A Raisin in the Sun: 
Anniversary of an American Classic

Margaret B. Wilkerson

Rarely, if ever, has a play by a Black-American been accorded the status of a classic. Parochialism and polemics, critics have claimed, render works based on Black experience unattractive and of limited or temporary appeal. Yet Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, the first play by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway and to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1959, has become an American classic within a quarter of a century. According to Samuel French, Inc., an estimated two hundred productions were mounted during the 1983–84 theatre season alone, including critical successes at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Yale Repertory Theatre, and the St. Louis Repertory Theatre. In a 1983 review in the New York Times, Mel Gussow called this play about a 1950s Black family in Chicago "an enduring work of contemporary theatre." Lloyd Richards, director of the Yale Repertory and director of the original 1959 production, labeled A Raisin in the Sun, "An historic . . . and . . . a timeless piece." Frank Rich, in his 1983 review of the Goodman Theatre revival, claimed that the play was dated only by "its dependence on plot mechanics." The St. Louis Repertory Company's production attracted unprecedented sell-out crowds in 1984, while a 1986 production at the Roundabout Theatre drew the admiration of off-Broadway audiences. What accounts for the extraordinary appeal of A Raisin in the Sun? How has it transcended the racial parochialisms of American audiences?

A variety of factors have contributed to its enduring success: the finely crafted text; a brilliant cast in the original production and subsequent casts with talented performers; its historic reception on Broadway in the 1958–59 season and subsequent impact on a new generation of artists; and the events of the past quarter century that

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confirmed Hansberry’s prescience. However, textual additions and revisions since the original production, some as recent as 1984, have sharpened the major issues of the play, revitalizing the work for contemporary audiences. This essay will discuss the various social, historical, and artistic factors that have contributed to the play’s contemporary relevance and popularity, with particular focus on recent script revisions published by Samuel French, Inc., in the 1984 Anniversary Edition of the play.

The history of that first production is the stuff of which theatre legend is made. “Housewife’s Play Is a Hit,” read one local headline, indicating the sheer luck and nerve that allowed A Raisin in the Sun—a play written by an unknown Black woman, produced by inexperienced newcomers, and directed by an untried young Black man—to reach the professional New York stage. Although Sidney Poitier brought “star quality” to the show, the other performers (with the exception of Claudia McNeil) had yet to make their mark on the American theatre. Yet the talent of this first cast proved extraordinary and the chemistry perfect for a memorable show. Today the names of playwright Lorraine Hansberry, director Lloyd Richards, producers Phil Rose and David Cogan, actors Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Lou Gossett, Glynn Turman, Diana Sands, Ivan Dixon, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, understudies Douglas Turner Ward, Lonne Elder, Beah Richards, and others are widely known for their contributions to theatre.

Starting from a half empty house in New Haven, A Raisin in the Sun attracted larger audiences on its out-of-town trials through Chicago and other cities until a last minute rush for tickets in Philadelphia earned it a Broadway house. It had taken a year to raise the $100,000 needed for the show—the “smart money” would not take a risk on a serious play about a Black family. The tenuousness of its production life ended, however, with its New York opening. The show ran on Broadway for nineteen months and won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award against such plays as Tennessee Williams’ Sweet Bird of Youth, Archibald MacLeish’s J.B., and Eugene O’Neill’s A Touch of the Poet.

The play’s phenomenal reception can be attributed, in part, to its timeliness, for this drama reflects that moment in U.S. history when the country was poised on the brink of cataclysmic social and legal upheavals that would forever change its character. In his 1959 review of the show, Walter Kerr observed that Hansberry “reads the precise temperature of a race at that time in its history when it cannot retreat and cannot quite find the way to move forward. The mood is forty-nine parts anger and forty-nine parts control, with a very narrow escape hatch for the steam these abrasive contraries build up. Three generations stand poised, and crowded, on a detonating-cap.”

The tensions of the times that Kerr sensed in the play had been captured earlier in a short, provocative poem by Langston Hughes, a work that had given Hansberry the title and theme of her drama. “What happens to a dream deferred,” asked the poet in his historical collection of poems on Harlem. “Does it dry up like a raisin in the

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sun . . . or does it explode?" Lorraine Hansberry answered by fashioning a play about the struggles and frustrations of a working-class Black family living in Chicago’s South Side ghetto during the 1950s. Crowded into a cramped, roach-infested kitchen-ette, this family of laborers wages a constant battle to survive and to maintain hope for a better future. When Lena Younger (Mama), the elder of the household, receives a $10,000 widow’s benefit, each family member sees the money as fulfillment of a private dream. The conflict is sharpest between the dual protagonists of the play, Mama and her thirty-five-year-old son, Walter Lee, who lives with his sister (Beneatha), his wife (Ruth), and son (Travis) in his mother’s home. Walter, frustrated by his dead-end chauffeur’s job, wants to invest in a liquor store as a way out of their economic and psychological trap. But Mama, seeking more physical space for the family and the psychological freedom it would bring, puts a down payment on a house that happens to be in Clyboure Park, a white neighborhood. Her decision decimates Walter who views the money as his last chance to gain some economic control over his life. When Mama realizes how deeply her decision has hurt her son, she entrusts him with the remaining money with a portion to be placed in a savings account for his sister’s college education and the rest for Walter to do with as he wishes. His good fortune is short-lived, however, because he loses the money in a dubious business deal. A disillusioned man, Walter faces his mother and family in a highly emotional scene; when presented with the opportunity to recover his losses by selling out to the Clyboure Park Association (which is determined to keep the neighborhood white), he decides to take their offer despite its demeaning implications. However, Walter comes to realize that he cannot live with this denigration of his family’s pride and consequently rejects the proposal. The play ends as the family begins to move to the new house.

The spirit and struggles of the Younger family symbolized the social progress and setbacks characteristic of the 1950s, and the Broadway audience of that time could not help but notice. In 1955, three years before the opening of A Raisin in the Sun, the Supreme Court had declared racial segregation in public schools illegal, marking a climax to decades of advocacy and legal challenges, but initiating a new level of resistance. The Montgomery bus boycott was staged the same year, marking the beginning of Martin Luther King’s visible leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Boycotts and sit-ins intensified as federal troops were called in to prevent interference with school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas. As the struggle continued in the United States, it was also raging in Africa as Ghana became an independent nation, signaling the imminent demise of European colonialism.

During the play’s run and shortly thereafter, Black and white Freedom Riders headed South and were greeted by a wave of terrorism as Southern segregationists retaliated; lunch counters in over 100 Southern cities were integrated; sit-ins and protests accelerated; Martin Luther King was arrested and jailed repeatedly; Black children were murdered, and churches were burned by racists, while the President of

the United States shattered precedent by declaring that segregation was morally wrong. The bloody years continued as public figures like Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy were assassinated.

"[Hansberry] saw history, whole," wrote Frank Rich in his 1983 review of the play, "... the present and the future in the light of the past." The time was ripe for a play that could somehow bridge the gap between Blacks and whites in the U.S. while communicating the urgency and necessity of the civil rights struggle. Black militancy born of anger, frustration, and deferred dreams was captured in the explosive and desperate Walter Lee. Rosa Parks’s sudden refusal to move to the back of the bus, which became the catalyst for the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott, was mirrored in Lena Younger’s apolitical decision to live in Clybourne Park, and her unintentional challenge of the restrictive covenants of the day. The rise of independent African nations was reflected in the presence of Asagai, the African student, who brings home the reality of his people’s struggle for liberation, while Beneatha’s adulation of things Africaine anticipated a new wave of hair and dress styles that Black Americans would soon adopt. In an uncanny way, Hansberry sensed what was to come. Her prescience extended even a decade beyond to the assertion of women’s rights and women’s equality through the assertive Beneatha who aspires to be a doctor, and the loyal, loving Ruth who seriously contemplates an abortion. The play touched the vibrating nerve of a country on the verge of change and a people on the move.

The timeliness of the play was equalled only by the captivating characters with whom white audiences were willing to identify and of whom Black audiences could be proud. Lena Younger was a strong point of identification. She was everybody’s Mama – strong, caring, determined – the glue that held the family together. The self-sacrificing love of wife and mother were recognizable in Ruth’s quiet strength and giving nature. Although Walter Lee was a new kind of character for white audiences, intended as a “ghetto hero” by Hansberry, the generational conflict with his mother was very familiar. For Blacks, Walter was a welcome affirmation of the urgency and potency of the Black struggle, while his sister, the ebullient Beneatha, represented its intellectual potential. Each character was molded with skill, humor, and the best tools of realistic theatre. The human qualities of Hansberry’s characters came through without negating their racial integrity, and the play was loudly acclaimed on that account.

Critics praised the play as much for what it did not do as for its achievements. It presented characters who were neither sentimentalized nor stereotyped. There was no special pleading. The play was honest and had integrity. It did not preach political dogma, reviewers claimed. Even the F.B.I. file on Hansberry confirmed that the play was not propagandistic, according to the agents’ report. Apparently, it did not pose a danger to the Republic. Because the humanity of this family was so brilliantly exposed, white audiences could see themselves reflected in those Black faces. Because the racial experience was so authentically portrayed, Blacks found a new voice and created a vital, provocative theatre movement in the next decade. However, during the 1960s,

Black critic Harold Cruse labeled the play a "glorified soap opera," reflecting a few reviewers' growing impatience with realistic plot structures and disagreement with what they perceived to be the play's political views. Nevertheless, the vitality and sharp definition of characters, the wit and humor of its sparkling dialogue, and the continued affirmation of the play's "message" by Black and white audiences alike, have far outweighed that criticism, causing audiences to return year after year to relive the now well-known rituals of the Younger family. However, A Raisin in the Sun is also a play of ideas and functions on a deeper, philosophical level, which until recently has been obscured to some extent by the racial prism through which it was originally viewed.

Writing in her scrapbook of reviews, Hansberry agreed with a 1959 passage by Daniel Gottlieb of the Hartford Times: the playwright "manages to weave the threads of the Negro-white conflict, materialism vs. spiritualism, and the individual vs. his conscience into the play." The seductiveness of material values is at issue in the play and the Youngers' struggle for a spiritual and economic future poses fundamental questions about the American dream of success. As Gregory Mosher, Director of the Goodman Theatre, asks, "Is Walter Lee right when he says money is all that matters? How important is economic success in securing rights for a minority group? Such goals give you power, but do they also corrupt you?" In order to advance materially, must the Youngers also become materialistic? The contradiction between the profitable, economic values of acquisition, power, and status and the "unprofitable" values of integrity, justice, and freedom runs deep in the American psyche. Walter's desire to "make it" is as American as Mama's determination to retain the family's pride and honor.

Although the original production script contained ample confirmation of this theme, events of the last twenty-five years both offstage and on have helped audiences to perceive these fundamental issues more clearly. The re-insertion of some omitted lines has sharpened and clarified the philosophical content without altering the basic structure of the play. Some scenes were cut in the original production in order to minimize risk; the producers and director chose to keep the playing time as tight as possible without sacrificing the playwright's values. Among the scenes and lines that were eliminated were three portions of dialogue which have since been restored to more recent publications and were included in 1983-84 productions. These sections offer important insights to the character of Walter Lee and Mama, the play's dual protagonists, and greatly strengthen the articulation of the fundamental theme.

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The debate over materialism and integrity is framed by Walter Lee and Mama whose conflict drives the play. However, the full implications of Walter's desires must be grasped in order to perceive the deeper levels of the debate. The New American Library edition (1966) and the 25th Anniversary edition published in 1984 restored a scene which is key to this understanding. Inserted at the end of Act II, Scene 2, the scene shows a brief moment between Walter and his young son, Travis. Walter, who has just been entrusted with the remaining $6500 by his mother and who sees his dream of economic success within his grasp, speaks in a tender tone not heard before from him:

You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy's gonna make a transaction . . . a business transaction that's going to change our lives . . . . That's how come one day when you bout seventeen years old I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they
do... 'cause an executive's life is hell, man—. . . And I'll pull the car up on the driveway... just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white walls—no—black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy... though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth—maybe a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in. . . And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will be clipping away at the hedges and he'll say, "Good evening, Mr. Younger." And I'll say, "Hello, Jefferson, how are you this evening?" And I'll go inside and Ruth will come downstairs and me meet me at the door and we'll kiss each other and she'll take my arm and we'll go up to your room to see you sitting on the floor with the catalogues of all the great schools in America around you... All the great schools in the World! And—and I'll say, all right son—it's your seventeenth birthday, what is it you've decided? Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll go. Just tell me, what it is you want to be—and you'll be it... Whatever you want to be—Yessir! You just name it, son... and I hand you the world!12

The placement of this speech is critical to its import for it catches Walter in a rare, reflective moment. Throughout the play, the audience has seen the restless side of Walter, constantly at odds with his family, desperately trying to convince his strong-willed mother of the importance of his plans. This speech is Walter's only chance in the play to explain his ideas fully, without interruption and criticism. While the speech verifies Walter's desire to shape a better future for his son, it also signals a shift in his value system—one which will make the outrageous offer from the white homeowners' association both attractive and logical. Walter is willing to buy into a system of roles and class stratification in order to realize his dream. His image is typical Americana—the independent male who controls the world and around whom the universe revolves. Wife, secretary, gardener, Cadillac, sports car—all are complements to his material universe. His manhood is at stake, he believes, and the women around him with their traditional values are holding him back.

Walter's speech was also deleted from the 1961 film version of the play. In its place was a brief exchange between Mama and Walter in which Walter equates his investment opportunity with his parents' move North out of the economic and spiritual traps of the Deep South. The money represents his chance to board his generation's train to the North. Without the Walter/Travis scene, however, the text lacks the subtle class and sexist implications of the American dream that Walter seeks.

To sharpen this fundamental debate, Lena Younger/Mama must be rescued from the persistent image of passivity, accommodation, and self-satisfaction associated with the Black Mammy stereotype. She must be revealed for what, in fact, she is, according to Hansberry: "The Black matriarch incarnate: The bulwark of the Negro family since slavery; the embodiment of the Negro will to transcendence. It is she who, in the mind of the Black poet, scrubs the floors of a nation in order to create Black diplomats and university professors. It is she who, while seeming to cling to traditional restraints, drives the young on into the fire hoses and one day simply refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery."13

The original production script also included a scene in Act II, Scene 2, that clarified

this image of Mama. However, the entire scene, along with the character of Mrs. Johnson, was eliminated in order to trim the show's playing time. It has now been published for the first time in the addendum of the 1984 Samuel French edition and has been included in several recent productions. The original producers may have sacrificed too much, underestimating the persistence of the Mammy stereotype in the American psyche. The perception of Lena Younger as a conservative, retarding force has been a difficult one to shed. Although the dialogue in this scene is carried by Mrs. Johnson, a nosy neighbor and somewhat humorous character, Mama's responses clearly place her in the militant forefront. Mrs. Johnson, always the happy bearer of
bad news, makes explicit the danger in the family’s move and Mama’s quiet determination to take the risk.

Johnson: I guess y’all seen the news whats all over the colored paper this week . . .
Mama: No — didn’t get mine yet this week.
Johnson: You mean you ain’t read ‘bout them colored people that was bombed out their place out there? . . . Ain’t it something how bad these here white folks is getting here in Chicago! Lord, getting so you think you right down in Mississippi! . . . Course I thinks it’s wonderful how our folks keeps on pushing out . . . Lord — I bet this time next month y’all’s names will have been in the papers plenty — . . . “NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK — BOMBED!”
Mama: We ain’t exactly moving out there to get bombed.
Johnson: Oh, honey — you know I’m praying to God every day that don’t nothing like that happen! But you have to think of life like it is — and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods.
Mama: We done thought about all that, Mis’ Johnson.14

The conversation continues with Mrs. Johnson carrying most of the dialogue, while Mama speaks briefly, but with quiet authority. Then Lena Younger makes a surprising philosophical connection.

Johnson: Sometimes . . . [Beneatha] act like she ain’t got time to pass the time of day with nobody ain’t been to college. Oh — I ain’t criticizing her none. It’s just — you know how some of our young people gets when they get a little education . . . ’Course I can understand how she must be proud and everything — being the only one in the family to make something of herself! I know just being a chauffeur ain’t never satisfied Brother none. He shouldn’t feel like that, though. Ain’t nothing wrong with being a chauffeur.
Mama: There’s plenty wrong with it.
Johnson: What?
Mama: Plenty. My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn’t a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man’s hands was made to make things, or to turn the earth with — not to drive nobody’s car for em — or . . . carry they slop jars. And my boy is just like him —
Johnson: Mmmmm mmmm. The Youngers is too much for me! . . . You sure one proud-acting bunch of colored folks. Well — I always thinks like Booker T. Washington said that time — “Education has spoiled many a good plow hand” —
Mama: Is that what old Booker T. said?
Johnson: He sure did.
Mama: Well, it sounds just like him. The fool.
Johnson: Well — he was one of our great men.
Mama: Who said so?15

The physical image of Mama (large, dark, dominant) suggests the Mammy stereotype of countless American plays and films, but her criticism of Booker T. Washington’s ideas in this passage aligns her with Washington’s intellectual opponent,

15 Ibid., pp. 139–40.
W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois and other militant advocates for civil rights founded the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP), the organization that provided much of the legal bases for protesting segregation. The Washington/DuBois debate framed the philosophical and political issues facing Black-Americans and the fight for human and civil rights early in this century. The stereotype of the Black Mammy suggests complicity with Washington’s emphasis on accommodation and economic self-sufficiency. However, in an ironic twist, Hansberry equates Mama’s determination with the militant spirit of DuBois’s position and Walter’s entrepreneurial interests with the materialism associated with Washington’s philosophy. Lena Younger is not the accommodating Mammy who chooses the passive, safe path, but rather the folk figure, the courageous spirit that lends credence and power to the militant struggle. In her own determined way, she gives birth to revolutionaries and is herself a progressive force. The explicit reference to Washington in this scene illuminates the “revolutionary” aspect of Lena and sharply delineates the philosophical difference between Mama and Walter.

Hansberry’s final and most definitive framing of the philosophical issues occurs at the beginning of Act III in the dialogue between Asagai and Beneatha. Abridged in early publications of the script, most of this exchange was cut from the film. As in the earlier Walter/Travis scene, the placement of this scene is important. It occurs just after the highly emotional moment when Walter and Mama discover that the money is gone. The audience, affected by the sheer magnitude of the loss, is now invited to reflect on the family’s future. At a time when Mama’s faith is being sorely tested and the materialistic underpinnings of Walter’s faith have been destroyed, what values will shape the family’s response? Here Hansberry places a key dialogue—the debate between Asagai and Beneatha. Some critics dismiss this section as a distracting, verbose passage, out of place in this realistic piece of theatre. Yet a closer examination of the unabridged scene reveals its crucial role in the philosophical progression of the theme.

The question here is not whether the family should move or stay, but rather what they will learn from this tragedy. Will they act out of an affirmation of life or be paralyzed by despair? Asagai focuses on Beneatha, but Hansberry focuses her critique on Walter and all those who would base their future on the acquisition of things. As the money goes, so goes Beneatha’s and Walter’s faith in humankind. “Man is foul!” Beneatha says, “And the human race deserves its misery! . . . From now on, I worship truth—and the truth is that people are puny, small and selfish.” The logical extension of this “truth” is to ignore human values and to act, if one does at all, out of selfishness and the needs of the existential moment. This idea enables Walter later in Act III to consider any means to recover the lost money. But Asagai counters:

Truth? Why is it that you despairing ones always think that only you have the truth? I never thought to see you like that, you! Your brother made a stupid, childish mistake—and you are grateful to him. So that now you can give up the ailing human race

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16 For example, see Max Lerner, “A Dream Deferred,” New York Post, 8 April 1959, p. 2. The “theme of the African heritage and possible future of the Negro is marginal to the main theme of the play.”

17 Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun/The Sign, p. 114.
on account of it. You talk about what good is struggle; what good is anything? Where are we all going? And why are we bothering?\textsuperscript{18}

Beneatha responds:

And you cannot answer it! All your talk and dreams about Africa and Independence. Independence and then what? What about all the crooks and petty thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power to steal and plunder the same as before — only now they will be black and do it in the name of the new Independence — You cannot answer that.\textsuperscript{19}

Asagai shouts over her: “I live the answer!”\textsuperscript{20} Asagai proposes his being, his life, his very existence — and the meaning that commitment creates — as the embodiment of his answer. Asagai acts out of a belief in the transcendent power of man and woman, a belief that cannot be shaken by the loss of money, material things, or even the devastation of human betrayal. This faith will be his armor when he returns to his troubled homeland to fight against terrible odds — poverty and ignorance, not to mention the British and the French — to achieve the full liberation of his people.

Asagai expresses in philosophical and political terms the affirmation that Lena Younger has lived. At this moment, he is her symbolic son — the long-desired reuniting of Africans and Afro-Americans through shared beliefs, not color alone. The debate anticipates the ambivalence of Walter’s emotions as he is torn, up to the very end of the play, between an act of despair and an act of affirmation. Ironically, affirmation carries no assurances. For just as Asagai does not know whether he will be revered or murdered for his efforts on behalf of his people, so Walter and the Younger family will face an uncertain future in their new neighborhood. Although Asagai prevails in the debate, Walter must peer into the abyss of despair and lost pride before he can finally acknowledge the progressive, enlightened values of his forebears — the spirit of life which has allowed humankind to transcend its condition.

The play repudiates the kind of materialism that values money and acquisition over human dignity and life. The spirit of humankind, Hansberry insists, must affirm freedom, justice, integrity, caring — at the expense of comfort or even life itself. It is a courageous statement made in the face of the desperate economic needs of the Youngers of the nation. It is offered as a framework for the liberation struggles of the world, in defiance of traditional American notions of success. The uncut scene in Act III gives full expression to the debate and heightens the philosophical questions implicit in the Youngers’ struggle. When this scene is cut, as in the film, or abridged, as in the early publications and the original production, the import of Hansberry’s philosophical position is diminished and the intellectual dimensions of Beneatha and Asagai are trivialized. The Yale production used the full version of this scene with great success. One critic even claimed that this scene could well be the climax of the play.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 114–15.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 115.
Hansberry's sensing of future trends was most evident in another casualty of the original production script: Beneatha adopts a natural hairstyle (long before the “Afro” became popular) and a bourgeois George Murchison is surprisingly appreciative of the look. But the most dramatic change in the play occurred long before the show went into rehearsal. In an earlier version of the script, Hansberry wrote a more somber ending in which the family is shown sitting in the darkened living room of their new house, armed and awaiting an attack by their white neighbors. The accepted and ever popular upbeat ending, which shows a jubilant family moving to their new home, was no less true than the other ending. This more positive view did, however, emphasize the Younger’s evolution and progress rather than the violent, retrogressive attitudes of the racists who awaited them.

Despite the loss of much of the play's philosophical dimension, *A Raisin in the Sun* was a smashing success in 1959 and has continued to attract audiences for a quarter of a century. The productions that recent audiences have applauded are for the most part based on an expanded text that includes portions of the scenes discussed in this essay and that provides greater definition of major characters and theme. The heavy financial risks associated with professional productions resulted in a necessarily conservative handling of the original production and robbed early audiences of the full import of Hansberry’s achievement. It may have been asking too much of 1959 audiences to cope with the full vision of the play. Only the very naive would have expected them to accept the intellectual dimension emanating from the experiences of a working-class Black family and the pen of a Black woman writer during the heat and turmoil of those days. The timeliness of the play has not diminished. Its criticism of materialistic values is more poignant amidst the affluence and poverty of American society in the 1980s. At the same time, its depiction of the Black struggle against pernicious, persistent racism remains current as racial intolerance continues to pervade the country’s institutions, albeit in more subtle forms. Perhaps because the idea of Black stage characters is not as exotic as it once was, the 1980s audience can perceive the full meaning of the play. Perhaps they are more capable of comprehending the theatre of Black experience, not only as literal portrayal, but as a metaphor for the American experience. Hansberry, however, did not wait for such enlightenment on the part of her audience; she insisted on restoring many of the deleted scenes as soon as possible. It is to her credit that she did so. Her literary executor, Robert Nemiroff, has continued in the same spirit, making other scenes available since the playwright’s death. The expanded text has revitalized the play for this generation and has added a new dimension to the exploration of Black experience in the American theatre.

22 The “Afro” was deleted because it was not attractive on actress Diana Sands.