

Notes on Raisin

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Background on Lorraine Hansberry

- Grew up on the South Side of Chicago. Had an early interest in writing, and her most notable work A Raisin in the Sun opened in 1959. It was a big event, and sparked a vigorous movement in Black Theatre.
- Eugene O'Neill said "A play should focus on the most intense and basic human relationships," which Raisin does.
- The play focuses on a black family, the Youngers.
- The play is one about a family, but is also one dealing with larger sociological issues.
- Her husband, after her death, collected much of her work into an informal biography—"To Be Young, Gifted, and Black".

1 Introduction and Act I

Introduction

- The introduction to the play (the version given to us, anyway,) is one on the versions and impacts of the play. It criticises the earlier TV version of the play for removing important content.
- The original cuts made to the play were, in the perspective of the author, necessary and took little away from the meaning of the play. In order for the play to show on Broadway in the manner it did, some revision was necessary.

- The play makes comments about race, and about racism, and about the segregation of neighborhoods and life at the time.
- One of the biggest selling points of Raisin, the author of the introduction states, is that the Younger family is like any other American family.
- The capacity of people to “Deceive themselves where race is concerned” is mentioned, with regards to people in general and Northerners.

1.1 Act I, Scene I—Friday Morning

- Family shenanigans occur.
- Walter and Beneatha are at odds, and Walter feels worried. He both worries about her, and worries about his own potential.
- There are many arguments. Walter implies Ruth is never on his side, and says Mama would listen to her, then trying to get her to talk about the liquor store to Mama.
- Mama’s entry is built up.

2 Act II

- Asagai and George are interesting people in Beneatha’s life, and represent the differences in what she wants and what people want for her.
- George’s parents are successful and wealthy.
- Walter is kind of a dick to George, and would not be able to converse with his parents.
- Beneatha is saying OCOMOGOSAI and Ruth is like Pearl Bailey.
- When Walter leaps up on the table he is said by Beneatha to be a descendant of Shaka.
- The statement is made on p. 86 between George and Walter, George calls Walter Prometheus, which is an allusion. Walter does not do as he is told.

- Ruth complains of black people. Walter asks who even cares about her.
- Ruth apologizes for the baby, and asks what else she can give him.
- Ruth is sick of the apartment, and her goal is to provide a better life for her family.
- Walter's reaction has been a thing.
- George tells Beneatha she looks nice, and that guys aren't going to go for the atmosphere. He tells her to drop the garbo routine (an allusion to an actress, Greta Garbo. She oft played dramatic, hard to get characters.)
- George does not want to discuss with Beneatha the nature of quiet desperation. This is an allusion to Thoreau.
- The scene with Mrs. Johnson was cut from the original play. She is a woman who decided to be excited about everything.
- Johnson overstays her welcome.
- There are contrasts between Johnson and the Youngers—Johnson thinks being a chauffeur is a fine job, while the Youngers do not. The Youngers hold themselves with a higher sense of pride than Mrs. Johnson.
- Johnson says the one racial slur what white people ought not say.
- Walter has been skipping work, and borrowed Willy's car and went all over.
- Mama says there is nothing worth holding on to if it will destroy her boy, and she gives Walter the money.
- Walter has all his dreams set up and talks of how everything is going to be just swell, saying he will hand his son the world.
- Walter's dream is unrealistic.
- Scene 3 opens a week later, everyone is packing up and Beneatha enters with a guitar case.

- Linder shows up, being linder and saying one thing when he means another:
 - Says he just wants to talk and communicate, when he wants them out of the neighborhood.
 - Says race doesn't even enter into it, when that's the only thing into it at all.
 - Says black families are generally happier when they're in their own communities when that's not the youngers' goal.
- Linder is incredibly uncomfortable with the whole scenario.
- Linder states it would be a financial gain to the Youngers, and once Walter realizes he kicks Linder out.
- Mama talks of the symbolic plant, and the gardening tools and hat are given to Mama.
- Mama hits Walter, as he basically gave away his father's work.

3 Act III

- At curtain, there is a solemn light of gloom in the living room—grey light, not unlike that in act I.
- Life as a circle speech is given,