

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Lorraine Hansberry faithfully presents the real life of African Americans in the 1950s of America through the case of the Younger family. The historical and social plights in segregation laws of this time confined black Americans' civil rights in housing, living space, education, and employment and forced them to negate their racial confidence and capability. Observing the interconnection between history and the play, I find the clues revealed by the author in *A Raisin in the Sun* to the vital problem of why and how African Americans should break the ice and rebuild their own identities. As an American classic, this play serves as a good example for the American blacks of the later generations to consider about their own path in the future trend.

According to the theory of chronotope, space and time are concretized to carry symbolic meanings in literary works. The segregation laws make the meaning of space crucial in interpreting the play. Limited living space directly points to the confined civil rights, suggesting that African Americans can neither act freely as their white counterparts nor access the equal treatments in society. Both the real historical events and the plot in the play explain the American social phenomena of the 50s. In housing, the blacks choose either to stay in the ghetto or endure the violent attack accompanying their attempt to move into the white district. The shabby living space reflects their dry hope and deferred dream under the white hegemony. Discrimination also hinders the black students from receiving the equal rights of education. The low-end jobs seem to become such a dead end that African Americans cannot get rid

of poverty through any form of hard work.

In the chronotopic dimension, each character in the play represents a different chronotope which forms his or her own thinking according to his or her social status and growing background. The analysis on these characters' standpoints offers a deeper understanding of them. On the one hand, passive characters have their reasons to keep their preservations. Lena is a dominant mother who does not understand the younger generation's new form of dream, but she cares about her children's needs and devotes herself to the family's welfare wholeheartedly. Ruth, as a helpless mother, believes family harmony and her children's happiness to be more important than anything else. Mrs. Johnson takes a more conservative attitude for fear of the social disorder violent actions may cause. As these blacks tend to prevent risks in life, they also set limits for themselves and for the black Americans. On the other hand, active blacks are eager to prove their own value but they seem to become assimilated easily. Walter, under the great influence of American dream, possesses his great vision but fails because of both his false value judgment and the social denial. Educated Beneatha's disrespect toward her family shows her shallowness. The rich college boy, George, totally brainwashes himself with the white ideology and despises his cultural roots. African Americans stuck in the economic plight cannot find a true identity as long as they keep focusing their eyes on the pursuit of material safety and enjoyment.

In this particular time, African Americans resort to civil rights movements to express their own opinions courageously. Confronting the whites, they prove that they can make decisions for themselves. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry offers her opinions on how African Americans should find new identities. In face of the white

power, they should bravely strive for their own rights. In culture, they accept their blood origin and instinct of African ancestors. And, they also recognize that America is the land to build their new home and unique identity in. In family, the pride of being an African American will never die out and it will be inherited from generation to generation through the support of female characters. This autobiographical play not only reflects its contemporary times but also poses a direction for African Americans.

Hansberry's universality in her works has been criticized for not speaking for the black.¹ In fact, she turns the invisible black into the visible one in the Broadway theatre by introducing the reality of black people's life to the white audience, directing in a natural but not violent manner the concept that the blacks are also human beings who can feel sorrow and happiness as well. She is smart enough by cutting in the new and unfamiliar theme in a mild way so that most of the white audiences can accept the play at the very beginning of black theatre's awakening. And her way and her work have proved to be a successful start for black theatre in literary history.

Hansberry is the writer who denounces all the injustice and encourages individual voices. She understands that there is discrimination all around the world. Human dignity and life wisdom are universal lessons for everyone to learn, black or white, old or young, past or present. The experience of the Younger family can not be treated as a single case; rather, its complexity needs extensive research in order to disclose more truths about people in depression. As Hansberry was interviewed with the question about her own attitude and intention of writing this play, she answered:

¹ Critics' opinions on Hansberry's universality have been discussed in the literary review in Chapter One.

I believe that one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from truthful identity of what is. In other words, I have told people that not only is this a Negro family, specifically and definitely culturally, but it's not even a New York family or southern Negro family. It is specifically Southside Chicago . . . that kind of care, that kind of attention to detail. In other words, I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they're supposed to be, to the extent they can become everybody. (*Young* 114)

Although this play deals with only one of the African American families, their individual experience can be borrowed to understand the universal situation of the oppressed in search of their own identity.

This play naturally generates some inspirations while one reads it. For African Americans, they should always be confident of their own race and be strong when challenged by hostility or violence. They also have to stand still and defend for themselves and their family to keep their rights complete. For all the readers and audience, they should learn to respect different races and their culture. Finally, one should remember that discrimination will never disappear since it is a human nature to deny or despise others for building up one's own subjectivity or authority. Therefore, it will always be a universal life-long issue. Bearing these illuminations in mind, each individual has the capacity for heroism. Lorraine Hansberry indeed teaches people all over the world a useful lesson.