



A Raisin in the Sun

By Lorraine Hansberry

Resource Pack

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1. *HARLEM* by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

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

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load?

Or does it explode?



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2. A SYNOPSIS

Act 1, Scene 1

Friday Morning. The action takes place in the cockroach infested flat of a Black family, the Youngers, living in a predominantly Black area in Chicago's Southside, between 1945 and 1959. The family consists of:

- Lena, or Mama, matriarch in her early sixties and recently widowed
- Walter Lee, Lena's son, mid-thirties and a chauffeur
- Ruth, Walter Lee's wife, in her thirties
- Travis, Ruth and Walter Lee's son, eleven
- Beneatha, Walter Lee's younger sister, twenty, a student planning to become a doctor

A Friday morning in September. The Youngers slowly get up, led by Ruth, and compete with their neighbours and each other for access to the communal bathroom. They are anticipating the arrival of a large cheque for Lena tomorrow. Travis needs 50 cents for school and Walter gives it to him, despite his wife's complaints that they cannot afford it. After Travis leaves, Walter tries to persuade Ruth to encourage his mother to invest the cheque in his plans to open a liquor store (off-license) with his friends Willy Harris and Bobo. Beneatha wakes up and Walter accuses her of selfishness for intending to become a doctor, as Lena will certainly spend part of the cheque, an insurance payment on the life of their father, to support her daughter's education. Infuriated Walter storms out.

Lena rises and Ruth tries to persuade her to invest in the liquor store, but Lena sees alcohol as being irreligious, so Ruth encourages Lena to spend the money on herself instead. Lena declares her intention to use the money as a down payment on a new house for the family, saying it was what her husband would have wanted and reminiscing about how distraught he was at the death of their third baby. Beneatha returns from the bathroom and Ruth and Lena tease her about her relationship with George Murchison, a rich student towards whom Beneatha is largely indifferent. During the conversation Beneatha expresses atheistic feelings and Lena slaps her. Beneatha leaves. Lena chats to Ruth until she realises that Ruth has fainted.

Act 1, Scene 2

The following morning. The family is cleaning the flat and poisoning cockroaches, except for Walter who is arranging business deals, confident that he will receive his mother's money. Joseph Asagai, an African student telephones Beneatha and insists on visiting the flat. Beneatha implores her mother not to patronise Joseph. Ruth returns and announces that she is pregnant, which delights Lena while the thought of further crowding in the flat terrifies Beneatha. Ruth grows faint once more just as Asagai arrives. He has previously expressed his attraction to Beneatha but she is unsure of her feelings for him. He presents her with the traditional garments of his tribe, the Yoruba. They banter about Beneatha's relaxed hair, which Asagai feels makes her an *assimilationist*, a Black



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person attempting to be absorbed into White culture. As Asagai is leaving he meets Lena who confuses, rather than patronises, him and makes him explain Beneatha's nickname, Alaiyo, which means 'One For Whom Food is Not Enough.' Beneatha leaves shortly after his departure.

The cheque arrives. Once the excitement has passed, Lena sends Travis out to play and then implies that Ruth intends to abort the foetus. Walter returns and tries to talk to Lena about the cheque but she insists that he talk with Ruth first. When he refuses Lena tells him that she will not invest in his store. Furious, he attempts to leave but is prevented by Lena's revelation that his wife is pregnant and plans to have an abortion. He is stunned and Lena berates him for not being firm with his wife, calling him 'a disgrace to your father's memory.'

Act 2, Scene 1

Later the same day. Beneatha is listening to African music dressed in her Yoruba costume. Walter enters, drunk, and plays at being a great warrior while Ruth looks on disapprovingly. George Murchison arrives to take Beneatha to the theatre. She challenges him for not joining in their dancing and thus failing to celebrate their culture but he refuses to enter into a discussion and she goes to her room to get ready to go out. Walter tries to arrange a meeting with George's entrepreneur father but becomes infuriated by George's cool reaction. Beneatha manages to escort George off in time to avoid further aggression. Ruth manages to calm Walter and the couple discuss Ruth's growing unhappiness. Lena returns and announces that she has placed a down payment on a new house, to Ruth's pleasure and Walter's fury, in Clybourne Park, an *all-White* neighbourhood, to the horror of both. Ruth leaves mother and son together and Walter accuses his mother of shattering his dreams.

Act 2, Scene 2

Friday night, a few weeks later. Beneatha and George arrive, quarrelling over his refusal to engage in her philosophical discussions. He leaves and Lena arrives. Beneatha explains that George is a fool and her mother appears to understand. Walter's employer phones, asking after him and complaining that he has not been to work for three days. Ruth challenges him and he explains that he spent the time wandering and drinking. Lena, shocked at the level to which he has sunk, gives him the remainder of the money, telling him to put Beneatha's half in a bank and use the other half as he sees fit. Overjoyed by his mother's trust and the prospects of his investment, he tells Travis about the beautiful future he has planned for them all.

Act 2, Scene 3

The following Saturday, the day of the move. Ruth and Beneatha, while packing crates, remark upon the improvement in Walter's mood and in his relationship with Ruth. Walter enters and the three of them dance and joke. They are interrupted by the arrival of Karl Lindner, a quiet-looking White man, who explains that he is from the Welcoming Committee of Clybourne Park and asks them not to move in as some of the community are not



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happy with the prospect of Black neighbours and offers to buy the house from them at a very generous price. Walter throws him out of the house.

Lena returns and is undaunted by the news and the family present her with gardening tools and a comical gardening hat from Travis. They are interrupted by another visitor, Bobo, one of Walter's business partners, who explains that not only did he and the third partner, Willy, invest less money than Walter did, but that Willy has now disappeared with all the cash. Lena guesses correctly that Walter invested Beneatha's share as well as his own. She flies into a rage and attacks him before standing mute, stunned by his betrayal.

Act 3, Scene 1

One hour later. Asagai arrives and hears of the theft. Beneatha explains that she had wanted to be a doctor because she desired to make a difference to the world, but now doubts that it is possible to improve anything. Asagai attacks her pessimism and proposes that she marries him and lives in Africa. He leaves her to consider this. Walter emerges and Beneatha verbally abuses him before he silently leaves. Lena decides not to move, despite Ruth's pleas. Walter returns, explaining that he has rung Lindner with the intention of accepting his offer for the house. Lena is shocked by his lack of pride.

The removal men arrive just as Lindner does. Lena insists that Travis watch how his father acts. Walter finds the strength to reject Lindner's offer, explaining that his ancestors have earned their way from being slaves to occupying a good home. As the family leaves they bicker over Beneatha's plans to move to Africa with Asagai and they appear ready to face the hostility of their new neighbours.



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3. A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry was born 19 May, 1930, Chicago, Illinois, the fourth child of Carl Augustus Hansberry, prominent real-estate broker, and Nannie Perry, school teacher and later a full time Civil Rights activist. In 1938 the family moved into an all-White neighbourhood, protected under restricted covenants dating back to the late 19 Century. Her father defended his right to live there and took his case to the Supreme Court. *Hansberry vs. Lee* (1940) became a legendary case that resulted in the repeal of the restricted covenant legislation. Unfortunately enforcement did not follow the change in the law, and her father, despairing, finally gave in and emigrated to Mexico, where he later died in 1946.

Lorraine began her interest in theatre and writing at high school and continued to study courses on drama and stage design when she went to the University of Wisconsin in 1948. She found her education frustratingly disconnected from real life, however, and she left in 1950 to study at painting at the Art Institute of Chicago and then the Roosevelt University, Chicago. Lorraine quickly tired of these institutions and she eventually moved to Harlem, New York, the site of the legendary Harlem Renaissance of Black Culture in the 1920s and home of the American Negro Theatre. In New York she continued her studies at the New School for Social Research and later the Jefferson School of Social sciences where she studies under the legendary activist W. E. Dubois. Meanwhile she worked in menial jobs and refined her writing skills. It was during this period that she met the Jewish writer Robert Nemiroff. They were married in 1953. During the following years she was to play an active role in the work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and was a committed protester for Black and gay rights. She wrote for a number of periodicals, including *Freedom*, edited by actor, singer and activist, Paul Robeson, and through this work met other Black cultural icons such as the poet Langston Hughes.

A Raisin in the Sun, opened on the 11 March 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway, directed by Lloyd Richards and starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee. It was the first Broadway play in fifty years directed by a Black person and the first ever to be written by a Black woman. As a result of its success Lorraine became the youngest person and the only Black woman ever to win the New York Drama Circle Award. Other nominees that year included Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill. She was also voted Most Promising Playwright in *Variety* (the entertainment industry newspaper). In 1961 the film of **A Raisin in the Sun** was released and received a nomination for Best Screenplay of the Year from the Screenwriter's Guild and won a special award at the Cannes Film Festival.

In 1964 Hansberry and Nemiroff divorced. Her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, a drama of political questioning and affirmation set in Greenwich Village, New York City, opened on Broadway in 1964, to mixed reviews and ran until 12 January, 1965, the same day as Lorraine died of pancreatic cancer. She left

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several unfinished plays, such as *Toussaint*, an opera about an 18 Century Haitian Leader, and *Les Blancs*, set in Africa. Nemiroff became her literary executor and compiled her writings into an autobiographical play, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, which was produced off-Broadway in 1969 and was published as a book in 1970. He completed *Les Blancs*, which premiered in 1970 and in 1973 he and Charlotte Zaltzberg adapted **A Raisin in the Sun** into a musical called *Raisin!* It won a Tony award.



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4. CHICAGO: THE WINDY CITY

Chicago was originally founded by an Afro-French trader, Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable around 1790 and by 1840 it was a key commercial centre for grain and livestock. Chicago's African American community centred on the banks of the river and consisted primarily of fugitive slaves from the Southern States. Chicago resisted the Illinois Black Code that stated all African Americans had to carry a certificate of freedom and pay a \$1000 bond, and the Black community and White abolitionists encouraged slaves from the South to flee to the city through the 'underground railroad', a system of safe-houses along the route to the North. Thus the Black community was about 1,000 strong by the start of the Civil War.

After the conclusion of the conflict Chicago began the process of industrialisation and thus the African American population went from 5,000 in 1875 to 15,000 by 1893, centred in the 'Black Belt' an area of 3 by 15 blocks on the Southside. While the community was hampered by being barred from occupying most industrial and skilled labour jobs they did have Black businesses, churches, women's social clubs, gambling houses and dance halls. In 1871, Chicago received its first Black public official when John Jones was elected county commissioner, its first Black state representative in J W E Thomas in 1876 and its first African American newspaper, *Conservator*, in 1878. The struggle for civil rights was evident by the end of the century when intellectuals such as Ida Wells-Barnett began to campaign against lynching.

Around 1915 the rate of African Americans fleeing the oppression, segregation, racial violence and poverty of the Southern States for the opportunities of the Northern States' urban centres, greatly increased. This process, known as the Great Migration, took several decades and involved around 2 million people, so that the proportion of the total Black population of the USA resident in the South went from 85% in 1890 to 42% by 1960. One of the city's most effected by this was Chicago, whose Black population went from being 1.19% of the total (4,470) in 1890 to being 22.89% of its 3.5 million inhabitants in 1960. In fact the Black community in Chicago doubled between 1910 (40,000) and 1920 (80,000) alone. This period saw the development of Black hospitals, a nurse's training school, a bank, a YMCA settlement house and, in 1905, the *Chicago Defender*. The *Defender* quickly became the largest Black-owned daily newspaper in the United States and encouraged even more people to join the migration, as it was able to present a more true and critical picture of racial violence and economic exploitation in the South than Southern papers, fearing retribution, were prepared to do.

During World War I Chicago's African American community benefited from the labour shortage and moved into new jobs in the meatpacking, car production and steel mill industries. In order to check the expansion of the Black community, however, White neighbourhoods contained the 'Black Belt' through legal restrictions. In 1919 a race riot erupted in which 23 African Americans and 15 Caucasians, 537 people were injured and over a million dollars



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of property was damaged, when young White men, frustrated by a growing economic crisis, began to attack the Black community.

Fortunately the prosperity of the 1920s saw an increase in Black politicians holding office, including Oscar De Priest, the first Black man elected to the United States House of Representatives. The jazz scene flourished with Ferdinand 'Jelly Roll' Morton, Joseph 'King' Oliver, Earl 'Fatha' Hines, Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters and Louis Armstrong all basing their careers in the city.

In 1929 the Wall Street Crash plunged America into the Great Depression and the Black community were the worst hit. Hope was at hand, however, as World War II created a labour shortage the community could fill, and change in union legislation meant that Black workers could finally benefit from membership.

Between the Depression and the 1950s Chicago music flourished and became the home to a new style of blues born out of the Mississippi Delta tradition, as exemplified by Big Bill Broonzy, Howlin' Wolf, Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup and Muddy Waters.

Meanwhile the Great Migration continued apace, the Black population going from 277,731 in 1940 to 492,265 in 1950, and the Southside swelled, but was countered by legal and violent opposition from their White neighbours; for example in 1938 Lorraine Hansberry's family moved into a legally all-White neighbourhood and had a brick thrown through her window and other attacks. Despite her father's successful Supreme Court case, which repealed the laws prohibiting Black families from living in white districts, the repeal was not enforced and he left America, planning to settle in Mexico. In 1953, a Black family moved into the all-White Trumbull Park housing project and were greeted by racial violence that escalated into a riot that ran almost continuously for over three years and required over one thousand policemen to maintain order. Meanwhile, The Chicago Housing Authority built high-rise housing projects amid the Black community and the city became amongst the most residentially segregated in America.

In addition to the segregation the Black community across the Nation had to contend with a high proportion of poverty, of the 39.5 million Americans living under the poverty line in 1959, 22.4% of the total population, 9.9 were Black, a total of 55.1% of African Americans. The average American family in 1960 had an income of \$5,620 in 1960 while the average Black family earned only \$3,233, due to racial discrimination and the poor quality of education available prior to desegregation.



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'I could no more imagine myself allowing the Youngers to accept [Mr Lindner's] obscene offer of money than I could imagine myself allowing them to accept a cash payment for their own murder. You see, our people don't

really have a choice. 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.'

Lorraine Hansberry

Shortly after **A Raisin in the Sun**, in 1962 civil rights groups will form the Coordinating Council of Community Organisations that will attempt to integrate housing and schools and in 1966 Martin Luther King and the CCCO will launch the Chicago Freedom Movement, campaigning for open housing. They will meet with little success and the frustration of the situation will spark major riots in 1966 and 1968. The future of the African American community in Chicago includes police shooting the leader of a chapter of the Black Panthers and the election of the first Black mayor, Harold Washington, in 1983. By 1990 the Black population was well over a million and made up 39.07% of the total population of the city and conditions in the Southside are still difficult with deteriorating housing projects, high unemployment and crime and under-resourced public schools.



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5. A BRIEF HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THEATRE

The history of African American writings are almost as old as the presence of Africans in North America; the story starts with Phillis Wheatley who was brought over from Africa as a child slave in 1761. She quickly learnt to read the Bible and studied Latin and Greek. Her first poem was published in 1767 and she earned a reputation as one of the first African American poets. Her book of verse, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was written in 1773, preceded by letters attesting that the material was written by a Black woman. This was significant because it was a commonly held belief that no African could achieve something as intellectual as a well formed poem; the mere publication of the book was a political statement and she was given her freedom as a result of her efforts.

In the following century there was a proliferation of Black writing concentrated in two areas. There were the free African Americans of the North, which were often tracts, such as David Walker's *Appeal, in Four Articles*, attacking the slavery in the South and the inequalities of the North, which while free from slavery, had not extended equal rights or voting powers to the Black community. The Northern writers also produced the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. This period also featured a wealth of publications by Black women, even if social constraints forced them to publish anonymously as 'A Lady of Colour.'

Meanwhile in the South, the main form of expression was not debate and argument but fictional or autobiographical life stories, often collaborations between an ex-slave and a White abolitionist. This is why the most famous of all the slave autobiographies is titled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, as a statement of intellectual independence. Douglass went on to become a respected campaigner for the abolition of slavery.

During the early 18th Century minstrel shows appeared, written and performed for White audiences by White performers in blackface. After the American Civil War, however, Black musicians began to perform in minstrel shows, and by the turn of the century they were producing Black musicals, many of which were written, produced, and acted entirely by Black people. The first known play by a Black American was James Brown's *King Shotaway* (1823), William Wells Brown's; *The Escape or, A Leap for Freedom* (1858), was the first Black play published, but the first real success of a Black dramatist was Angelina W. Grimké's *Rachel* (1916).

In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century there were two main voices in African American literature; Brooker T Johnson and W E B DuBois. The first argued for a slow process of reform while the second, in works such as *The Soul of the Black Folk*, in which he employed various modes of writing and challenged the formal boundaries of several disciplines to define Black experience and the place of Black culture in America.



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The first big revolution in 20th Century African American culture is widely referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. The Jamaican-born poet and novelist Claude McKay was the first Black literary figure of the 1920s to attract a large White audience, with poetry such as *Harlem Shadows* (1922). The innovative novel *Cane* (1923) by Jean Toomer voiced the common theme of the Harlem Renaissance in its identification with the lifestyles of the Black poor. Although Toomer and the poet Countee Cullen were members of the Black elite, they and other Black writers combined European literary techniques with African-American topics. The most popular and prolific of the Black writers of the 1920s was the poet Langston Hughes, whose works showed strong identification with the Black working class, and who coined the phrase 'a raisin in the sun' in his poem, *Harlem*. These writers gained an audience largely through the efforts of White patrons and Black editors, such as Charles S. Johnson at *Opportunity* (published by the Urban League) and Jessie Fauset and Du Bois at *The Crisis* (published by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People). Alain Locke, a Harvard graduate and a Rhodes scholar, was one of several Black academics who promoted African-American and African culture. His work was later continued by Zora Neale Hurston, a novelist who in 1935 published *Mules and Men*, an outstanding book of southern Black folktales.

Black activities in theatre also reflected a desire to display African-American cultural distinctiveness to the public. Several musical comedies produced in the 1920s by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle allowed Black performers to demonstrate their talents. The Black actor Charles Gilpin played more serious roles, including the title role in *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O'Neill. Paul Robeson also performed in O'Neill's plays, starred in *Othello* by William Shakespeare, and later gained prominence as a singer of Black spirituals and working-class folk songs.

African-American music was also deeply affected by the social developments of the 1920s. Previously confined to the South, jazz and blues began to be played in northern cities during World War I and soon became established in the rapidly growing northern Black communities. Louis Armstrong went from New Orleans to Chicago in 1922 to play with the jazz band formed by King Oliver, and during the mid-1920s 'Jelly Roll' Morton began arranging the previously spontaneous jazz pieces, thus preparing the way for big band leaders such as Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson.

Meanwhile, while some Black Americans were taking to the commercial theatre, Black experimental groups and Black theatre companies were emerging in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, DC. Among these was the Ethiopian Art Theatre, which was where Paul Robeson established himself. Garland Anderson's play *Appearances* (1925) was the first play of Black authorship to be produced on Broadway, but Black theatre did not create a Broadway hit until Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* (1935) won wide acclaim. In that same year the Federal Theatre Project was founded, providing a training ground for Black performers. In the late 1930s, Black community theatres began to appear, revealing talents such as those of Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, who would



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later star in **A Raisin in the Sun**. By 1940 Black theatre was firmly grounded in the American Negro Theatre and the Negro Playwrights' Company.

After World War II black theatre grew more progressive, more radical, and more militant, reflecting the ideals of Black revolution and seeking to establish a mythology and symbolism apart from White culture. Councils were organised to abolish the use of racial stereotypes in theatre and to integrate Black playwrights into the mainstream of American dramaturgy. **A Raisin in the Sun** (1959) and other successful Black plays of the 1950s portrayed the difficulty of Blacks maintaining an identity in a society that degraded them. The 1960s saw the emergence of a new Black theatre, angrier and more defiant than its predecessors, with Amiri Baraka (originally LeRoi Jones) as its strongest proponent. Baraka's plays, including the award-winning *Dutchman* (1964), depicted Whites' exploitation of Blacks. He established the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem in 1965 and inspired playwright Ed Bullins and others seeking to create a strong 'Black aesthetic' in American theatre. The powerful and prolific dramatist August Wilson was the most important creator of Black theatre in the 1980s.

Following Baraka's lead the African-American cultural revival continued and spread to other forms, although not always within the confines of the earlier militant mood. Many prominent writers in the 1970s and 1980s were committed to describing and analysing the Black experience, such as the novelists Alex Haley, Paule Marshall, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison, Pulitzer Prize winner with *Beloved* in 1988 and Nobel laureate in literature in 1993. Among the playwrights of the late 20th century were Pulitzer Prize winners Charles Fuller with *A Soldier's Play*, in 1982 and August Wilson with *Fences* in 1985. Poets also expressed themselves through their work, for example, Gwendolyn Brooks (in *To Disembark*, 1981, she calls for a 'disembarking' from oppressive White cultural patterns), Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni; and poet-playwright Ntozake Shange. Other renowned Black artists include the opera star Leontyne Price; the dancer-choreographer Alvin Ailey, whose works expressed the Black heritage; the artist Jean Michael Basquiat; filmmakers such as Gordon Parks, Melvin Van Peebles, and Spike Lee; and painters, among them the poetic Romare Bearden, the realist Jacob Lawrence, and Benny Andrews. Andrews, whose paintings are social commentary in allegorical form, was one of the organizers of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, which in 1969 protested against the inadequate representation of Black people in American art - particularly since their contribution has become an integral part of American art and architecture, and of American literature. In the 21st Century, when Black performers can 'open' major Hollywood films or top the music charts, it would be easy, and dangerous, to forget that African Americans are still far from receiving the fair representation envisioned by Andrews.



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6. AN AFRICAN AMERICAN TIMELINE

*This history contains major events in the social history of African Americans, interspersed with the publication of major works by Black authors, poets and playwrights and biographical details from the life of Lorraine Hansberry. It will hopefully show the history that Lorraine Hansberry was drawing on while writing **A Raisin in the Sun** and also how prophetic her depiction of race relations in America would prove to be in the decade after its premiere. This history is a compiled, expanded and edited version of several chronologies from the internet, as listed in the bibliography.*

Bold type indicates a key event in the history or literary heritage of African Americans, or an important event in the life of Lorraine Hansberry.

Italics indicate the title of a publication or play, followed by its author. The year listed is the year of publication for books and of premiere performances for theatre, unless otherwise noted.

- 1619** **The first Africans arrive in the American Colonies.** 20 indentured servants (bound to work without wages) are captured in Africa and then sold in an auction in Jamestown, Virginia. White indentured servants can earn their freedom after four to seven years. Most of the Black servants do not have this opportunity.
- 1638** The New England slave trade begins with the shipment of Native American slaves to the West Indies, where they are exchanged for Africans and goods.
- 1664** First law prohibiting marriage between English women and Black men enacted in Maryland; the other colonies will pass similar laws.
- 1760** *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries*, by Jupiter Hammon, a New York slave and probably the first Black poet.
- 1773** Massachusetts slaves petition the legislature for freedom.
Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phillis Wheatley.
- 1776** **Declaration of American Independence adopted on 4 July.** A section denouncing the slave trade was deleted.
- 1777** Vermont becomes the first American colony to abolish slavery. Other Northern states followed over the next two decades.
- 1791** Beginning of the Haitian Revolution.
- 1804** Jean Jacques Dessalines proclaims the independence of Haiti, which becomes the second republic in the Western Hemisphere.
The first of a series of Northern Black Laws is passed by the Ohio legislature. These restrict the rights



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and movement of free Black people in the North.

- 1807** **Congress bans the slave trade.**
- 1820** Missouri Compromise enacted. It prohibits slavery to the north of the southern boundary of Missouri.
- 1823** ***King Shotaway*, by James Brown, first known play by a Black playwright.**
- 1827** ***Freedom's Journal*, the first Black newspaper, is published in New York City.**
Slavery abolished in New York State.
- 1834** Slavery abolished in the British Empire.
- 1837** ***La Mulatre*, by Victor Séjour, the earliest known work of African American fiction.**
- 1845** *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, by Frederick Douglass, one of the most eminent Abolitionists of the Century.
- 1850** Fugitive Slave Act passed by Congress, which provides for the seizure and return of runaway slaves fleeing from one state to another.
- 1853** ***Clotel*, by William Wells Brown, the first novel by a Black American.**
- 1854** The Kansas-Nebraska Act repeals the Missouri Compromise and opens Northern territory to slavery.
- 1857** Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court opens Northern territory to slavery and denies citizenship to American Black people.
- 1858** ***The Escape*, by William Wells Brown, the first play by a Black American to be published.**
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln is elected president: South Carolina declares itself an 'independent commonwealth.'
- 1862** Congress abolishes slavery in Washington.
- 1863** **Emancipation Proclamation issued by US President Abraham Lincoln** on 1 January, 1863, that frees the slaves of the Confederate states in rebellion against the Union.
- 1865** **The Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery.**
- 1867** **The Fourteenth Amendment extends the Bill of Rights to individuals**, thus preventing states from depriving individuals of federally guaranteed rights.
- 1870** **The Fifteenth Amendment guarantees the right to vote to all men of all races** (women do not get the vote until 1920).
- 1875** **Civil Rights Bill gives African Americans the right to equal treatment in inns, public transportation, etc.**
Many African Americans gain elective office, but at the same time there are outbreaks of violence against Black people in the South.
- 1880** *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, by Joel Chandler Harris.
- 1881** **Segregation of Public Transport.** Tennessee segregates railroad cars, establishing a trend that spread through 13 states over the next 30 years.
An Autobiography of the Reverend Josiah Henson ('Uncle Tom').
- 1882** More than 1200 reported lynchings of African Americans.



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- 1890** *Clarence and Corinne; or, God's Way*, by Mrs. A. E. Johnson.
- 1896** **The doctrine of 'separate but equal' upheld by the Supreme Court**, 18 May in the case of Plessy vs. Ferguson. **The ruling initiates the age of Jim Crow legislation**, a nickname for all segregation laws based on a character from the Black-faced minstrel shows.
***The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, by W E B DuBois**, eminent sociologist and one of the most important Black protest leaders of the first half of the 20th Century, who would later lecture Lorraine Hansberry at University.
Lyrics of Lowly Life, by Paul Laurence Dunbar.
- 1896-1906** 800 reported lynchings of African Americans.
- 1898** **Spanish-American War**. Sixteen regiments of Black volunteers recruited in the course of the war. US gains the Hawaiian Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands. Five Black soldiers win Congressional Medals of Honour.
- 1899** *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales*, by Charles W. Chesnutt.
- 1900** **Census** – US Population: 76,994,575, Black Population: 8,833,944 (11.6%).
Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing, composed by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, will become a Black anthem.
- 1901** ***Up From Slavery*, by Booker T. Washington**, educator and reformer, who, this year, becomes the first Black man to be invited to dine at the White House.
- 1903** ***The Souls of Black Folk*, by W E B DuBois**, in it he rejects the gradualism of Booker T. Washington, calling for agitation on behalf of African American rights.
- 1905** The Niagara Movement, led by DuBois, demands abolition of all distinctions based on race.
- 1906** Race riots in Atlanta and Philadelphia.
- 1909** **National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) founded on 12 February**, the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, with the intention of promoting the use of the courts to restore the legal rights of Black Americans.
- 1910** *Crisis*, first issue published by DuBois, sponsored by the NAACP
Segregated Neighbourhoods. On 19 December, the City Council of Baltimore approves the first city ordinance designating the boundaries of Black and White neighbourhoods. This ordinance was followed by similar ones in nine other cities.
- 1911** The National Urban League formed to help African Americans secure equal employment.
- 1912** *W C Handy's Memphis Blues*, the first blues composition to be published.
The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, by James Weldon Johnson.
- 1913** Harriet Tubman, dies 10 March. A bondswoman who escaped from slavery in the South, she became a leading Abolitionist before the American Civil War. She led hundreds of bondsmen to freedom in the North along the route of the Underground Railroad - an elaborate secret network of safe houses



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organised for that purpose.

Woodrow Wilson's administration begins segregating Blacks and whites in government departments.

- 1915** Renowned African American spokesman, Booker T. Washington dies, 14 November.
Ku Klux Klan receives a charter from the Fulton County, Georgia, Superior Court. The organisation spreads quickly, reaching its height in the 1920s, when it has an estimated 4 million members.
Great Migration begins. Approximately 2 million African Americans from the Southern states move to northern industrial centres during the following decades, looking for relief from racism and seeking better jobs and schools. The migration increases during the First World War when jobs opened up in war production industries. It continues through to the 1960's. In 1890 85% of the Black population lived in the South. By 1960 that number had been reduced to 42%.
- 1916** ***Rachel, a play by Angelina W. Grinké is a great success.***
- 1917** **United States enters World War I.**
Major race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois.
More than 10,000 Black Americans, organised by NAACP, march down Fifth Avenue in New York City in a silent parade to protest lynchings and racial indignities.
Race riots in Houston lead to the hanging of 13 Black soldiers.
- 1918** **World War I ends.** Official records indicate that 370,000 Black soldiers and 1400 Black commissioned officers participated, more than half of them in the European Theatre. Three Black regiments—the 369th, 371st, and 272nd—receive the Croix de Guerre for valour. The 369th was the first American regiment to reach the Rhine.
- 1919** DuBois organizes the first Pan-African conference in Paris.
The 'Red Summer'; a total of 26 race riots in Charleston, Washington, Chicago, Arkansas, and Texas. In Chicago, 27 July a young Black man, Eugene Williams flees a fight between Black and White gangs on 29th Street Breach by swimming out into the water where he became exhausted and drowned. A rumour that he had been stoned to death provokes five days of rioting, resulting in the deaths of 23 African Americans, 15 White people and injuring a further 291 people.
- 1920** **Marcus Garvey launches the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem;** the first mass movement for African Americans. He addresses 25,000 Black Americans in Madison Square Garden.
- 1921** **Harlem Renaissance begins,** a remarkable period of creativity for Black writers, poets and artists, especially Claud McKay, Jean Toomer, Alaine Locke and Countee Cullen.
- 1922** A federal anti-lynching bill is killed by filibuster (a speech by a senator that lasts so long it obstructs the progress of the bill) in the Senate, the same year as 51 African Americans are known to have been lynched.
Martial law is declared in Oklahoma as a result of activities by the Klan.
Cane, by Jean Toomer.



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- 1923** *There is Confusion*, by Jessie Fauset and *Fire in the Flint*, by Walter White.
- 1925** Malcolm Little (later Malcolm X) born on 19 May in Omaha, Nebraska.
Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters organised; A. Philip Randolph elected president. The BSCP is the first union of Black workers, at a time when half the affiliates of the American Federation of Labour barred Black people from membership.
Louis Armstrong records the first of Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings that influenced the direction of jazz.
40,000 Klu Klux Klan members parade in Washington
Colour, by Countee Cullen and *The New Negro: An Interpretation* by Alain Locke.
- 1924** Carter G. Woodson organises the first Negro History Week celebration in the second week of February to include the birthday of Abraham Lincoln and the generally accepted birthday of Frederick Douglass.
- 1925** *The Weary Blues*, by Langston Hughes and *Blues: An Anthology*, edited by W C Handy.
- 1926** Duke Ellington opens at the Cotton Club in Harlem.
Congaree Sketches, by Edward C L Adams and *Walls of Jericho* by Rudolph Fisher.
- 1928** *Nigger to Nigger*, by Edward C L Adams, *Quicksand*, by Nella Larsen and *Home to Harlem*, by Claude McKay.
- 1929** Martin Luther King, Jr born on 15 January in Atlanta. Later to become Dr King.
The stock market crashes on 19 October, beginning the **Great Depression**; by 1937, 26% of Black males are unemployed.
The Blacker the Berry, by Wallace Thurman.
- 1930** **Lorraine Hansberry born 19 May in Chicago.**
- 1931** **First Scottsboro trial begins in Scottsboro, Alabama on 6 April.** Nine Black youths are accused of raping two White women on a freight train. The blatant injustice of the case outrages the public throughout the 1930s.
Black No More, by George Schuyler.
- 1932** *Southern Road*, by Sterling A. Brown and *The Conjure Man Dies: A Mystery Tale of Dark Harlem*, by Rudolph Fisher.
- 1934** *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, by Zora Neale Hurston.
- 1935** Joe Louis, the Black boxer, defeats Primo Carnera at Yankee Stadium.
National Council of Negro Women founded in New York; Mary McLeod Bethune, President.
Mulatto, by Langston Hughes, a Broadway hit.
- 1936** Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Olympics in Berlin.
Black Thunder, by Arna Bontemps.



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- 1937** Joe Louis becomes heavyweight boxing champion.
Bessie Smith, one of the great blues singers, dies.
Uncle Tom's Children, by Richard Wright.
- 1938** James Weldon Johnson, poet, diplomat and anthologist of Black culture, dies.
Lorraine Hansberry moves into all-White neighbourhood near the University of Chicago. Her father, a real-estate broker, wins the Supreme Court case allowing them to stay in the neighbourhood, which was instrumental in the repealing of restricted covenants.
Marian Anderson performs before 75,000 at the Lincoln Monument. Her concert is scheduled in protest of the decision made by the Daughters of the American Revolution to forbid, for reasons of race, Ms Anderson to sing in Constitution Hall.
- 1940** Marcus Garvey dies in London.
President Roosevelt issues a statement that segregation is the policy in the U.S. armed forces.
Native Son, by Richard Wright.
- 1941** **United States enters World War II.**
President Roosevelt, responding to pressure from Black leaders, issues an Executive Order forbidding racial and religious discrimination in war industries, governmental training programs, and governmental industries.
First U. S. Army flying school for Black cadets dedicated at Tuskegee.
The first of many serious racial incidents between Black and White soldiers and Black soldiers and White civilians; these continue throughout the war. Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, jazz composer and pianist who pioneered the use of prearranged, semi-orchestrated effects in jazz-band performances, dies.
The Negro Caravan, by Sterling Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee.
- 1942** Congress of Race Equality (CORE) organised in Chicago. It advocates direct, non-violent action. The National CORE is organised in 1943.
Negro Digest, 1st issue published by John H. Johnson.
- 1943** Race riots in Detroit, Harlem, and elsewhere.
Thomas W. 'Fats' Waller, pianist, composer and one of the few jazz musicians to achieve commercial fame, dies.
- 1944** United Negro College Fund is founded by Frederick D. Patterson, President of Tuskegee University. The fund goes on to become America's oldest and most successful African American higher education assistance organisation.
Adam Clayton Powell, prominent Black activist, is elected to Congress.
Rendezvous with America, by Melvin Tolson.



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- 1945** President Roosevelt dies.
United Nations founded.
Germany surrenders on 8 May, V-E Day. Japan surrenders on 2 September, V-J Day, ending World War II. Total of 1,154,720 Black Americans were inducted or drafted into the armed services during the war.
White students in various metropolitan areas protest integration in the schools.
Brooklyn Dodgers sign Jackie Robinson, the first Black man to play major league baseball.
Ebony, 1st issue published by John H Johnson, *Lay My Burden Down*, by B A Botkin, *A Street in Bronzeville*, by Gwendolyn Brooks and *If He Hollers, Let Him Go*, by Chester Himes.
- 1946** Supreme Court bans segregation on interstate bus travel.
The Street, by Ann Petry and *The Foxes of Harrow*, by Frank Yerby.
- 1947** Widespread violence against Black Americans, especially returning soldiers.
CORE sends 23 Black and White Freedom Riders through the South to test compliance with court orders.
Knock on Any Door, by Willard Motley.
- 1948** President Truman issues an Executive Order directing equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed forces.
- 1950** Gwendolyn Brooks receives Pulitzer Prize for poetry.
Ralph Bunche receives Nobel Prize for his successful mediation of the Palestine conflict.
Lorraine Hansberry moves to New York and starts work on African American paper *Freedom* edited by Paul Robeson, celebrated singer, actor and Black activist.
Americans from Africa, by Saunders Redding.
- 1951** *Jet Magazine*, founded by John H Johnson.
- 1952** **Oliver Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.** In the 1950s, school segregation was widely accepted throughout the nation. In fact, it was required by law in most southern states. In 1952, the Supreme Court heard a number of school-segregation cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. It decided unanimously in 1954 that segregation was unconstitutional, overthrowing the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that had set the 'separate but equal' precedent.
University of Tennessee admits first Black student.
Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison, *Review* by Saul Bellow, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, by Melvin B Tolson.
- 1953** **The movement of Black families into Trumbull Park housing project in Chicago**, 4 August, triggers virtually continuous riot lasting more than three years and requires over one thousand policemen to maintain order.



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Lorraine Hansberry marries Robert Nemiroff.

Go Tell It to the Mountain, by James Baldwin.

1954 **Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* declares segregation in public schools unconstitutional** – 'Separate is not equal.' School integration begins in Washington

and Baltimore.

Defence Department announces elimination of all segregated regiments in the armed forces.

Youngblood, by John O. Killens.

1955 Marian Anderson debuts at the Metropolitan Opera House, the first Black singer in the company's history.

Supreme Court orders school integration "with all deliberate speed."

Emmet Till, aged 14, kidnapped and lynched in Money, Mississippi on 28 August.

Montgomery Bus Boycott. Rosa Parks, a 43 year old Black seamstress, is arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a White man. The following night, fifty leaders of the Negro community meet at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church to discuss the issue. Among them is the young minister, **Martin Luther King**. The leaders organise the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which deprives the bus company of 65% of its income, but also results in a \$500 fine or 386 days in jail for Martin Luther King. He pays the fine, and eight months later, the Supreme Court decides, based on the school segregation cases, that bus segregation violates the constitution.

Richard J. Daley elected Mayor of Chicago and holds the office for an unprecedented 14 years and 3 days.

1956 Home of Martin Luther King is bombed on 30 January.

First Black student admitted to the University of Alabama on 3 February. She is suspended after a riot on 7 February and expelled on 29 February.

Nat King Cole attacked on stage in Birmingham, Alabama by white supremacists.

Bus Boycott begins in Tallahassee.

Federal court rules that racial segregation on Montgomery city buses violates the Constitution.

Supreme Court upholds the decision several months later.

1957 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organised; Martin Luther King president.

Prayer Pilgrimage, the biggest civil rights demonstration to date, held in Washington.

Civil Rights Act of 1957 passes Congress, giving the Justice Department the authority to seek injunctions against voting rights infractions.

Desegregation at Little Rock, Arkansas. Little Rock Central High School is to begin the 1957 school year desegregated. On 2 September, the night before the first day of school, Governor Faubus announces that he has ordered the Arkansas National Guard to monitor the school the next day. When



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a group of nine Black students arrive at Central High on 3 September, they are kept from entering by the National Guardsmen. On 20 September, Judge Davies grants an injunction against Governor Faubus and three days later the group of nine students return to Central High School. Although the students are not physically injured, a mob of 1,000 townspeople prevent them from remaining at school. Finally, President Eisenhower orders 1,000 paratroopers and 10,000 National Guardsmen to Little Rock, and on 25 September, Central High School is desegregated.

Corner Boy, by Herbert Simmons.

1958 Members of the NAACP begin sitting at lunch counters reserved for white people in Oklahoma city, in protest at segregation.

Stride Toward Freedom, by Martin Luther King.

1959 ***A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry (at the age of 29) premieres;** the first Broadway play by a Black woman, winner of the New York Drama Critics Circle Award.

Prince Edward County, Virginia, Board of Supervisors closes the county's schools in an attempt to prevent integration.

Brown Girl, Brownstones, by Paule Marshall.

1960 **Sit-in Campaigns.** After having been refused service at the lunch counter of a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, Joseph McNeill, a Black college student, returns with three friends and refuses to leave until they are served, which they are not. The four students return to the lunch counter each day. When an article in the New York Times draws attention to the students' protest, they are joined by more students, both Black and White, and students across the nation are inspired to launch similar protests.

Student protest marches spread; White police forces and White civilians respond with violence. By March, more than 1,000 are arrested.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organised at Shaw University, North Carolina.

President Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1960 on 6 May, an attempt to protect the rights of Black voters.

John F Kennedy elected President.

The Bean Eaters, by Gwendolyn Brooks and *The Angry Ones*, by John A Williams.

1961 SNCC launches Jail-in movement ('Jail, no Bail.').

Thirteen Freedom Riders take a bus trip through the South as part of a campaign to try to end the segregation of bus terminals. On 14 May, the bus is bombed and burned. Robert F Kennedy sends four hundred federal marshals to Montgomery to keep order. Hundreds of protesters, including Martin Luther King, are arrested and beaten.

***A Raisin in the Sun*, the film starring Sidney Poitier** wins a Cannes special award.

Preface to a 20 Volume Suicide Note, by LeRoi Jones.



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- 1962** **University of Mississippi Riot.** President Kennedy orders Federal Marshals to escort James Meredith, the first Black student to enrol at the University of Mississippi, to campus. A riot breaks out and before the National Guard can arrive to reinforce the marshals, two students are killed.
Martin Luther King is jailed in Albany, Georgia.
Several Black churches are burned.
A Ballad of Remembrance, Robert Hayden and *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning*, by Charles Perry.
- 1963** Medgar Evers, Black civil rights activist, is assassinated on 12 June, becoming a martyr for the Black Civil Rights Movement.
National Guard troops brought to Boston because of protests against integration.
W E B DuBois dies on 27 August.
March on Washington. Despite worries that few people would attend and that violence could erupt, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin organises the historic event that will come to symbolise the civil rights movement when 250,000 people march on Washington on 28 August. A reporter from the Times wrote, 'no one could ever remember an invading army quite as gentle as the two hundred thousand civil rights marchers who occupied Washington.'
Church Bombing. Birmingham, Alabama is one of the most severely segregated cities in the 1960s. Black men and women hold sit-ins at lunch counters where they are refused service, and "kneel-ins" on church steps where they were denied entrance. Hundreds of demonstrators are fined and imprisoned. In 1963, Martin Luther King, the Reverend Abernathy and the Reverend Shuttlesworth lead a protest march in Birmingham. The protestors are met with policemen and dogs. The three ministers are arrested and taken to Southside Jail.
More than 225,000 students boycott Chicago schools on 22 October to protest the continuation of segregation in everything but name.
John F. Kennedy assassinated on 22 November.
Letter from Birmingham Jail, by Martin Luther King and *The Learning Tree*, by Gordon Parks.
- 1964** **24th Amendment eliminates poll tax requirements in federal elections.** Previously failure to pay the tax had meant forfeiting voting rights and impoverished African Americans were widely effected by this.
Muhammad Ali defeats Sonny Liston on 25 February.
Malcolm X resigns from the Nation of Islam on 12 March.
Civil Rights bill signed by President Johnson on 2 July.
Malcolm X founds the Organization for Afro-American Unity on 28 June.
Race riots in Harlem, Brooklyn, Rochester, Jersey City, Philadelphia.
Martin Luther King receives Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December.
***The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, Lorraine Hansberry's second play premieres;** it enjoys modest success. **She divorces Robert Nemiroff.**



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Catherine Carmier, by Ernest J. Gaines, *The Dead Lecturer*, by LeRoi Jones and *Why We Can't Wait*, by Martin Luther King.

1965 Martin Luther King begins a voter registration drive in Selma. King and more than 100 others are arrested on 1 February.

Malcolm X assassinated on 21 February.

Bloody Sunday. Outraged over the killing of a demonstrator by a state trooper in Marion, Alabama, the Black community of Marion decide to hold a march. Martin Luther King agrees to lead the marchers on Sunday, 7 March, from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, where they will appeal directly to governor Wallace to stop police brutality and call attention to their struggle for suffrage. When Governor Wallace refuses to allow the march, Martin Luther King goes to Washington to speak with President Johnson, delaying the demonstration until 8 March. However, the people of Selma cannot wait and they begin the march on Sunday. When the marchers reach the city line, they find a posse of state troopers waiting for them. As the demonstrators cross the bridge leading out of Selma, they are ordered to disperse, but the troopers do not wait for their warning to be headed. They immediately attack the crowd of people who have bowed their heads in prayer. Using tear gas and batons, the troopers chase the demonstrators to a Black housing project, where they continue to beat the demonstrators as well as residents of the project who have not been at the march. Bloody Sunday receives national attention, and numerous marches were organised in response. Martin Luther King leads a march to the Selma bridge that Tuesday, during which one protestor is killed. Finally, with President Johnson's permission, Martin Luther King leads a successful march from Selma to Montgomery on 25 March. President Johnson gives a rousing speech to congress concerning civil rights as a result of Bloody Sunday, and passed the Voting Rights Act within that same year.

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Bill on 6 August, authorising the end of literacy tests for voting.

Riots in Watts and Chicago.

Lorraine Hansberry dies of cancer at the age of 34, the same day *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* ends its short run.

The Promised Land, by Claude Brown, *The System of Dante's Hell*, by LeRoi Jones, *Harlem Gallery*, by Melvin B. Tolson and *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, by Malcolm X and Alex Haley.

1966 Julian Bond, Black civil rights leader, is denied his seat in Georgia House of Representatives because of his opposition to the Vietnam War.

First world festival of Black art is held in Dakar, Senegal.

Martin Luther King denounces the Vietnam War.

Stokely Carmichael named chairman of SNCC.



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James Meredith is wounded by sniper during the Memphis-to-Jackson voter registration march. Carmichael launches the Black Power Movement during the same march.

Race riots in Chicago, Lansing, Milwaukee, Dayton, Atlanta and nearly forty other cities.

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party in Oakland.

New American Library edition of *A Raisin in the Sun* features cut scenes; Beneatha and Asagai in the final scene, and Walter sharing his dream with Travis.

Selected Poems, by Robert Hayden, *Home*, by LeRoi Jones, *Jubilee*, Margaret Walker.

- 1967** Julian Bond is finally seated in the Georgia legislature.
Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr is expelled from the House of Representatives for refusing to pay damages having lost a libel case. Harlem voters defy Congress and re-elect Powell.
H Rap Brown replaces Stokely Carmichael as chair of SNCC.
Thurgood Marshall becomes the first Black man appointed to the Supreme Court.
Race riots in Roxbury, Tampa, Cincinnati.
Muhammad Ali convicted for refusing induction into the army on religious grounds; sentenced to five years of prison and stripped of his titles, overturned by the Supreme Court in 1971.
Newark Rebellion; racial tension causes riots which spread to other New Jersey cities. Riots in numerous cities across the nation. National Guard called out. 75 major riots during the year.
Tales, by LeRoi Jones, *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, by Ishmael Reed and *A Glance Away*, by John E Wideman.
- 1968** Kerner Commission Report states that White racism is the fundamental cause of the riots in the cities.
Martin Luther King announces in March plans for Poor People's Campaign in Washington, scheduled for 20 April but he is assassinated in Memphis on 4 April. Riots ensue throughout the country.
Robert F Kennedy assassinated on 6 June.
Richard M. Nixon elected President on 5 November.
Soul on Ice, by Eldridge Cleaver, *Bloodline*, by Ernest J. Gaines, *Black Feeling*, *Black Talk*, by Nikki Giovanni and *The First Cities*, by Audre Lorde.
- 1969** ***To Be Young Gifted and Black*, a compilation of Lorraine Hansberry's writings and autobiography** is dramatised by Robert Nemiroff and presented off-Broadway.
- 1970** ***Les Blancs*, Lorraine Hansberry's unfinished piece, premieres** having been completed by Nemiroff.
To Be Young Gifted and Black is published in book form.
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, by Maya Angelou, *The Lives and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger*, by Cecil Brown, *I Am a Black Woman*, by Mari Evans and *Hurry Home*, by John Edgar Wideman.
- 1974** ***Raisin!* a musical version of *A Raisin in the Sun* premieres**, adapted by Nemiroff and Charlotte Zaltzberg. It wins a Tony award.



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- 1981** Claudia McNeil, who played Lena in the 1959 production of *A Raisin in the Sun* plays the role in a revival of the musical version.
- 1989** *A Raisin in the Sun*, film starring Danny Glover.
- 2001** **Young Vic brings *A Raisin in the Sun* back to the London stage** (for the first time since The Tricycle Theatre's production 15 years ago), at the same time as *Les Blancs* is revived at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester.
- 2004** **Sean Coombs (Puff Diddy) appears on Broadway as Walter Lee.**



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7.A BLACK BRITISH TIMELINE

This Timeline was compiled from a number of sources (see Bibliography.) It is intended to act as a broad overview of the subject rather than as an exhaustive history.

We use the word Black conscious that today it means different things to different people – and add to its meaning those people discriminated against because of the colour of their skin.

Bold type indicates a key event in the history or literary heritage of Black British people.

Italics indicate the title of a publication or play, followed by its author. The year listed is the year of publication for books and of premiere performances for theatre, unless otherwise noted.

- 210** **African soldiers, described as a 'division of Moors,' are sent by Rome to defend Hadrian's Wall.**
The presence of these Africans predates the arrival of those who are today considered 'English,' since Britannia (modern-day England) was created during Roman rule.
- 800** The Ancient Irish record the existence of 'blue men' from Morocco who were captured by the Vikings and taken to Ireland.
- 1000** **A young African girl dies in North Elmham, Norfolk.** Her body will be found almost 1000 years later.
- 1441** **Antam Goncalves, Portuguese sailor, seized ten Africans near Cape Bojador;** generally seen as the start of the Atlantic Slave Trade.
- Early 1500's** A small group of Africans are 'attached,' or enslaved, to King James IV's court.
- 1511** Henry VIII employs a Black trumpet player, who receives 8d a day.
- 1515** **First samples of Caribbean sugar sent to Spain.**
- 1541** Between 1541 and the 1850's, there are 61 taverns called the Black Boy in England and 51 called The Blackamoor's Head in London alone.
- 1550** **The first English traders land in West Africa.**
- 1555** Five West Africans come to London from present-day Ghana to learn English and assist traders.
- 1563** **Sir John Hawkins, an 'unscrupulous adventurer,' purchases 300 Africans from the coast of Guinea and sells them at Hispaniola** (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), thus beginning England's foray into the slave trade.
- 1570's** African slaves come to England as servants for households, prostitutes to the wealthy and court entertainers.



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- 1596** Queen Elizabeth, despite her fondness for Black entertainers in court, is disturbed by the growing Black population in England and issues an edict ordering English slaveholders to 'have those kinde of people sent out of the lande.'
- 1624** **England colonises Barbados and St. Kitts.**
- 1641** Frances, a 'Blackymore maide' servant who joined a church, became the first recorded person of African heritage in Bristol.
- 1642 – 1646** The Great Civil War. Charles I is captured. Queen Henrietta Maria and Charles, Prince of Wales, escape to France.
- 1647** First Barbados sugar sent to England.
- 1649** Charles I is beheaded. The Interregnum; the Commonwealth established.
- 1650-1800** Sugar, needed to sweeten the newly created and insatiable English appetite for tea, chocolate, and coffee, dramatically increases the number of African slaves in Britain. Absentee plantation 'sugar barons', government officials, navel officers and army captains bring slaves to Britain. In much smaller numbers, Africans came to England as free sailors, recruited to replace white English sailors who had died while at sea. For the next 150 years slavery is the driving force behind Britain's Triangular Trade economy and fuels the Industrial Revolution.
- 1660** The Restoration; Charles II returns from France and takes the throne.
- 1663** The Royal Adventurers became the first English company chartered to take part in the African slave trade. The company reflects the 'cream' of English aristocracy; twenty-five percent of the company's stock was owned by the King and Queen of England.
- 1665** **English capture Jamaica from the Spanish.**
- 1672** Establishment of the Royal African Company to take control of the British slave trade. It transports an average of 5,000 slaves year.
- 1688** *Oroonoko*, Aphra Behn's popular story of the life of an enslaved African prince, is published.
- 1698** Private traders, on payment of 10 percent duty on goods exported to Africa, are given parliamentary approval to participate in the slave trade.
- 1700's** By the eighteenth-century, the 'Black presence' in England has become a reality. The visible signs of slavery are evident especially in port cities (Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff) and London. Street names such as Black Boy Alleys, Black Boy Court, Blackamoor's Head Yard, reflect the nature of the businesses and people living there. In London, Black pages, dressed in silks and satins are a sign of wealth and status. Interracial marriages between working class White women and Black men are documented in paintings, prints, engravings, popular novels and plays.
- 1700** **Liverpool's participation in the slave trade begins in September** when the Liverpool Merchant set sale for Barbados carrying 220 slaves, who are sold for £4,239.
- 1707** Act of Union between Scotland and England.



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- 1713** **The signing of the Treaty of Utrecht gives Britain the right to provide Spain's colonies with slaves** and Britain becomes the world's pre-eminent slavers.
- 1729** British law continues to be contradictory in court rulings on issues of slavery. Africans enslaved because they were heathens did not necessarily gain their freedom when baptised. Most slaves respond to the legal confusion by simply freeing themselves; the numbers of runaway slaves increases throughout the eighteenth century.
- 1731** Job Ben Solomon, a non-European educated African descended from Muslim royalty, is captured in Gambia and sold to a Maryland slave owner. A British general intercepts a letter in which Solomon pleads for his release and is so impressed by the writer's level of education that he orders that Ben Solomon should be taken to England. There, Ben Solomon becomes the darling of Britain's intellectual set, is 'lionised and feted by polite society.'
- The Lord Mayor of London proclaims that no Black person will be taught trades, and neither Black slaves nor servants were entitled to poor law relief or wages.
- 1732** Black characters feature regularly in William Hogarth's engravings, such as *Southwark Fair*.
- 1738-1739** Liverpool's slave trading peaks and eclipses Bristol's lead when its vessels travel 52 times to Africa.
- 1750** Parliament gave annual grants to British Royal Africa Company totalling £90,000.
- 1752** The monies brought from Britain's slave trade accounts for 40% of Europe's economy.
- 1754** Anglo-French war begins in North America.
- 1756** Seven Years War starts.
- 1757** India captured from the French.
- 1759** Two Africans, one being Prince William Ansah Sessarakoo, recently rescued from slavery, attends a showing of the play *Oroonoko*, adapted from Behn's 1688 book.
- 1765** The letters of Philip Quaque are stored in the Rhodes House Library in Oxford. Most of Quaque's letters were written to London missionaries asking for their help in maintaining various missions in Africa.
- 1770** *A Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, Related by Himself* is published.
- 1772** A declaration makes it illegal to forcibly remove any person from England.
- 1773** ***Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, by Phillis Wheatley, is published.*** Although the author was an American, her work was 1st published in London due to an inability to get any work published by a Black person in the United States. She was the first Black female author to be published in Britain or America.
- 1775** American Revolution begins.
- 1777** Richard Pennant elected MP for Liverpool. He owns 8,000 acres of sugar plantations and over 600 slaves in Jamaica. He is re-elected from 1784 to 1790.
- 1781** 3 of the 41 councillors in Liverpool are slave ship owners or major investors in the slave trade.



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- 1782** *The Letters of the late Ignatius Sancho* is published after his death by his children.
- 1783** **Peace Treaty signed between Great Britain and the United States.** Black North American soldiers, who fought alongside British soldiers in the American Revolutionary War, arrive in London to reap the 'freedom' they were promised. Instead they experience homelessness, starvation, or kidnapping and re-enslavement.
- 1787** All 20 of Liverpool's mayors holding office between 1787 and 1807 finance or own slave ships. *Ottobah Cugoano's (John Stuart) Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* is published. It is more outspoken than previous and contemporary works on the evils of slavery.
- 1789** *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself* is published and becomes a bestseller. It is widely used to fight in the abolition of slavery in Britain.
- 1801** Union of Great Britain and Ireland.
- 1804** **Ira Aldridge, 'The African Roscius' is born in America.** In 1824 he emigrates to Britain and becomes the first Black actor to play the major Shakespearean roles winning acclaim as Othello, King Lear, Shylock, Macbeth and Hamlet.
- 1808** **Britain and the United States abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade.**
- 1812** Britain and the United States are at war.
- 1813** Sweden abolishes the slave trade.
- 1814** Treaty of Ghent ends Anglo-US War.
Britain and allies invade France.
- 1815** Charles Dickens writes about a Black woman who dressed as a man and surreptitiously served as a British sailor for eleven years after leaving her husband.
- 1815** *The Life, History and Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher*, by John Jea is published.
- 1821** Spain abolishes the slave trade.
- 1824** *The Horrors of Slavery*, by Robert Wedderburn was published. This vivid account of slavery is the most passionate and radical thus far.
The Rights of Man in the West Indies is published under the pseudonym Anthrosos.
- 1827** **Britain declares slave trading piracy, and is thus punishable by death.**
- 1829** Peel establishes the Metropolitan Police.
- 1831** *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*, by Mary Prince is published; the first account of the female slave experience.
- 1833** **Emancipation Act in British Parliament**, introduces 5 year apprenticeship system.
- 1833** Slavery finally abolished in the British Empire.
- 1846** Sweden abolishes slavery.



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- 1853** *American Prejudice Against Colour*, by William G Allen. This autobiography talks about the prejudice that exists in America in regards to inter-racial marriages and Allen's decision to flee from America to avoid persecution.
- 1853-6** Crimean War.
- 1857** *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands*, by Mary Seacole, is one of only two books by Black British women published in the nineteenth century. It tells the story of a freeborn Black woman who served as a nurse to the British during the Crimean war.
The Indian Mutiny.
- 1859** American Black and White Minstrel performer, George Washington Moore, performs in St James' Hall, London and creates popular demand for White performers who 'black-up.'
- 1867** Canada is the first British colony given self-governing Dominion status.
- 1868** *West African Countries and Peoples*, by James Africanus Beale Horton, argues for self-government in the West African countries.
- 1879** The Zulu War.
- 1881** *African Trading: or the Trials of William Narh Ocansey*, by John E Ocansey and tells a different kind of story of slavery.
- 1887** *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, by Edward Wilmot Blyden's is published.
- 1889** *Froudacity*, by J J Thomas is a response to a book by an Oxford Professor, Froude, which is racist in its treatment of Black West Indians. Thomas eloquently refutes the claims of Froude with factual evidence as well as exposing the Professor as a racist.
- 1891** Control of West African trade passes to the Elder Dempster Company, a Liverpool shipping firm.
- 1900** Australia becomes a Dominion.
- 1910** South Africa becomes a Dominion.
- 1914-18** **The first substantial numbers of Afro-Caribbeans arrive in Britain to fight in WWI.**
- 1918** Walter Daniel Tull, a famous Black footballer is the first Black man commissioned into the British Army in WWI. He dies on a battlefield in Favreuil in the second battle of the Somme.
All men over 21 and women over 30 are given the right to vote.
- 1918** Public outcries mount for immigrant restrictions, particularly in seaport towns where White residents fear competition from Black seamen during recessions and unemployment. White people also voice concerns over 'inter-racial liaisons' and poverty.
- 1919** Race riots occur in seaside towns.
- 1922** The African Churches Mission is founded by Nigerian Pastor G D Ekarte in Liverpool for unemployed and 'stranded' African seamen.
- 1926** Imperial Conference held. For the first time, Britain is prepared to accept the dominions as free countries within the British Commonwealth of Nations.



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- 1928** Equal voting rights for men and women.
African American actor, Paul Robeson, stars in *Show Boat*, Drury Lane in London's West End.
- 1930** First Empire or Commonwealth Games are held.
Paul Robeson plays *Othello* in London.
- 1931** West Indian doctor Harold Arundel Moody founds the missionary and welfare League of Coloured Peoples in Merseyside.
Statute of Westminster; Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa become freely associated members of the British Commonwealth. This new status of the so-called 'White Dominions' helped to ease tension and provided clarification for these countries on their position within the Commonwealth.
The Beacon is published and is highly influential throughout the Black community under the editorship of Albert Gomes.
- 1932** Iraq gains independence.
At the Imperial Economic Conference Britain agrees to give preferential treatment to certain goods from commonwealth nations.
- 1936** Egypt gains independence.
How Britain Rules Africa, by George Padmore, is a critique of British colonialism in Africa.
- 1938** Paul Robeson turns down a West End show to appear in *Plant in the Sun*, a strike play produced by the radical left-wing company Unity Theatre.
- 1939-45** **The second (and larger) wave of Afro-Caribbeans arrives in Britain to fight in WWII.** Several thousands fight in the RAF and other branches of the armed forces, and to serve as military technicians. Many others are also recruited to work in Merseyside munitions plants.
- 1940** The British Colonial Office begins welfare work for Black seamen and their families in seaport towns.
- 1941** The British Ministry of Labour open a welfare hostel in Liverpool.
Labour Minister M A Bevan argues that Britain should 'dismiss the idea' of bringing West Indian labourers to Britain 'from the start.' And the possible arrival of additional West Indians causes fear within official circles that a potential 'colour racial problem' will arise in Britain.
- 1944** The 1944 Education Act combines church, state, and charitable schools that had once been separate under the control of local education. Detractors in the 1960's and 1970's maintain that the system institutionalised religious and class differences and, from its inception, automatically placed Afro-Caribbean children into programs for 'under-achievers,' and declared most Asian children inferior due to cultural and language differences.
Negro Repertory Arts Theatre, one of the first Black theatre companies in Britain, produces Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, at Colchester. NRAT was founded by Robert Adams, a British Guyanan who had a highly successful career as an actor in film, theatre, radio and television.



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- 1946** **Les Ballets Negres is founded;** the first black dance company in Europe. This pioneering company toured throughout Britain and paved the way for other Black dance groups such as Pearl Primus, Mas Movers, Kokuma, IRIE!, Adzido, Sakoba and Phoenix.
- 1947** India, Pakistan and Burma become independent.
- 1948** **Nearly 500 people arrived in Britain on board the Empire Windrush and 100 enter on the S S Orbita.** The Windrush's passengers are detained on board, interviewed, and most are placed in agriculture, the iron foundries, railways, and in other industries that needed labourers. Passage of the British Nationality Act provides for common British citizenship for Commonwealth members. Britain's previous 'laissez-faire' policy towards Black immigration comes under attack but the importance attached to the citizenship rights of British subjects becomes the obstacle to tightening controls on the numbers of Black migrants to Britain. Among the 492 Jamaicans who arrive in England seeking the employment are the writers Wilson Harris, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon.
- 1949** Membership in the Commonwealth widened to include republics such as India, as they were more willing to join this new idea of a Commonwealth of Nations. The Republic of Eire becomes independent. The first colonial Black football team from Lagos, Nigeria plays at Merseyside, home of Britain's largest and oldest Black community, and defeats the Marine team, 5-2. The touring Nigerian team is the first of many colonial teams from Africa and the Caribbean who, from 1949-1959, are be used prove that Britain's economic and political system was far superior that any offered in Africa.
- 1950's** Britain continues to invite West Indian workers and British Rail, the National Health Service, and London Transport particularly recruit workers from Jamaica and Barbados. By the mid-1950's most of the West Indies have lost one-third of their workforce. There are over 30,000 'coloured British subjects' in Britain, and 5,000 have migrated since 1945 with a majority from West Africa and the West Indies. Levels of Black unemployment in Merseyside and Liverpool concern citizens and led to calls for deportation and a quota of how many Black workers are needed at each port.
- 1951** In other parts of Britain labour shortages increase the numbers of West Indian nursing and labour recruits. This rises from less than 1,000 persons per year in 1951 to 10,000 per year in 1954. The Society of Friends meet at Toynbee Hall to discuss promoting racial harmony through increased welfare programs and changing the restriction policies used by British labour unions. The remains of several Roman-era (third-century AD) African soldiers are exhumed in an archaeological dig at York. Edgar Mittelholzer's novel, *Shadows Move Among Them* focuses on the differences between cultures



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and the need for creating new ones.

1952 The Wales Establishment Office reports that Black males can only find employment on foreign-owned ships, and that Black women have been forced from jobs as domestics and shop girls to working for 'mainly rag and bone merchants in the docklands area.'

British Ministry of Labour Staff Association reports that only half of the 152,000 job vacancies for that year are open to Black men due to job quotas, bar from jobs where White women also worked, racist stereotypes, and perceptions of a low skill base.

1953 George Lamming's first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, portrays the life experiences of Barbadian children.

1955 The number of West Indian nursing and labour migrants increases to an average of 32,850 per year.

1956 As the need for workers is reduced a substantial number of West Indian migrants return home.

Yvonne Brewster, co-founder of Talawa Theatre Company, comes to England as one of Britain's first Black women drama students, attending Rose Bruford and the Royal Academy of Music.

1958 **Racial clashes occur in Nottingham and Notting Hill in London.** The Conservative Macmillan government, strong on law and order, support the police, punish offenders and reassure West Indian officials. Civil liberty groups denounce the violence encountered by Blacks. The politicisation of Black immigration issues and escalating violence assist the Conservatives in their fight for immigration controls.

The segregation of Blacks people into manual jobs has given these occupations the 'taint' of racial inferiority. In a Ministry of Labour brief presented to the House of Commons, it is revealed that white unemployed people are 'not suitable for the kind of jobs held by the coloured people.'

1959 The fatal stabbing of Kelso Cochrane by a White assailant and the police's handling of the incident confirms the belief among Notting Hill's Black community that the police are far from racially impartial.

A Raisin in the Sun has its British premiere at the Adelphi Theatre, London. The actor playing George Murchinson was harassed and beaten by police in Trafalgar Square. He was fined £7 for assaulting an officer.

E R Brathwaite's first novel, *To Sir, With Love*, was published.

Shelagh Delaney's play, *A Taste of Honey*, controversially deals with an inter-racial relationship and the birth of a mixed race child.

1959 Birmingham Immigration Control Association, a fascist, far right wing political cell, is created and heralded in the British press.

Palace of the Peacock is the first novel by Wilson Harris.

The Black and White Minstrel show is a regular feature in the West End theatre and on Sunday evening television.

1961 The British government begins to keep official statistics on Commonwealth immigration.



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South Africa withdraws from the Commonwealth due to its apartheid policy.

- 1962** **Britain passes the Commonwealth Immigrants Act to restrict the entry of non-White Commonwealth citizens to Great Britain.** As a consequence the numbers of West Indian immigrants falls to less than 14,000 a year.
- 1963** The Black West Indian Association notes that brutal attacks by the police had escalated without public criticism
Cyril Lionel Robert James' *Beyond a Boundary* covers his philosophy on life, art, culture and political ideology told through the game of cricket as a model for life.
- 1964** *The Feather Pluckers*, written by John Peter Jones depicts the lives of three Black British youths and their battles with society.
- 1965** **The Notting Hill Carnival is started** by writer and activist Claudia Jones and takes place during August Bank Holiday weekend.
- 1966** Joseph A. Hunte publishes *Nigger Hunting in England?* which is presented at the West Indian Standing Conference on police brutality.
- 1968** Wole Soyinka publishes his poem, *Telephone Conversation in Voices*.
- 1970** Two-fifths of the Black population in Britain are second-generation.
- 1971** Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles agrees that all Commonwealth Nations support a loose set of principles including individual liberty, international peace and cooperation, opposition to all forms of racism, and a willingness to promote free and fair trade.
Leeds police officers are convicted of the manslaughter of David Oluwale, a Nigerian vagrant but receive light sentences.
As Time Goes By, by Trinidad-born Mustapha Matura, premieres at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh and then the Royal Court, London. It receives the George Devine and John Whiting Awards.
- 1971** Selective Commonwealth immigration policies result in larger numbers of white-collar workers and their families migrating to Great Britain.
- 1972** Pakistan withdraws from the Commonwealth in protest at the recognition of East Pakistan as Bangladesh, but rejoins some years later.
The West Indian Standing Conference issue a memorandum to Parliament's committee on relations between the Black population and police. The committee's chairman responds that 'the memorandum which you have submitted to us does present a case almost akin to civil war between the West Indians and the police.'
Temba, a theatre company pioneering new Black writing from Britain, Africa, America and the Caribbean, is formed by Oscar James and Alton Kumalo. Playwrights involved include Mustapha Matura, Jimi Rand, Edgar White and Leroi Jones. Temba is the Zulu word for hope.



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Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* tells the story of the isolation that is felt by Caribbean communities who arrived in Britain in the Great Migration of the 1950s.

- 1973** The international oil crisis of 1973 heralds the end of Britain's need for post-colonial labourers. Sociologist Maureen Cain publishes *Society and the Policeman's Role*, and argues that stereotypes and racial epithets are part of the police used to 'control' Blacks
- 1973** Nkemba Asika self-publishes a volume of his poetry entitled, *Black Waves*.
- 1974-76** Four 'Political and Economic Planning Reports' are published and indicate that most of the two million people of African heritage in Britain are subject to discrimination in employment, housing, education, and areas of law enforcement.
- 1975** In *Troubled Waters*, Ernest Marke gives a rare account of what it was like to be Black in Britain before 1950.
Linton Kwesi Johnson publishes a poem entitled *Rage in Dread Beat and Blood*.
- 1976** *The Bride Price*, written by Buchi Emecheta emphasizes the role of the wife in Nigerian life. Albert Gomes, previously editor of *The Beacon* and a politician in Trinidad, publishes his controversial autobiography, which relates his views of British government.
Tara Arts is established, becoming the first theatre company in Britain to be run by Asian artists.
The Blood Knot, by Athol Fugard performed by Temba.
- 1977** *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, by Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona and John Kani performed by Temba.
- 1978** Roy A K Heath's novel, *The Murderer* is published.
A wave of Jamaican middle-class emigrates to Britain due to governmental unrest in their homeland.
- 1979** **Another account of police brutality, *Police Against Black People*, is submitted to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure.** The evidence, taken from lawyer's case files, legal and advisory centres, Black self-help groups, and personal interviews, argues that Britain's police 'no longer merely reflected or reinforced popular morality [but] re-create it - through stereotyping the Black section of society as muggers and criminals and illegal immigrants.' By the beginning of the 1980's Black youth swear they were not going to take any more abuse from police officers.
- 1981** The number of British persons born in the West Indies has increased from 15,000 in 1951 to 304,000 in 1981. At the time, the total population of persons of West Indian ethnicity was between 500,000 and 550,000.
The Education Act of 1981 paves the way to race-based educational segregation, which allowed White parents to remove their children from predominantly Black or Asian schools that didn't reflect proper 'British culture.'
Increasingly, Black people have to provide proof of citizenship to receive health and welfare service benefits, or to have access to housing, education, and employment. Future Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher justified British racism as a necessary measure; 'People are really rather afraid that this



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country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture.'

Thirteen Black people burned to death in a fire that the Black community believed was racially motivated in Deptford. Over 15,000 Black protesters march from Deptford to central London in protest against widespread injustices against the Black community. In what is perceived as a retaliatory gesture police unleash 'Swamp 81' against Brixton's Black community. In six days, 943 Black people are stopped and detained on the street and 118 are arrested and Brixton erupts in a rebellion, with violence spreading to Southall, Toxteth in Liverpool.

1982 The Black Theatre Co-operative is formed. Pioneered by dramatist Mustapha Matura and director Charlie Hanson it produces works by Black playwrights such as Jacqueline Rudet, Edgar White and Farrukh Dhondy.

1983 Grace Nichols' publishes her book of poetry, *i is a long-memored woman*.

1984 David Dabydeen's collection of poetry, *Slave Song*, is published and wins the Commonwealth Poetry Prize.

Les Isaac's *Dreadlocks* is published and gives an autobiographical account of one man's struggle to survive as a Black man in Britain.

Amos A Ford gives his account on the role of Black service men during WWII in his narrative, *Telling the Truth: The Life and Times of the British Honduran Forestry Unit in Scotland (1941-1944)*.

Desmond Johnson's poem *Mass Jobe* in *Deadly Ending Season* looks back at the life of an older man and relates the disappointment he feels at not accomplishing his goals in England.

Black Mime Theatre formed by David Boxer and Sarha Cahn.

1985 British Home Office study reports that over 70,000 racially motivated attacks occur each year. Talawa Theatre Company is founded by Yvonne Brewster, Mona Hammond, Carmen Monroe and Inigo Espejel. The company aims to use Black culture to enrich British Theatre, to demonstrate Black talent and to enlarge theatre audiences among the black community. Its inaugural production is *The Black Jacobins* by CLR James.

John Agard edits a book of old and new poems in a volume entitled, *Mangoes and Bullets*.

Fred D'Aguiar's book of poems entitled *Mama Dot* is published. It won the 1984 Commonwealth Poetry Prize and has received national attention.

James Berry publishes *Confession* in *Chain of Days*.

Caryl Philips' novel, *The Final Passage*, won the Malcolm X Prize in the Greater London Literature Competition.

Joan Riley's novel, *The Unbelonging*, explores the alienation a little girl feels as she is moved from her home in Jamaica to England and back to Jamaica again.

The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne



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Safe.

- 1986** Berry's text, *The Rise of Dub Poetry and After*, serves as the first substantial critical work on contemporary African-British poetry.
Woza Albert!, by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon is staged by Temba.
Prodigal, by Ivor Osbourne explores issues of alienation in his story of a man's return to Jamaica after living for several years in Britain.
- 1988** The 1988 Education Reform Act builds upon the new freedoms given to parents in the 1981 Education Act to choose (within limits) their children's schools.
- 1989** Mahogany Carnival Arts, a group of multidisciplinary artists combining British theatre design, Asian and Caribbean performance traditions and Carnival 'mask-making', is founded by Clary Salandy and Michael Ramdeen and becomes a regular feature at Notting Hill Carnival and other events in Paris, Nice and Trinidad.
Back Street Mammy, by Trish Cooke, performed by Temba.
- 1990** The Black Mime Theatre expands by forming the Black Mime Women's Troupe.
Streetwise, the first play by dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah is produced by Temba.
- 1991** Harare Commonwealth Declaration made in which commonwealth countries agreed to promote democracy and human rights in developing countries as well as sustainable economic and social development.
- 1992** John Patten, the secretary of state for education, publishes a White Paper that makes it possible for more schools to 'opt out' of local education control.
A Passage to England: Barbadian Londoners Speak of Home is a collection of interviews by John Western in which Barbadians discuss their memories of their homeland and the reasons they felt they had to leave it.
- 1992** The Ensemble combines the Black Mime Theatre and Black Mime Women's Troupe to create *Heart* performed in the Young Vic Studio.
- 1993** **22 April, Stephen Lawrence, a Black A-Level student, is murdered in an unprovoked attack in Eltham, London.** After a series of attempted public and private prosecutions no one has yet been convicted of the crime.
Running Dream, by Trish Cooke is produced. This play tells the story of three generations of Black Dominican women.
Iced by actor and singer, Ray Shell, is published by Flamingo.
- 1994** **South Africa rejoins the Commonwealth.**
Talawa's production of *King Lear*. Ben Thomas played the title role and became the first Black man to play the part since Ira Aldridge in 1859.



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The Booker Prize committee awards a special Best of the Past 25 years, to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

Fred D'Aguiar's first novel *The Longest Memory* wins the Whitbread Award.

1995 Whitbread awards Salman Rushdie best Novel prize for *The Moor's Last Sigh*.
The Black Album by Hanif Kureishi, is published by Faber.

The Saga Prize is awarded to Diran Adebayo for his first novel *Some Kind of Black*.

1996 Steve Martin's historical thriller, *Incomparable World* is published.
New Nation newspaper launched.

Andrea Levy publishes *Never Far From Nowhere*.

1997 The Theatre Museum and Talawa collaborate on Blackgrounds, a project to record interviews with senior black theatre professionals.

Mike Phillip's *The Dancing Face* about a stolen African mask is published.

Leone Ross' first novel *All the Blood is Red*.

LARA the first novel of Bernardine Evaristo, is published.

1998 John Agard engaged as BBC Poet in Residence, to commemorate Windrush celebrations.
Empire Windrush - the irresistible rise of Multi-racial Britain by Mike Phillips.

Empire Windrush - Fifty Years of writing about Black Britain, edited by Onyekachi Wambu

1999 **Tricycle Theatre stages *The Colour of Justice*, an adaptation of the report of the public inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.**

Ray Fearon is the first Black actor to play Othello in Stratford-upon-Avon since Paul Robeson in 1959.

Steve McQueen wins the Turner Prize.

2000 **David Oyelowo is the first Black actor to play a king in one of Shakespeare's history plays as part of the RSC's season at the Young Vic.**

The Young Vic brings *A Raisin in the Sun* to the London Stage and *Les Blancs* is performed in Manchester.

Push, a diverse mix of contemporary Black arts, media and culture takes place at the Young Vic.

2002 *Simply Heavenly* by Langston Hughes is produced at the Young Vic.

2003 World premiere of collaboration between visual artist Steve McQueen and soprano Jessye Norman.
Decibel and Arts Council initiative is launched to raise the voice of culturally diverse arts in Britain.

2004 *The Big Life* by Paul Sirett with music by Paul Joseph opens at Theatre Royal, Stratford East.

Push 04 opens a season of new Black British theatre, opera and ballet at the Almedia theatre and Sadlers Wells.

Simply Heavenly by Langston Hughes is produced at the Young Vic transfers to the West End.

Young Vic Theatre Company
In association with the Lyric Hammersmith

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8. PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS



Walter Lee Younger and Ruth Younger

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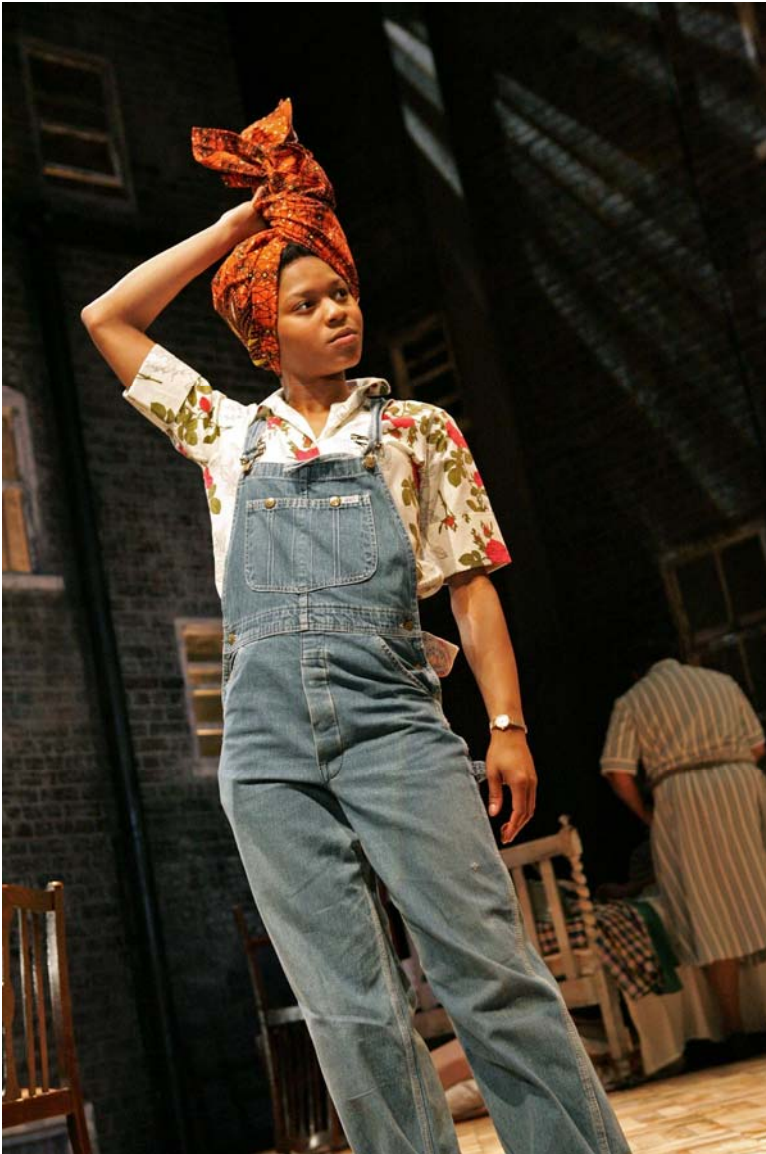
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Beneatha Younger



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9. LORRAINE HANSBERRY IN HER OWN WORDS

The following are short extracts from To Be Young Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her own Words, adapted by Robert Nemiroff (1969)

From a speech made at a Negro Writers' Conference, date unknown

'I was born on the Southside of Chicago. I was born black and a female. I was born in a depression after one world war, and came into my adolescence during another. While I was still in my teens the first atom bombs were dropped on human beings at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and by the time I was twenty-three years old my government and that of the Soviet Union had entered actively in to the worst conflict of nerves in human history - the Cold War.

I have lost friends and relatives through cancer, lynching and war. I have been personally the victim of physical attack, which was the offspring of racial and political hysteria. I have worked with the handicapped and seen the ravages of congenital diseases that we have not yet conquered because we spend our time and ingenuity in far less purposeful wars. I see daily on the streets of New York, street gangs and prostitutes and beggars; I know people afflicted with drug addiction and alcoholism and mental illness; 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, indifference to human misery 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.'

April 4, 1960. Excerpt from letter to Mr. Chuchvalec of the State Theatre in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia

'...I am the first to say that ours is a complex and difficult country and some of our complexities are indeed grotesque. We who are Negro Americans can offer that last remark with unwavering insistence. It is, on the other hand, also a great nation with certain beautiful and indestructible traditions and potentials, which can be seized by all of us who possess imagination and love of man. There is, as a certain play suggests, a great deal to be fought in America - but, at the same time, there is so much which begs to be but re-affirmed and cherished with sweet defiance.

Vulgarity, blind conformity and mass lethargy need not triumph in the land of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and Walt Whitman and Mark Twain. There is simply no reason why dreams should dry up like raisins or prunes or anything else in America. If you will permit me to say so, I believe that we can impose beauty on our future...'



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A letter to her mother, dated January 19, 1959

'Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I 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. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope it will make you very proud.'

From a speech made at a Negro Writers' Conference, date unknown

'I must share with you a part of a conversation I had with a young New York intellectual in my living room in Greenwich Village. "Why," he said to me, "are you so sure the human race should go on? You do not believe in a prior arrangement of life on this planet. You know perfectly well that the reason for survival does not exist in nature!"...

I answered him the only way I could: that man is unique in the universe, the only creature who has in fact the power to transform the universe. Therefore, it did not seem unthinkable to me that man might just do what the apes never will - impose the reason for life on life. That is what I said to my friend. I wish to live because life has within it that which is good, that which is beautiful and that which is love. Therefore, since I have known all of these things, I have found them to be reason enough and - I wish to live. Moreover, because this is so, I wish others to live for generations and generations and generations...'



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10. INTRODUCTION TO THE 1988 PLAY SCRIPT by Robert Nemiroff

*Robert Nemiroff was Lorraine Hansberry's ex-husband, biographer and literary executor and after her death he completed Les Blancs and compiled Young, Gifted and Black. Here, in extracts from his introduction to the 1988 edition of **A Raisin in the Sun**, he talks about Lorraine and the play. (Please note that the spelling and punctuation is true to the original text.)*

"The events of every passing year add resonance to **A Raisin in the Sun**. It is as if history is conspiring to make the play a classic"; "...one of a handful of great American dramas ... **A Raisin in the Sun** belongs in the inner circle, along with *Death of a Salesman*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *The Glass Menagerie*." So wrote The New York Times and the Washington Post respectively of Harold Scott's revelatory stagings for the Roundabout in which most of the elements, cut on Broadway, were restored. The unprecedented resurgence of the work (a dozen regional revivals at this writing, new publications and productions abroad, and now the television production that will be seen by millions) prompts the new edition.

Produced in 1959, the play presaged the revolution in black and women's consciousness -and the revolutionary ferment in Africa - that exploded in the years following the playwright's death in 1965 to ineradicably alter the social fabric and consciousness of the nation and the world. As so many have commented lately, it did so in a manner and to an extent that few could have foreseen, for not only the restored material, but much else that passed unnoticed in the play at the time, speaks to issues that are now inescapable: value systems of the black family; concepts of African American beauty and identity; class and generational conflicts; the relationships of husbands and wives, black men and women; the outspoken (if then yet unnamed) feminism of the daughter; and, in the penultimate scene between Beneatha and Asagai, the larger statement of the play and the ongoing struggle it portends...

..James Baldwin has written that "Americans suffer from an ignorance that is not only colossal, but sacred." He is referring to that apparently endless capacity we have nurtured through long years to deceive ourselves where race is concerned: the baggage of myth and preconception we carry with us that enables northerners, for example, to shield themselves from the extent and virulence of segregation in the North, so that each time an "incident" of violence so egregious that they cannot look past it occurs they are "shocked" anew, as if it had never happened before or as if the problem were largely passe. (In 1975, when the cast of *Raisin!*, the musical, became involved in defence of a family whose home in Queens, New York City, had been fire-bombed, we learned of a 1972 City Commissioner of Human Rights Report, citing "eleven cases in the last eighteen months in which minority-owned homes had been set afire or vandalized, a church had been bombed, and a school bus had been attacked" - in New York City!)



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But Baldwin is referring also to the human capacity, where a work of art is involved, to substitute, for what the writer has written, what in our hearts we wish to believe. Such problems did not, needless to say, stop America from embracing **A Raisin in the Sun**. But it did interfere drastically, for a generation, with the way the play was interpreted and assessed - and, in hindsight, it made all the more regrettable the abridgment (though without it would we even know the play today?). In a remarkable rumination on Hansberry's death, Ossie Davis (who succeeded Sidney Poitier in the role of Walter Lee) put it this way: "The play deserved all this-the playwright deserved all this, and more. Beyond question! But I have a feeling that for all she got, Lorraine Hansberry never got all she deserved in regard to **A Raisin in the Sun** - that she got success, but that in her success she was cheated, both as a writer and as a Negro."

One of the biggest selling points about **Raisin** - filling the grapevine, riding the word-of-mouth, laying the foundation for its wide, wide acceptance - was how much the Younger family was just like any other American family. Some people were ecstatic to find that "it didn't really have to be about Negroes at all!" It was, rather, a walking, talking, living demonstration of our mythic conviction that, underneath, all of us Americans, color-ain't-got-nothing-to-do-with-it, are pretty much alike. People are just people, whoever they are; and all they want is a chance to be like other people. This uncritical assumption, sentimentally held by the audience, powerfully fixed in the character of the powerful mother with whom everybody could identify, immediately and completely, made any other questions about the Youngers, and what living in the slums of Southside Chicago had done to them, not only irrelevant and impertinent, but also disloyal ... because everybody who walked into the theater saw in Lena Younger ... his own great American Mama. And that was decisive.

In effect, as Davis went on to develop, white America "kidnapped" Mama, stole her away and used her fantasized image to avoid what was uniquely African-American in the play. And what it was saying. Thus, in many reviews (and later academic studies), the Younger family -maintained by two female domestics and a chauffeur, son of a laborer dead of a lifetime of hard labor - was transformed into an acceptably "middle class" family. The decision to move became a desire to "integrate" (rather than, as Mama says simply, "to find the nicest house for the least amount of money for my family... Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out always seem to cost twice as much.").

Mama herself - about whose "acceptance" of her "place" in the society there is not a word in the play, and who, in quest of her family's survival over the soul - and body-crushing conditions of the ghetto, is prepared to defy housing-pattern taboos, threats, bombs, and God knows what else - became the safely "conservative" matriarch, upholder of the social order and proof that if one only perseveres with faith, everything will come out right in the end and the-system-ain't-so-bad-after-all. (All this, presumably, because, true to character, she speaks and thinks in the language of her generation, shares their dream of a better life and, like millions of her counterparts, takes



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her Christianity to heart.) At the same time, necessarily, Big Walter Younger - the husband who reared this family with her and whose unseen presence and influence can be heard in every scene - vanished from analysis.

And perhaps most ironical of all to the playwright, who had herself as a child been almost killed in such a real-life story, the climax of the play became, pure and simple, a "happy ending" - despite the fact that it leaves the Younger's on the brink of what will surely be, in their new home, at best a nightmare of uncertainty. ("If he thinks that's a happy ending," said Hansberry in an interview, "I invite him to come live in one of the communities where the Youngers are going!") Which is not even to mention the fact that that little house in a blue-collar neighborhood - hardly suburbia, as some have imagined - is hardly the answer to the deeper needs and inequities of race and class and sex that Walter and Beneatha have articulated.

What is for me personally, as a witness to and sometime participant in the foregoing events, most gratifying about the current revival is that today, some twenty-nine years after Lorraine Hansberry, thinking back with disbelief a few nights after the opening of **Raisin**, typed out these words -

"... I had turned the last page out of the typewriter and pressed all the sheets neatly together in a pile, and gone and stretched out face down on the living room floor. I had finished a play; a play I had no reason to think or not think would ever be done; a play that I was sure no one would quite understand..."

her play is not only being done, but that more than she had ever thought possible - and more clearly than it ever has been before - it is being "understood."

Yet one last point that I must make because it has come up so many times of late. I have been asked if I am not surprised that the play still remains so contemporary, and isn't that a "sad" commentary on America? It is indeed a sad commentary, but the question also assumed something more: that it is the topicality of the play's immediate events - i.e., the persistence of white opposition to unrestricted housing and the ugly manifestations of racism in its myriad forms - that keeps it alive. But I don't believe that much alone is what explains its vitality at all. For though the specifics of social mores and societal patterns will always change, the decline of the "New England territory" and the institution of the travelling salesman does not, for example, "date" *Death of a Salesman*, any more than the fact that we now recognize love (as opposed to interfamilial politics) as a legitimate basis for marriage obviates *Romeo and Juliet*. If we ever reach a time when the racial madness that afflicts America is at last truly behind us - as obviously we must if we are to survive in a world composed four-fifths of peoples of color - then I believe **A Raisin in the Sun** will remain no less pertinent. For at the deepest level it is not a specific situation but the human condition, human aspiration, and human relationships - the persistence of dreams, of the bonds and conflicts between men and women, parents and children, old ways and new, and the endless struggle

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against human oppression, whatever the forms it may take, and for individual fulfillment, recognition, and liberation - that are at the heart of such plays. It is not surprising therefore that in each generation we recognize ourselves in them anew.



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11. **AN ARTICLE IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES** by Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka, formally LeRoi Jones, is one of the most influential of Black playwrights of this century and a powerful figure in the Black Civil Rights Movement. In this article from the Home Edition of the Los Angeles Times, Sunday, 22 March, 1987, he talks about his changing attitudes between first seeing the play in the 1960s to reviewing it in a Washington production. (Please note that the spelling and punctuation is true to the original text.)

A Wiser Play Than Some of Us Knew

In the wake of its 28th anniversary, Lorraine Hansberry's great play, "A Raisin in the Sun," is enjoying a revival of a most encouraging kind. In city after city, "Raisin" has played to packed houses and, as on the night I saw it, to standing ovations. It has broken or approached longstanding box-office records and been properly hailed as "a classic."

For a playwright who knows, too well, the vagaries and realities of American theater, the assessment is gratifying. But even more so is the fact that "A Raisin in the Sun" is being viewed in the light of a new day - by masses of people, black and white.

When "Raisin" first appeared in 1959, the civil rights movement was in its early stages. As a document reflecting the essence of those struggles, the play is unexcelled. For many of us it was - and remains - the quintessential civil rights drama. But any attempt to confine the play to an era or a strictly topical issue (housing) was, as we see now, a mistake.

"Raisin" opened amid these kinds of events: In February, 1960, black students at North Carolina A&T began to "sit in" at Woolworth's. By the end of 1960, some 96,000 students across the country had gotten involved in these sit-ins.

By this time, too, Malcolm X, "the fire prophet," had emerged as the truest reflector of mass black feelings. Young militants like myself were taken with Malcolm's coming, with the imminence of explosion (e.g., Birmingham, when black men and women struck back with ice picks and clubs in response to the bombing of a black church and the killing of four girls in Sunday school).

We thought Hansberry's play was "middle class," in that its focus seemed to be on "moving into white folks' neighborhoods" when most blacks were just trying to pay their rent in ghetto shacks.



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We missed the essence of the work - that Hansberry had created a family engaged in the same class struggle and ideological struggle as existed in the movement itself and among the people. What is most telling about our ignorance is that Hansberry's play remains overwhelmingly popular and evocative of black and white reality - then and now. The masses of black people dug it true.

"Raisin" lives in large measure because black people have kept it alive. And because Hansberry has done more than document, which is the most limited form of realism. She is a critical realist, in the way that Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Margaret Walker are. She analyzes and assesses reality, and her statement cannot be separated from the characters she creates.

Hansberry's play was political agitation. It dealt with the very same issues of democratic rights and equality that were being aired in the streets. But it dealt with them not as political abstractions, but as they are lived.

For me this is the test of a writer: No matter what the skill of the execution - what has been executed? What is it he or she is talking about?

"A Raisin in the Sun" is about dreams, ironically enough. For Lena Younger, a new house and the stability and happiness of her children are her principal dream. This is the completion of a dream she and her late husband - who was literally, like the slaves, worked to death – conceived together.

Her daughter-in-law Ruth's dream, as mother and wife, is somewhat similar. A room for her son, an inside toilet. She dreams as one of those triply oppressed by society - as worker, as African-American and as woman.

But her dream, and her mother-in-law's, conflicts with that of her husband, Walter Lee. He is the chauffeur to a rich white man and dreams of owning all and doing all the things he sees "Mr. Arnold" own and do.

Walter Lee's and Ruth's dialogues lay out his male chauvinism and even self-hate, born of the frustration of too many dreams too long deferred: the powerlessness of black people to determine their own lives and that of their families in capitalist America where race is place, white is right and money makes and defines human values.

Walter dreams of using his father's insurance money to buy a liquor store. This dream is in conflict not only with the dreams of the Younger family women, but with reality. But Walter appreciates only his differences with the women - and blames them for it.

Throughout the work, Hansberry addresses herself to issues the very young might feel only "The Color Purple" has raised.



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Walter's sister Beneatha dreams of medical school. Part militant, part dilettante, liberated woman, little girl, she questions everything. She dreams of service to humanity, an identity beyond self and family in the liberation struggles of her people. But will she have the strength to stay the course?

Asagai, the Nigerian student who courts Beneatha, dreams of the liberation of Africa and even of taking Beneatha there: "We will pretend that . . . you have only been away for a day." But that's not reality either, though his discussion of the dynamics and dialectics of revolution still rings with truth!

Another dream in the play is the American Dream. Malcolm X said that for Afro-Americans it was the American Nightmare. The little ferret man, Lindner, is this dream's spokesman, and the only white person in the story.

"You've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way," says Lindner. Except black folks.

Yet there is even a hint of compassion for Lindner, the man, as he bumbles on in outrageous innocence of all he is actually saying - that "innocence" for which Americans are famous, that begs you to love and understand me for hating you . . . the innocence that kills.

The next two explosions in black drama, James Baldwin's "Blues for Mr. Charlie" and my own "Dutchman" (both 1964), raise the militancy of the movement as it came fully into the Malcolm X era. But neither of these plays is as much a statement from the African-American majority as is "Raisin." For one thing, they are both too concerned with white people.

It is Lorraine Hansberry's play, though it seems "conservative" in form and content, that is the accurate telling of the real struggle.

The Younger family is part of the black majority, and the concerns I once dismissed as "middle class" - of buying a house and moving into "white folks' neighborhoods" - are actually reflective of the essence of black people's striving 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!

The Younger family is the incarnation - before they burst from the bloody Southern back roads and the burning streets of Watts and Newark onto TV screens and the world stage - of our common ghetto-variety Fanny Lou Hamers, Malcolm X's and Angela Davis's. And their burden surely will be lifted or one day, like that raisin in the sun, it certainly will "explode."

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12. AN ARTICLE IN THE GUARDIAN by Alfred Hickling

was born in Chicago's Southside ghetto, the father was a relatively well-to-do professional, and she remembered "being the only child in my classes who did not come from the Rooseveltian atmosphere of the homes of the 1930s. My mother in the middle of a conversation would boat me up, and I think it was from that moment that I became a rebel."

Yet it was the universal dream of the play's revolution that led to Broadway. When an excited interviewer exclaimed: "This is not really a negro play - it could be about any race," Hansberry coolly replied: "Well, I hadn't noticed the contradiction - because I'd always been under the impression that negroes are people."

Raisin changed the face of American theatre. Between 1964 and 1974, more than 600 African American theatre companies sprang into existence across the US. In 1970 Charles G. Coates Ph.D. wrote: "Somebody became the first play by an African American writer to win the Pulitzer prize. But somewhere in there Hansberry got lost. She spent her third play, but it was still unfinished when she died."

"I sit at this desk for hours and hours," she once wrote, "and sharpen nothing happens. I begin to think more and more of doing something else with my life while I am still young. I mean, almost anything - running a ski lodge in the state of New York, instead of this endless struggle. I expect the theatre will kill me."

The two plays Hansberry did herself. After the all-black, one-act drama of Raisin, The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window turned out to be a sprawling multifaceted play of ideas. Not only did she finish, she still; she wrote, declared it would stand as his former wife's greatest work. It is a neocolonialist drama set in a mission compound in the middle of the 1930s, and it was an almost complete drama drawn on an almost Shakespearean scale, the play is a vivid examination of an ideological conflict escalating into bloodshed.

of any war, anywhere, at any time," says Marianne Elliott, who is directing the Royal Exchange production.

The stage-worthiness of *Les Blancs* was only a matter of time. It was performed and it will be performed in the historical reconstruction as much as an original piece of work. But as the final entry in Hansberry's journal, it was the last before her death.

before her death, Hansberry would have placed all commas and periods will be my thoughts. This list should be the who think I do."

Les Blancs opens at the Royal Exchange, Manchester 0161-833 9633, tonight. *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Lyric Hammersmith 01753 330331 on Monday 17.2.2008. The Young Vic, London, SE1 6DU - 7928. (Ed: John Jan 11.02.08)



Even though the play was written in the 1950s, it is still as relevant as ever. The death of Martin Luther King or the inner-city uprisings, Hansberry, according to Nelson, "somehow managed to foresee history whole."

Raisin depicts the hostility faced by a black family when they attempt to move into an exclusive white neighbourhood - a bitter experience drawn from life. Although Hansberry

never been plays of colour in that arena has become a staple of the American actress. It changed my life."

A Raisin in the Sun borrowed its title from a line in the poem Harlem by Langston Hughes, whom Hansberry married in 1958. A radical African American paper Freedom, Hughes's poem asks what happens "to a dream deferred".

Does it dry up like a seed? Or does it explode?

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window was produced in 1958. Mixed reviews on January 12 1965. On the same night, Hansberry, 34, died. She had been diagnosed with cancer less than 18 months earlier.

writer James Baldwin fondly recalled a young student at the time of the original production, and confirms its impact. "I saw those people up on the stage, and I thought, 'There had simply my family up there'."

Sweet Lorraine
Martin Luther King called her an inspiration. Nina Simone wrote a song for her. So why has Britain taken so long to discover the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, asks **Alfred Hickling**



in 1969 Nina Simone hailed a "new voice" in soul music. She said she was inspired by the song. The emotion of the moment was captured on the album. "I remember the look about a friend. It seems that she sometimes alive more and more. I'm talking about Lorraine Hansberry. This is the story of her life, and each scene I did, she comes a little bit more alive. It's called Young, Gifted and Black."

Ten years earlier Hansberry, who herself coined that beautiful phrase, had become an overnight celebrity. She was the first black woman to have a play produced on Broadway and, at 29, the youngest winner of the New York Critics' Play of the Year award. She was also the first black actress to be nominated for an Oscar for her performance in the leading role. Hansberry's striking, statuesque features appeared in Vogue, while her elegant, sophisticated style of dress and her sophisticated wit had been published her response alongside those of TS Eliot, Harry S Truman and Igor Stravinsky.

In America A Raisin in the Sun was a landmark. In Britain, it was a revelation. Hansberry and she is studied in schools and universities. Her plays are performed by the Royal Exchange and the Lyric Hammersmith. Her work has been brought together by her ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff. But in Britain, the words of actor Lennie James, "I think she was one of those who never remember who wrote it."

James is currently preparing to star as Walter - the role that made her famous - in the first major production of the play in 15 years. This co-production between the Young Vic and Salisbury Playhouse is one of two plays set to re-impress Hansberry's name on the British consciousness. The other is *Les Blancs*, the Royal Exchange presents the British



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13. INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DAVID LAN

When did you first come into contact with *A Raisin in the Sun*?

I first heard about the play a long time ago and then I read it again ten or fifteen years ago and I thought it was fantastic. When I started as director at the Young Vic I began thinking about putting together a programme of plays that would reflect the diverse audience that this theatre attracts.

What did you do to prepare for rehearsals?

I read the play very carefully, I read a little bit about Lorraine Hansberry's life, a little bit about the Civil Rights Movement in America in the 1950s and 1960s and I also read a couple of novels from the same period such as *The Invisible Man* by Robert Ellison and *Another Country* by James Baldwin.

The most surprising thing I found about the play was how good it is. It is a rare thing when the characters really do seem to have a life of their own, you can go on thinking about them, trying to figure them out, you can never exhaust them. The characters are bigger, more interesting, intelligent, emotional, and have a greater range than we have which demands every bit of experience and emotional intelligence that you have in order to understand them and that's rare in plays.

However, there are particular challenges to directing an American play. Because it is a realistic play, you have to find a way of telling the story that ensures the audience believe it is true. It was written at a time when audiences were used to quite long evenings at the theatre. Shows lasted three hours and had two intervals. What's quite tricky is to find a way of keeping the play going so that the audience is never ahead of the story. Today's audiences are used to films and television, which cut very quickly from one scene to the next and where the narrative gallops along. This play has a powerful narrative rhythm but it's not a quick one. It's not written like that, and it has that in common with other plays from the same era. The challenge is to make sure the tension of the play never relaxes and that the audience are really clear about where we're going without getting ahead of us.

What are the challenges?

Rehearsals have been going pretty well because the play is so strong – it is endlessly fascinating. I think the actors feel sustained by the depth of the writing. Where I feel a bit anxious is whether we have enough time to explore it all as deeply as we need to do to make the play really sing. We have to know it well enough and have it deeply enough in our nervous system so the actors can be free, can play within that. Getting to that point is going to be challenging



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What qualities make a good Director?

Energy, energy, energy! Any amount of energy is really what you need. A director has to try and be the focus of the creativity in the room, or to try to focus the creativity in the room. Sometimes you've got ideas, sometimes you haven't, sometimes you know what you're doing, sometimes you don't. But when you're surrounded by people who have a powerful engagement with the work, as much as you can you try and evoke... entice... seduce... surprise the actors into exploring the play and the characters using all the experience of life that they have. You have to have the potential for really liking or 'falling for' the actors that you're working with. But the main thing, I find, is energy.

What does the play *A Raisin In The Sun* mean to you?

Like all plays it's about love and death and deep personal struggle. Suffering! There's only one subject in the theatre and that's suffering, there isn't another one. It's a fantastically beautifully written story about a particular kind of suffering and the survival of suffering. Like all good and exciting stories, you never know until the last moment whether the key characters are going to get what they want.



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14. INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER FRANCIS O'CONNOR

When did you first encounter the play?

I'd never heard of either the play or Lorraine Hansberry. The first time I'd heard of it was when David asked me to read it and consider designing the show.

How did you start work on the design?

First I read the play, then David and I discussed our reactions to it and feelings about it. We talked a lot about how we might approach the play. It's quite a naturalistic play and I think one of the reasons David asked me to work on it was that he had seen my previous work that tackled naturalism in a way that heightened the naturalism without it becoming expressionistic. We wanted to find a similar territory within this play. We didn't want to do the kind of three-wall version with all the furniture, props etc. When you look at objects on mass they can become irrelevant and it felt better to pare things down and take a more measured approach. Then each object on the stage has a resonance. When an object is alone or exposed it has an energy, it has a presence to it that if it's surrounded by other stuff, it doesn't. For example, the table and chairs have a real energy because they are the only real ingredients on the set. It has much more value than on a set where there are lots and lots of ingredients. Also the window is a window, but it also represents a view out. A way out.

I think heightened naturalism is about taking a natural object, or a natural thing and giving it a theatrical value.

Why do you make a model box?

A model box is basically a scale, miniature version of what you see on stage. A good model box should be a very accurate indication of how the production will look when it gets onto the real stage. I believe that models are very important so I spend a lot of time and money on them. Even this one, which is quite a simple model, went through two or three versions before we arrived at the final design.

How did you approach the costume design?

Research. I found out about the period and looked at pictures, photos etc. It's quite handy the play is set in the 1950s as there are lots and lots of pictorial reference around, however, it was quite difficult to find information about Chicago from an African American perspective. There are a few books but they're usually set in jazz clubs and not about how people actually lived on a day-to-day basis. So, once I had the photographic research together, I re-read the play and figured out who needs what in the play – the actual physical requirements. I made a long list of all of that and then I did drawings and costume designs. In this case I didn't colour them in. They were more of a pictorial indication of what would be needed. We decided we weren't going to make anything, and instead we'd set about finding original clothes. We went to this brilliant place in Glasgow that someone had told me about. 1950s clothes have become collectors items so it is hard to find good stuff that's not



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expensive. This place was incredible; it was full of clothes from Victorian to 1970s and we spent a day sifting through trying to find what we needed. Obviously, we might have to alter some of the clothes to fit the actors but basically the costumes are all original clothing.

I had a vague notion in my head about the colour scheme, but when you're using originals you can't be too precious. You only have a limited choice and whatever you can find that fits and looks good you have. I always believe in finding what is right for somebody and then letting that define the colour scheme. What happens is that I'll have two choices, a first and a second choice, and I'll leave that decision until we get up on stage, so if something isn't working I'll bring out this other costume I've been hiding. There is a palette emerging which is earthy greens, blues and reds, which sounds like quite a wide palette but as the garments are all old they have a slightly faded and muted tone to them. This gives them an interesting colouration.

How did your conversations with David influence the design?

The most essential question he posed was how do we do this show without having all the bits of furniture that you might need? I know in rehearsal the actors had a range of furniture and props that they pared down. By doing this they didn't lose anything, in fact they gained a lot. Essentially it gives more focus to the performers, which is really exciting. There are beautiful moments and movements, which you don't want to get lost behind some bloody box. I think it is a really interesting approach. I try to be an actor friendly designer. For two years I studied acting before I became a designer - I was lousy, which is why I became a designer. I am maybe a bit more empathetic than some might be.

What qualities should a good designer have?

I feel it's really important quality to be collaborative. The whole reason for doing theatre design is not to work in isolation as say a fine artist does - a sculptor or a painter - and just create something out of their own vision. To be a designer, director or actor, is really to be an interpreter. You are still being creative but you're really interpreting something. In order to do that, you have to work very collaboratively with the people you are working with. I don't like working in situations where you feel one can't speak, and sometimes that happens, thankfully it hasn't happened on this one.

The next thing is to have a free imagination. Design is the best playground in the world for a visual artist because the scale of stuff is so big. You don't just get to work with physical stuff like scenery, props and costumes, but moving people as well. So if you get it right, it's very, very exciting. Opera and music theatre are even more exciting, because you have a really huge paint box.



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As I said I wanted to be an actor but I wasn't very good so I moved over to something that I was better at. My interest in theatre was less from a visual end as it was the writing that appealed to me. I really like interpreting text. Finding something in the text and being true to the writer's intention without necessarily following all their stage directions. Trying to find a way of presenting a piece of drama that is maybe an original approach to it without it being in conflict with what the writer may have intended. And for me that's the sign of a good design. And if you can do it in a way that frees the text, that reveals it in a way that maybe even the author didn't imagine, but is truthful to what you perceive the author's intention is, then that is what a good designer does. It's not necessarily about creating a thrilling visual coup. Although there is part of me that loves that too!

How do designers and lighting designers work together?

Different designers work in different ways with lighting designers. The way I work is, I really know what I'm doing when it comes to sets and props and costumes, and I obviously I have an idea about what the lighting should be but lighting is a huge skill in itself and I wouldn't dream of pretending that I could light a show.

I get together quite early on with the lighting designer. When we have a model box, which shows the vision of the show, that's usually when a lighting designer comes on board, and contributes their ideas to the piece. And a lot of the lighting happens in the preparatory work but most of it happens in the theatre. That's when it comes alive and when the relationship between a lighting designer and a director is very symbiotic and has got to be really collaborative. I'm very lucky on this job, I've worked with Tim Mitchell (the lighting designer) a couple of times and he's terrific. Because I've designed such an open stage the way it is lit is really important. Obviously I've had my input, I've spoken to Tim about my ideas and he will go away and do a far better job of it than I ever could.

What does the play to mean to you?

I'm not sure yet. This is going to get a little bit personal now. The relationship between Ruth and Walter I find incredibly moving because they are both very sympathetic characters. Walter has his problems, but there is something about him. When he says 'Who cares about you,' and it just makes me go 'God, no,' because it's just the wrong thing to say. But how often do you say that or feel that about someone you love. You don't mean it, well in the moment you probably do, but every time I see it in the run through I find it the most moving moment; touching and sad. It's real life and for me that's the most important and powerful aspect. It's the character's willpower and the strength to move on, to just take things and run with them and make the best out of what is offered to you.



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15. INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR LENNIE JAMES

Do you remember when you first read the play?

Not exactly, I knew of the play, I'd heard of it, I'd seen the Sidney Poitier film years ago, but I didn't really remember much about it and had no idea about Lorraine (the writer).

I think it is a great play that hasn't been performed for about fifteen years. I have been thinking about it and reading it with a mind to doing it for nearly two years now so I was very excited when David first sent me the script. Then when I read it this time I was slightly taken by surprise by it. I think there are a lot of plays written about this specific political era, the civil rights etc - I've been in number of August Wilson plays and others that are written with a modern perspective. **A Raisin in the Sun** was written, bang smack in the middle of it. I think there is a question about whether we can do plays like this now that we are in such a different political context. However, the reason why I was so interested in doing the play is that at the centre of the play are politics with a big 'P' but these in no way negate or overshadow politics with a small 'p'. It's still a really strong domestic drama, and that's why I think the play works in a completely different way to some of the other plays written around that time that are very much dependent on that political context.

How do you usually go about creating a character?

Well, I'm a bit of a freak. I don't learn lines because once I've said them a couple of times I know them. I try to figure out what my character is thinking because I think that in life, you are always having a conversation with yourself when you're speaking. What's interesting is the split between what you're thinking, what you want to say and then what you actually say. I don't try and have an outside image of my character so I try and create it from the inside out. So therefore the characters take shape.

I also don't think that the character is ever different from your self - even those actors who are chameleons like Gary Oldman. Although he is very diverse, all his characters are versions of Gary Oldman. He doesn't actually become someone else, you can't become someone else, so I think you create different versions of yourself as an actor, and characters are created by the different thought processes that you're going through. That is how the audience learns about your character, but it is also how you find your character. Like with Walter Lee for example, Walter is on an emotional rollercoaster and the rollercoaster is created by his thoughts. Why does he say the next thing he says? Because that's what he has to say in order to get what he wants. And it is always about getting what you want. Particularly for Walter, his whole journey is about getting what he wants. And that's how the character comes out. I don't decide that he walks in a certain way or talks in a certain way. The tune is set by the writer. I've got to figure out the thoughts that play that tune. I've got to learn the notes so that I can play the tune.



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Do you enjoy playing Walter?

I love playing him because I think he's an incredibly emotionally brave character. And because if you play him right, you can't say what he says unless you go there yourself. He gets lifted up at the end of the play, after Bobo's left, he's right down, and most plays would end right there – when Bobo's left and the dream is dead. But Walter has to go round another corner and scale a whole other emotional journey. And that's what's exciting but also what's frightening. The journey is also internal, not external and you have to go there or you won't do it. It's why he's comparable to Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*) or Jimmy Porter (*Look Back in Anger*) or Hamlet because what he has to say means nothing unless you are there emotionally. And that's a rare piece of writing.

What challenges does an American play hold for you?

The greatest challenge is understanding the points of reference. I think it's very important to know what things mean to your character, and they can't be general, they have to be specific. For example, in the scene when Walter talks about 'the Man', 'Mr Charlie', 'Old Mr Captain Boss Man', and you have to know what those references mean in a very precise way. You need to know what a 'conked head' is, but you also need to know what level of importance they have. Are they throw-away phrases, or really resonate on a deep level with the character. At one point Walter says 'ain't nobody bothering you' and that's just a familiar, fling away Americanism that has no particular weight. I think the specific thing you need to bear in mind with **A Raisin in the Sun** is that it was written in the pre-Civil Rights, pre-Martin Luther King making his noise, pre-Kennedy, and pre-Rosa Parks saying 'no' on the bus. Basically it's pre-all the vital moments that we associate with the Civil Rights movement.

In its time it was prophetic, but now we've seen a lot of the things the play talks about transpire. But we still have to be aware of the fact that Walter Lee is a man, struggling in a time when the rest of the world has not started having the conversations. That's what the play's about. At this stage global conversations aren't going on so the people that Walter is talking to don't understand where he's coming from. If the play were set in 1969 there would be such a different feel to everything.

How does the generation gap between the various family members impact on each character's levels of ambition?

I think the thing that Lorraine Hansberry does brilliantly in the script is explore the four different generations in the family. There was the mother's generation for whom life was about not being lynched and being able to make it to the north. Then there's Walter's generation which is post second world war, which I think is vital, it's the men coming home and (whether they fought or didn't) they are talking about who they are going to be in America. So for Walter it's about being a man his own right, not a man who has to settle for anything, but a man who can define himself. The next generation is Beneatha's, because there's a fifteen year difference gap between her and Walter. Her generation is the generation who will go to University, who will be educated in non segregated



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universities and they are, in a way, generation X, because they will be the first generation to have the right, to benefit from what Walter's generation were fighting for. The final generation is Travis who will inherit the wind if everyone gets what they want. Things that his grandmother and his father and his aunt fought for he will take as a matter of course, his war will be something completely different. It won't change it'll just be different.

Apart from the generational differences there's the gender differences. For example there's a big difference between the women that Mama, Beneatha and Ruth are. All of which I think Lorraine Hansberry tackles really well. That's why the small 'p' politics of the play are so massive.

Do you think that the experience of a Black American actor is different to your own?

To some extent 'yes', and to some extent 'no'. I think if I was my equivalent in America, Walter Lee is still someone I would have to study. He isn't somebody that I would know as matter of course, and I think that a lot of the decisions that the Younger family took and some of the journeys the Younger family went through I would have to think about. Although the detail of the Youngers' experience is different to what my parents generation did by leaving the West Indies for England, the journey from Mississippi or Alabama to Chicago is, I suppose, in emotional terms as huge as my parents experience. When Mama says, 'You know what people down south always said about her, that she was always above herself, trying to get ahead of herself, aiming too high' that was the kind of stuff that was said about my mum when she left Trinidad at the age of 18 to come to England on her own, on a nurse's scholarship – 'you want too much, you think there's something special about you'. The same kind of stuff that Mama would have been pushing into her kids; one who wants to define himself as a man, one who wants to be a doctor. Mama and Big Walter, Walter's father, produced two kids who are not satisfied with the world that they're growing up in and my generation in Britain were pretty much the same. We grew up not satisfied with the world that we were in and had to fight against it.

What do you think acting is about?

It's not about being real, it's about being truthful. The great actors invite you into their head. They don't ask you to sit there and listen to what they've got to say – they invite you into their heads to see what they're thinking. I learnt that when I was in the youth theatre at the Lyric, where we improvised and created our own shows which we then wrote and rehearsed like any other show, but they came from truth. It might not necessarily be real – I remember one show about breaking into the dole office and getting all your records and finding something there that would scare you. The show was about what it was that would scare you most to find there, that you didn't want anyone to know. I've never been in that situation, but we stayed true to what that situation might be. So you are using the situation and working with yourself. Because that's all you've got.



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I'm the only emotional blueprint I've got, so the only thing that makes my interpretation of this character different to anyone else's is me - which is why you can play Hamlet or Macbeth three or four times or see a different person playing that character because it will always be a different emotional journey.

Coming back to play Walter Lee three years later means that I'm having to reintroduce myself to Walter Lee and the other characters in the play. Because Nicole has not played Beneatha before, I don't know who Beneatha is until Nicole creates her. And the same with the other characters in the play. Also, your memory of the play is the play in performance, when you're kind of used to playing the tune. Going back into rehearsal you realise 'I was playing the wrong note there. I mean, the note works, but it's not the tune that's written - it's the wrong harmony or chord' and if you go back to the text it is all there for you.

I also, think that the first time around I was in awe of the play and I felt that the job back then was that we have to do the play justice. Just get it out there. Now I think there is another job, which is to get ahead of the play. Almost to strap the play on and bring the play to Walter Lee. That's what I've set my sights on this time. That's what I hope we are all able to do - to use the play as a springboard into performance - not simply be in awe of it.

Why act in theatre?

I think if you're going to be an actor, you have to do theatre at some point. The job of a writer is to write, the job of an actor is to act. And I think a lot of people who say 'I want to be an actress', what they want to be is a movie star and all the trappings that come with being a movie star. And that's fine, good luck. But it's not acting. And it's not that acting on screen is a different job to acting on stage, it's not. But if you're going to be an actor, then you've got to love that moment between 'action' and 'cut', you've got to love that moment between lights up and lights down, because that's where your job gets done. And you've got to love that moment. You can't be loving the bit that comes after, you can't be loving the applause, you can't be loving the reviews, or whatever financial gain you get from it. Your job is done between action and cut and between lights up and lights down.

My favourite actors, I suppose, are movie actors, but they are actors. They are John Turturro, Steve Buscemi, Morgan Freeman, Jeff Bridges, Gary Oldman and Linda Hunt. They are actors - people who invite you into their thoughts.

Why do you think people should see this play?

Because like all great plays it has everything to say. It's timeless. This play will always have something to say. As long as there are families, this play will always have something to say. As long as people struggle and feel outside of somewhere they want to be, this play will have something to say. This play will always have something to say as long as there are families, love and inequality. And that's the mark of a great play. Which is why it's

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easy to come back and do it again, because I keep saying lines and thinking 'I never heard that before' or 'I missed that last time'.



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16. INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR NOVELLA NELSON

What was your first contact with the play?

I am from New York and I went to see it at the theatre maybe about two weeks after it opened. The play had got a lot of press attention as it was the first play by a woman of colour, an African American woman.

How do you usually go about creating a character for the stage?

I go to the text. I read the script often, a lot. Usually, I read a play and I treat it like a musical composition. And I begin to understand what instruments I may be and how I fit into the harmonies. I think Mama is a string instrument – a bass or cello, or sometimes she's a viola. They seem right because the resonance, the deepness of their tones, the fact that they touch the ground, that you don't carry them, like a guitar.

What is it like as an American actor working on a London production?

It's been very challenging. It's a different approach to achieving the same ends. Every director works in a different way and every actor has their own techniques. I am very much an actor who concentrates on the text. On this production I found that some people were trying to find lives outside the text, what happens in between, and I haven't done that kind of thing in years. I found there was a difference in the approach to the rehearsal process. I found it involved more discussion and analytical clarity as opposed to just active doing.

What are the specific challenges in playing Lena Younger?

The inner turmoil of Lena Younger is not necessarily shown in the same way as her children's, so that some of the basic things that you would do to work them out, washing dishes, fixing pillows, keeping a house in a certain way, would easily signify and clarify her own emotional turmoil. But she doesn't have that in this production because of the simplicity of the staging, so that's a challenge.

What does the play say to Black people in 2005?

I can't speak for all Black people, but it speaks to us both very similarly and very differently from how it did in the fifties. In 1950s America there were the rumblings of, I won't say the Civil Rights movement because if you really deal with the history of the African American there have been several the Civil Rights movements, but the one that most people are familiar with is that of the 1960s, so the rumblings of that were already beginning in the 1950s. This play foretold what was to come on many levels, which is very dramatic. Today the concept of economic unity, economic growth, that exists in that play, the sense of taking the bold step, which is what I think Walter finally does when he looks in himself and goes 'this is who I am' is something we can still learn from. I think, whether consciously or not, people still fear certain things that they shouldn't, they are not free, at the most basic level, and that's not just people of colour, that's people in general who are afraid to realise their dreams.



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What is the significance of the 'middle passage'?

The middle passage is that time when Africans were taken from their mother country put on slave ships and travelled to the Caribbean and the Americas. When the Africans were packed in like sardines, which was, and is to me, the most devastating holocaust, that has ever existed, millions were lost for one reason and another; they died, they jumped over board, and so that those who survived and made it to the Americas have a certain strength whether they consciously understand it or not. It's not something that was always communicated, the suffering of slavery or the suffering of the middle passages were something people just didn't want to talk about.

Is it significant that we find three generations of women in the play?

Metaphorically, it's like a tree. There are roots and then there is the trunk and then there are branches. Lena's the roots, Ruth's the tree and Beneatha is its branches. There's a continuum, the strengths are still there; even though it's a sapling and the branches look weak, they are strong and everything is supported, one unto the other.

What does the play mean to you?

I don't know what that means. It had a very different impact on me in 1959 than it does now. Then I was a college student, and that's the difference - age changes a lot. I've been quoted as saying that the play is what made me into an actress, but that's not true at all. I was the first college student in my family. I had come from a working class family, my father drove a taxi and my mother worked - we were all workers. I had two brothers who were older, so the impact of seeing that family in a tenement building going through some of the things that emotionally touch you, really effected me when I saw the play. My own snobbishness at my own family, which I had not thought about in those terms, impacted on me a lot, because it wasn't that I didn't love them, it's just that.....

Today, I'm amazed – it's a good play, and I hadn't thought about it in these terms before but in this process I really see how well constructed it is and also, as you look back, that Lorraine Hansberry foretold so much. She didn't judge any of the characters; there is nothing wrong with George Murchison's concept of economic freedom, there is nothing wrong with Beneatha's sense of pan-Africanism or Asagai's sense of African Unity and his recognition that you might die within that fight, or Walter's struggle for his own identity and manhood and Mama trying to hold on to the morality that exists in a family. It amazes me; it's a wonderful little play.



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17. INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR NICOLE CHARLES

How did you become an actor?

I grew up on an estate and there were 3 houses surrounding a concrete square. And this square is a stage. We played in it, put our paddling pool in it and we also used to make plays in it. Cinderella, Snow White...and we'd rehearse these plays, me and my next door neighbours, and we'd call our parents, and they'd pay 20 pence and they'd watch it. And the plays would go on and on, they would never have an end cos we loved the attention so much, until our parents would say, ok we're bored now, stop. So that's where it started. And then I was sent off to a local drama group – Hummingbird Community Project – round the back of Peckham. Then my mum sent me to London Bubble youth theatre, and I didn't want to go but she made me and then I fell in love with it and decided that I wanted to be an actress.

I left school and worked as an actress for a year – bit parts in the Bill and stuff. And then I got bored, thought I was getting stuck in TV bit roles. And I had always wanted to do theatre. In theatre, you make it happen. In TV you're just part of the machine. You're part of a machine in theatre too, but you are just much more part of the action, of making it happen. It's about the human. It's live and exciting.

Why do you want to do theatre?

Because I revere it. I revere its ability to inspire and to motivate the audience as well as the actor. I revere it also because of what the actor has to discover within themselves to fulfil the role they play. I believe that everything is within that you just have to find it and build it up and build it up. Everyone has the seeds of something within them. I find that absolutely fascinating. I also revere theatre as a forum of expression about anything. It can be purely entertainment, it can be political, it can be anything. But it is a safe forum to explore issues in society that people can't express for one reason or another or don't feel heard. Theatre raises those issues. And it brings people together.

I notice that you do something interesting in your script...

I photocopy the script, then I stick one page on the right hand side of an exercise book, and I leave the left hand side of the book for notes or things that help me get into the scene...poetry that helps me, inspirations, previous circumstances. So in rehearsal I don't have to go to another book, I've got it all in the same place. I write down what I say about myself. I write down what I say about other people, my attitudes to other people in the play.

Then I write what other people say about me, the stage directions – what the writer says about me. That helps me get a scrambled approach of who my character is. (See attached sheets.)



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Act One, Scene One 19

Ruth (wearily) Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say nothing new. (Struggling) So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So - I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace.

Walter That is just what is wrong with the coloured women in this world . . . Don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something.

Ruth (dryly, but to hurt) There are coloured men who do things.

Walter No thanks to the coloured woman.

Ruth Well, being a coloured woman, I guess I can't help myself none.

She rises and gets the ironing board and sets it up and attacks a huge pile of rough-dried clothes, sprinkling them in preparation for the ironing and then rolling them into tight fat balls.

Walter (mumbling) We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds.

His sister Beneatha enters. She is about twenty, as slim and intense as her brother. She is not as pretty as her sister-in-law, but her lean, almost intellectual face has a handsomeness of its own. She wears a bright-red flannel nightie, and her thick hair stands wildly about her head. Her speech is a mixture of many things; it is different from the rest of the family's, insofar as education has permeated her sense of English - and perhaps the Mid-west rather than the South has finally - at last - won out in her inflexion; but not altogether, because over all of it is a soft-sharred and transformed use of vowels, which is the decided influence of the Southside. She passes through the room without looking at either Ruth or Walter and goes to the outside door and looks, a little blindly, out to the bathroom. She sees that it has been lost to the Johnsons. She closes the door with a sleepy vengeance and crosses to the table and sits down a little defeated.

Beneatha I am going to start timing those people.

for more? - comes on to the scene, Beneatha, joined and don't go the way out of the room to check to bathroom if drops the setting.
well, it's for need to find the lightness and peacefulness between the family

Person's Circumstance → Sleeping in my bed, dreaming about Africa, Mama wakes me up

Scene Action → To get to the bathroom to get ready

What do I expect to see when I wake up?

What do I carry into the scene with me?

I bring on my bed and my wash bag & book

Physicality's straight up right bed with head.

Bring the book downstage with me after going to the bathroom ..

23/05 This line is still unclear

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Walter You should get up earlier.

Beneatha (her face in her hands. She is still fighting the urge to go back to bed) Really - would you suggest dawn? Where's the ^{paper?} ^{leaves}

Walter (pushing the paper across the table to her as he studies her almost clinically, as though he has never seen her before) You a horrible-looking chick at this hour.

Beneatha (dryly) Good morning, everybody.

Walter (senseless) How is school coming?

Beneatha (in the same spirit) Lovely. And you ^{knows} know, biology is the greatest. (Looking up at him) I dissected something that looked just like you ^{yesterday}.

Walter I just wondered if you've made up your mind and everything.

Beneatha (gaining in sharpness and impatience) And what did I answer yesterday morning - and the day before that?

Ruth (from the tanning board, like someone disinterested and old) Don't be so nasty, Bennie.

Beneatha (still to her brother) And the day before that the day before that!

Walter (defensively) I'm interested in you. Something wrong with that? Ain't many girls who decide...

Walter and Beneatha (in unison) ... 'to be a doctor.'

Silence.

Walter Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?

Ruth Walter Lee, why don't you leave that girl alone and get out of here to work?

Beneatha (goes out to the bathroom and bangs on the door) Come on out of there, please!

1st rehearsal - just feeling what it requires
need more contact with brother, and the space
who is Bennie in this space?
What is the house like and what are you about at 7 PM?
The house is cold. How do I express this? CROSSED arms, rubbing my
Really - could try to get a look at Ruth at
hands? Hands in between
thighs?

My energy sharpens throughout the scene
slap, witty, pitted

WORDS

Play biology for character and as a choice to
play Walter?

How many times or rather
how often does Walter see
me this question? Build on the
nastiness for Ruth

Go out to the bedroom



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What parts of Beneatha's journey have you been able to identify with?

Lots of them. Firstly, where the Youngers live. The cramped environment in which they live, the house being way too small and there being a whole lot of dreams in a place where there's not much space for them. The ways forward to get the dreams seem quite distant, but the desire is there. The passion is strong and they clash. I identify with that very strongly from my own family. My family's beginnings, where I grew up. Very small place and lots of people with lots of ideas.

Secondly, Beneatha's ambition, and it being something new to the generation of people before her. It's wonderful, but it's also problematic – a lack of understanding between the generation before her and the generation now – there's not a bridge. The ideas of someone who is entering a new phase. Being first generation black British means that I've adopted lots of English things, I'm English, and I have to say to my parents 'that's who I am, I was born here' and there's difficulties with that. Identity. Which is a fundamental part of Beneatha's journey. Who am I? Who am I to myself, who am I to the world? Also, the hair thing. And I think it's wonderful that Lorraine has incorporated that, because it's an issue for lots of black women. All black women actually.

Can you tell us a bit about cutting your hair and what that means to you?

I have locks, short and in a bob and obviously for this part I'm required to cut it, which is very difficult for me.....I've been through what Beneatha has been through...I've been through the relaxing, the pressing the tonging, the hotcombing, braiding, extensions...you name it I've done it. I've come to the conclusion that locks are the way forward. And Beneatha is where I left off.

How do you find your way into a role?

First I find out all the things I have in common with a character. Then I find out all the differences – what I have to invent. It's about working on the things we don't share.

I also research everything in the script that I don't understand, anything I don't know about. I try and read the books that my character would read. I need to know what she would think. What she would dream. What's the first thing she thinks when she wakes up in the morning. Those are the things that make me know who I am. Yesterday I was lying on the bed and I had a dream about Africa and being a doctor and kids and being a mother and being on a mountain in Nigeria. Which really helped for a sense of who Beneatha is. Watching period films helps. Just knowing what's in your character's consciousness.

Is there anything in Beneatha's journey that you have found hard to relate to?

The period. I'm particularly aware that I move differently than they did in the 50's. My physicality is different. My feet are wider than someone in the 50's. I wear trainers, they wore shoes and how that affects the way you walk.



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And how you carry yourself is distinct. That I don't relate to. The relationship between men and women I think is very different as well. I think I need to find more of that.

And also, even though a lot of the issues are the same now, they were definitely more heightened then. We've come a long way from the 50s. This was before civil rights. All the issues are more present and they're bigger and they're more of a danger. I think that now, you can get by without noticing any issues. Then, you couldn't get by. It's there in your face every day. And that was something that was in every black person's consciousness in a way that it isn't now.

Also, the relationship to issues, and the way they are dealt with. It's different to now because now we think we have freedom, we think it's done, we're there. This hasn't happened then. It's still to be done.



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18. REHEARSAL DIARY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SARA POWELL

Monday 17 January

First day meet and greet. The room is full of people who have something to do with this production at the Young Vic and the Lyric Hammersmith. We have to introduce ourselves to the whole room one by one. Will anyone remember who or what anyone does or is?

After everyone leaves David Lan gives a short welcome speech and then it's just the director, the actors, the deputy stage manager and me. Whereupon we all dance the Lindy-Hop for two hours. Although only Lennie and Noma are scripted to dance in the show, David thinks it's a good idea for everyone to learn it for a number of reasons: there may be an opportunity for others to dance at some point, we don't have to leap straight in with a read-through which is always nerve-wracking on a first day of rehearsal, we start to listen to music from the time the play is set and lastly, we all muck about with each other, look silly, have fun and help each other out from the word go. It's a lovely way to start work on the play.

Two hours and much giggling later, we sit down and David talks us through what the first week will involve. No read-through at all it turns out. Instead he wants us to research the background of the play and of this family all together. To find out what really matters to the people in the play, what is important to them, what is their state of mind politically, economically and socially? Firstly we look at the model box to see what the designer (Francis O'Connor) has given us to work on. It is a beautiful, quite bare set, with only one room seen on stage. It is very different from the stage directions that Lorraine Hansberry gives in the script and it is clear that the actors will have to imagine a great deal of the space that they live in, e.g. the separate room for Beneatha and Mama, as it will not be seen on stage. (For a fuller discussion of the design, see the interview with Francis O'Connor.)

We sit back down and start to put together what we need to know about the world of the play.

David: What do we know about Chicago?

Noma: It's windy

Lennie: There's a lot of Black folks. It's the home of the blues

Noma: Black folk migrated to Chicago for the work originally. They were leaving the south in the hope of jobs and a better life in the cities of the north.

Novella is a great resource for the group. She tells us about growing up in a Black working class family in the 1950s in New York and what it was like to be the first person in her family to go to college, as Beneatha is.

We are all sent off with homework; the actors are to research as much as possible about their characters.



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Tuesday 18 January

Jean (the Lindy-Hop teacher) starts the day with a physical warm-up and more Lindy-Hopping. She tells everyone to improvise to the music before introducing the steps that she's taught us. Everyone responds when she tells the guys to look at the girls like they're princesses and the girls to follow the guys' steps. It suddenly looks like everyone is in a Harlem night club in 1942, having a great night out. Because the couples are looking at each other and responding to each other, it becomes 'a social dance', which is what is called for in the script (in Act 2, Scene 3)

A couple of hours later, we start discussing the things the actors have discovered about their characters in the play.

David: Did anyone find out anything that surprised them?

Nicole: I was surprised that Beneatha stayed in bed so late. Being such a motivated character, it was a shock to see that she liked to lie around like any other college student.

We discuss Beneatha's attitude to her studies and her extra-curricular activities which she takes up and discards quite easily it seems (such as horse riding and learning the guitar). We begin to see why Walter-Lee expects she may tire of her idea to be a doctor, like she has tired of so many other pursuits and why he thinks his idea of how to spend the insurance money is so much more practical.

We discuss relationships between the characters. How long have Ruth and Walter Lee lived in the house? Where did they meet? Where is Ruth's family? We discuss other questions like- when did Big Walter die? Where did he sleep? What were the sleeping arrangements when Big Walter was alive and did they change when he got sick? How much is \$10,000 today? (about £250,000). How possible is it for Beneatha to become a doctor?

Lastly, we talk about all the people who are mentioned in the play but who do not appear on stage - Mrs Arnold, Big Walter, Claude, Willy Harris, Mrs Murchison, Charlie Atkinson and the people who live upstairs.

In the afternoon, we read the first scene of the play.

Wednesday 19 January

Lennie and Noma kick off with a short dance rehearsal.

We read the first half of Act 2, Scene 1. Then we discuss sororities and fraternities, Benin, Songhay civilization and Bantu poetry. Mark is asked to research all of these topics for himself and Nicole. We discuss what theatre



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George and Bennie are going to see. Is this usual? Do they have to dress in a certain way? We will come back to these questions again and again and sometimes the answers will change, or develop or we will have found out more about Chicago life in the 1950s and that will influence our decision. We ask if Black and white people can go to the theatre together in the 1950s. Novella reminds us of the difference in racist attitudes between north and south of the US. Racism is overt in the south but not in Chicago or New York. Of course you can go to the theatre in Chicago at that time. The only question is: what would George and Beneatha go see?

More questions:

David: We need to talk about alcohol. How often does Walter Lee drink, what does it mean that he comes in drunk...to Ruth, to Mama, to Beneatha. What bombs are Ruth referring to?

We read the second half of the scene.

David: Is anything we need to know.

There is no reply.

David: What is a cracker?

Only Novella knows that a cracker is a white person.

David: What is an Asagai?

Only Jim Dunk (the only white person in the play) knows that it is a short stabbing spear used by Zulu warriors.

By asking all these questions, we are all becoming a gang together, creating our own special world that the actors will be able to bring onto the stage every night. The more questions we answer, the more detailed and precise that world becomes and the stronger I think the actors feel about themselves within the play.

Thursday 20 January

We start trying to identify a date for the play. Research into nuclear testing (the bombs going off that are mentioned in the play) doesn't give us a clear idea. I have to find out what "Colonel McCormick is sick" (Act 1, Scene 1) is referring to, which might give us a date. We discuss whether Walter Lee would have been drafted. Lennie is going to research Black men and the draft in World War Two.

We are back to rehearsing Scene 1. There is a discussion about roaches and the state of the house. Cleaning rituals. Novella points out, that cockroaches live in the apartment all the time and that they come out *when* you spray. Otherwise, they are just living happily with you. Is the cleaning ritual an enjoyable one for the family? Or is it particularly exciting and energised today because the cheque is coming? What day is this? What time? Is it cold? It is clearly not a work or college day. How does Ruth know she is pregnant? Who does she see? Is it a doctor or an abortionist? How is Ruth going to reveal that she has lost the child if she does go through with the



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abortion? Would she ever really have an abortion? How long ago did Asagai get back from Canada? Novella is figuring out what she thinks about Big Walter's death. How did he die? Did Mama have an abortion? Everyone disagrees, including Novella, but she wants to explore ideas of how he died.

- David: What was family planning in 1950s black America?
- Lennie: Why does Ruth not have the abortion that morning? Is it to give Walter one more chance?
- Noma: She could not have the abortion today because everyone would know about it.
- David: Both of these ideas are true. I want you to explore and discover where the situation could go one way or the other.

Back to practicalities....

- David: What do we need to clean the room? Water, mop, broom, scrubbing brush?

Novella insists that Mama would scrub the floor on her hands and knees, not with a mop), spray, bucket, cloths, polish. They would be dressed for cleaning: headscarf, something over Bennie's face while she is spraying.

The actors stumble through Act 1 Scene 2.

- David: Does Beneatha go back to cleaning after the phone call? How surprised is she to get the call? What is Walter doing at the beginning of the scene?

The actors go through the scene again. David offers suggestions to each person in turn which gives greater detail each time they go through.

Friday 21 January

We start the day talking about Beneatha and George. Who is George?

Nicole points out that the radicals of Black US politics came from George's 'class'. For example Stokely Carmichael (1966 Chairperson of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and co-author of *Black Power*) was born to middle class parents in Trinidad.

Mark thinks George is educated and sporty. It's Friday night and he doesn't want to talk, he wants some action.

I am deeply satisfied when I finally work out what the "Colonel McCormick is sick" reference is, as it means we know definitely when the play is set. Colonel Robert Rutherford McCormick was a Chicago newspaper magnate with very right wing views who died in April 1955. The play is set in September, so it must be September 1954. I feel very smug!



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Saturday 22 January

We rehearse with Beneatha, Asagai and George. We discuss Marxism, Uncle Tom, passive resistance and radicals. Mark and Nicole start a passionate discussion about how to live in this world. Bourgeois or communist? They are turning into the parts they are playing.

David lets Mark and Nicole develop arguments they will have had. When they get stuck, he tells them what the argument against the other should/could be and they go off at it again.

We discuss a time where unions were powerful. Nicole can only remember Thatcher's legacy – 'the unions are poison'. In the 1930s David reminds us, the unions represented the great potential for change and revolution. Nicole gets frustrated when she feels she doesn't have the words to argue against Mark's convincing George-like reasoning. David tells her to remember the feeling of frustration.

We read an essay on *Quiet Desperation and Delusions of Need* which Nicole has brought in. We remember that in this scene (Act 2, Scene 2) it is a Friday evening and Beneatha George are coming back from a night out. We all see George's point about wanting Beneatha to shut the hell up sometimes!

We move on to Asagai and Africa.

David: What is Asagai going to do? What is his plan?

Monday 24 January

We start running lines and David goes through some minor cuts. He thinks there is a bit of repetition in some areas. "Horse riding" goes, with protests from Ruth and Beneatha. We agree to put a question mark by it - as well as by a couple of other cuts, but I notice that by week four of rehearsal they have not reappeared. When directors make cuts and say they will reconsider later on, you had better keep on at them if you really want the lines back.

The set in rehearsals has been completely dressed and looks great. Noma asks for a fold-up bed for Travis as we have done away with the sofa. Novella is vehemently opposed – where would they keep it? (no answer) - Who would tidy it away? And enough other justifiable objections so that we all agree it is impractical.

We start back at the beginning of the play and go through technically. Noma swiftly finds herself in prop hell. David urges Noma not to hurry her actions. He says that everything is interesting, and it is most interesting when it's real. We spend some time organising the stove, sink, workspace at the back of the stage.

In the afternoon, we meet the three boys playing Travis' for the first time. They are all very different and so are not in competition with each other. Each one brings something different to the part. They are all good actors. Quick and excited to learn stuff.



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Tuesday 25 January

I work with the boys in the afternoon and David puts them into the scene after I've gone through with them what is going on. At the end of the day, David spends time going through the first Bennie and Asagai scene line by line, emotion by emotion. He forces the actors to know exactly what they are thinking on every line. For example he asks questions like, how do you feel about Canada? What were you studying there?

Wednesday 26 January

Act 2 Scene 1

David: What does Ruth do when Bennie switches off the radio? It must be completely weird and unexpected when she starts dancing - like she has just started doing Kabuki in your living room. Ruth should enjoy Bennie's dance. The girl is entertaining, if a little odd in her ideas.

David: Why does Walter say "ocomogosiay"?

Lennie: Dunno.

So he doesn't say it.

David: How does Ruth react to Walters entrance?

How does George feel when he enters the room? Is he disgusted, afraid, intolerant, now what?!

Don't lower your status by being angry. Don't let any of this get to you until she calls you an Uncle Tom and even then, don't let it really get to you.

Has Ruth or George ever seen a hair-do like Bennie's?

Noma: No.

David: Exactly. It is like seeing your first huge afro or mohican.

Mark thinks George is worried about his car parked in this neighbourhood and so keeps going to the window to check on it. It brings the scene downstage and also gives him a fun inner story to be telling during the scene.

David: What does Ruth want from this scene with Walter?

Noma: Just to talk without going away from each other. To make the connection - this whole baby thing has just thrown everything.

David: What does Walter want?

Lennie: Walter wants Ruth on his side. Which is difficult on one level because in this scene he wants her to be someone else - someone who's going to dream the same things he does. Some one who's going to back him up, someone who's not pregnant.



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Noma: I want to get him onside as well. Only my side is me, you and Travis
David: Very good. And then there is the anguish of Mama coming in and Walter goes immediately to her.

Thursday 27 January

We start on the scene when Karl Lindner arrives. What does Beneatha think the white man is doing here? Has there ever been a white person in this apartment? I try to impress upon the boys playing Travis that it would be almost as if a grizzly bear just walked into their front room.

David starts to ask questions: What is this association?; What does it do?; Why has Lindner been appointed to this task?; What are the 'instances' Lindner refers to?

Friday 28 January

We start with one hour of dancing with Lennie and Noma. Jean has added some new moves and they look very good. It's as if they have been dancing together half their lives. We go back to the Lindner scene and Novella teaches the cast her version of All God's Children Got Wings.

Monday 31 January

The morning is all about moving furniture. In the afternoon, we go back to the beginning of the play, working through every tiny detail – like exactly how does Travis wake up?

Tuesday 1 February

We run through Act 1 Scene 1. Novella is very detailed about where Travis's bed is left. How to clear the table, what she cleans, what she eats, when she says grace. When she has all that in place, (she remembers her lines much more clearly when they are linked to actions) and the scene between her and Ruth suddenly takes off. Letting everyone imagine as precisely as possible makes the scene take off in a wonderful way.

We run the scene once more and the actors get a bit gloomy – caught up as they are in props – it is slow work, but it is magical when they start to forget about the things they have to move and just act the scene.

Wednesday 2 February

David is now stuck into blocking. Yesterday he said that he believed that the piece will emerge best when we have worked out exactly what the action is at every point. Where the actors move and why? When do the actors make the decision to move?

We also discuss Walter Lee's feelings about the new baby.



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Lennie: When he hears about the baby, it means his dream is gone because the \$10 000 will be spent on the child. It is not that he wants to get rid of the baby, but rather that he desperately wants to achieve his dream.

Thursday 3 February

We work on Act 2 Scene 1. Yesterday Nicole was very concerned about having to cut off her hair. She thought that she could get away with wearing a wig, but finally realized that she will have to cut off her beautiful locks which she has been growing for four years. A black girl and her hair are not easily separated. We have a long discussion about what her dreads mean to her. They are part of her identity as a Black British person and she feels strongly about wearing dreads as an act of political significance. Reclaiming an oft derided style as an appropriate and professional look. She is very courageous when it comes to letting go of what is effectively part of her personality. The decision to do so is every bit as dramatic as is Beneatha's decision to cut off her own "mutilated hair".

It seems to me that an actor exposes a great deal of their personality in rehearsals and of course in performance. In rehearsal, a lot can be rejected. In performance, the whole lot can be rejected. That's why actors are such a nervous bunch. All the actors in **A Raisin in the Sun** seem to me to be very unselfconscious and giving of themselves. The more they give of themselves, the more exciting the production becomes. Nicole's agreement to cutting off her hair makes her commitment to the play and the part she is playing very evident.

Saturday 5 February

Nicole and Javone work on Act 3 Scene 1. The actors run the scene first thing and after about five minutes, Nicole stops and says, "no, sorry we've lost it. There's nothing here". David and I thought so too, but we were convinced by them for longer than they were convincing themselves.

They give themselves some time to think through where they are, what they are thinking and what has just happened to both of them before this scene takes place. There is a lot of information to remember and focus on. David points out that they will not take in and be able to use everything immediately, but that if we fully explore all the ideas in the scene, then over time, as they act the scene over and over again, all of those ideas will in turn come back to them and they will be able to pick and play with them as they occur to the actors in the scene. I haven't seen this scene in a while and I don't know where they've been, but the characters of Beneath and Asagai are shining out of Nicole and Javone today. They have both come a long way in a very short time.



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Monday 7 February

First run through of the play. It takes nearly four hours! It seems to me that the shape is all there, but that some definite decisions need to be made about where everyone is going (physically more than emotionally). David says exactly that. For example, if Ruth does not throw her coat to the floor as Novella expects her to, Mama will not have anything to tidy away, which affects how she will play the following scene with Walter. Noma has to work out exactly when to crack her eggs so that she can scramble them on the line when Walter asks for his eggs “not scrambled”.

In the afternoon, David works with Noma and Lennie on their scenes together while I go with Nicole to the hairdresser. Tears are shed, but luckily for Nicole, she looks great with really short hair.

Thursday 10 February

We run Act 2 Scene 1. Afterwards, David says that the thing we have to work on is the movement from one part of the scene to the other. Handing over the scene from one group of actors to another is a tricky task but one that this play really demands. We get stuck into making sure that everyone is clear what they are thinking on every line – Noma is still not sure what Ruth means when she says: “Africa sure is claiming her own tonight” and it shows - Noma has always mumbled the line. We discuss that she probably thinks the same things about Africa that Mama does - she gives money in church to help the heathen get saved. She thinks Walter is behaving like a heathen. As soon as she does the scene again, she says the line out loud and we know exactly what she means when she says it.

It is a slow process now, making sure everyone is clear at every point in the piece about their journey and it sometimes feels like wading through treacle to get there, but every discussion moves the storytelling forward.

I need to do some work with the boys. They are looking nervous on stage. I think it's partly because we haven't had time to play around with them and let them get used to the space and circumstances. So Saturday morning will be given over to play.

Saturday 12 February

I spend the morning going through the Travis scenes with the boys; doing improvisations to try to get them to relax in the scenes and let some more of themselves come out on stage. One of the boys is very self-conscious. He refuses to do certain things because he is embarrassed and thinks he looks silly. After a while spent telling him all the reasons he might find to do the move David wants him to do and he still won't do it, I finally remind him that his job as an actor is to act and if something doesn't work, he needs to act well enough to make it work. That finally shifts him and we move on.

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By the end of the morning, I think that they have all taken on board the need for Travis to be more spirited on stage, but we will see if it holds on Monday when they are back with everyone else in the rehearsal room.

Tuesday 15 February

It's the last day in the rehearsal room before we go to the Lyric Hammersmith to begin the tech. We are still working in great detail and new discoveries are being made all the time. We will run the play this afternoon for the second time. And no doubt we will keep on rehearsing until opening night on Thursday 24 February.



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Information on Stokely Carmichael

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Black Literature and incredibly detailed Timeline of Black Performers on British Television and Radio

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/archive/windrush/timetext.html>

Other Resources

The **Theatre Museum** is a valuable source of information.

An exhibition *Let Paul Robeson Sing!* took place at the Theatre Museum in early October 2001, exploring the life, artistic and political career of the great American singer, actor and activist.

For more information call 020 7943 4700.

A Raisin in the Sun was recorded for the National Video Archive of Performance at the Theatre Museum. Group viewings (3 or more) can be booked by phoning 020 7943 4806. Individual viewings (maximum of 2 people) call 020 7943 3727.

The archive also contains many other significant productions including performances of Talawa's production of *King Lear* (and rehearsal footage), *Oroonoko* at the RSC, Athol Fugard's *The Island*, *Wine in the Wilderness* by Alice Childress and a number of documentaries and other material.