validity of their argument. “Proof by pathos disposes the audience to feel emotions conducive to accepting the proposed judgment. Finally, proof by logos derives from the argument itself and shows the truth or apparent truth of the proposition asserted” (Starger 1056).

Aristotle’s teachings highlight how the ability of the speaker to appeal to an audience in all three ways is related to his or her ability to persuade. Starger explains that in “Aristotle’s formulation of proof and persuasion functioning through ethos, pathos, and logos, we see the ancient origins of the familiar modern conception of the communication triangle” (1056). A rhetorical triangle forms when speaker, audience, and subject are joined in language.

Rhetorical Hermeneutics and Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

In the discussion of how to use classical rhetoric for modern audiences, a main point will be the explanation of rhetoric’s continuing usefulness. The scholar, Steven

Mailloux, has researched and written extensively in the field of rhetorical hermeneutics which is using a theoretical as well as historically informed approach to interpret texts. Hermeneutics is defined as the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation.

In the essay, “From Segregated Schools to Dimpled Chads: Rhetorical Hermeneutics and the Suasive Work of Theory in Legal Interpretation,” Mailloux provides a useful framework for analysis of the Hansberry lawsuit. He explains that rhetorical hermeneutics, “is an interweaving of rhetorical pragmatism in contemporary theory debates with cultural rhetoric studies in ongoing, historical practice” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 13).

Mailloux describes the field as one that is particularly useful in analyzing legal and literary texts. He explains that rhetorical hermeneutics is applicable in those areas of study because they “can be approached through reception study” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 14). Reception theory is a way of understanding texts by understanding how the text is read by an audience. Mailloux describes it as “the interpretive history of how events, texts, figures, and other cultural bits are used at different times and places, including the specific ways they are rhetorically established as meaningful and appropriated in different contexts for different purposes” (“Segregated Schools” 14). Reception theory places the reader in context and takes into account the broad social and historical issues that may influence their interpretation of a text.

An example that Mailloux uses to illustrate rhetorical hermeneutics is in his analysis of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* in 1954. The case revolved around the concept of separate but equal and the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal

protection clause. The court ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 15), a ruling which sparked both praise and criticism of the court. It is notable that the court had previously ruled in *Plessy v.*

Ferguson in 1896 that separate but equal facilities for races was fair. Mailloux writes:

To see how the court rhetorically achieved this reinterpretation, we can look first at the theoretical moments in the Brown opinion, those moments in the argument when the court comments self-reflexively on its own interpretive practices in the 1954 decision, the court began with the question of whether arguments from intention could resolve the dispute over the constitutionality of racially segregated schools. Each side claimed that the historical evidence for intent supported its case, but the court remained unpersuaded: “This discussion and our own investigation convince us that, although these sources cast some light, it is not enough to resolve the problem with which we are faced. At best they are inconclusive.” (“Segregated Schools” 15)

The Supreme Court made a decision about the framework it would use for interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment prior to hearing any arguments in the Brown case. The Court determined that it would not interpret the equal protection clause within the historical context of its adoption. It would also not examine the issue within terms of its application in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The Court would look at the matter from the vantage point of the twentieth-century American education system. Mailloux writes, “What the court then determined was that separate means unequal and therefore state-

imposed segregation in public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and must come to an end” (“Segregated Schools” 16).

This research study examines the legal case brought by Carl Hansberry and how he used rhetoric to bring about change. Rhetorical hermeneutics as described by Mailloux provides an additional lens through which to focus. The Supreme Court essentially struck down the idea of school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, and even prior to that decision in a similar way the court struck a blow against blanket restrictive covenants when it ruled in favor of Carl Hansberry in 1940. The court reexamined the interpretations of the restrictive covenant and class-action lawsuits as determined by the lower courts and made an important change.

Mailloux argues that the issue of interpretive constraints becomes problematic when theorists believe “that self-conscious reflections within one’s arguments are something more than rhetorically specific, historically situated uses of theory to extend and justify those arguments” (“Segregated Schools” 17).

Rhetorical hermeneutics replaces a general hermeneutics with rhetorical histories, “rather than proposing still another theory of how to define and constrain individual interpreters and their relations to independent texts” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 17). Rhetorical hermeneutics suggests an alternative method which is not a “confrontation model of interpreter and text with a conversational model of arguments among interpreters” (“Segregated Schools” 18).

It can be argued that many rhetorical situations revolve around a power-knowledge interaction. Mailloux argues that “historically situated reception studies about

historically situated textual arguments cannot escape the configurations of power-knowledge that are constitutive of both the interpretive context of historical description and the interpreted context of the history described” (“Segregated Schools” 18).

Historical context is a vital part of gaining a more complete understanding of an issue.

From the viewpoint of the scholar, the analysis of legal rhetoric can be explained in very clear terms using hermeneutics as a frame. “Rhetorical hermeneutics,” Mailloux writes, “claims that all interpretation involves rhetoric (we make our interpretations through figure and argument) and all rhetoric involves politics (power relations both condition and are affected by our arguments); therefore interpretation, including legal adjudication, is not completely separable from politics” (“Segregated Schools” 21). There are conditions both historical and political which may effect the arguments and decisions of the judiciary.

In terms of the landmark court case of *Hansberry v. Lee* the societal norms of the time period could have had an impact on the Court’s decision not to rule about racism in the restrictive covenants but to limit their discussion to the determination of what constituted a class in class action legal cases. Mailloux explains that “theoretical moments in these cases function as part of the persuasive attempt to prove or disprove, support or challenge a specific interpretive argument” (“Segregated Schools” 19).

Although *Hansberry v. Lee* is a case still studied in law schools and represents the first major victory concerning fair housing at the Supreme Court level, one even more famous case, *Brown v. Board of Education* showed the monumental challenges that the nation faced against racism. Mailloux writes that the rhetorical power of any “judicial

opinion effectively organizes the argumentative energies functioning within particular socio-historical contexts, disciplinary and extra-disciplinary, in which textual meanings are established” (“Segregated Schools” 19).

Rhetorical hermeneutics is a theoretical practice that resides at the intersection of rhetorical pragmatism and cultural rhetoric. It has been defined as a type of rhetorical cultural studies in which certain historical acts of interpretation are examined within their cultural context. Mailloux calls this “rhetorical hermeneutics” and observes that it is a reworking of the law/politics distinction. One of the ways that critics framed their opposition to the Brown decision was to separate law and politics of the rhetoric of the decision (“Segregated Schools” 20).

Mailloux provides an additional example of reception in the essay concerning the issue of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Bush v. Gore* the court ruled that the presidential election recount must stop because “the formulation of uniform rules to determine intent was practicable and necessary, but the want of those rules here has led to unequal evaluation of ballots in various respects” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 21). For the majority of the court the interpretation of dimpled or hanging chads was subjective and, “a lack of uniform interpretive standards ultimately entails unequal treatment of individual votes and a violation of the equal protection of voters” (“Segregated Schools” 22).

Of course, that historical case has been written about in detail in terms of this unusual reception “of the Fourteenth Amendment that it is a creative or unprecedented or cynical application of the equal protection clause” (“Segregated Schools” 22). Mailloux

writes, “Did politics influence the court’s decision in *Bush v. Gore*? There seems to be as little doubt in this case as in *Brown*. Is there a way of separating out the politics from the legal interpretation?” (Mailloux, “Segregated Schools” 22).

The relevance of Mailloux’s argument is distinctly apparent in contemporary American politics at the highest level. The political process was repeatedly called into question by some, and the media raised the issue of the impact of appointing a new Justice to the Court right before an election and if that appointee would follow a more conservative or liberal path. Mailloux writes, “Though there might be no general way for distinguishing in principle where appropriate interpretation ends and objectionable politics begins, there are contextualized ways of judging when bad rhetoric is replacing good, which is to say (among other things), when unpersuasive arguments are replacing persuasive arguments” (“Segregated Schools” 22).

Claudia Ingram explains the relevance of studying legal rhetoric as a means of teaching developing writers. In her article, “Rhetoric Where (As Always) Rhetoric Counts: Reading Judicial Decisions in the Writing Class,” she writes, “Judicial decisions vividly illustrate the importance of considering the audience’s thinking during the invention process” (Ingram 21). The contemporary usefulness of rhetoric in terms of writing is also illustrated when she writes, “decisions can thus be used not only to bring issues into focus but also to help refine students’ awareness of rhetorical situations and of the critical importance of considering audience assumptions during the invention process” (Ingram 22).

The importance of the audience in rhetorical situations cannot be overstated. Ingram discusses the concept when she writes that students should not be given the idea that “the rhetorical process consists of a writer’s effort to conform her position to her audience’s preconceptions” (28). Studying the rhetoric of legal decisions and the background of legal cases can help illustrate the importance of the legal decision in terms of the historical climate. Carl Hansberry’s lawsuit was addressing an audience that had already established its position by enforcing the racially restrictive covenants prevalent in Illinois in the 1930s.

One of the requirements for a rhetorical act to take place is that an audience is involved. The relationship between the communicator and audience is one of the cornerstones of rhetoric. Ingram discusses the relationship between writers and the audience when she writes that the writer’s position is informed by the framework of shared meaning she has with the audience and “that if the writer’s argument is persuasive, the framework of meaning itself is shifted and refigured by her position” (29).

Understanding one’s audience is crucial to effective communication whether spoken or written. Legal rulings are another kind of document that represent strong examples for rhetorical analysis. Ingram reminds writers that they should “examine the assumptions she shares with readers with care” and look for assumptions that might be expanded so “that the universe of shared discourse might accommodate her position” (29).

The *Hansberry v. Lee* Supreme Court case was the first of its kind, and students who examine other court cases prior to it may see why it stands out and is taught in

contemporary law classes when students learn about *res judicata*. Ingram writes that “careful reading of inconsistent decisions also alerts students to the effect of communities of interest and moments of identification on interpretation” (30).

The interpretation of law and its relation to literary criticism helps to form the basis of an analysis both of the court case and the play. In his essay, “Working on the Chain Gang: Interpretation in the Law and in Literary Criticism,” Stanley Fish discusses history and law when he writes, “a function of the law’s conservatism which will not allow a case to remain unrelated to the past and so assures that the past, in the form of the history of decisions, will be continually rewritten” (208). Fish had previously written “Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities” in which he describes the interpretive communities. His theory stated that each reader approaches a literary text as part of a community of readers and not as an individual in isolation and that it is these communities that produce meanings. He writes about the similarity between the community he discussed in literary criticism and the legal community interpreting historical court cases.

Fish argues that “all histories are invented in the weak sense that they are not simply discovered but assembled under the pressure of some present urgency; but no history is invented in the strong sense that the urgency which led to its assembly was unrelated to any generally acknowledged legal concern” (“Working on the Chain Gang” 208). The time period of the *Hansberry v. Lee* case had bearing on its implications then, and it has implications now when viewed from an historical standpoint.

In his essay Fish describes how new interpretations of law could be similar to interpretations of genre literature. He uses the example of looking at a detective novel as a philosophical work. He writes, “the emergence of semiotic and structural analysis has meant that it is no longer necessarily a criticism to say of something that it is ‘formulaic,’ a term of description, which under a previous understanding of literary value would have been invoked in a gesture of dismissal, can now be invoked as a preliminary to a study of signifying systems” (“Working on the Chain Gang” 209).

Through reading the court documents and the play, concepts about intention can be illustrated. Fish explains that “the act of reading itself is at once the asking and answering of the question, What is it that is meant by these words?, a question asked not in a vacuum but in the context of an already in place understanding of the various things someone writing a novel or a decision (or anything else) might mean (that is intend)” (“Working on the Chain Gang” 212). Readers can apply this theory about already in place understandings about things to an examination of the Supreme Court Case of Carl Hansberry where he challenged the understanding which was in place about where African Americans could live in Illinois.

Determining intention is not a static endeavor and interpretations are subject to change over time and from varying perspectives. Stanley Fish states that “one cannot read or reread independently of intention, independently, that is of the assumption that one is dealing with marks or sounds produced by an intentional being, a being situated in some enterprise in relation to which he has a purpose or a point of view” (“Working on the Chain Gang” 213).

The Rhetoric of Protest and *Hansberry v. Lee*

The restrictive covenant that Carl Hansberry fought against had a long history and was not limited to Chicago but existed across the nation. In his article “The Origins and Diffusion of Racial Restrictive Covenants,” Michael Jones-Correa states “...the diffusion of racial restrictive covenants across the nation was spurred by a critical historical moment: the urbanization of black Americans and the consequent race riots from 1917-1921” (543). The race riots subsided and were replaced by restrictive covenants as a legal means of maintaining segregated practices. The courts routinely upheld these covenants although within five years there were legal challenges to the real estate agreements.

For example, the 1926 *Corrigan v. Buckley* decision was upheld by the Supreme Court, and the judges attempted to clarify their reasoning behind upholding these discriminatory covenants. The judges state the “constitutional right of a Negro to acquire, own and occupy property does not carry with it the constitutional power to compel sale and conveyance to him of any particular private property” (Jones-Correa 544). They decided that the citizens could decide to whom they would sell their private property. The decisions became cloudier however, when arguments were made that the States were upholding and enforcing unconstitutional practices such as the argument made by Carl Hansberry’s lawyers.

The *Hansberry v. Lee* decision allowed the Hansberry family to continue to live in what was at that time a White neighborhood, but it did not address the restrictive

covenants or racism. The Court's ruling sanctioned racial restrictive covenants until the practice was reversed by the Supreme Court in 1948 (Jones-Correa 544).

Although the restrictive covenants were upheld for many years, racial zoning was generally not allowed. In 1917 in *Buchanan v. Warely* that type of zoning was overruled. The Supreme Court was "finding elsewhere that the state could not interfere with private racism, neither could it tolerate the state's enforcement of racial zoning. These ordinances, the Court found, interfered with individuals' property rights" (Jones-Correa 548). This decision may have allowed more minorities to own property where they wished, but soon restrictive covenants began to be more frequently used to maintain segregation. The earliest racial restrictive covenant cases appeared in California, where the covenants were directed against Chinese immigrants. In *Gandolfo v. Hartman*, a California case decided in 1892, for instance, the judges highlight the disputed passage in a deed which reads, "the party of the first part shall never, without the consent of the party of the second part, his heirs or assigns, rent any buildings or ground owned by said party of the first, and fronting on said East Main Street, to a Chinaman or Chinamen" (Jones-Correa 550).

The scholar Carol M. Rose wrote about the restrictive covenants in her article, "Racially Restrictive Covenants—Were They Dignity Takings." She describes the historical background in which these policies took root when she describes the resemblance between the restrictive covenants and other segregation laws. She writes that they "sprang up around the beginning of the twentieth century in the southern states, all requiring segregation in ordinary aspects of life: public transportation, schools, parks,

theaters, other amusement facilities” (Rose 939). Louisiana had the first statute that required segregated railway cars between Black and White travelers. “When the Court upheld ‘equal but separate’ racial segregation in the notorious *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896, Southern state legislatures followed with a whole array of segregation measures commonly known as ‘Jim Crow’ laws” (Rose 940).

Jim Crow laws differed from restrictive covenants in some ways. Rose states that the main difference was that the laws were contained to the Southern states, but “residential racial restrictions occurred all over the country, North as well as South, West as well as East, becoming prevalent as waves of African Americans abandoned the rural South for urban areas all over the nation” (940). This movement is also known as the Great Migration.

The other main difference between Jim Crow laws and racially restrictive covenants in housing was that the covenants were not mandated by legislatures or public administrative actions (Rose 940). The covenants were devised and entered into by private citizens, not the government. One of the other ways that segregation was put in place was through the process of racial zoning. The Supreme Court ruled that racial zoning was unfair to the property owners. The Court’s decision in the *Buchanan v. Warley* case in 1917, ruled that racial zoning was an “undue intrusion on property owners’ ability to buy and sell property as they wished and that, as such, racial zoning violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s prohibition on state action denying due process of law and equal protection of the laws” (Rose 940).

The Supreme Court invalidated racial zoning in 1917 with its ruling, but two years after the decision a major race riot broke out in Chicago. The violent summer of 1919 seemed to lend credence to the idea that races could not live together peacefully. Later that year, “several important state supreme courts upheld residential racial covenants. These cases distinguished zoning from covenants, viewing zoning as a type of public restriction—unlike covenants, which they regarded as private arrangements” (Rose 941). The Supreme Court saw no “constitutional jurisdictional” basis to hear a challenge to racial covenants in a case from Washington, DC in 1926.

It could be argued that these covenants were substitutes for more violent means of segregating the neighborhoods. There was violence, however. Lorraine Hansberry remembered the angry mob outside her home when she was a child. Rose writes, “methods sometimes went so far as bombings, arson, and cross-burnings, and more routinely included rocks through windows, insults painted on siding, and personal molestation of African Americans” who tried to move into white neighborhoods (942).

The NAACP, founded in 1909, “fought a running battle against racially restrictive covenants from roughly 1915 through the next several decades, generally arguing that these devices constituted state action which was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment” (Rose 942). The only case decided in their favor was the one for Carl Hansberry in 1940.

Textual Examples from the Legal Case

In the brief to the Supreme Court, the lawyers for Carl Hansberry addressed both the prior court’s decision and the remedy that he was seeking. Court records provide

details of the case. In relation to the covenant, the brief states, “the enforcement by the State’s judicial officers, agencies and courts, of such a harsh, oppressive and discriminatory agreement is state action, and therefore, a denial of the petitioners’ right to due process of law in violation of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution” (Dickerson et al. 40).

The lawyers continue:

It would be therefore a very narrow and strained construction of the 14th Amendment to hold that while the state and the municipal legislatures are forbidden to discriminate against citizens in their legislation, that nevertheless the state courts by their judicial recognition and participation in such agreements, could nevertheless by their state action do something which the sovereign legislature might not do....It is one thing to say that citizens may do with their property what they please and enter into such harsh, oppressive and discriminatory restrictive agreements, as such agreements among themselves might give certain sanctions among themselves, and a certain desired effect in respect to dealing with their own property, however, when the state, through its courts, enforces such harsh, oppressive, and discriminatory restrictive agreements, it is thereby providing the necessary state action which violates the 14th Amendment. (Dickerson et al. 41)

The lawyers argue several other points that they claim to have been in error in their Summary of the Argument, the first issue being that *Burke v. Kleinman* was not “a representative or class suit, and the decree therein could not bind the privies or the

petitioners herein who were not parties and not served with process or summons, on the theory of res judicata.

An additional point they make under item I of their argument is that the decree “enjoining Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company, as mortgagee and Harry H. Pace, sued as its president was manifestly erroneous and so unreasonable and arbitrary as to deny these petitioners of their rights and property without due process of law, particularly in that the agreement sought to be enforced specifically exempted mortgagees from its operation” (Dickerson et al. 29).

The attorneys also argued in point II that the decree in the case of *Burke v. Kleinman* found by the trial chancellor to have been fraudulently and collusively brought and obtained upon the basis of “false stipulation of facts that the required frontage consent had been obtained, cannot be res judicata against any one, and especially not against the petitioners and their privies who were not parties and were not served with summons or process in said suit and given a real opportunity to defend” (Dickerson et al. 30).

Point III stated that the enforcement by the State Courts by means of a mandatory injunction of a harsh, oppressive, and discriminatory restrictive agreement among property owners “wherein Negroes are prohibited from owning and occupying real estate solely on account of their race or color, deprives the petitioners of due process of law, the equal protection of the laws, and likewise abridges their privileges and immunities as citizens of the United States in violation of the 14th Amendment” (Dickerson et al. 30).

Point IV emphasizes the prior rulings of the State Courts. The lawyers state that the decrees “deprived the Hansberrys of their property without compensation” and that it was “contrary to law as to amount to a mere spoliation in violation of their rights” (30). The fifth point addresses the enjoining of Israel Katz and states that the decree was issued “without any evidence whatsoever” and that it was an “arbitrary and capricious judicial seizure of his property and a denial of his rights without due process of law in violation of the 14th Amendment” (Dickerson et al. 31).

The brief concludes with the lawyers asking for the judgments from the Circuit Court of Cook County and of the Supreme Court of Illinois to be reversed. Contemporary researchers may note that even though the legal team argued several times that forcing the Hansberrys to move because of the restrictive covenant which violated their constitutional rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court responded in terms of *res judicata*. As previously discussed in the description of rhetorical hermeneutics, perhaps this lens can be applied to an examination of the opinion from the Illinois Supreme Court and later the Supreme Court of the United States.

In April 1939 the Supreme Court of Illinois issued its ruling on the case. Justice Jones delivered the majority opinion. In the introduction of the opinion the Court summarizes the issue and explains how Carl Hansberry was able to purchase the property in the first place. The restrictive agreement was put in place in 1928 and stated that no person of the “colored race” could occupy property in that area before at least 1948. The homeowners alleged a “conspiracy on the part of the defendants to destroy the agreement by selling or leasing property in the restricted area to Negroes” (48). A White man, Jay B.

Crook, purchased the property for Carl Hansberry in May 1937 after the deed had been executed with the Chicago Title and Trust Company.

The opinion states that in order to decide the question of res judicata, the court would have to refer to the case of *Burke v. Kleinman*. “Olive Ida Burke, wife of James J. Burke, a defendant in the case at bar was plaintiff...the defendants were Isaac Kleinman, the White owner, Sam Kleinman, James L. Hall, a Negro tenant, and Charles J. Sopkin, trustee of trust deed on the property” (Dickerson et al. 49). After examining the prior case the court simply recited the stipulations made in *Burke v. Kleinman* and ruled that the covenant was in effect from February 1928 and that it was a “covenant running with the land.” (Dickerson et al. 50).

The Illinois Supreme Court concluded that in *Burke v. Kleiman*:

it thus appears that *Burke v. Kleiman*, supra, was a class or representative suit. It cannot be seriously contended that it was not properly a representative suit. There was a class of individuals who had common rights and needed protection. They were so numerous it would have imposed an unreasonable hardship and burden on them to require all members to be made parties to the suit. (Dickerson et al. 50)

In reviewing the opinion, it may raise the question of how much of the Court’s decision to set aside the percentage of required signatures to form a binding covenant was influenced by the politics of the times. This question may be illustrated further with comments later in the opinion. The Court states, “the mere fact that it later appears that the finding is untrue does not render the decree any the less binding. The principle of res judicata covers wrong as well as right decisions, for the fundamental reason that there

must be an end of litigation” (51). This interpretation of res judicata is precisely what the United States Supreme Court will reverse.

It is notable that there was a dissenting opinion also filed along with the majority opinion. Justice Shaw delivered his dissenting opinion which discussed his view of the Court’s interpretation of res judicata in this matter. The proper amount of signatures was 95%, and it was later determined that the covenant had less than 60%. Justice Shaw argued that this left out a significant number of parties who were being bound by this restrictive covenant. He wrote:

the undisputed fact is that by means of fraud and collusion between total strangers and agreement which is void on its face has been imposed upon some ten million dollars worth of the property of five hundred other parties who were never in court, who never had notice of any lawsuit, and who have never been accorded any process whatever, either due or otherwise. And it is said that this is binding upon them; that they constituted a class because one man fraudulently said they did and another man collusively, and with equal fraud, admitted the allegation, because this second man signed a stipulation saying they had signed an agreement which they never signed. Certainly no man’s rights can be safe under such a rule of law. (Dickerson et al. 55)

Although Justice Shaw is arguing the illegality of holding the other property owners to the restrictive covenant, it is easy to see a comparison to the argument that Carl Hansberry’s lawyers were making. They repeatedly argued that the Hansberrys were never given their due process of law either. Justice Shaw made a point of highlighting the

Court's description of the unreasonable "hardship" the property owners would have faced if they had attempted to gather the required number of signatures. He wrote, "It is true there were five hundred defendants, but even the humblest of these five hundred had a right to his day in court, to be made a party to the suit and to be given an opportunity to defend it. Their names were on the public records of Cook County and not the slightest excuse appears for not making them parties to the suit" (Dickerson et al. 55).

Shaw states, "The entire theory of class representation is a dangerous exception to the general rule that each interested person must be made a party by name, notified of the proceedings and given his day in court" (Dickerson et al. 57). This is in direct contrast to what the court ruled that it would have been too much of a burden for the required number of covenant signers to be named in the court case.

The most accurate picture of what happened in the court case can be gained from examining the testimony from the transcript. Below is the testimony given by Carl Hansberry under direct examination by the attorney, Mr. Churan:

My full name is Carl A. Hansberry. I live at 5949 Michigan Avenue. I have lived there about four months. Prior to that I lived at 6140 Rhodes Avenue. I lived there about six or seven months. I don't remember exactly the day I moved in, I think about the 25th or 26th or 27th. I don't remember if it were the day before I obtained the deed from Crook or not. I lived at 549 East 60th Street prior to living at 6140 Rhodes Avenue. I lived there about eight or ten months. Ruth Hoffman gave me permission to move in that apartment at 549 East 60th street. She is a cousin of mine. She is a white woman. Yes, I know James Joseph Burke. I have known him

about four, five, possibly six months. I did not know him before I got title to this property from Crook, had never seen him before.” (Dickerson et al. 140-141)

In the first part of his testimony Carl Hansberry is stating where he is living now and how he came to be living in the apartment on 60th street. His cousin Ruth Hoffman gave him permission to move into the apartment where the family resided prior to purchasing the house. He acknowledged that his cousin was White.

When Carl A. Hansberry was called as a witness on behalf of the defendants, having been previously sworn in, he testified as follows under examination by the attorney, Mr. Stradford:

I testified previously in this case. I have not conspired with anyone with reference to purchasing or mortgaging the property at 6140 Rhodes Avenue. I own and operate my own property, also a gasoline filling station. I was accountant for the Board of Education for 2 years, the United States Deputy Marshal in 1929-30-31. (Dickerson et al. 174)

In this part of the testimony Carl Hansberry describes his financial and employment situation. Previously in this chapter the Aristotelian appeals were discussed. This section from Hansberry’s testimony provides an example of Ethos. The more that Carl Hansberry describes his background, perhaps it speaks to his character or creates the idea that he should be listened to in his legal argument that he has a right to this property. Hansberry points out that he has not “conspired” with anyone to purchase the house on Rhodes Avenue and that he “owns” his property and a gasoline filling station. He may be establishing that he is a solid community member for the long term since he is a business

owner. His prior employment as an accountant and deputy marshal may also contribute to an overall impression of a man who operates within the law and who is experienced in financial matters.

Under cross-examination by Mr. Chruran, Carl A. Hansberry stated:

I did not know James Joseph Burke at the time of the case *Plath vs. Delaunty* was being tried. The first time I saw the name James Joseph Burke was when I was Secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and I sent out some circular letters. I was interested in getting in the area where I now live so that my children could go to Sexton School. I moved from 4418 South Parkway because the school was crowded and the children could not go to school all day and all the schools in that immediate vicinity permitted kids to go to school a half day and I wanted my children to go to school all day. That is why I moved in there. (Dickerson et al. 174)

This section of Carl Hansberry's testimony explains why he purchased the home and moved into the Woodlawn neighborhood which was a White neighborhood at that time. He explains simply that he wanted to live in that neighborhood, so that his children could go to school all day instead of half-day. He explains the reason that he moved there in a straightforward manner that can be considered a logical reason why a parent would want to move to another area. In terms of rhetorical appeals, this part of the testimony is aligned with Logos or appeals to logic.

Law professor Allen R. Kamp provides additional historical background about the lawsuit in his article, "The History Behind *Hansberry v. Lee*." According to Kamp, the

article grew out of a student's telling him that Carl Hansberry was Lorraine Hansberry's father and the play grew out of her own personal experience. Kamp traces the development of legal case through several stages and points out other reasons the Supreme Court could have ruled in Hansberry's favor, such as fraud or racism, but that they focused on class action judgment and res judicata.

The housing shortage in Chicago was one of the origins of the Hansberry lawsuit. Between 1900 and 1934, the city's Black population grew from 30,000 to 236,000. During this time Blacks were continuously more segregated, "In 1910, 25% of Blacks lived in areas of under 5% Black population. None lived in areas of over 90% concentration. By 1934, less than 5% lived in areas of under 5% concentration, while 65% lived in areas that were 90% or more Black. Geographically, Blacks were concentrated in two narrow corridors stretching westward and southward from downtown Chicago" (Kamp 483). This area became referred to as the "Black Belt" and was one of the reasons that Carl Hansberry looked for a home in a different part of the city.

According to Kamp, the segregation was accomplished with racially restrictive covenants and violence. He writes that after the violence of the 1920s subsided racially restrictive covenants were put in place. These covenants covered entire neighborhoods in Chicago and were legal, "in 1926 the Supreme Court dismissed for want of jurisdiction a case upholding a racially restrictive covenant in *Corrigan v. Buckley*" (Kamp 483).

After the *Corrigan* case in 1926, the Chicago Real Estate Board "started a program to cover neighborhoods with the covenants. They prepared a model covenant.

The Hansberry covenant was based on this model. Then the Board sent out speakers and organizers across the city” (Kamp 484) to gain support for the covenants.

The adoption of the restrictive covenants was not an easy task because of the processes involved. “Legal descriptions and signatures had to be obtained and the covenants had to be filed with the Recorder of Deeds. Notary publics were hired to notarize and then record signatures. Subsequently, if any Black persons moved into the area, they were reported, a suit filed against their occupancy, and an injunction obtained” (484). By the late 1920s Chicago was strictly segregated and more than 80% of the city was bound by these racially restrictive covenants. The covenants legally prevented African Americans from living in specific neighborhoods. The covenants bound the signer as well as any future purchasers. Courts upheld the covenants and when African Americans moved in, they were ordered to leave, or suffer the “pain of contempt” of Court.

It more clearly demonstrates the fight that Carl Hansberry was waging by examining the exact language of the restrictive covenant that was at the heart of the conflict:

(owner) does hereby covenant and agree with each and every other of the parties hereto that his said parcel of land is and until January 1, 1948, and thereafter until this agreement shall be abrogated and hereinafter provided, shall be subject to the restrictions and provisions hereinafter set forth, and that he will make no sale, contract of sale, conveyance, lease or agreement and give no license or permission in violation of such restrictions or provisions. (Kamp 484)

The restriction that was being put in place was that no part of the property could be “used or occupied directly by a negro or negroes” (Kamp 484).

The situation was made even further damaging to minorities when the covenant went on to explain certain situations when an African American could live outside the “Black Belt” area:

Provided that this restriction shall not prevent the occupation, during the period of their employment, of janitors or chauffeurs’ quarters in the basement or in a barn or garage in the rear, or of servants’ quarters by negro janitors, chauffeurs, or house servants, respectively, actually employed as such for service in and about the premises by the rightful owner or occupant of said premises. (Kamp 484)

This is an example of the discriminatory housing policy that Carl Hansberry was fighting against. The covenant also had to define what constituted a negro. “Negro was defined as every person having one-eighth part or more of negro blood, or having any appreciable admixture of negro blood, and every person who is what is commonly known as a colored person” (Kamp 485). The last clause provided clarification in the event there was a problem establishing that a person had one-eighth African American blood.

The covenants ran “with the land,” so even when the owner sold the property, the racially restrictive covenant was still in place. The “parties” referred to were any owners who had signed as well as future owners or renters. Kamp explains that the covenant was only useful if “most of the owners had signed it. Thus, a covenant’s effectiveness required that a certain percentage of owners participate. Thus, the issue in dispute in

Hansberry —actual percentage of the signatures in the affected area—was a key requirement:

This agreement and the restrictions herein contained shall be of no force or effect unless this agreement or a substantially similar agreement, shall be signed by the owners above enumerated of ninety-five per cent of the frontage above described, or their heirs or assigns, and recorded in the office of the Recorder of Deeds of Cook County, Illinois, on or before December 31, 1928. (Kamp 485)

An important part of Carl Hansberry’s lawyers’ argument was that the covenant did not have 95% of the required signatures. There were several reasons why the restrictive covenant was put in place, those include the housing shortage and the desire to segregate the residential areas of Chicago. For example, the area where Carl Hansberry purchased his home, Washington Park, was covered by such a covenant. The area was a rectangle bounded by Washington Park on the north, Cottage Grove on the east, 63rd Street on the south, and South Park Avenue on the west. The entire area was about four blocks and each block was considered at about an eighth of a mile (Kamp 486). “A racetrack, torn down in 1908, formerly occupied the land. This area was populated by Whites but surrounded on the west and south by Black areas” (Kamp 486).

The area where Hansberry’s home was located, was in between the White areas and Black areas of the subdivision and served as a kind of barrier between the Black community and Woodlawn, which was predominantly White (Kamp 486). In 1928, “a group of White businessmen, the Woodlawn Property Owners Association, organized a covenant to cover the South Park neighborhood. The covenant had the support of outside

real estate organizations, institutions, banks, and mortgage companies” (Kamp 486).

These covenants became the standard method for not allowing minorities to move into White neighborhoods. Although racial zoning was not allowed because it was viewed as public discrimination, restrictive covenants were private tools for racism.

The president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, stated in 1937 that “however unsatisfactory they (the covenants) may be they are the only means at present available by which the members of the associations (neighbor associations) can stabilize the conditions under which they desire to live” (Kamp 486). The restrictive covenants may not have been so widely used if they had not had the backing of prominent establishments such as the university.

The racially restrictive covenants that segregated the city, began to lose power by the 1930s when minority families challenged them by attempting to purchase and occupy homes within the designated White areas. There was a significant increase in the Black population by the 1930s, and the Great Depression also fueled the housing shortage. Kamp writes that these two historical factors, “produced an increased Black demand for housing and a depressed market for White housing. Hansberry was able to buy his house because he was the only person who wanted it” (Kamp 486).

As previously stated, Chicago’s African American population had skyrocketed. For example, “In 1937, it was estimated that there were 50,000 more black people than units available. Blacks had to pay 20 to 50% more than Whites for comparable housing” (487). The Depression reduced the market for White housing. In the Washington Park subdivision, the population decreased by 13.8% between 1930 and 1934, but the

remaining White neighborhood members still did not want African Americans living next door.

For example, the prior owner of the Hansberry home, James Burke, had left the house vacant at the time he moved from the subdivision. The house that was the subject of a years' long court battle had been sitting empty before Carl Hansberry had purchased it. Due to the Depression and the growth of the African American population in the city, most of the people who wanted to rent or buy in White areas were Blacks:

The Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of the blacks, but even before that ruling [Hansberry], other White property owners opened their buildings to Blacks and extracted high rentals for accommodations which were unable to attract White tenants. Rather than suffer financial losses, they elected to violate existing covenants and fill their vacant units with Blacks. (Kamp 487)

Because of the restrictive covenant, Burke set up a dummy transaction in which Jay D. Crook bought the property with Carl Hansberry's money and then gave him the deed. In the suit to enforce the covenant against the Hansberrys, it was alleged that:

through fraudulent concealment on the part of the defendants James T. Burke and Harry A. Price, from the Bank [First National Bank of Englewood], of the fact that Hansberry was a Negro, and that the property was being purchased for him, a deed was procured from the bank to Jay D. Crook who, in fact, purchased for Hansberry. (Kamp 488)

James Burke was one of the defendants in *Hansberry*, attacking the decree obtained in a prior suit by his wife, Olive. The defendant, Carl A. Hansberry, was an

active man who had had varied careers, including deputy United States Marshal, businessman, and unsuccessful Republican candidate for Congress. He distributed pamphlets on Black civil rights under the name of The Hansberry Foundation. However, the court case took a heavy toll on him. The victory is considered a winning case for African Americans because the Hansberrys were allowed to stay in the home.

But Lorraine Hansberry described another side to the victory in a letter to the *New York Times* when she referred to Carl Hansberry as being from a generation of African Americans who believed in the “American Way” as something that could work for them. She said that he spent a small fortune and years of his life fighting the restrictive covenant that would have barred her family from living in the home they had purchased in the White neighborhood. Readers can imagine that there was another side to the victory in court because although they won the right to live in their home, the neighbors were no more accepting of them than they had been before the legal victory. The court case may have done nothing to change people’s minds. Lorraine Hansberry called it “hellishly hostile” and that “howling mobs” surrounded the house. Her memory of the time is clearly evident in her later work. Her voice as an author was clearly impacted by this turbulent period. She wrote that her memories of what may have been considered the “correct way of fighting white supremacy in America include being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school” (qtd. in Kamp 488). She sounded almost bitter when she wrote that the case is described as a victory that ridicules more “radical means” of protest. The most poignant part of the letter is when she described how Carl Hansberry died and wrote that the case, “contributed to my father’s early death as a

permanently embittered exile in a foreign country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto locked as ever, does not seem to figure in their calculations” (Kamp 488). The court case was an important step towards defeating discriminatory housing practices, but it was not the deserved answer to Carl Hansberry’s goals of protesting against racism in America.

There were several legal avenues available to Hansberry to fight the restrictive covenant, such as the Fourteenth Amendment, but the main arguments considered by the Illinois Supreme Court concerned the covenant’s interpretation and validity under its own terms (Kamp 489). It is interesting that the lawyers did not focus on the constitutional question relating to a covenant that prohibited African American citizens from living where they chose. In the Illinois Supreme Court case, no constitutional objection was considered.

Restrictive covenants had strict qualifying procedures to make the agreements “valid.” One thing they had to have was 95% of the homeowners to sign. If they did not have the required signatures, the covenant was not in effect. The restrictive covenant for Woodlawn had considerably less than that, only about 60%, but the defense lawyers argued that “conditions had so changed in the area that enforcing the decree would be inequitable” (Kamp 489). Nevertheless, the Illinois Supreme Court, in *Lee v. Hansberry*, found that *Burke* was a class action suit and that any questions pertaining to the covenant’s validity were res judicata. (Kamp 490). What this meant for Carl Hansberry was that the “covenant’s validity could not be relitigated and the decree evicting the Hansberrys was affirmed” (Kamp 490).

Carl Hansberry petitioned for certiorari to the Supreme Court. Certiorari means the process by which one asks a higher court to review a decision of a lower court. There were several legal options available to Carl Hansberry on which his lawyers could argue the case. Allen Kamp points out that fraud could have been another basis for arguing against the covenant when he writes, “the Woodlawn Property Owners Association’s executive secretary, Fred Helman, stated that he knew that 95 percent of the frontage owners had not signed the agreement” (492). Kamp explains that another argument could be made against the existence of the class in *Burke* under the then existing class action law of Illinois. At the time of the Hansberry lawsuit, Illinois class action law was generally interpreted to require that a person had to have equal property rights to participate in a class action (Kamp 492).

Although Hansberry’s attorneys wanted to have these types of restrictive covenants declared unconstitutional, they put that argument last in their petition. It was not until 1948 in the case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, that the Supreme Court ruled that judicial enforcement of restrictive covenants constituted state action and violated the fourteenth amendment:

These are cases in which the States have made available to such individuals the full coercive power of the government to deny to petitioners, on the grounds of race or color, the enjoyment of property rights in premises which petitioners are willing and financially able to acquire and which the grantors are willing to sell. The difference between judicial enforcement and non-enforcement of the restrictive covenants is the difference between being denied rights of property

available to other members of the community and being accorded full enjoyment of those rights on an equal footing. (Kamp 493)

The Court's ruling in the Shelley case finally states what Carl Hansberry and his legal team wanted all along: the right of a person of any race to own property where he or she desired. The "human situation, later portrayed by Lorraine Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun*, was that enforcing the decree would evict the Hansberrys from their home. Such an eviction would deprive them of the rights of home ownership enjoyed by other Americans" (Kamp 493).

The *Hansberry v. Lee* decision is somewhat unexpected because there were so many other issues in question, such as discrimination, constitutionality, and the covenant that was not valid in terms of the required number of signatures. The Supreme Court in 1940, however, "retreated into a theoretical treatise on class actions, ignoring the organized racism embodied in enforcing the covenants. The Court instead looked at the due process considerations involved in binding one to a class action judgment" (Kamp 493).

Conclusions

Law can be used as a substitute for violent action. In modern American society, it is the more acceptable choice to file a lawsuit to right an injustice rather than resorting to physical violence. The Hansberrys were faced with physical confrontation but used legal means and rhetoric to secure their victory. Kamp reminds readers that the Hansberry ruling "is a replacement of the real issues, created by a system of apartheid, with unreal

ones: the law involved. *Hansberry*, however, to an extreme extent denies reality in favor of writing an abstract essay on due process in class actions” (495).

Kamp discusses an article written in the 1930s where the author describes racially restrictive covenants in terms of legal realism. In the article he addressed the need for a closer look at why African Americans had migrated to the North in the first place rather than only looking at them in terms of legal ways to achieve the goals of the majority White population. “Categorizing the case as concerning the constitutional parameters of class actions allowed the Court to give the Hansberrys the victory while sidestepping any adjudication of the covenant’s constitutional validity” (Kamp 496). The Supreme Court was able to give Carl Hansberry what he wanted at that time without having to address the legality or ethics of the racially restrictive covenant.

It is interesting to note that at this time the neighborhood where the Hansberrys moved to is almost completely African American and that one of the streets that was considered a border of the Black Belt is now named Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive (Kamp 499). Carl Augustus Hansberry’s purchase of the home in the Woodlawn neighborhood created two significant historical and cultural pieces, the Supreme Court case in which an African American family retained the right to stay in the home they had purchased and the award-winning play by his daughter Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The play is a part of many students’ education about American drama and the legal case is taught in law school as a classic example concerning res judicata.

Carl Hansberry’s decision to purchase the home and move into the neighborhood triggered many other actions that followed from court cases to the writing of the play.

Although Hansberry died in Mexico disillusioned, his bold action influenced others and can be viewed as a precursor to the Civil Rights Movement. The example he set by moving into the neighborhood and the example his daughter set with her play may have fueled the next generation's desire for equality and shows that rhetoric can be used in a powerful way to bring about change in society.

CHAPTER III

THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

A Raisin in the Sun is a critically acclaimed literary work that uses the African American experience as a call to action. The author of this play was Lorraine Hansberry. She was born on May 19, 1930 and died on January 12, 1965. She was the first African American woman to have a play produced on Broadway. The play tells the story of a small family living in Chicago. The father has recently died and left his widow life insurance proceeds. The mother would like to use the money to buy a house with enough room in a neighborhood far removed from the ghetto where they live and to send the younger children to college. Her eldest son, Walter, would rather invest the money in a liquor store business.

The main conflict of the play arises when Mama entrusts what is left of the money—after she puts a down payment on a house—to Walter, and he promptly gives it to his friend to invest. His friend disappears with all the money. Part of Walter's internal conflict is how frustrated he is with their financial situation. He wants to make a quick change in his life and the "get rich quick scheme" of buying a liquor store sounds like the best idea to him. He has not checked out the business plan, but blindly gives the money to his friend because he so desperately wants a better life. He seems to be tired of going slowly or even backwards and throws caution to the wind. Unfortunately, his judgement costs the family the only large sum of money they have ever seen; but it costs Walter

even more because he feels even worse about himself and his ability to lead as the head of the family.

The other characters have their own problems as well. Mama is mourning the loss of her husband and worrying about Walter's judgement. Ruth is thinking of not bringing another child into a bleak home. The younger sister, Beneatha, aspires to become a doctor one day, but she is not oblivious to their meager surroundings. At the end of the play, Walter is given a second chance to make a decision as the leader of the family. A White man comes to the apartment and offers the family money back and more if they agree not to move in to the new neighborhood. This time Walter responds in a way that gives the family a chance at improving their quality of life by other means.

A close examination of the play shows how the drama is an example of protest rhetoric. Protest rhetoric can take many different forms and includes speeches, marches, songs and chants as well as literature and legal cases. Protest literature creates a "revolutionary language and a renewed vision of the possible. It gives distinctive shape to long-accumulating grievances, claims old rights, and demands new ones," according to scholar Zoe Trodd (xix).

Trodd writes that this literature "creates space for argument, introduces doubt, deepens perception, and shatters the accepted limits of belief"(xix). Researchers can see examples of the deepening of perceptions in the relationships depicted in the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*, a drama in which an African American family is shown struggling to attain the same examples of the American dream that any other family might hope for, a nice house in a safe and pleasant neighborhood.

Charles Morris and Stephen H. Browne ask the question of why one would study the rhetoric of social protest and answer that it is of vital importance because “in the unfolding dramas of history can be found a remarkable range of voices striving to make the world over again” (1). This is a similar theme as the one offered by Trodd in terms of protest literature. Morris and Browne explain how answers connected to the study of protest rhetoric can be found in the past but are also clearly visible in the present when they write, “Our own age is being shaped decisively by people coming together, debating, designing, and otherwise mobilizing symbolic resources for social change” (1).

Morris and Browne describe the intersection between the study of rhetoric and social protest. They write that students of rhetorical movements and social protest “understand that words are deeds, that language has force and effect in the world. To study the rhetoric of social protest is to study how symbols—words, signs, images, music, even bodies—shape our perceptions of reality and invite us to act accordingly” (1). In his essay, “The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest,” Richard B. Gregg writes that the rhetoric of protest would logically seem to be aimed at those in power or positions of authority who appear responsible for the conditions being protested” (47). The rhetoric of protest is one way to learn about the past, as well as to deepen understanding of future events. Examining the work of Lorraine Hansberry provides a clear example of this type of research. Protests against the status quo are rhetorical by nature because “they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal” (Morris and Browne 1).

Lorraine Hansberry's comments about transmitting ideas emotionally were made in 1959 just a few weeks after the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway. They highlight her authorial intention for the play. This chapter focuses on the rhetorical strategies that Hansberry used in the play to influence the audience. *A Raisin in the Sun* is an ideal example for a rhetorical analysis because Lorraine Hansberry clearly shows her rhetorical intent to change society by showcasing the story of a family fighting for their right to live in a house they wanted.

The most well-known and frequently acted of Hansberry's plays, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is considered an integral part of the canon of modern drama. A careful analysis of the drama as an example of work that was intended to bring about a change in society leads to an unpacking of the rich rhetorical strategies Lorraine Hansberry used, strategies which were rooted in classical rhetoric. A strategy from classical rhetoric which can be applied to an examination of the play is the Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. These appeals form the artistic proofs. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg discuss these appeals in their text, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, in which they write that the arguments that one invents "should appeal to reason (logos), emotion about the subject under discussion (pathos), and trust in the speaker's character (ethos)" (31). Aristotle advanced the idea of rhetoric as an art and provided concepts in his writings about how to give speeches and the points speeches have to contain. For example, he described the types of appeals that a person would make in a speech as ethos, pathos, and logos. While these principles originally applied to speech, they can be applied to drama or other genres

of literature as well as transferred to court case arguments. The appeals are central tools in the rhetoric of protest.

Ethical appeals are related to ethics and showing the audience what a good reputation the speaker has and that he or she has the authority to speak on a subject. Appeals to emotion are pathos and require that the speaker consider the kinds of things will move the audience emotionally. A speaker would have to know who is in his audience to know what to say to strike an emotional chord with them.

M. J. Killingsworth discusses the nature of appeals and how they can be seen in a variety of settings. He writes, “to appeal to an audience--whether to plead or to please--means to promote agreement or harmony, to smooth the waters between author and audience or any two positions” (253). Lorraine Hansberry’s play is an example of this kind of appeal made to an audience.

The rhetorical conversation began to become diverse in the 19th century when women and minorities voices started to be heard more openly. However, “women of color have always labored under a double burden of racial and sexual oppression in their attempts to claim a public voice” (1201). Lorraine’s Hansberry’s creative work is all the more remarkable because of the oppression she faced. Despite obstacles, Hansberry’s play is a central text in the literature of protest.

This chapter examines Lorraine Hansberry’s play in terms of the classical rhetorical strategies used to influence the audience, contemporary rhetorical theories of African American rhetoric, and as an example of the rhetoric of protest. The analysis shows how the author used a wealth of rhetorical strategies to make her point about

changes needed in society. The analysis includes placing the play in historical context to highlight its unique position as the first play by an African American to be produced on Broadway. Its function as an act of protest is more clearly explained with biographical background to show how Lorraine Hansberry used her authorial voice to impact the audience. Textual examples from the play illustrate the rhetorical strategies she chose to use.

Lorraine Hansberry used the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* to form the message of protest. In the article, "I Have a Dream: Racial Discrimination in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*", the scholar Hana' Khalief Ghani provides an overview of the myriad of discriminatory issues the characters faced in the play. The character Mama Lena shows the damage that long-term social injustice can cause. Mama Lena functions on several levels. Ghani writes:

that in portraying Mama Lena as a strong Black woman who is able to say 'no' to the threats of Lindner and fulfill her dream, Hansberry has two purposes. Firstly, Mama's character represents a challenge to the stereotypical representation of black women on the American stage; and secondly, she wants her white audience to realize the danger of maintaining the racist policies in the American institutions. (611)

The message of protest is evident in Mama's action of putting a down payment on the house.

By mid-century, Chicago's South Side had become one of the most densely crowded ghettos in America. Carl Hansberry had fought in a courtroom for and won the

right to stay in the home he had purchased there and then, a generation later, his daughter Lorraine, waged a similar battle to protest racism with her award-winning play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Ghani writes, “Like the Youngers, 64% of black women and 34% of black men in Chicago worked as domestic servants. Like Mama Younger, some 80% of Chicago's interwar residents had migrated to Chicago from the South, seeking employment, education, the vote, and freedom from anti-black violence” (610).

Hansberry implies that there is a problem with the government being unfair to African Americans when she highlights how Walter Lee is convinced that he should have money ready to bribe the official to get a liquor license rather than attempting to get it lawfully. Ghani suggests that Walter is planning to “chop through the government's forest of red tape” rather than get overwhelmed by it (611). There is no mention of Walter Lee having any business experience, but he plans to take the action he has determined must be necessary in order to move up to another social level.

Early in the play Walter asks about the life insurance and points out a newspaper story about a bomb. “The relationship between these two questions, how to invest the life insurance money for the greatest good of the entire family, and how to live in a city and country where bombs are set off in the homes of blacks who move into white neighborhood- forms the heart of the play” (Ghani 612).

Walter's dreams are to have the kind of life he sees around him when he goes to work each day as a chauffeur. It is obvious through his interactions with his family, that Walter believes that money brings with it power and freedom. His desperation as an African American man in a dead-end job is clear when he has the emotional outburst

after Willy has stolen the money. His work as a chauffeur shows him the American dream, but it is an idea he has only seen from a distance, one he has no access to. He wants to give his wife fine things and to provide a world of opportunities for his son. He sees investing the insurance money in a liquor store and becoming successful as the way to reach his goal. His talk with Travis alludes to the idea that he may not have any idea how to run a business, but his mother decides to give Walter some of the family's money “in part because she witnesses how his failed dreams have begun to crush him. Rather than let go of them, he internalizes his dreams until they consume his spirit. In other words, he falls victim to the materialistic dictates of his society” (Ghani 612).

The fact that Lorraine Hansberry's writing was influenced by the world around her is clear in the scenes with Mr. Linder in the play. It should be noted that this character represents the play's allusion to an actual event that took place in 1959. In that year, in a growing neighborhood outside Chicago, Progress Development Corporation planned to sell a dozen homes to African Americans. When the residents of the all-White neighborhood of Deerfield discovered this intention, they were furious. A community leader in Deerfield, Bob Danning, explained his feeling and the feelings of his neighbors when he points out, “We're not bigots. We do not go around calling people names. And I do not think we want to deny Negroes or anybody else the right to decent home, just as good as ours. But not next door” (Ghani 612). Karl Linder is the fictional counterpart of Bob Danning.

Linder's speech is one example of how segregation was defended. The other rhetorical strategies in use were “a battle language of victimization and terrorism, on the

one hand, and a language of miscegenation and degeneration, on the other hand. With its talk of "Negro invasions" and "them bombs and things [Whites] keep setting off," *A Raisin* engages both the language and the violence of Chicago's housing segregation" (Ghani 613). Linder makes it clear that they will be moving into a neighborhood where they are not wanted and concludes that they have nothing to gain by moving there. However, when the Youngers refuse "his logic and his offer to reimburse them if they will relinquish their new house, Lindner essentially warns them that they've had their chance for a peaceful solution" (Ghani 613). The audience may recognize this warning as an implicit threat of violence.

The Younger family is seeking to move into a home in a previously all-White neighborhood. Housing segregation in Chicago was common during this period and Mr. Linder and the property association do not want to integrate the neighborhood. When Walter, Ruth, and Beneatha discuss Mr. Lindner's visit, Hansberry cuts to the heart of some White Americans' fear of integration:

BENEATHA: What they think we going to do—eat 'em?

RUTH: No, honey, marry 'em. (2.3.180)

Hansberry and Ruth understand that the specter of miscegenation activates a matrix of violence and anxiety. "Much like their Southern counterparts, Northern supremacists wielded a language of Black barbarism and absolute separation to impose the terror of miscegenation" (Ghani 613). Integration involves the acceptance and respect of diverse cultures as well as the desegregation of previously separated institutions.

Lorraine Hansberry used themes of personal change and growth as part of the rhetoric of protest in the play. One of the paths that make up the rich tradition of African American rhetoric is the Biblical allusion such as the Jeremiad. According to the scholar Frank Ardolino in his article “Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*,” Hansberry includes many references to the Book of Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Authorial intent does not happen by chance, Hansberry chose to use the Biblical references as one way to influence the audience. Ardolino explains that “Lena and Walter Sr. lost a baby earlier, and now that Ruth has decided to abort her pregnancy, Lena is in mourning because the Youngers love their children and do not want to lose another to poverty” (181). This attitude is seen in the example from the play in Act I Scene 1 when Walter gives his son Travis fifty cents for school that Ruth has already said they did not have to spare, and says with pride, “That’s my boy” (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 31). Although it is obvious that they do not have any extra money, even the fifty cents that Travis wants, it is more important to Walter that his son be happy that day. He asks Ruth why she told Travis they did not have fifty cents for him. Walter wants to shield Travis from their economic reality even in the small ways that he can. He even gives him an extra fifty cents to buy something after school.

The setting for the turning point in the play is determined when Lena demands that since Walter has decided to accept the association’s money and not move in, that he tell Linder this news in front of his son Travis. However, rather than accept the money Walter “declares his pride in the six generations of his family that have lived in America” (Ardolino 181). Lena is proud of the way that Walter responded. She says, “He finally come into his manhood today...kind of like a rainbow after the rain” (Ardolino 181).

Ardolino writes about how the Book of Ruth emphasizes the value of having a home and family, two things that are of paramount importance to the Younger family. A comparison can be drawn between the relationships of Ruth and her mother-in-law in the Bible and Ruth and Lena in the play. Ardolino writes that in the Bible story a famine caused Naomi and her family to migrate from Bethlehem to Moab but when her husband and sons die, she and her daughters-in-law are left alone. Out of loyalty Ruth goes with Naomi back to Bethlehem where she takes her mother-in-law's advice and works diligently in Boaz's fields to gather barley. Boaz marries Ruth after being impressed with her work ethic and devotion to her mother-in-law. The story has a happy ending because Ruth has a son with Boaz, Obed. Obed "shall be a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you...has borne him" (Ardolino 182).

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry makes reference to this Biblical narrative in the way that Lena nurtures her family. Ardolino writes, "on the day that Walter has come of age, they have had their humanity, maturity, and familial endurance restored" (182). In addition to the Biblical allusion, Hansberry makes her desire for social equality clear.

Hansberry's illustration of the African American bourgeoisie may be represented in the character of George Murchison. In Act II, George has a brief, but telling scene with Beneatha, Ruth, and Walter when he comes to pick up Beneatha for their date. She has cut her hair and Ruth asks if she expects George to want to go out with her "with your head all nappy like that" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 79). George calls her look "eccentric" and asks her to go change out of the African garment that Asagai bought for her. Beneatha becomes angry and begins to argue with George:

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!

GEORGE: Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage! In one second, we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Bénin—and then some poetry in the Bantu— and the whole monologue will end with the word heritage! (Nastily) Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!

BENEATHA: GRASS HUTS! (RUTH crosses to her and forcibly pushes her toward the bedroom) 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! (RUTH is pushing her through the door) The Ashanti were performing surgical operations when the English—(RUTH pulls the door to, with BENEATHA on the other side, and smiles graciously at GEORGE. BENEATHA opens the door and shouts the end of the sentence defiantly at GEORGE)—were

still tattooing themselves with blue dragons! (She goes back inside). (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.1.81)

In this scene Hansberry gives George what may be seen as particularly stinging and offensive statements to make about African history as nothing more than “grass huts,” but the author may have used the rhetorical strategy of a negative exaggeration to make an emotional impact on the audience. Hansberry embarked on an exploration of money values and the African American middle-class through her character George Murchison who is Beneatha’s bourgeois suitor. Chapman describes Murchison as the son of a prosperous African American Chicago realtor who “disapproves of the Yoruba garb she adopts in the middle of the plot, is snobbishly dismissive of her brother Walter Lee’s invitations to friendship and sneers at Beneatha’s desire to think expansively” (452). Hansberry casts Murchison as a symbol of the type of African American who sees no value in maintaining links to African culture.

Based on her writings such as Walter’s decision about Linder’s offer, Hansberry did not believe that freedom would come as the result of African American integration into the middle class of a prosperous nation. Hansberry was “unimpressed by the quest to integrate the contemporary US status quo. Along with E. Franklin Frazier, Paul Robeson, and other Black radicals, Hansberry evinced ‘an oppositional black politics skeptical of integration and animated by anticolonialism’ and thus saw the effort toward integration as too limited” (Chapman 453). Rather than only bringing more minorities into the majority culture, Hansberry argued for a society that appreciated diverse cultures and where barriers to equality were removed.

Perhaps Hansberry included George Murchison as an illustration of how disconnected the African American middle class could become from their African heritage. Chapman writes that Lorraine Hansberry focused on voters' rights, which was an issue the national civil rights movement had "yet to prioritize and sought a fundamental transformation in US political economy. 'Equality,' she argued, 'which above all must mean equal job opportunity, the most basic right of all men in all societies anywhere in the world – implies vast economic transformations far greater than any of our leaders have dared to envision'" (453). This kind of disconnect and the extreme disdain Murchison expresses for Africa when he talks to Beneatha are a rhetorical strategy that could provoke an emotional reaction from the audience.

An important point that Chapman makes about Hansberry is evident when she writes, "For Hansberry, freedom was 'possession of the self,' and 'money values' was its opposite. On behalf of Black America and Black people the world over, she did not seek integration into the American dream of bourgeois prosperity but the right and the means to claim and create a future of their own fashioning" (453). Perhaps this is most stunningly illustrated when Walter tells Linder, "we don't want your money" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 148). After all the euphoria and heartbreak he had gone through about the insurance money, at the end he found it not to be the most important thing.

Textual Examples

Lorraine Hansberry's works are examples of the rhetoric of protest. She wrote during the Civil Rights Era and her works reflect the non-militant approach of such black leaders as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Hansberry's play portrays characters who stand up

for themselves and grow and change during the process. There are examples in *Raisin in the Sun* of the discordant relationships between men and women and their accompanying attitudes. This is shown as Walter talks to Ruth about the liquor store and immediately generalizes women's perspectives. He says, "See there that just goes to show you what you women understand about the world" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 33). The idea of African Americans going back to Africa as a statement to protest the racial inequalities in America is presented in several scenes in the play. Beneatha is dressed in typical African clothing when she explains the meaning of her dance to Ruth in Act II Scene 1:

RUTH: What kind of dance is that?

BENEATHA: A folk dance.

RUTH: What kind of folks do that, honey?

BENEATHA: It's from Nigeria. It's a dance of welcome. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 77)

Lorraine Hansberry's uncle was William Leo Hansberry, a scholar who graduated from Harvard. He was a popular professor at Howard University and taught African Civilization. His students included a future president of Ghana and a future president of Nigeria. His academic studies may have influenced Lorraine Hansberry's author's voice as well. In Act III, the audience gets a firsthand example of African cultural legends when Asagai tells Beneatha that she should come home with him to Africa. In this section the dialog reveals Hansberry's acknowledgement of the beauty and importance of African cultural legends:

ASAGAI: Three hundred years later the African Prince rose up out of the seas and swept the maiden back across the middle passage over which her ancestors had come—

BENEATHA: To... to Nigeria?

ASAGAI: Nigeria. Home. I will show you our mountains and our stars; and give you cool drinks from gourds and teach you the old songs and the ways of our people—and, in time, we will pretend that—you have only been away for a day.

(Hansberry, *A Raisin* 3.1.137)

This passage is a direct example of the romanticized idea of African American people going back to Africa. Asagai only mentions the beautiful parts and talks about the “old songs and the ways of our people.” Music is an important part of the way cultures record their history and communicate it to others. Through Asagai’s speech Hansberry is highlighting the fact that African culture is a classical one and that those young African Americans should be taught about the beauty of it and see it as something to be proud of.

Walter’s role as the male head of the family and the trouble he has being successful in the role form the main heartbreak of the play. By the end of the play, Walter even jokingly reminds Beneatha that he has some influence in whom she should marry, which is a common tradition in many cultures. Walter says:

WALTER: Girl if you don’t get all them silly ideas out your head! You better marry yourself a man with some loot...

BENEATHA: What have you got to do with who I marry!

WALTER: Plenty. Now I think George Murchison—. (Hansberry, *A Raisin*
3.1.150)

Their conversation provides a satisfactory conclusion to this poignant story.

Robin Bernstein analyzed the critical response to the play when it debuted and noted several distinctions. According to Bernstein, when the play opened on Broadway in 1959, many White critics praised the play's universality. One reviewer wrote, "A Negro wrote this show. It is played, with one exception, by Negroes. Half the audiences here are Negroes. Even so, it isn't written for Negroes It's a show about people, white or colored I see 'A Raisin in the Sun' as part of the general culture of the U.S." (Bernstein 16). Other White reviewers praised the play as a "Negro" play that showed racial pride. Bernstein analyzes how both these interpretations continued to be attributed to the play even after Hansberry dispelled the idea of a paradox when she said that "I'd always been under the impression that Negroes are people" (16).

The argument that there was a contradiction between the play's being "universal" or for a "specific" audience reflects why the play is a part of the rhetoric of protest. Bernstein argues that the claim that the play's characters are universal "people" without specific ties to African-American culture "appears simply racist ('This is a well-written play; White people can relate to it; therefore, it cannot be a Black play'). Conversely, the assertion that the play is not universal but exclusively specific to African Americans — that is, that the characters exist outside the category of "human" implies racism as well (17). Hansberry was well aware that she was writing for an audience that may have held many preconceptions about African Americans.

Hansberry wrote about the ideas that may have already been in the minds of the White reviewers when she stated:

My colleagues and I were reduced to mirth and tears by that gentleman writing his review of our play in a Connecticut paper who remarked of his pleasure at seeing how "our dusky brethren" could "come up with a song and hum their troubles away." It did not disturb the writer in the least that there is no such implication in the entire three acts. He did not need it in the play: he had it in his head.

(Bernstein "Inventing a Fishbowl" 18)

Bernstein takes a critical view of the success of the play with White audiences. She argues that the play's ability to appear to encapsulate the "Negro experience" in the non-threatening form of a play about a family was easier for White audiences to enjoy without being faced with a highly critical presentation, and that was part of the reason why it was so successful. "In other words, the play's realism satisfied its white viewers in much the same way that minstrelsy satisfied its viewers by providing them with easy access to consumable, perceived "Negro culture" (Bernstein 18).

Bernstein maintains that the assertion that *A Raisin in the Sun* was specifically and exclusively Black effectively erased Hansberry's class analysis from the play. Not taking the class analysis into account suggests White critics were unwilling to engage with an African American writer's intellect. "By ignoring Hansberry's politics and recognizing only the play's specificity to Black culture, White critics erased Hansberry's authority to speak about anything but herself. This action positioned Blacks as if in a fishbowl: they could look at each other, but not at anything beyond their immediate

context” (Bernstein 19). By ignoring Hansberry's authority to write about anything but her African American heritage limited the discussion of her work to only the parameters the White critic may have deemed appropriate.

Other scholars examined the play’s critical reception. In the article, “Black Women on Broadway: The Duality of Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and Ntozake Shange’s *for Colored Girls*” the scholar Diana Adesola Mafe focuses on the impact of the female characters in the play. She writes that the play “engages with American culture through African American content” (31), but that universality does not have to mean non-specific in terms of diverse perspectives. Mafe agrees with Bernstein’s assertion that the paradox “implemented by White critics between universality and particularity” (17) was unnecessary and that it was not accurate to force *A Raisin in the Sun* to be viewed as “either universal or specifically Black” (17).

Mafe argues that canonizing a “minority” play highlights this type of paradox. She explains that to “label an “ethnically specific” play a “masterpiece,” then, is to label it exceptional, to separate it from its ethnic tradition. It was impossible in 1959—and it is arguably still impossible today—to label the work of a minority artist a “masterpiece” without simultaneously asserting its universality” (32).

A notable objection that Mafe has to previously written scholarship of the play is that humanity seems to equate to Whiteness. She writes, “there is a disturbing, if unintentional equation of “humanity” with “white audiences” and that “this search of the White self for a reflection in Black drama (in order to validate that drama) is illustrative

of theoretical concerns with the fraught relationship between the Western self and the Other" (Mafe 33).

Hansberry's authorial intent of bringing about change in society and protesting the status of that time is more clearly defined by acknowledging that the play could be universal and particularly significant without lessening the importance of either factor. Mafe echoes this idea when she refers to the interview Lorraine Hansberry gave about the play when the interviewer asked how she explained the play's appeal "despite the Negro storyline" (36) and Hansberry gave the response that "Negroes are people." Hansberry's witty response signals the absurdity of imposing a contradiction between the "universal" and the "particular" (Mafe 36).

The idea that the play was attempting to 'universalize' African American cultural forms did not impress some of the African American critics at the time. For example, the writer Amiri Baraka criticized the play for being part of the 'passive resistance' phase of the Black Arts movement. It was some 25 years later when he wrote a critical reevaluation of the play that he highlighted its powerful stance on protesting racism and social injustice. In "*A Raisin in the Sun's* Enduring Passion," he describes the play as reflecting "the real lives of the Black U.S. majority than any work that ever received commercial exposure before it, and few if any since" (9) and calls it the "quintessential civil rights drama" (Baraka 10).

Baraka explained that part of the reason that the play continues to live on is the fact that Hansberry did more than document the lives of the Younger family. He called Hansberry a "critical realist in a way that Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and

Margaret Walker are. That is, she analyzes and assesses reality and shapes her statement as an aesthetically powerful and politically advanced work of art” (Baraka 10).

Baraka concluded his essay by revisiting his former assessment of the play where he said that the Younger family’s goals were “middle class” because they were concerned with “buying a house and moving into White folks’ neighborhoods are actually reflective of the essence of Black people’s striving and the will to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression. There is no such thing as a “White folks’ neighborhood” except to racists and to those submitting to racism” (Baraka 20).

Lorraine Hansberry defended her position on whether the Younger family is aspiring to “middle class” goals rather than preconceived ideas about what African American should want. Lipari describes the types of questions that Hansberry was asked while promoting the play. For example, in an interview Pulitzer Prize winning author and radio broadcaster, Studs Terkel, asked Lorraine Hansberry how she would answer the claim that *A Raisin in the Sun* was not really a Negro play. She responded by explaining the interdependent relationship between universal and specific:

I believe one of the soundest ideas in dramatic writing is 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. In other words, I have told people that not only is the play about a Negro family, specifically and culturally, but it’s not even a New York family or a southern Negro family—it is specifically Southside Chicago. To the extent we accept them and believe them as who they’re supposed to be, to that extent they can become everybody. (qtd in Lipari 86)

In this response Hansberry explains how the two concepts do not have to be exclusive of each other. The “truthful identity” that she intended to create with the characters may be one of the reasons that a diverse group of people have watched and enjoyed the play either on stage or in the filmed version for the past five decades.

The characters in the play are another rhetorical tool that Lorraine Hansberry used to create her argument against social and economic injustice. The character Ruth for example, highlights some of the issues that women faced. In addition to poverty, she has shrinking control over her life. One of the few rights that she may have left is the “right to choose.” At the time the play was written and acted abortion was illegal in the United States. Although Ruth decided not to have the abortion, Hansberry dealt with the subject in an unflinching manner. It is not even Ruth herself who tells Walter about the pregnancy, but Mama Lena. Mafe writes that Ruth is hardly able to interrupt Walter’s speech long enough to tell him she is pregnant and that it is her mother-in-law who conveys “the news of both pregnancy and impending abortion” (37). Just before the curtain at the end of Act I, the shocking news is delivered:

MAMA: Son—do you know your wife is expecting another baby? (Walter stands, stunned, and absorbs what his mother has said) That's what she wanted to talk to you about. (Walter sinks down into a chair) This ain't for me to be telling—but you ought to know. (She waits) I think Ruth is thinking 'bout getting rid of that child. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 74-75)

Walter is sure that his mother is wrong and that Ruth would never get an abortion. However, upon hearing their conversation Ruth comes out of the bedroom to speak for herself:

RUTH: (Beaten) Yes, I would too, Walter. (Pause) I gave her a five-dollar down payment. (There is total silence as the man stares at his wife and the mother stares at her son)

MAMA: (Presently) Well – (Tightly) Well — son, I’m waiting to hear you say something ... (She waits) 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’m waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them—(She rises) I’m waiting to see you stand up and look like your daddy and say we done give up one baby to poverty and that we ain’t going to give up nary another one ... I’m waiting.

WALTER: Ruth— (He can say nothing)

MAMA: If you a son of mine, tell her! (WALTER picks up his keys and his coat and walks out. She continues, bitterly) You ... you are a disgrace to your father’s memory. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 1.2.75)

This scene highlights much of the issue of economic inequality that Hansberry protests. Although it is poignant and appeals to the audience on an emotional level, there is an element of anger about the circumstances that have brought them to this point that resonates. Of all the reasons that Lena could give for why Ruth would consider having an abortion, she names poverty as the cause. Ruth “represents the sheer desperation of a

working-class black woman who literally cannot afford to have another child” (Mafe 38).

One of the aspects of society that Hansberry wanted to change was the African American’s lack of access to well-paying employment. Ruth’s decision is driven by the family’s dismal financial situation.

Hansberry’s play reminds viewers that the "ethnic" is very much a part of the "universal." As Hansberry stated in a 1961 radio broadcast, “I don't think that there should be any over-extended attention to this question of what is or what isn't universal...we don't notice the Englishness of a Shakespearean fool while we're being entertained and educated by his wisdom; the experience just happens" (qtd in Mafe 44). Hansberry’s example of being English highlights the idea that any cultural group can be both ethnic and universal. Her comments illustrate her intention to present a drama that showed an African American family as a part of the American fabric, not separated from it.

Mafe highlights the timelessness of Hansberry's comments more than 50 years later. She argues that audiences should not devote too much of their time to the concepts of the universal and the ethnic and the limits they maintain, but instead should acknowledge “the artistic value of these popular "minority" plays that strike such a fine balance between the two” (44). Hansberry struck a balance between the ethnic and universal with *A Raisin in the Sun* and showed the Younger family as a specific family in a situation, but with desires and dreams that many can identify with.

Cultural awareness and African American rhetoric were also central themes in Lorraine Hansberry’s work. In the article, “African American Ethos and Hermeneutical

Rhetoric: An Exploration of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*," the scholar Eric King Watts analyzes Locke's work. Lorraine Hansberry referred to Locke in her own speeches and essays. Alain Locke wrote an anthology of African American art and culture surrounding the Harlem Renaissance and described a concept he defined as the "New Negro."

Watts explains that hermeneutical rhetoric "involves the location and development of appropriate topics to shape public understanding" (20). Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation. Watts argues that it is concerned with the essential questioning of how we interact with others in our everyday lives. This questioning is about how best to conduct "one's personal affairs within a field of conflicting and fluid relations and is instigated by one's social world and shaped by it. The ways in which we go about our interpretive acts are constitutive of the norms of a given community and of our understanding of how they affect our goal-oriented activity" (Watts 21).

In order to illustrate the concept of hermeneutical rhetoric, Watts writes that an interpretation is a "productive act that expresses communal values and interests while displaying the rhetorical competence of the one who speaks the "truth" of the thing interpreted" (21). The range of critical responses to *A Raisin in the Sun* can be seen as an example of this. Some White critics were perhaps interpreting the play from their community viewpoint whereas Black critics may have interpreted it from theirs.

Watts argues that there is an intersection between hermeneutic and rhetoric, "the place at which the oratorical art is more than a dimension added to hermeneutic understanding, but is part of its foundation. The ideas that make up interpretive acts are

themselves rhetorical topics” (Watts 21). From a rhetorical perspective, “one's competence can be assessed in terms of propriety or prudence; interpretive competence is similar” (Watts 21).

Watts discusses the similarity between rhetoric and hermeneutic and writes that both are oriented by a person's idea of the proper arrangement, categorization, and expression of “topical material in accordance with one's lived experience. If topics are best located and enacted through intimate contact with social life, however, then our sense of decorum is conditioned at the outset by a complex and contingent set of social relations” (Watts 22). It is important to the effectiveness of an argument to consider these concepts.

According to Watts, understanding speech requires both the perceptive and the sensory. The author defines common sense as “both perceptual (what we perceive to be true) and sensual (what we feel to be true)” and that all emotion involves both understanding and activity (Watts 22). A term from classical rhetoric applicable to the discussion of rhetorical hermeneutics is *imitatio*. Watts argues that imitation in these terms does not mean simply replication, but that rhetorical training in the classical period emphasized the speaker's capacity for judging the “practical requirements of any given case and for providing the “linguistic resources” called for by the situation. Instead of modeling speeches, students learned how a text managed historical exigencies and constraints, becoming sensitive to how the particularities of time and place were mobilized by the orator” (22). The dialogue of the characters in the play demonstrates the words needed for that time and place to make Hansberry's point about the need for

society to change and allow the Younger family and those in other disadvantaged situations, equal opportunities whether it be for work or a house in a particular neighborhood.

Watts explains, “imitatio functions as hermeneutical rhetoric that circulates influence between past and present. As the embodied utterances of the past are interpreted for current application, their ideas and modes of articulation are reembodyed, and old voices are recovered for use in new circumstances” (22). There are examples in the play when Hansberry’s characters use the language needed for their time period but also reference past voices and new circumstances, such as when Mama Lena is talking with Ms. Johnson. In Act II Scene 2 Lena criticizes the quote Ms. Johnson attributes to Booker T. Washington and says it is foolish to imply that education has “spoiled many a good plow hand” (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 103). Mama Lena opposes the idea that education for African Americans is negative in any way.

Lorraine Hansberry said that she wanted to transmit ideas emotionally. Watts discusses how emotions and ethics are a part of understanding. He writes:

history is not cold storage for remote and abstract concepts awaiting redistribution; the past speaks to us with a voice; however, in order for voice to emerge, the emotional and ethical entailments of speech are in need of public acknowledgment. Hermeneutical rhetoric is capable of facilitating voice because it specifies speech with a strong political and ethical tendency. Also relevant are the ways that idioms, styles, and premises from the past are made meaningful in cultural practices, offering up emotional values that function as rhetorical

capacities and constraints. The emotions attune us to the character of communal relations and to the significance of others and of their pursuits. (Watts 22)

Lorraine Hansberry found the right words to touch others in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Watts's description shows that hermeneutical rhetoric may be a particularly useful lens for analysis because "it has a sensual dimension; it works through an aesthetic praxis that moves people to the places in which to "find the right word" to touch others" (22). It is clear from the message of protest in *A Raisin in the Sun* that Hansberry intended to not only touch others with the drama but move them to change their behavior.

Hansberry's work as a playwright often returned to scenarios that she covered as a journalist, like the freedom movements in Kenya and throughout Africa (Colbert, "Practices of Freedom" 159). An example of this connection can be seen in *A Raisin in the Sun* through Beneatha's conversation with Asagai. When she is devastated after learning that the money is gone, Asagai asks Beneatha if there is not something wrong in a house where "all dreams—good or bad—must depend on the death of a man" (Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* 134; 3.1). As the scene continues, Asagai makes more reference to the kind of freedom movements and violence that Lorraine Hansberry wrote about in articles a few years before. At the beginning of Act III, Asagai comes over to the apartment:

ASAGAI: I will go home and much of what I will have to say will seem strange to the people of my village. But I will teach, and work and things will happen, slowly and swiftly. At times it will seem that nothing changes at all ... and then again, the sudden dramatic events which make history leap into the future. And

then quiet again. Retrogression even. Guns, murder, revolution. And I even will have moments when I wonder if the quiet was not better than all that death and hatred. But I will look about my village at the illiteracy and disease and ignorance and I will not wonder long. And perhaps ... perhaps I will be a great man ... I mean perhaps I will hold on to the substance of truth and find my way always with the right course ... and perhaps for it I will be butchered in my bed some night by the servants of empire...

BENEATHA: The martyr!

ASAGAI: (He smiles) ... or perhaps I shall live to be a very old man, respected and esteemed in my new nation ... And perhaps I shall hold office and this is what I'm trying to tell you, Alaiyo: Perhaps the things I believe now for my country will be wrong and outmoded, and I will not understand and do terrible things to have things my way or merely to keep my power. Don't you see that there will be young men and women—not British soldiers then, but my own black countrymen—to step out of the shadows some evening and slit my then useless throat? Don't you see they have always been there ... that they always will be. And that such a thing as my own death will be an advance? They who might kill me even ... actually replenish all that I was.

BENEATHA: Oh, Asagai, I know all that. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 135-36)

Hansberry makes several references in this exchange between the characters that can be compared to the historical changes in Africa in the twentieth century. For example, the rebellion in Kenya started in 1952 and by 1960 the British had been forced

out as rulers. It is notable that Asagai is not presented as a character who desires to become an American citizen. This inclination is clear when he says that he will go “home” instead of back to Africa. Asagai sees Nigeria as home. The phrase “nothing changes at all” may reflect the despair that the characters in the play feel at first with everyday struggles and the compounded by getting the money and losing the money in an incredibly short period of time.

Hansberry follows this passage with the description “sudden dramatic” events which implies that sometimes change happens unexpectedly and can be highly emotionally charged. The Civil Rights movement that would be in full swing a few years after her play was produced is one such example of dramatic changes.

Kristin L. Matthews writes about the family and social dynamic of the play in her article, “The Politics of Home in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*.” She writes:

In post-war Chicago, bombings, demonstrations, and assaults on Blacks attempting to move east into predominantly White neighborhoods were on the rise. By July 1946, there had been twenty-seven bombings and a demonstration of five-thousand people to keep blacks out of a public housing project. Between the years 1956 and 1958 alone, there were over 250 reported incidents of racial violence—a total that included at least thirty-eight arson cases. (Matthews 556)

This violence was the kind that the Hansberry family were met with when they moved into the Washington Park subdivision. Carl Hansberry’s victory in the Supreme Court allowed the family to stay in the home, but the city had not changed. Matthews writes, “twenty more years of racially motivated violence in the Chicago area suggested

that housing was still a primary front on which the war of civil rights was to be waged in the late 1950s/1960s” (557). In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the family’s neighbor, Mrs. Johnson, is startled to learn that the Younger family has purchased a home in the all-White Clybourne Park area. She seems to assume that violence will certainly be the result when she says, “Lord – I bet this time next month ya’ll’s names will have been in the papers plenty – ‘NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK – BOMBED!’” (Matthews 557).

The violence progressed to a point that even national civil rights leaders felt called into action. Matthews explains, “bringing Martin Luther King, Jr., himself to the battlefield in July of 1966, to nail on the door of Chicago’s City Hall his “theses” demanding non-discriminatory real-estate practices, as well as increased job opportunities and political representation reflective of Chicago’s diverse population” (557). The protest rhetoric of the Hansberry family was a precursor to events that would be definitive parts of the civil rights movement.

A Raisin in the Sun is unusual in that it does not identify a single character as the central character but shows events through each family member’s point of view.

Hansberry presents an ensemble cast. For example, Mama Lena is the matriarch, “The literal home that Mama Younger purchases in Clybourne Park mirrors her family’s various psycho-social struggles to attain, secure, and define a sense of place, or “home,” in the face of systemic socio-economic racism in Southside Chicago” (Matthews 557).

Lorraine Hansberry’s play has multiple characters who bring important ideas to the drama. Walter Lee and Beneatha both grow and change during the play and provide pivotal moments in the play.

In an interview with Studs Terkel, Hansberry pointed out that “When you start breaking rules, you may be doing it for a good reason, you may find something else. And since people are able to hold on to the play and become involved in a way that the central character is supposed to guarantee, then maybe you don’t really need it” (Matthews 557). By breaking theater’s unwritten rule that the play should focus on a central character, Hansberry finds “a pluralistic voice and social ethic” (Matthews 557). This pluralistic voice may be one of the reasons for the play’s enduring popularity and success.

A clear example of the rhetoric of protest is in the character of Mama Lena. Although she calls on traditional religious beliefs, which are a large part of the makeup of African American rhetoric, she also does something non-traditional which is the impetus of the drama. She goes out and purchases a home in a White neighborhood. She takes action when she sees her family falling apart. She looks outside conventional options to solve their problems and makes a down payment on a house in Clybourne Park, an all-White subdivision. In Act II Scene 1 Mama Lena explains why she chose a house in that area and says, “We was going backwards ‘stead of forwards.... When it gets like that in life – you just got to do something different, push on out and do something bigger” (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 94). One of the central characters, Lena Younger, is a strong matriarch but does not simply endure the disparaging racial problems of the present while waiting for a better life.

Mama Lena ignores the possible violence that will accompany doing something different such as moving into the new neighborhood. Linder mirrors what the Hansberrys faced when they won the right to stay in the home that Carl Hansberry purchased. In the

play, Linder says that the Youngers have nothing to gain by moving into the neighborhood “where you just aren’t wanted and where some elements – well – people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they’ve ever worked for is threatened” (119), he says “almost sadly,” “You just can’t force people to change their hearts” (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.3.119).

The other characters represent alternative viewpoints on the best way for African Americans to move forward. Matthews explains that the play serves as a precursor of the civil rights movement and suggests that the most effective path towards social justice would involve people with different perspectives working together. Matthews writes:

a close examination of *Raisin* presents a polyvocal portrait of the black struggle for communal civil rights and individual determination. Written prior to the civil rights movement’s zenith and subsequent fragmentation into passive resistance, Black Power, Pan-Africanism, and black feminism (among other groups), *Raisin* warns that discord and factionalism within the movement can be as dangerous to the end-goal of full enfranchisement as can the physical and ideological threats from without. Not unlike Langston Hughes’s poem “Harlem” (1948) from which Hansberry took her title, *Raisin* works through multiple avenues of resistance to the socio-economic trappings of racism, suggesting that the most effective mode of change is a coalition of unique individuals working together to meet a common goal. (558)

Walter Lee Younger equates happiness with material wealth. In his daily work as a chauffeur, he sees the wealthy and feels further separated from that level of society. He

admires people like George Murchison because he is wealthy. Part of Walter's poor decision about using the money is based on his overly romanticized ideas about what it means to be successful. Matthews writes, "the play demonstrates that race and economics cannot be separated, that capitalism was and is founded upon the subjugation of particular raced bodies. Not unlike his father who sacrificed all – including his own "flesh" (128) — for his "dream," Walter Lee accepts a system that refuses to accept him as a man" (559).

Lorraine Hansberry spoke about what her intentions were for the character of Walter Lee and noted that she did not want him to confuse the monetary things he wanted with the things his family needed. She said, "I don't want him to get confused about the reality of the one thing he really does need for his family with the other. One is paraphernalia, one is fluff and the other is a real base of good life and good living, and he is confused" (qtd in Chapman 454).

Hansberry is referring to Walter's dreams of becoming a businessman. In a poignant scene with Travis, Walter shares his dreams with his son:

WALTER: Son, I feel like talking to you tonight.

TRAVIS: About what?

WALTER: Oh, about a lot of things. About you and what kind of man you going to be when you grow up. ... Son—son, what do you want to be when you grow up?

TRAVIS: A bus driver.

WALTER: (Laughing a little) A what? Man, that ain't nothing to want to be!

TRAVIS: Why not?

WALTER: 'Cause, man—it ain't big enough—you know what I mean.

TRAVIS: I don't know then. I can't make up my mind. Sometimes Mama asks me that too. And sometimes when I tell her I just want to be like you—she says she don't want me to be like that and sometimes she says she does.... (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.2.108)

Here Hansberry is pointing out the kind of job Travis aspires to in order to show the frame of reference that the child has. His world exists inside the working-class life of his neighborhood and school. It is also interesting to note that Ruth does not say with certainty that she even wants her son to be like her husband when he grows up.

As the scene continues Walter wistfully talks about how their lives will be once he invests the money in the liquor store, the only idea he has about how to change their lives.

WALTER: (Gathering him up in his arms) You know what, Travis? In seven years you going to be seventeen years old. And things is going to be very different with us in seven years, Travis. ... One day when you are seventeen I'll come home—home from my office downtown somewhere—

TRAVIS: You don't work in no office, Daddy.

WALTER: No—but after tonight. After what your daddy gonna do tonight, there's going to be offices—a whole lot of offices....

TRAVIS: What you gonna do tonight, Daddy?

WALTER: You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy's gonna make a transaction ... a business transaction that's going to change our lives. ... That's

how come one day when you 'bout seventeen years old I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do ... 'cause an executive's life is hell, man— (The more he talks the farther away he gets) And I'll pull the car up on the driveway ... just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white walls—no—black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy ... though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth—maybe a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in. ... And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will be clipping away at the hedges and he'll say, "Good evening, Mr. Younger." And I'll say, "Hello, Jefferson, how are you this evening?" And I'll go inside and Ruth will come downstairs and meet me at the door and we'll kiss each other and she'll take my arm and we'll go up to your room to see you sitting on the floor with the catalogues of all the great schools in America around you. ... All the great schools in the world! And—and I'll say, all right son —it's your seventeenth birthday, what is it you've decided? ... Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll go. Just tell me, what it is you want to be—and you'll be it. ... Whatever you want to be—Yessir! (He holds his arms open for TRAVIS) YOU just name it, son ... (TRAVIS leaps into them) and I hand you the world! (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.2.109)

Here the audience can see how much Walter wants to give his family monetary things, but he has no concrete path towards that goal. He has seen these things, driving around as a chauffeur, but he has no personal experience to understand what these

businessmen do in offices downtown. He only knows that he believes they are happy and wants that for himself and his family.

Walter Lee dreams of this small business forming the foundation of an enterprise that will afford him wealth, prestige and power. He knows nothing about running a business and the description that he gives his son about how the future will look seems extremely naïve. Walter shares details with his son that create a picture for him. He imagines that he will work as an executive with a life filled with important business meetings, inefficient secretaries that he will complain about, and a beautiful home in the suburbs.

Lorraine Hansberry said that Walter Lee was representative of people who are confused about the importance of material wealth. She stated that in order to grow as a nation Americans should choose morality over money. She explained:

The focal moment of that play very much hangs on the denunciation of money values. When the mother confronts the son who is considering this betrayal of his heritage of a great people and says: 'I want what the bourgeois has.' The mother says to him from her resources as a daughter of the Negro peasantry, of the Negro slave classes: 'I come from five generations of slaves and sharecroppers and ain't nobody in my family never taken no kind of money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. (qtd in Chapman 455)

After Willy's betrayal Walter claims that although he was once blind to the system of how to get ahead in the world, he now could see that it required both "intellectual and material capital, to comprehend and thereby somehow control the means

by which one becomes a have (Matthews 560). Walter's journey toward this realization includes his interactions with the other characters including his wife, his mother, and Willy Harris.

Lorraine Hansberry uses symbolism in the character of Willy Harris. He represents the system that has "conned many Walter Lee Youngers into believing in the myth of upward mobility as a "fact." When Walter's world comes crashing down, he reveals a consciousness that is shaped by oppression" (Matthews 560). The only way that Walter Lee sees to recover is to submit to "the Man" which in the case of the play is represented by Mr. Linder. A desperate Walter Lee decides to stop fighting and give in to the society that he has always dreamed of overpowering, just to take Linder's money.

The beginning of Langston Hughes' poem asks the question of "What happens to a Dream Deferred?" and suggests several possibilities in the stanzas that follow. Mathews writes, "These different modes of resistance are embodied in the complex and sometimes conflicted Younger family, from Walter's belief in the "American Dream" to Ruth's pragmatism, Mama's spirituality, and Beneatha's Pan-Africanism. Because none of these four characters is "central," the play and its audience weigh and measure all responses equally" (558).

A Raisin in the Sun is a part of the literature of protest. Lorraine Hansberry uses the characters to highlight different paths toward changing society and the African American's place in it. The character Beneatha shows the audience the ideas of Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. "During the space of the play, however, her self-exploration assumes a markedly political bent, as her relationship with the Nigerian

Joseph Asagai develops. Asagai's discussion of black power and beauty seemingly awakens in Beneatha a new consciousness of self, history, and nation" (Matthews 562). He uses her straightened hair as a metaphor for how African Americans have tried to fit in with the dominant culture rather than rebel against it. He says, "But what does it matter? Assimilationism is so popular in your country" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 1.2.63).

It is Beneatha's other friend, George Murchison, who makes an even more striking statement that may have evoked an emotional reaction from some of the audience. The appeal to an audience's emotions or Pathos is a powerful means of persuasion. Mathews explains that George Murchison's reaction to Beneatha's speech on assimilationist, middle-class African Americans suggests that he has heard her passionate speeches on the topic before: "Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage!" (81). George's disparaging comments imply that he and the African American middle class he is representative of are disconnected from their African heritage. George is also rudely critical of it when he says, "Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 81; 2.2). Mathews writes, "Indeed, his dismissal of Beneatha's Afrocentric discourse punctuates his "distance" from both his heritage and the Black community" (563). George's reaction may cause viewers to question the authenticity of Beneatha's new realization:

implying that Black nationalism may be just another identity she is trying on for size. The play's audience, too, speculates about Beneatha's commitment to her new-found way of expressing identity, wondering whether she has found her

“self” at last or whether the trappings of her new consciousness will be discarded later like her riding habit and camera. (Matthews 563)

Beneatha may represent the different paths that African Americans could take to learn about themselves and establish their unique identity.

George’s assimilationist attitude is one example of the identity of African Americans while Asagai represents another extreme. Hansberry is showing the audience both ideas about what African Americans may want to achieve, but perhaps neither extreme is completely applicable. The idea of an African American “bourgeoisie” is an escape rather than a solution to “the socio-economic crisis of “Blackness” facing the Younger family, so, too, is Asagai’s proposal of a Pan-African “return” an escape. Leaving Southside Chicago would not change Southside Chicago, nor would it change her family’s present position within that oppressive social system” (Matthews 564). Hansberry’s own life mirrors some of those challenges. For example, she was a part of that middle class that Murchison was, but her family was forced to live in the ghetto. After the Supreme Court decision in *Hansberry v. Lee* when Carl Hansberry won the right to stay in his own home, it did not change the hostile neighborhood into a welcoming one.

Another classic example of African American rhetoric is highlighted in the relationship between Walter and his sister Beneatha. In Sarah Orem’s essay, “Signifying When Vexed: Black Feminist Revision, Anger, and *A Raisin in the Sun*,” she argues that Beneatha is as angry as Walter but expresses herself in a different way. According to

Orem, Beneatha mimics Walter as a way to both critique his feelings and also to undermine him.

Orem explains that Beneatha's "repetition" of Walter Lee's anger with a "signal difference" is a characteristic of the uniquely African American mode of artistic expression labeled "Signifyin(g)" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Orem writes:

Signifyin(g) allows a speaker to repeat and alter language patterns, imitating a specific discourse but in a way that is shot through with indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Beneatha revises her anger's outward form with rapid shifts, mimicking Walter one moment and critiquing him the next. (190)

Orem analyzes the similarities between Walter and Beneatha. She argues that while Beneatha might not "compare her anger to her brother's...her family does. Walter's wife, Ruth, asks Beneatha why she and her brother must "make an argument out of everything people say" (81), just as their mother, Lena, complains about her children's "tempers" (Orem 192).

Orem's comparison of Walter's and Beneatha's anger in the first scene of the play also provides an example as Walter asks if Beneatha is still set on medical school. He begins to argue that her goal of becoming a doctor is unusual for a woman, implying that she should become a nurse. Orem states, "He gets out the first part of an invective, "Ain't many girls who decide –," but Beneatha anticipates his jab and says, "in unison" with him, "to be a doctor" (192). At this moment, Beneatha echoes Walter's verbal assault

back to him” (Orem 192). The play is bookended by their bickering. They begin the play fighting about medical school and end it arguing about who she should marry.

Orem explains that the “playfulness” that Beneatha exhibits in light of her frustration matches the definition of Signifyin(g), which is a light combination of: mimicry and transformation. This quality of playfulness seems inherently wedded to Beneatha’s character, especially since Hansberry confesses that she “had a ball poking fun” at herself through Beneatha. Beneatha is a play on *Raisin’s* “Angry Young Man,” and she performs this work in a profoundly playful manner. (Orem 198)

Hansberry kept the tone light enough that audiences can imagine the fondness they have for each other in spite of the arguing.

Beneatha’s playfulness sometimes confuses Walter, which is perhaps her intention. According to Orem when Walter is critical of Beneatha for using the family’s money to attend college, she responds in a way that leaves him perplexed. At first, she is angry; and when Walter then accuses her of being ungrateful, she “switches into a comedic mode of anger” (Orem 198), following him around the room on her knees while pretending to beg dramatically for forgiveness. She shouts, “And forgive me for ever wanting to be anything at all! (37), to which Walter responds with the question: “Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor?...Just get married and be quiet” (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 38; 1.1). Beneatha seems to have grown tired of the argument with Walter by that point and says, “give up; leave me alone” (Orem 198).

At the close of the argument, Walter does not seem to understand Beneatha's responses. According to Orem, the way that Beneatha switches her response to Walter's attack leaves him not understanding what her true feelings are. Because of Beneatha's "strategic repetition of Walter's anger with a difference, he cannot pin down her meaning precisely" (Orem 198). In this scene, Walter turns to Ruth and asks her if she has heard him being insulted. "He knows he's been tricked, but he can't prove it" (198). Beneatha's tactics confuse Walter.

Although Walter contends that no one will ever "understand" him, it is possible that Beneatha is using that "misunderstanding to her advantage. Orem notes that Signifying speech often traffics in the "obscuring of apparent meaning," such that it must be "interpreted or decoded by careful attention" (198). In the aforementioned exchange with Walter, Beneatha creates a "measure of undecidability" within her speech (Orem 198), when she seemingly begs forgiveness but actually seems to be taunting him. According to Orem, Beneatha's "anger emerges through double-speak, since her plea for forgiveness could have two different meanings (Orem 198).

Lorraine Hansberry herself, told the "truth" of the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*. In the article, "Lorraine Hansberry as Ironist: A Reappraisal of *A Raisin in the Sun*," the scholar, Lloyd Brown writes about the irony that Hansberry infused into the play. He argues, "The point is not that Lorraine Hansberry rejects integration or the economic and moral promise of the American dream, but that she remains loyal to this dream ideal while looking, realistically, at its corruption in the United States" (Brown 240).

The money at the focal point of the play also represents another avenue for irony according to Brown. Mama Lena wants to use the money to buy a house in a potentially hostile neighborhood while Walter wants to invest it in a liquor store although he has no experience running a business. Brown writes, “if housing integration is praiseworthy on the ideal principles of the American dream, then it is difficult to accept the Younger venture into a determined and hostile neighborhood as a complete fulfillment of the dream ideal” (244).

Hansberry’s own experience made her aware of the irony involved with enforced housing integration. She knew first-hand that legal victories were different from “the complete reconciliation of human beings” (Brown 244). Her father’s victory at the Supreme Court in 1940 allowed them to remain in their home, but their neighbor’s attitudes did not change.

According to Brown, Lorraine Hansberry ironically juxtaposes the ideal possibilities of the dream with the limitations of the American reality. The Younger family purchased the home and will live in it, but not without the reality of Linder and the property association. The family’s “moral triumph over White racists is real enough, and it is undoubtedly significant in the confirmation of Walter's self-respect. But as the humiliations and hardships of the Hansberry family demonstrated in a white Chicago neighborhood, the tactical defeat of individual racists is not, ipso facto, the destruction of racism” (Brown 244). Hansberry’s play dramatizes this fact for the audience to protest against this type of discriminatory treatment.

Brown argues that “the integration which is eventually realized at the end of the play has been severely, and realistically, limited by Hansberry's awareness of the contradiction between the dream ideals of reconciliation and equality, and the social realities of hatred and unresolved conflict” (244). The end of the play refers to the rhetoric of protest because it shows a family refusing to go along with current racial segregation. Although Walter says that they “don’t want to fight no causes” just by moving into the house that is what they are doing.

While Brown argues that the play is a work whose main concepts are based in irony, there are other scholarly analyses that examine it from other perspectives. For example, Aaron Thomas looks at the play in terms of Black theater history and whether Communist Party USA could have been a positive influence. The author uses internal memos concerning the surveillance the FBI had on Hansberry and the play at the time of its debut.

Thomas writes that a month before *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation sent an agent to observe the show and find out if the play contained any Communist propaganda. Hansberry had been under surveillance by the U.S. government as early as 1952. Her Freedom of Information Act file contains FBI reports regarding her activities and connections to the Communist Party throughout the 1950s (Thomas 462). The file ends in 1965 at the time of her death.

The FBI was concerned about the play because of Hansberry’s career in journalism during which she wrote for several Communist newspapers. Thomas explains

that the FBI was particularly anxious about *Raisin*. The Bureau followed the reviews of the play and sent an agent to one of its early performances (Thomas 462).

Thomas quotes the FBI agent's memo to the bureau dated February 5, 1959, when after seeing the play he writes, "the play contains no comments of any nature about Communism as such but deals essentially with negro aspirations, the problems inherent in their efforts to advance themselves, and varied attempts at arriving at solutions" (463). Thomas stresses the importance of reading a play correctly since if the agent had misinterpreted the play, it might have been censored and not have gone on to become a national sensation or have endured for the past five decades in relevance. Thomas writes, "Hansberry wrote within two idioms. *Raisin* is a play for white audiences as well as black; it addresses a 1950s consciousness of both Africanness and Americanness" (463). Part of the reason for its long-standing appeal is the way that Hansberry addressed the concerns of African Americans as well as all Americans in general.

Michelle Gordon describes some of the elements of rhetorical protest that Lorraine Hansberry used in her article "'Somewhat like War': The Aesthetics of Segregation, Black Liberation, and *A Raisin in the Sun*," in which she discusses the period when Lorraine Hansberry grew up and how it influenced her political beliefs and art. Hansberry grew up during a period in which restrictive covenants and segregation were legal and common. This environment inevitably shaped her consciousness, "radical politics, and revolutionary art. As a young playwright, Hansberry shaped her aesthetic practices to respond to the urban segregation her family had fought against for so long,

and, in the midst of the Cold War, the capitalist systems from which segregation grew” (Gordon 121).

A Raisin in the Sun focuses on segregation struggles in Chicago as a major symbol of oppression of minorities. By taking this approach, Hansberry “brought local, individual struggles of African Americans-- against segregation, ghettoization, and capitalist exploitation-- to the national stage” (Gordon 122). Hansberry stated it succinctly herself when she wrote, “Our Southside, is a place apart. Each piece of our living is a protest” (Nemiroff and Hansberry 17).

Gordon argues that Lorraine Hansberry offers an "aesthetics of segregation to generate public testimony about urban black life, to represent her radically expansive notion of the real, and to provide a prophetic framework for anti-racist, anti-colonialist movements gaining force in the US and the world” (122). The play provides a clear portrait of life in a poor urban neighborhood and uses the plot and characters to make its point about the damage that racism and poverty can do. The Younger family do not have access to better employment opportunities that would make it possible for them to improve their quality of life.

Lorraine Hansberry felt strongly about the damage segregating minorities to impoverished areas did. She wrote about how dangerous the situation was in *To Be Young Gifted and Black*:

We must come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams, as Mama says, but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction to us that the average American Negro has a life expectancy of five to ten years less

than the average white. You see, Miss Oehler, that is murder, and a Negro writer cannot be expected to share the placid view of the situation that might be the case with a White writer. (Nemiroff and Hansberry 117)

Hansberry addressed the need for African American writers to make problems of oppression a central part of their work, and she continued her call to action in her writing and speeches throughout her short life. It is interesting to note that Hansberry used her fame to encourage other writers to craft works that would help change society and improve the lives of minorities. It is clear that given the numerous social justice marches in contemporary society, those needs still have not been addressed.

This chapter discusses *A Raisin in the Sun* as an important example of the rhetoric of protest. There are multiple of analyses of the play, but there is not an abundance of rhetorical analyses in this area. Gordon points this lack out as well and “James Baldwin similarly speculated on the critical silence surrounding Hansberry's artistic treatment of social protest and Black experience, pointing to her "unmistakable power of turning the viewer's judgment in on himself" (124).

Gordon uses the term “aesthetics of segregation” to describe a consciously Black artistic approach to Black experiences under Jim Crow policies. This approach is seen in a range of texts including, Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*, and Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, from which Hansberry took the title of her play. “Black artists' aesthetics of segregation share four primary 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 126).

Hansberry’s play is an example of protest against segregation and racism, and her work shows that she understands that “individuals cannot fight against that which they do not understand, her art renders visible the compound systems of Black oppression in the urban North” (Gordon 127). What she presents as the "indestructible contradictions to this state of 'being' —the rats, roaches, worn furniture, over-crowded conditions, and anti-integration bombs—therefore not only set the stage for the dramatic action in *A Raisin in the Sun*, but also serve as evidence of Chicago's political and economic infrastructures of deliberate segregation (Gordon 127).

The character of Mama Lena is protesting segregation when she buys the house in Clybourne Park. When the family learns where their new home is, there is a sense of resigning to the idea that there will be trouble with the other homeowners. In Act II Scene 1 there is evidence of this expectation:

RUTH: Where is it?

MAMA: (Frightened at this telling) Well -well- it's out there in Clybourne Park-.

RUTH: Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA: (Almost idiotically) Well, I guess there's going to be some now...

(raising her eyes to meet Walter's finally) Son- I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family.

RUTH: (Trying to recover from the shock) Well- well- 'course I ain't one never been 'fraid of no crackers, mind you- but- well, wasn't there no other houses nowhere?

MAMA: Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.1.93)

In a scene cut from the stage and first published version of the play, Hansberry brings the Youngers' neighbor, Mrs. Johnson, to report the latest anti-integration bombing in Clybourne Park:

JOHNSON: You mean you ain't read 'bout them colored people that was bombed out their place out there? Ain't it something how bad these here white folks is getting here in Chicago! Lord, getting so you think you right down in Mississippi! (with a tremendous and rather insincere sense of melodrama) 'Course I think it's wonderful how our folks keeps on pushing out. . . . Lord- I bet this time next month y'all's names will have been in the papers plenty- (Holding up her hands to mark off each word of the headline she can see in front of her) "NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK—BOMBED!"

MAMA: ...We aint exactly moving out there to get bombed.

JOHNSON: ... But you have to think of life like it is- and these here Chicago pecker woods is some baaaad peckerwoods.

MAMA: (wearily) We done thought about all that, Mis' Johnson. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.2.102)

Here, Hansberry employs an aesthetics of segregation to encourage social change: she exposes the oppressors, as well as the effects of their oppression, systems, and tools. Emphasizing place— “here in Chicago.” It is important to note that the play debuted four years after the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, a teenager from Chicago who was visiting relatives in Mississippi and was abducted and lynched after allegedly flirting with a White woman. Mrs. Johnson’s reference to Mississippi may allude to Till’s murder. According to Gordon, Hansberry’s description of the violence against African Americans in Chicago functions as an instructive rhetorical maneuver. Hansberry presents parallels to the violence of Southern Jim Crow and “these comparisons work to demystify Chicago’s complex racist power structures” (Gordon 128). By showing the similarities between racial oppression in the North and South, Hansberry suggests the potential for a national fight for social equality by African Americans.

Other scholars have discussed race and politics in the history of African American theater. In an article published in 2019, Danica Čerče writes that the scholar Michael Lipsky defined protest as activity as “a strategy utilized by relatively powerless groups in order to increase their bargaining ability” (229). To meet this objective, protest groups need to “cross the threshold of invisibility” and attract the attention of various societal groups.

Čerče argues that the category of “protest” is “not restricted to civic action, but can also refer to symbolic action, which is often communicated indirectly to its target group” (229). The scholar, Nicholas Coles, points out that an essential aspect of protest literature is its capacity “to offer revelations of social worlds to which readers respond

with shock, concern, sometimes political questioning” (qtd in Čerče 229). Hansberry’s play meets this definition as it contains multiple examples which may cause the audience to respond with shock or concern.

Although a superficial reading of the play may give the idea that Hansberry’s characters are trying to assimilate into the dominant White culture by moving to Clybourne Park, a closer reading shows that may not be the case. In 1995, the writer, Amiri Baraka recanted his initially unappreciative critical view of the play based on a similar misconception. By observing that the “the concerns [he] once dismissed as ‘middle class’—buying a house and moving into white folks’ neighborhood—are actually reflective of the essence of black people’s striving and the will to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression” (qtd. in Čerče 230). Baraka’s stance challenged the idea of assimilation that many Black nationalists may have held.

In a 1964 speech to winners of a creative writing contest, Hansberry encouraged the writers to “write about the world as it is and as you think it ought to be and must be.” This path is similar to the one she took in writing *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry was aware that writing for a diverse market would sometimes require the writer to influence the audience to “applaud the very protest directed towards them” (Čerče 230).

The relevance of this claim is well demonstrated in the success of Hansberry’s play. Although it is “a penetrating political critique of racism and capitalism underlying what seems to be “a good old fashioned, homespun saga of some good working-class folk in pursuit of the American dream,” as condescendingly described by Harold Cruse (qtd.

in Čerče 231). Diverse audiences have seen the play for more than 50 years and experienced Hansberry's persuasive drama.

A Raisin in the Sun was not only the first play written by an African American to be produced on Broadway; it was a major success with 530 performances, and it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play of the year. Some controversy surrounded the play concerning the question of whether it was communist propaganda because of Hansberry's communist ties. Some representatives of the Black Arts Movement dismissed it as an "example of a failed and degrading integrationist philosophy" and thus "representative of a bygone era," (Wilkerson 41). However, in spite of such opposing views, *A Raisin in the Sun* has remained one of the most produced plays in the United States.

There are several examples in the play which show the protest argument that Hansberry was making. Čerče writes that in response to Lindner's discriminatory offer, Walter Lee "responds with his readiness to fight for his people's dignity, rather than tolerate racism: My father almost beat a man to death once because this man called him a bad name or something.... Well—what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride" (Čerče 235). In a similar way Mama Lena is greatly insulted by the offer. She says, "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. We ain't never been that dead inside" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 3.1.143). Although the family lacks material wealth, they have always maintained their dignity.

The struggle for social and economic equality was a long-term fight. In the years after the Great Migration minority families still did not have access to equal housing. There was increased segregation in residential neighborhoods after World War II. In the 1950s, African Americans had to pay much more for less appropriate places. Gordon provides an example of a White family being able to rent a five-room apartment for \$60 a month in Cicero (235), while an African American family on the South Side of Chicago would have to pay nearly the same amount for a two-room apartment, without access to hot water and electricity and typically infested with rats and roaches.

In addition to racism, Hansberry condemns capitalism and its exploitative practices because of which the Youngers, despite working hard, cannot afford decent housing until they receive their deceased husband and father's insurance check. Čerče explains that Hansberry is critical of both White and Black capitalists, with the latter being described in the play as "the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 1.1.49). In Beneatha's words, they are "the crooks and petty thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power to steal and plunder" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 3.1.134).

Walter Lee's plan to start a liquor store also depends upon the exploitation of African American people. His aspiration for material gain, arising from his life without prospects illustrates his belief that having money will lead to social mobility. Early in the play Walter laments what he has to offer his son. Walter Lee says, "I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room, and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live" (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 1.1.34).

Hansberry uses his statements to illustrate the frustrations many African Americans faced during this period.

The need for material gain takes on monumental importance to Walter Lee, who sees it as a lifeline to social equality. This view is illustrated in the play in the emotionally charged scene in which Bobo comes to tell Walter Lee that Willy has run away with the money. The scene shows how desperately important the money was to the family. The amount was \$6,500, but it represented a great deal more:

BOBO: I'm talking about the fact that when I got to the train station yesterday morning—eight o'clock like we planned ... Man—Willy didn't never show up.

WALTER: Why ... where was he ... where is he?

BOBO: That's what I'm trying to tell you ... I don't know ... I waited six hours ... I called his house ... and I waited ... six hours ... I waited in that train station six hours ... (Breaking into tears) That was all the extra money I had in the world ... WALTER with the tears running down his face) Man, Willy is gone.

WALTER: Gone, what you mean Willy is gone? Gone where? You mean he went by himself. You mean he went off to Springfield by himself—to take care of getting the license —(Turns and looks anxiously at RUTH) You mean maybe he didn't want too many people in on the business down there? (Looks to RUTH again, as before) You know Willy got his own ways. (Looks back to BOBO) Maybe you was late yesterday and he just went on down there without you. Maybe—maybe—he's been callin' you at home tryin' to tell you what happened or something. Maybe— maybe—he just got sick. He's somewhere—he's got to

be somewhere. We just got to find him—me and you got to find him. (Grabs BOBO senselessly by the collar and starts to shake him) We got to!

BOBO: (In sudden angry, frightened agony) What's the matter with you, Walter! When a cat take off with your money he don't leave you no road maps!

WALTER: (Turning madly, as though he is looking for WILLY in the very room) Willy! ... Willy ... don't do it ... Please don't do it ... Man, not with that money ... Man, please, not with that money ... Oh, God ... Don't let it be true ... (He is wandering around, crying out for WILLY and looking for him or perhaps for help from God) Man ... I trusted you ... Man, I put my life in your hands ... (He starts to crumple down on the floor as RUTH just covers her face in horror. MAMA opens the door and comes into the room, with BENEATHA behind her) Man ... (He starts to pound the floor with his fists, sobbing wildly) THAT MONEY IS MADE OUT OF MY FATHER'S FLESH—

BOBO: (Standing over him helplessly) I'm sorry, Walter ...

(Only WALTER'S sobs reply. BOBO puts on his hat) I had my life staked on this deal, too ... (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 2.3.127-9)

At the close of the play the idea of money as the only thing of value is dispelled.

Walter tells Linder his decision:

LINDNER: (Looking up, frozen) No, no, I'm afraid I don't—

WALTER: (A beat. The tension hangs; then WALTER steps back from it) Yeah.

Well—what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride. I mean—

we are very proud people. And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor—and we are very proud—

LINDNER: Well—I am sure that is very nice, but—

WALTER: What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this— (Signaling to TRAVIS) Travis, come here.

(TRAVIS crosses and WALTER draws him before him facing the man) This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation of our family in this country. And we have all thought about your offer—

LINDNER: Well, good ... good—

WALTER: And 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, *A Raisin* 3.1.148)

Hansberry explained that her play demonstrated that race and economics are tightly connected, and that capitalism was and is founded on the subjugation of particular groups of people. In her words, Walter's failed attempt is “the acceptance of the capitalist economic system that necessarily excludes him from ascendancy” (Čerče 237).

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, wrote James Baldwin, “never before in the entire history of the American theater had so much of the truth of black people's lives been seen on the

stage” (“Sweet Lorraine” 1969). Published and produced worldwide in over thirty languages and in thousands of productions nationally, the play changed American theater forever and became an American classic. It was at the time of its original production and remains a prime example of the use of rhetoric to persuade and protest.

CHAPTER IV
THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN SELECTED PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF
LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Lorraine Hansberry wrote articles and gave speeches which illustrated how her work is a central part of the rhetoric of protest. An examination of selected other writings by the author shows the recurring theme of calls for social justice and protest against unfair treatment of African Americans. Placing Hansberry's writing in historical context helps to show the political climate that she was writing in and the changes she desired to bring about in society.

The scholar Yomna Saber writes about the decade that Lorraine Hansberry's play was produced in the article, "Lorraine Hansberry: Defining the Line Between Integration and Assimilation" and describes the changes in reception of literature by African American writers in the 1950s. The author writes that the decade opened with some African American critics urging African American writers to broaden their literary horizons in order to reach the universality of works written by other American writers (Saber 451). She writes that although Hugh Gloster "claimed in his 1950 essay "Race and the Negro Writer" that the African American author should not abandon his ethnic character, he strongly advocated complete integration into the larger American literary tradition" (Saber 451).

Integration in these terms was not to be confused with accommodation or cultural assimilation, however. According to Saber, the term, "accommodation," embraced the

negative concepts of resigning to the White majority and removing any sense of racial pride. The idea of “assimilation” suggested an attempt to blend in that would result in a loss of ethnic identity. In assimilation, the African American identity would be dissolved into White American culture. Saber writes, “integration in the 1950s, however, had the aim of asserting black racial pride. It was an attempt to cross racial lines and not to see everything through sharp black–white dichotomies, but to form a kind of racial settlement and to end racial exclusion” (452). Integration sought to illustrate the point that African American writers were as American as anyone else and deserved a wider acceptance and appreciation.

The idea that African Americans were a full and vital part of America is a theme that echoes throughout the history of African American rhetoric from the pioneers like Maria Stewart to writers like Hansberry, and in contemporary protest movements where the call for social equality does not require that the African American set aside their history to be more like the majority group but seeks a renewed understanding of a long and rich heritage. It is interesting to note that as the calls for equal rights were growing in intensity among African American, the decade began with Gwendolyn Brooks’ being the first African American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1950 and closed with Lorraine Hansberry’s play *A Raisin in the Sun* winning the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1959. She was the first African American writer to win that award.

The beginning of the Civil Rights movement marked the time when African Americans and others dedicated to equal rights organized to work together to demand an end to social injustice. Saber writes, “politically, it was seeking the right to vote;

economically, it was the right to rise above abject poverty; and socially, it was the right to have desegregated good education and desegregated housing policies” (453). While some may view Hansberry’s work as an attempt at assimilation, it is equally valid to view her public statements as forms of protest and a call for equality.

Hansberry’s work could have been marginalized because of her race and gender, but she is remembered for her courageous play and the impact it had on people of all races. “Many critics compare her play to Wright’s *Native Son* as both works open with an adamant alarm ringing in similar settings of Chicago’s rat-infested ghettos, both protagonists are Black chauffeurs working for white masters, and both have dreams beyond their reach because they face poverty and racism” (Saber 454). Hansberry did not convey her story in terms of naturalist style which would have been darker, but instead she took a more optimistic tone. In comparison to Wright’s character of Bigger, who ends up on the gallows, Walter ends the play by making a choice to move into the new house.

The American literary movements realism and naturalism are important to understanding Hansberry’s writing choices. American literature changed over time. From the time of the end of the Civil War, writers were interested in creating an authentic literature and not merely an interpretation of British literature. Writers such as Mark Twain exemplify that early period called realism which was from about 1865 to 1900. During the realist period, writers attempted to show life like it actually was, including the way America was changing. The industrial age and immigration helped shape the country and form the literature. Characters in the fiction of this period resembled ordinary people. The literature of this period was followed by the naturalist movement. Naturalist

writers used darker themes and character portrayals that realism may not have focused on. While naturalist writers may still have used a realist style, the theme may have been different such as in the tragic story of Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* where the main character is trapped by circumstance, or in Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*. Although there are other valid views of the distinctions between realism and naturalism, Lorraine Hansberry developed her own definition which she applied to her creative work. She argued that:

Naturalism tends to take the world as it is and say: this is what it is, this is how it happens, it is 'true' because we see it every day in life that way—you know you simply photograph the garbage can. But in realism—I think the artist is creating what the realistic work imposes on it not only what is but what is possible . . . because that is part of reality too. So that you get a much larger potential of what man can do. And it requires much greater selectivity—you don't just put everything that seems—you put what you believe is... (Saber "Lorraine Hansberry" 455)

In this quote, Hansberry describes the difference she sees between naturalism and realism. She defined realism as the artist's ability to superimpose ideas about what is possible over the stark illustration of naturalism. Hansberry imported elements of both naturalism and realism in the play. *A Raisin in the Sun* demonstrates her idea of naturalism by setting the play in the economically depressed neighborhood and even highlighting Travis' talk about the rats. In another example, Hansberry's idea of realism

or the “what is possible” shows in the way that Beneatha wants to be a doctor. She emphasizes that fact that she wants to be a doctor and not a nurse.

Saber argues that Lorraine Hansberry’s “marginalized voice in terms of race and gender, emerged from Chicago—which she once described as “dirty, dismal Dreiseresque”—and from the protest aesthetic landscape of Richard Wright whose impact is clear in her play” (453). Saber discusses other scholars who point to *A Raisin in the Sun* as a work of protest literature in a similar vein as Richard Wright’s *Native Son* such as Jewell Gresham who wrote that “*A Raisin in the Sun* is to Black drama what Wright’s *Native Son* is to the Black novel” (qtd. in Saber 453), and C. Bigsby who argued that in both works, the “sense of desperation is the same” (qtd. in Saber 453). It is apparent that Hansberry was influenced by Wright’s protest novel and wanted her work to deliver a similar message against racism.

In terms of the kind of realism that Hansberry described, viewers get an example in the first scene of the play as the family’s day is beginning, and Ruth casually inquires about Walter’s breakfast:

RUTH: No—I’m just sleepy as the devil. What kind of eggs you want?

WALTER: Not scrambled, (RUTH starts to scramble eggs) Paper come? (RUTH points impatiently to the rolled-up Tribune on the table, and he gets it and spreads it out and vaguely reads the front page) Set off another bomb yesterday.

RUTH: (Maximum indifference) Did they?

WALTER: (Looking up) What’s the matter with you?

RUTH: Ain't nothing the matter with me. And don't keep asking me that this morning. (Hansberry, *A Raisin* 1.1.26)

This simple exchange is housed in complexity because even though they are just talking about breakfast and feeling sleepy, the most interesting part of the conversation is the casual way they talk about the bombing. Hansberry's approach to the scene allows the characters' attitudes to imply that bombings were becoming so commonplace that although it is news, it is not shocking anymore.

In the article, "'Fearful of the Written Word': White Fear, Black Writing, and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* Screenplay" Lisbeth Lipari discusses the changes that were made to Lorraine Hansberry's movie script of the play in order supposedly to make it more appealing to White audiences. She writes, "Although the theater and film versions of *A Raisin* unquestionably made significant contributions to the affirmative and Afrocentric depiction of African Americans on stage and screen, Hansberry's unfilmed original screenplay also presented a radical and unrealized opportunity to contest the Hollywood images of whiteness associated with goodness, universality, and innocence" (Lipari 83). Hansberry included ideas for the film to include more of the depressed areas of the city to impact the audience's sense of the living conditions of the Younger family.

Hansberry's screenplay may have been even more recognizable as an act of protest if it had been filmed the way she had originally intended. But the studio executives wanted to make a film that was non-inflammatory based on their internal memos and communications to her. Lipari writes, "by calling for the removal of what

they term ‘excess race issue material,’ and strongly recommending that ‘no White person be shown in the screenplay,’ other than the sole unambiguously racist character of Karl Linder” (83) the executive’s edited version of Hansberry’s screenplay would not cast an unflattering light on White people any more than the play did. This kind of rhetorical act can be called a “translation” because it is one that “privileges certain choices and interests” (Lipari 83). Even though the studio hired her to write the screenplay they would not allow her to follow her vision for the film and produce a film with a stronger protest message against racism.

Due to the resounding success of her play, Lorraine Hansberry was sought out for interviews. Several questions would follow Hansberry as she gave interviews about the play. Many of the White critics would use the term “universal” to describe the play and explain why a White audience could enjoy it. Lipari discussed the problems this caused, however, when she wrote that “writers in the White critical establishment read the play as ‘universal’ in ways that obscured its critiques of racism and classism” (85). The film version of *A Raisin in the Sun* calls attention to racism in very direct ways, such as when Walter talks about the bombing at the beginning, when Ms. Johnson talks about their getting bombed for moving, and when Linder comes over to offer them money not to move to the White neighborhood.

Hansberry’s writing, whether in her plays, speeches, or essays, often focused on the ways in which race, gender, and class oppression occur simultaneously. Part of the reasoning behind Walter investing in the liquor store idea and planning to give a bribe to get a license to sell alcohol is that he does not see any other opportunities around him.

Another example of the way race and class oppression have lasting impact is that the dream job that Walter's son aspires to is that of a bus driver. Lipari refers to these competing discriminatory practices as intersectionality. She explains that the scholar Patricia Hill Collins described intersectionality as highlighting how African American women and other social groups are positioned within unjust power relations (86).

According to Lipari, some White critics suggested that the tensions between Mama Lena and Walter were an example of an intergenerational struggle. Beneatha would be another example of how an older generation's values and ideas might conflict with a younger generation. She argues that some African American critics said the conflicts were "the expression of integrationist and assimilationist aspirations" (86), but Lipari views the conflicts between the characters as more complex. She writes that they are "particular to black Americans, such as the intersection of capitalism, slavery, reconstruction, northern racism, and sexism" (Lipari 86).

Lorraine Hansberry's screenplay takes full advantage of cinema as a "rhetorical resource; the screenplay not only extended the counter-racist rhetoric of the play, but also used the camera to elaborate an intersectional critique" (Lipari 87). In the screenplay Hansberry included notes for the camera to capture a series of montage scenes depicting the "Calumet Highway at night, the steel mills of Chicago, the stockyards, the Chicago Loop at midday, the Southside, and the Negro Soldier's monument" all the while a despondent Walter Lee wanders around Chicago (Lipari 87). However, studio executives were against including any material they viewed as additional anti-racist rhetoric. A

Columbia Pictures executive wrote a memo about the script changes Hansberry wanted to make in transition from the stage to the movie screen. Kramer's memo reads:

It was agreed that the addition of race issue material in the screenplay should be avoided. The play conveyed its 'message' simply, but eloquently and movingly. The screenplay should let well enough alone in this regard. The introduction of further race issue elements may lessen the sympathy of the audience, give an effect of propagandistic writing, and so weaken the story. (Lipari 93)

By the time the film was released in 1961, many of the scenes Hansberry had written, almost one third of the screenplay, had been cut. The version released in theaters was very close to the stage version.

During many interviews, Hansberry was asked about universalism and specificity in terms of race. Those concepts are also discussed in Eric King Watts' article, "African American Ethos and Hermeneutical Rhetoric: An Exploration of Alain Locke's The New Negro." Watts analyzes Locke's theoretical standpoint when he writes that the value of diverse cultural practices is directly "related to how important they are to the preservation and perpetuation of elements of a particular social system. From this perspective, no group's values and beliefs can be asserted over another group's based solely on abstract principles. The distinctiveness of "concrete human experience" warrants cultural pluralism" (Watts 26). This theory is relevant to a discussion of Lorraine Hansberry because she often made a point of including characters from Africa and their descriptions of the culture. The character Asagai and his conversations with Beneatha about Africa are examples of Hansberry's showing the importance of diverse cultures.

Watts writes, “Locke's hermeneutical rhetoric infuses the future with the past. What Africa offers here is not romance nor "cultural inspiration or technical innovations, but the lesson of a classic background, the lesson of discipline, of style, of technical control pushed to the limits of technical mastery” (28). An example of coming from a classic background is shown in Act III of *A Raisin in the Sun* when a disheartened Beneatha complains to Asagai that there is no real progress being made, that African Americans are simply travelling around in a circle trying to reach an image that they think is the future. Asagai disagrees and explains that people have been moving in a line so long that she cannot see the end.

In the article, "Practices of Freedom: Lorraine Hansberry, Freedom Writer" Soyica Colbert describes the way Hansberry's early life and writing career shaped her later work. The author writes, “Although Hansberry participated in public activism she also pursued freedom through the private act of writing” (Colbert 157), which can be described as a type of freedom practice. Hansberry's writing practices outside of her work as a playwright included participating in conferences and protests, giving speeches, and writing for periodicals. She wrote articles for the Marxist monthlies *Masses and Mainstream* and *New Challenge*, the African American leftist newspaper *Freedom*, and the lesbian magazine *The Ladder* among others (Colbert 157). Hansberry's articles and speeches confronted physical, rhetorical, and representational violence in the United States and internationally.

Soyica Colbert writes that the “repetitions within Hansberry's short form writing of the 1950s shows how the daily impact of racial power often emerges in violence

against women or with women attending to the effects of racialized violence. Therefore, by examining women's activism, Hansberry's work reveals the intervening force of freedom practices" (Colbert 158). Her articles and speeches prepared her for the national prominence that followed *A Raisin in the Sun* and the stakes of being an artist/activist on a national stage. Shortly after arriving in New York City, Hansberry joined the staff of *Freedom*, a newspaper founded by Paul Robeson. The periodical intended to tell an international story of "Black freedom struggles, artistic creation, and innovation" (Colbert 159).

During the first years that she was in New York, Hansberry wrote stories about civil rights protests, minorities attempting to organize labor unions, lynching, and the post-colonial freedom revolution in Africa. Colbert writes that Hansberry was able to revel "in the beauty of Black people" through the varied cultural and political news she wrote about (159). In 1957, Hansberry began to write *A Raisin in the Sun*. She continued to submit fiction and write letters to engage in public debates. Hansberry wrote two letters to *The Ladder* during this period (Colbert 168). Hansberry explains that as an African American, she is familiar with the language and rationale for respectability politics and nevertheless knows that "What ought to be clear is that one is oppressed or discriminated against because one is different, not 'wrong' or 'bad' somehow (Colbert 168).

Colbert explains that there is not much understanding to be gained by merely labeling a person, such as Lorraine Hansberry, because labels define the subject's point of view and sets the expectations from there. Colbert argues, "One does not learn much

by assigning an identity category to a person, although investigating the circles of Hansberry's affiliates does offer some evidence of her possible influences, mentors and collaborators" (169). Lorraine Hansberry's "unwillingness to yield to the conventions, restrictions, prohibitions, or expectations for a Black woman in the 1950s enabled her to cultivate freedom practices in solidarity with calls for black liberation" (Colbert 171) such as demonstrated in *A Raisin in the Sun* and her other public statements.

In one of her last public appearances, Hansberry spoke of segregation's debilitating effects in personal and broad sociopolitical terms:

I was given, during the grade school years, one-half the amount of education prescribed by the Board of Education of my city.... I am a product of Chicago's segregated school system and one result is that- to this day- I can not count properly...[or] make even simple change in a grocery store....This is what is meant when we speak of the scars, the marks that the ghettoized child carries through life. To be imprisoned in the ghetto is to be forgotten- or deliberately cheated of one's birthright-at best. (Ghani "I Have a Dream" 611)

Hansberry uses several rhetorical strategies in this short example from the speech to make her point. According to Aristotle, epideictic rhetoric is ceremonial and either praises or blames something. In the first line she explains that she was only given half of the education she was supposed to receive. She names the segregated school system in Chicago for being to blame for her lack of mathematical training. She also gives a specific example that may appeal to the emotions of the audience when she says that she cannot make change at the grocery store.

Kristin L. Matthews writes about the social and political aspects of Hansberry's life in the article, "The Politics of Home in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*," and explains how Lorraine Hansberry's early life influenced her later writing. Hansberry was very familiar with African history, culture, and politics having grown up in a family with a world-renowned scholar of African history at Howard University. Her childhood home in Chicago was a meeting place for "notable figures like W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes, and her work on Paul Robeson's radical paper *Freedom* was an opportunity to write about contemporary African liberation struggles" (Matthews 563). Hansberry learned about the need to work together and wrote a letter to the *New York Times Magazine* and argued that African Americans would have to present a united front in order to stand against the attacks against their freedom.

Lorraine Hansberry argued that calls for "separation" were not a program to benefit minorities but were "an accommodation to American racism" (Matthews 564). The idea that to go back to Africa for freedom or to be treated with respect would seem to negate the fact that people of African descent have been contributing to the United States for more than 200 years and are also truly "American." Matthews writes:

Hansberry's work implies that separation, whether it be returning to Africa or establishing a Black Muslim nation within America, replicates the closemindedness sustaining segregation, for it refuses to recognize that blacks are "old stock' Americans" and part of an American nation. Hansberry argues that black separatism fails to see how all Americans are part of the same national fabric and would tear apart that fabric only to see all unravel. (564)

Hansberry's statements continue a long-standing argument in African American rhetoric. The argument that African Americans cannot abandon America for Africa in an attempt to find true identity has been made for more than a century. Pioneers of African American rhetoric, such as Maria Stewart, addressed the issue.

The rhetorical contributions of Maria Stewart are a precursor to the African American rhetoric of the period in which Lorraine Hansberry developed her author's voice. Maria Stewart was born in 1803 one hundred and fifty years before the play was written, but her rhetorical style still had an influence on the rhetoric of African American speakers and writers who followed her. She began her brief public speaking career in 1832 and spoke to an African American women's group and published her speech in *The Liberator* (Bizzell and Herzberg 1033). In addition to being subjected to the discrimination facing people of color, she was also disapproved of because women were not expected to be public speakers. She spoke out against racism and was careful not to "chastise" African American men "for lacking in educational and professional ambition... Stewart's criticism was more religious, more feminist, and less violent. Apparently, however, hearing such trenchant words from the mouth of a woman was too much for her audience" (Bizzell and Herzberg 1033). She retired after only a brief public speaking career.

Maria Stewart has not received as much attention as other female speakers of the period, but her contributions to rhetorical theory set the stage for those who would follow. Stewart's biographer writes that her contribution was in her ability to synthesize "religious, abolitionist, and feminist concerns" (Bizzell and Herzberg 1034). She is

described as a “forerunner” to speakers like Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. Stewart’s “rhetorical style is a form of “black jeremiad” drawing heavily on announced religious inspiration and on Biblical echoes and references, especially to Jeremiah and the Book of Revelations” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1035). It should be noted that in the black Jeremiad, “African Americans became the preeminent chosen people whose future was scrutinized and whose moral reform was invoked to ensure divine salvation from slavery and racist oppression” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1069) instead of the Anglo-American which was the focus of the Puritan Jeremiad (1069).

Stewart’s rhetorical style used the jeremiad to make a call for social protest and improvement in the lives of African Americans. She makes references to African “greatness, which clearly try to connect African Americans to a proud collective legacy” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1035).

A few examples from her “Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall” illustrate this point and perhaps illustrate the frustration that Lorraine Hansberry described when discussing similar topics more than a century later. Early in Stewart’s speech, which was given in 1832, she said:

O, horrible idea, indeed! to possess noble souls aspiring after high and honorable acquirements yet confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty to lives of continual drudgery and toil. Neither do I know of any who have enriched themselves by spending their lives as house-domestics, washing windows, shaking carpets, brushing boots, or tending upon gentlemen’s tables. I can but die for expressing my sentiments: and I am willing to die by the sword as the

pestilence; for I am a true born American; your blood flows in my veins, and your spirit fires my breast. (Bizzell and Herzberg 1037)

Stewart highlights how negative the situation is by using the word “horrible” to describe what the lives of African Americans were like. She describes African Americans as having “noble souls,” which implies high social rank, and she also compounds the idea by using the word “aspiring” which would imply a desire to move upwards. She said that African Americans were reaching for “high and honorable acquirements,” which are terms which contrast clearly with the words she uses to describe the current situation, “confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty.” “Confined by the chains” alludes to slavery.

Stewart uses strong terms to create a bleak picture when she describes, “continual” or never-ending, “drudgery and toil.” This is in stark contrast to the honorable acquirements she mentioned earlier. Although Stewart’s rhetorical style was not violent, she uses the strongest terms possible to describe that which she is willing to sacrifice to speak out when she says that she can but “die” for it. The phrase “die by the sword as the pestilence” is an example of the Black Jeremiad. There had been some ideas about African Americans being sent back to Africa, and Stewart was against this idea. She states that she is a “true born American.” She is focusing on the idea that African American people had a right to stay in America because it was their country also. The phrase “your blood flows in my veins” may be intended literally to point to the idea of slave children fathered by white slave owners. “Your spirit fires my breast” seems to go along with the idea that we are all the same on the inside. The concepts that Stewart

mentions are not all that different from those described by Hansberry more than 150 years later.

In the essay, “The Discourse of African American Women: A Case for Extended Paradigms,” the scholar Dorothy L. Pennington discusses the foundations of African American women’s rhetoric. She points out that the “discourse of African American women is historically grounded in religion and spirituality” (Pennington 293). She focuses on the need for a multi-faceted rhetorical research paradigm to examine the works of African American women.

Pennington argues that for African American women’s discourse to be more completely analyzed, a paradigm, or research standard that includes more than one focus is required. She suggests that the work of scholars such as Logan who combined Eurocentric and Afrocentric theories in their “analysis of the persuasive discourse of nineteenth- century African American women (e.g., combining theorists such Perlman and Olbrets-Tyreca with Afrocentric concepts, such as nommo and African communalism) and Collins (1991), who combined feminist and Afrocentric paradigms” are aware of complex identities reflected in African American women’s discourse (Pennington 297). Pennington argues that African American women’s rhetoric may not be analyzed in terms of “simple theoretical constructs and frames” (Pennington 297).

Stewart points out the differences between the lives of Blacks and Whites, but also shows their similar desires when she says: “the Whites have so long and so loudly proclaimed the theme of equal rights and privileges, that our souls have caught the flame also, ragged as we are” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1038). The idea of people moving back to

Africa in order to find a true home was not part of the idea that Maria Stewart was arguing for, and neither was it present in the rhetoric of Lorraine Hansberry's play. Although Beneatha considers the idea, ultimately, she chooses a life in the United States. The necessity of equal rights and privileges were what prompted Carl Hansberry to buy a home in a neighborhood reserved only for White families and what influenced his daughter to write a ground-breaking play two decades later.

Margaret Wilkerson writes about the changing critical view of Lorraine Hansberry's work in her article, "The Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart of Lorraine Hansberry." She argues that the literature of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s seem to be examples from "hidden reserves of anger deep within the Black community" (Wilkerson 698). While writers such as Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins are associated with the movement, Wilkerson argues that Lorraine Hansberry heralded it and that few recognize the "strains of militance" in her work.

Wilkerson provides insightful biographical background on the events and accomplishments in Lorraine Hansberry's short life. Hansberry wrote more than sixty magazine and newspaper articles, poems, speeches, and plays. Her autobiographical play, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* toured the country after her death. "An activist artist, she spoke at Civil Rights rallies and writers' conferences, and she confronted then-U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy in a controversial meeting with Black leaders about the role of the FBI in the deep South" (Wilkerson 698).

Margaret Wilkerson describes Hansberry as being important not only because of her work as an activist and playwright, but "because of her incisive, articulate, and

sensitive exposure of the dynamic, troubled American culture. That she, a Black artist, could tell painful truths to a society unaccustomed to rigorous self-criticism and still receive praise is testimony to her artistry” (698). Lorraine Hansberry’s public statements continue the theme of protesting racial inequality that is present in her creative work.

Artists from minority groups are often met with a variety of expectations implied by society. Hansberry was caught in a paradox of expectations because she was African American. She was expected to write about that which she was most familiar with, the Black experience, and yet that expression was doomed to be called parochial and narrow. Hansberry, however, challenged these facile categories and forced a redefinition of the term “universality,” one which would include the dissonant voice of an oppressed American minority” (Wilkerson 699). She was asked on multiple occasions about racial differences, but she more often focused on discussing the similarities that define us as people.

Hansberry’s interest in becoming a playwright was sparked during her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin when she watched a rehearsal of the play *Juno and the Paycock*. She identified with the suffering of the Irish characters and recognized:

‘a universal cry of human misery’ that she would convey in terms of African Americans for the rest of the world to see and hear. The dramatist said, ‘I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they’re supposed to be, to that extent they can become everybody’. Such a choice by a Black writer posed an unusual challenge to the literary establishment and a divided society ill-prepared to comprehend its meaning. (Wilkerson 699)

Hansberry encouraged other African American writers to challenge society's expectations with their work and to remain invested in the task of illuminating for readers the challenges facing minorities in America.

Hansberry said, "all art is social: that which agitates and that which prepares the mind for slumber" (Wilkerson 699). Her creative work is part of the art that agitates in that it is a call to action in society. In a speech in 1959 to a writers' group Hansberry spoke about some of the things she had seen in her life:

I see daily on the streets of New York, street gangs and prostitutes and beggars. I have like all of you, on a thousand occasions seen indescribable displays of man's very real inhumanity to man, and I have come to maturity, as we all must, knowing that greed and malice and indifference to human misery and bigotry and corruption, brutality, and perhaps above all else, ignorance—the prime ancient and persistent enemy of man—abound in this world. I say all of this to say that one cannot live with sighted eyes and feeling heart and not know and react to the miseries which afflict this world. (qtd. in Wilkerson 700)

This belief system is clearly illustrated in Lorraine Hansberry's public statements and creative works. With the sighted eyes that she mentioned, she portrayed the abject poverty and discontentment that the Younger family experienced, but with her feeling heart she provided a response that is questioning and hopeful rather than angry and bitter. The audience does not know what the family will have to go through after their move; it could be violent or unwelcoming as Linder suggests, but the fact that they do not take the money and are moving in anyway is the beginning of their lives changing. The speech

discussed above was also published as an essay in *The Black Scholar* literary journal. The title that Hansberry gave the essay was, "The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism." This essay is one of the most important and direct statements from Hansberry about her rhetorical views on writing and race. Two weeks before *A Raisin in the Sun* premiered on Broadway, Hansberry had a strong message for the writers who would come after her and the challenges they faced.

She wrote that African American writers should participate in the intellectual affairs of "all men, everywhere" and not try to create in an intellectual space removed from the "pressing world issues of our time" (Hansberry "The Negro Writer" 3). This idea is evident in her essays and speeches because she uses the works to protest the social injustice facing African Americans.

She makes reference to Arthur Miller in her essay and his discussion of the adolescent plays, or "plays in which the adolescent spirit endlessly beats itself against the imprisonment of its tortured soul. In and of itself, as Miller carefully notes, this a valid area for the exploration of human experience" (Hansberry "The Negro Writer" 5). Hansberry said that she agreed with Miller that "there is a simple and beautiful fusion of the two sides of the artistic inspection of any question when it is genuinely inspected" ("Negro Writer" 5).

Hansberry did not aim to protest the unjust treatment that the Younger family faced at the expense of portraying the human drama of the family. Hansberry wrote, "In other words, let there be no rush in the name of a "socially conscious" attack in literature to throw out the anguish of man; but let there be magnificent efforts to examine the

sources of that anguish” (“The Negro Writer” 5). Hansberry used the opportunity of publishing this essay to make her point that the questions surrounding the causes of racial oppression had to be addressed.

One of the most intriguing arguments that Hansberry made in the essay was that there was not a great deal of time left to take action. One of the many features of the rhetoric of protest is that speeches, songs, or works of drama are accompanied by a sense of urgency and a call to action. Hansberry wrote that there was an:

illusion in America that there exists an inexhaustible period of time during which we as a nation may leisurely resurrect the promise of our Constitution and begin to institute the equality of man within the frontiers of this land. The truth is of course that a deluded and misguided world-wide minority is rapidly losing ground in the area of debating time alone. The unmistakable roots of the universal solidarity of the colored peoples of the world are no longer "predictable" as they were in my father's time - they are here. (“The Negro Writer” 6)

Hansberry makes the argument that the time was at hand for minority people across the world to stand in solidarity and work together to bring about changes in society. Her reference to the promise of the Constitution may be an allusion to her father’s legal fight to stay in the home he purchased for them in a previously all-White neighborhood in Chicago. The legal appeals process went all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States and one his lawyer’s arguments was the constitutionality of racially restrictive covenants.

Hansberry describes the African American writer as being in a position where he or she is neither completely involved or outside the issues facing society. She writes that the African American writer is “the prime observer waiting poised for inclusion” (Hansberry “The Negro Writer” 7). But she makes it clear in her next statements that the time for merely watching the events of the world happen or enduring life while waiting for social justice was over. She writes that the African American writer had shouted for two hundred and fifty years “because he found it difficult to be heard. Then, on occasion, he allowed his voice to drop to a whisper, stillness even. Now it is time to shout again” (Hansberry “The Negro Writer” 7). This is Hansberry’s clear call to action.

Hansberry writes:

Thus comes the Negro writer. And, thus, does his mid-twentieth century task bear within it an explosive artistic potential that must not escape us for lack of awareness. We must turn our eyes out ward-but, to do so, we must also turn them inward toward our people and their complex and still transitory culture. There is much to celebrate, there always has been. We have given the world many of its heroes and the marching feet have not stopped yet. Turn inward to where a culture has never, as Alain Locke pointed out thirty years ago, been adequately understood. (“The Negro Writer” 7)

Hansberry discussed the need for introspection to see the value in African ancestry that had been overlooked. She encouraged African American writers to show the world the many positive contributions that African Americans have made.

Hansberry calls on other writers to protest with their work in a similar way to that which she had been doing. She writes, “The Negro writer has a role to play in shaming, if you will, the conscience of the people and the present national government, executive and legislative, into action on behalf of the free and unharassed voting rights of all people of the South” (Hansberry “The Negro Writer” 10). Hansberry was adept in the use of rhetoric, and this section from her speech is an example of epideictic rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric is that which involves praising or, as she stated, placing blame in the situation. Hansberry clearly felt that part of the blame should be placed on the government for not doing more to ensure that African Americans were getting to exercise their right to vote, especially in the South where the problem was so prevalent.

Hansberry wrote specifically about the issues of race and inequality that were present in America in the early 1960s. She wrote:

Let no Negro artist who thinks himself deserving of the title take pen to paper - or, for that matter, body to dance or voice to speech or song - if in doing so the content of that which he presents or performs suggests to the nations of the world that our people do not yet languish under privation and hatred and brutality and political oppression in every state of the forty-eight. The truth demands its own equals. Therefore, let an America that respects its name and aspirations in the world anticipate the novels and plays and poetry of Negro writers that must now go forth to an eager world. For we are going to tell the truth from all its sides, including what is the still bitter epic of the Black man in this most hostile nation.

As it is, so shall it be recorded in fiction and essay and drama. (Hansberry “The Negro Writer” 10)

Hansberry uses a deliberate rhetorical approach to make her point about the importance of the issues facing African Americans. Hansberry said that she wanted to transmit ideas emotionally, and this call to action is an example of that. Pathos is the appeal to emotion, and in this passage Hansberry builds such an appeal when she says that no African American artist who deserves that title should create any artistic work that does not let the world know that African Americans are still oppressed. She uses strong vivid description to create a disturbing picture when she chooses the words “hatred and brutality.” Hatred is intense dislike or ill will which may have been the kind of experience she had when her family first moved into the house in the Woodlawn area and a “neighbor” threw a brick through the window and almost struck her head. Brutality implies a type of savage physical violence. She says that it is happening in “every state of the forty-eight” so the reader will understand that the situation was everywhere, and no one could turn a blind eye as though it was not happening near them. She calls for an “America that respects its name” to stop the ill treatment of African Americans or the consequences will be that African American writers will “tell the truth from all its sides” in their literature.

Other scholars discuss Hansberry’s protest against social injustice. In the article “Staging Gendered Radicalism at the Height of the US Cold War: *A Raisin in the Sun* and Lorraine Hansberry’s Vision of Freedom,” Erin Chapman writes that Hansberry, “Having worked as a staff writer and eventually an associate editor of the black Leftist periodical

Freedom before McCarthyism forced its closure in 1955, Lorraine Hansberry closely followed these and many more international and domestic developments. At the end of the decade, she incorporated her view of Black freedom into her play *A Raisin in the Sun*, which premiered on Broadway in March 1959, was nominated for four Tony Awards and was named the year's best play by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. Although the play was most often celebrated as a dramatic rendering of African American integration in simplistic, feel-good terms, Hansberry understood *A Raisin in the Sun* as a critique of the liberal, patriarchal vision of the contemporary civil rights movement.

In a speech to the American Society of African Culture in 1959 she said:

And, as of today, if I am asked abroad if I am a free citizen in the United States of America, I must say only what is true: No. If I am asked if my people enjoy equal opportunity in the most basic aspects of American life, housing, employment, franchise – I must and will say: No. And, shame of shames, under a government that wept for Hungary and sent troops to Korea, when I am asked if that most primitive, savage and intolerable custom of all – lynching – still persists in the United States of America, I will say what every mother's child of us knows: that they are still murdering Negroes in this country. (qtd in Chapman 446)

During this speech Hansberry also challenged her fellow writers to create “socially conscious art that would point the way toward Black liberation, and to align themselves with the people of color all over the world who were rising in organized protest and revolt against US and European imperialism and White supremacy” (Chapman 446). The scenes when Asagai is speaking about his potential future in Africa

are allusions to the fight for freedom in Africa and the corrupt politics that created problems in the region. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, “and through the political and social prominence its success afforded her, Hansberry advocated a radical politics of Black freedom and self-determination informed by her communism, feminism and black nationalism” (Chapman 446).

Other personal writings highlight Hansberry’s intent for the play. For example, in the article ““Measure Them Right””: Lorraine Hansberry and the Struggle for Peace,” Robbie Lieberman discusses a letter that Hansberry wrote to her mother in 1959 days before *A Raisin in the Sun* opened. Hansberry wrote, “Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I just think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are — and just as mixed up — but above all that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks — people who are the very essence of human dignity” (qtd in Lieberman 206). The letter shows that Hansberry wanted to show the world how African Americans have the same complicated stories as other groups of people and that the most important idea she wanted to show was the element of self-respect that was present in an oppressed race of people.

Lorraine Hansberry’s political beliefs have been analyzed by scholars as well. She was affiliated with the communist party in her youth, and the FBI maintained a file on her activities until the time of her death. Lieberman explains that Hansberry’s political beliefs influenced her writing as well. Lieberman states that Hansberry’s “belief in humanity and in the need to change social structures that prevented each individual from reaching his or

her full potential meant that for her peace depended on justice, and together these served as the overarching issues undergirding her creative work” (208).

Lieberman describes Hansberry’s writing as pulsing with her “outrage at social injustice and her desire for change” (208). In a letter to her friend Edythe Cohen in 1951, she commented on the impact of McCarthyism and wrote, “Quite simply and quietly as I know how to say it: I am sick of poverty, lynching, stupid wars and the universal maltreatment of my people and obsessed with a rather desperate desire for a new world for me and my brothers” (Lieberman 209).

Hansberry used her writing to illuminate the problems caused by structural violence many times, even as she reminded people of the looming threat of nuclear holocaust. Lieberman points out that as a young reporter for Robeson’s newspaper, *Freedom*, Lorraine Hansberry wrote: “No skill, no job, bad schools, inadequate recreational facilities, no future (unless atomic war can be called a ‘future’) — these are among the causes of the disturbing youth crime and delinquency rates which the sensational documentation of the commercial press omits” (215). It is interesting to note that Lorraine Hansberry wrote this in the 1950s, but the same description could apply to contemporary society if a scan of news headlines is an indicator.

Hansberry described her own dreams also. “I would like very much to live in a world where some of the more monumental problems could at least be solved. I’m thinking of course, of peace. That’s part of my dream that we don’t fight. Nobody fights. We get rid of all the little bombs and the big bombs. . .” (Lieberman 223).

Lorraine Hansberry was involved in a meeting with Robert Kennedy and several other African American activists in 1963. Lieberman argues that the point when the meeting fell apart had to do with young civil rights activist, Jerome Smith, saying he would not fight against Cuba if asked to do so:

Reminiscent of Robeson's (misquoted) 1949 statement that Black people would not fight against the Soviet Union, Smith's comment left Kennedy aghast. Hansberry's response was to tell Kennedy that Jerome Smith was the most important person in the room, the one to whom he should be attending most closely. The *National Guardian's* report of the meeting stressed that the participants were united in feeling that Kennedy just did not understand. James Baldwin said, "it was a great shock to me that the Attorney General did not know that I would have trouble convincing my nephew to go to Cuba to liberate the Cubans in defense of a government which says it is doing everything it can and can't liberate me. (Lieberman 225)

In contrast, Erin Chapman writes that contemporaries described Hansberry as consistently polite, "sweet, pretty, even 'pixyish' and 'like a coed' who 'look[ed] even younger than her 28 years' at the time of her play's first production. Publicly, much like her radical contemporaries Rosa Parks and Ella Baker, Hansberry neither spoke nor wrote in the tones of a militant firebrand of any political persuasion" (Chapman 450). Lorraine Hansberry's gentle demeanor did not make her message of protest any less powerful.

Lorraine Hansberry chose her public words carefully. In her speech to the American Society of African Culture she encouraged all African American writers to

seek to bring about change in society with their work. Chapman writes that Hansberry called upon her audience to “‘dispel the romance of the Black bourgeoisie.’ Rather than shy away from the language, deportment, and expression of the Black working classes as if ‘any reminder of the slave past or the sharecropper and ghetto present is an affront to every Negro who wears a shirt and tie’” (452). Hansberry wanted the coming generation of African American writers to work towards reclaiming African American history and culture.

Lorraine Hansberry’s public statements about the lives of minorities during the Civil Rights era are filled with examples of the rhetoric of protest. She published essays and spoke at rallies to protest racial inequality. Her most well-known work, *A Raisin in the Sun*, catapulted her to fame and as a result, she was frequently sought out for interviews. She used those opportunities to continue her call for social justice and to protest the racial and economic oppression that dominated many African American’s lives at that time.

CHAPTER V

A SUMMATION OF THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN THE HANSBERRY V. LEE SUPREME COURT CASE AND LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* AND OTHER PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Protest rhetoric comes in various forms from speeches and marches to literature and legal cases. Protest literature creates a “revolutionary language and a renewed vision of the possible. It gives distinctive shape to long-accumulating grievances, claims old rights, and demands new ones,” according to scholar Zoe Trodd (xix). Two works that illustrate this definition are the United States Supreme Court case brought by Carl Hansberry and the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, by his daughter, Lorraine Hansberry. Following the success of her breakthrough drama, Lorraine Hansberry provided additional messages about protest in her essays, interviews, and speeches.

The literature of protest exposes openings for debate and questions the accepted societal norms in favor of a new discussion. Researchers can see examples of the deepening of perceptions in the relationships depicted in the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*, a drama in which an African American family is shown struggling to attain the aspects of the American dream that any other family might hope for- a nice house in a safe and pleasant neighborhood.

As we have also seen, another clear example of protest is the legal case that Carl Hansberry brought fighting against the previously accepted practice of restrictive covenants which barred minorities from moving into neighborhoods designated only for

White people. The Courts in the United States had rejected the idea of racial zoning and struck down cases attempting to enact the process, but restrictive covenants were considered valid across the country. The first time that an African American family won the right to stay in their home in the restricted neighborhood was in the case of Carl Hansberry. Carl Hansberry was the father of the playwright, Lorraine Hansberry. Lorraine Hansberry went on to write the classic play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, before her untimely death at age 34. She did give speeches and interviews on protest after her play. Her work and the work of her father are examples of protest.

Charles Morris and Stephen H. Browne ask the question of why one would study the rhetoric of social protest and answer that it is of vital importance because “in the unfolding dramas of history can be found a remarkable range of voices striving to make the world over again” (1). Morris and Browne describe the intersection between the study of rhetoric and social protest. They write that students of rhetorical movements and social protest “understand that words are deeds, that language has force and effect in the world. To study the rhetoric of social protest is to study how symbols—words, signs, images, music, even bodies—shape our perceptions of reality and invite us to act accordingly” (1). The lawsuit was a form of protest by its very nature of a minority man suing the established majority and asking the legal system to enforce the fact that he had the right to buy a home for his family where he wished. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a part of the literature of protest because of its subject matter and the rhetorical strategies Lorraine Hansberry used to protest racism and housing segregation. Her subsequent commentaries after the play also continue her message of protest.

Protest literature “taps into an ideological view of dissent and announces to people that they are not alone in their frustrations” (Stauffer xii). Examining the work of Lorraine Hansberry, alongside the court case of her father Carl, provides a clear example of this type of research. Protests against the status quo are rhetorical by nature because “they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal” (Morris and Browne 1). This study has analyzed the rhetorical strategies at work in the literature of the Hansberrys including the arguments and appeals used to attempt to “make over” the world by legal action, drama, and public comments. As Morris and Browne point out, “persuasion, contingency, public life, argument, and appeal are concepts definitive of rhetoric itself” (1).

The legal case and the play and reaction to it examined in this study highlight the rhetoric of protest. The scholar John Stauffer writes in the foreword to *American Protest Literature*, that he defines protest literature as “the uses of language to transform the self and change society” (xii). He expands his definition when he adds that protest literature “functions as a catalyst, guide, or mirror for social change. It not only critiques some aspect of society, but also suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, a solution to society’s ills” (xii).

A Raisin in the Sun clearly meets this definition in the way the Younger family’s struggles are a mirror for social change that leads out of slum housing and dead-end jobs for African Americans. *Hansberry v. Lee* functions in a similar way because by filing the lawsuit and continuing to appeal all the way to the Supreme Court, Carl Hansberry was

attempting to change society. Both family members contributed to the rhetoric of protest in impactful ways in American society. The play is a classic of modern drama, and the court case is taught in law schools in civil procedure to teach that *res judicata* does not apply to a plaintiff who had no opportunity to be represented in earlier civil action.

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In testimony to the Supreme Court of the United States, Carl Hansberry explained why he wanted to move into the neighborhood. He described one of the reasons he was urging society to change with his court case:

I was interested in getting in the area where I now live so that my children could go to Sexton School. I moved from 4418 South Parkway because the school was crowded, and the children could not go to school all day and all the schools in that immediate vicinity permitted kids to go to school only a half day and I wanted my children to go to school all day. That is why I moved there. (Dickerson et al. 174)

Carl Hansberry’s desire to move into a neighborhood where his children would have equal access to education would have seemed feasible given his constitutional rights set

out by the Fourteenth Amendment. However, until the time of his case, restrictive covenants were routinely upheld.

In an interesting correlation, Lorraine Hansberry spoke about the same topic her father testified about. In one of her last public appearances, Hansberry spoke of segregation's debilitating effects in personal and broad sociopolitical terms:

I was given, during the grade school years, one-half the amount of education prescribed by the Board of Education of my city.... I am a product of Chicago's segregated school system and one result is that- to this day- I cannot count properly...[or] make even simple change in a grocery store.... This is what is meant when we speak of the scars, the marks that the ghettoized child carries through life. (Ghani "I Have a Dream" 611)

These quotes highlight the kind of social change that Carl Hansberry was fighting for. According to his daughter, she suffered from not going to school in non-segregated schools to the point it still affected her basic math skills as an adult.

Carl Hansberry won the lawsuit in 1940. After years of court cases, the matter was argued in front of the Supreme Court in October 1940. The primary holding of the case was that "If a party is not adequately represented in a class action, the judgment in the case is not binding on that party" (Supreme Court 311 U.S. 32).

The victory did represent a step towards change for the family because after years of fighting, the family could stay in the neighborhood. However, Hansberry's daughter Lorraine would later explain that the victory had come at the cost paid by her father of a "small personal fortune, his considerable talents, and many years of his life" (Lasman).

The Hansberry family's time to enjoy the victory was brief. Sam Lasman writes that Carl Hansberry died six years later, "in Mexico while searching for a place to relocate his family, convinced that US racism was so pervasive it could only be evaded, not defeated" (Lasman). Lorraine Hansberry described the cost of the court cases in terms of the emotional turmoil the family went through. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* dated April 23, 1964 she wrote that he had fought for years alongside NAACP lawyers against the restrictive covenants, but that he had died disillusioned in a foreign country while searching for a new place for the family to live because he was convinced that systemic racism could not be conquered, only avoided. Her words summarize a tragic situation that influenced her later writing.

Lorraine Hansberry was the first African American female author to have a play performed on Broadway. That play was *A Raisin in the Sun*, which ran for more than 500 performances from its first performance in March 1959. It also won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award (Short and Lederer). The play was inspired by her reading Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem," from which she took the title. The play depicts the struggles, both internal and external, facing an African American family in Chicago seeking to move into a predominantly White neighborhood and to improve their living situation. Her subsequent public statements after the play such as interviews and speeches continue her message of protest. She took advantage of the fame awarded her by writing the stunningly successful play and used her public speaking opportunities to illuminate the challenges facing minorities in America and to encourage other writers to follow her lead.

Research on this topic is useful for those interested in how classical rhetoric can influence modern audiences as a form of protest. Examining the rhetorical strategies that Lorraine Hansberry used in the play and her subsequent writings alongside the rhetoric of Carl Hansberry's lawsuit in this study, demonstrates how the case was a prequel to the play and how both Hansberrys used rhetoric to achieve their goals and bring changes in society. We are currently living in an age of protests and the study of high literary works can provide a reasonable roadmap forward to sincere communication.

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