Social Issues
in Literature

Gender in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Gary Wiener, Book Editor
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   Lorraine Hansberry was a tireless activist for social justice as well as a writer whose work continues to influence younger generations.

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   Notable Black American Women
   Hansberry’s statement that A Raisin in the Sun “wasn’t a ‘negro play’” caused numerous subsequent commentators to miss the point of her life and art.

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   Jewelle L. Gomez
   As a warrior in the revolution of ideas in the United States, and as a black woman, writer, and lesbian-feminist, Lorraine Hansberry has much to offer to those who have followed in her footsteps.

Chapter 2: A Raisin in the Sun and Gender

1. A Raisin in the Sun Depicts Complicated Male and Female Family Relationships 50
   Geneviève Fabre
   Refusing to pigeonhole African Americans into traditional gender types, Hansberry creates a complex family structure that defies easy classifications.

2. Hansberry Depicts the Struggle of an Emasculated Male Hero 56
   C.W.E. Bigsby
As gay African American author Richard Wright does in his works, Hansberry depicts the struggle of Walter, an emasculated male, in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Her solution to Walter's dilemma, however, is artificial and unconvincing.

3. Walter Must Reclaim His Role as Family Head

*Paul Carter Harrison*

*A Raisin in the Sun* is the story of an emotionally castrated male, stripped of his patriarchal status by the forces of white hegemony. With his mother's help, he must reclaim his rightful role as family head.

4. Walter Becomes a Man When He Learns to Be Like His Father

*William Cook*

Walter Younger achieves manhood when he chooses his father's values and rejects the corrupt standards he has learned from the Murchisons and Willy Harrises of the world.

5. Hansberry's Drama Rejects the Stereotype of the Emasculating Woman

*Sharon Friedman*

*A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Drinking Gourd* take issue with the claim that African American women do not support their men and impede their progress toward achieving their dreams.

6. *A Raisin in the Sun* Is Dominated by Women

*Anita Singh*

*A Raisin in the Sun* is about the anxieties and aspirations of three African American women, Lena, Ruth, and Beneatha.

7. Hansberry's Play Depicts Strong-Willed Women Who Refuse to Be Marginalized

*Sally Burke*

Ruth, Beneatha, and Lena exhibit strength of spirit, will, and mind. Through them, Hansberry refutes the notion that women are inferior to men and subject to men's control.
8. Beneatha Fights Male Chauvinism as Well as Her Own Flaws

*Steven R. Carter*

Though she battles against the oppression of the males who attempt to dominate her life, Beneatha displays a troubling selfish streak that is similar to Walter’s.

9. A *Raisin in the Sun* Is a Protest Against Homophobia

*Karen Ocamb*

While *Raisin in the Sun*’s most obvious target is racism, as a closeted lesbian playwright, Lorraine Hansberry is also protesting discrimination against the gay community.

10. Mama Lena Is an Acceptable Tyrant

*Trudier Harris*

As the matriarch in an African American family, Lena Younger projects a domineering personality that is necessary to keep her family from falling apart.

11. Hansberry Sought to Undermine the “Mammy” Stereotype

*Lisa M. Anderson*

Through her character Lena Younger, Hansberry intended to debunk the Mammy stereotype, yet the play has often been interpreted as reinforcing that label.

12. Black Matriarchs Should Be Admired

*Mary Louise Anderson*

Countering the negative stereotypes associated with strong black women, three plays by African American playwrights depict black matriarchs as a necessary force in the African American community.

**Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on Gender**

1. Feminism Has Not Made Women Unhappy

*Barbara Ehrenreich*

Detractors have sought to blame twenty-first-century women’s supposed dissatisfaction with life on the feminist movement, but their logic is flawed.
2. Men Should Support Feminism  

*Mandy Van Deven*

Both sexes must play an active role in countering sexism, which is not only the problem of women, but of men as well.

3. Black Men and Women Should Stop Comparing Their Victimization  

*Stephanie L. Phillips*

Instead of arguing whether black men or black women have it worse in society, the two sexes should work together to aid each other.

4. The African American Beauty Industry Is Still Controlled by White Corporations  

*Susannah Walker*

How African American women wear their hair and makeup has been a political and socioeconomic issue, but the truth is that white America is still dictating what products they use.

For Further Discussion

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