

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Lorraine Hansberry

World Drama in Its Context II – TH216
Lecture by Magda Romanska

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

- **BACKGROUND**
- **PRODUCTION HISTORY**
- **AUTHOR**
- **TITLE**
- **FIRST PRODUCTION**
- **ISSUES:**
 - **HOUSING – PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY of RACIAL SEGREGATION**
 - **AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY – BETWEEN AFRICA AND AMERICA**
 - **FAMILY STRUCTURE – GENERATION GAPS**
 - **AMERICAN DREAM**
 - **GENDER AND RACE – CRISIS OF BLACK MASCULINITY**
- **DRAMATIC STRUCTURE**
- **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**
- **STAGING**



PRODUCTION HISTORY

PRODUCTION HISTORY

- *A Raising in the Sun* first opened in New Haven and Philadelphia, then Chicago, before finally debuting on Broadway on March 11, 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.
- From 1959 to 1966, the show ran for a total of 530 performances.
- Directed by Lloyd Richards.
- Produced by Philip Rose.
- Cast that included Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands (Outer Critics Award, 1959) , Ruby Dee and Louis Gossett.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

- In 1959, *New York Times* proclaimed “Raisin” as ‘A play that changed American Theatre forever.’
- At 29, Lorraine Hansberry became the youngest playwright, the fifth woman, and the first African American playwright ever to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play of the Year.
- “Raisin” was the first play to be written by an African American with a black cast.
- It was the first play to be directed by an African American since 1907.
- It became the most often performed production of all times.
- It was chosen as one of the 100 Most Significant Works in the Twentieth Century in a National Theatre poll of playwrights, actors, directors, journalists, and other theatre professionals.
- It was translated into over 30 languages.



Sidney Poitier and Claudia McNeil

TITLE

A Dream Deferred

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?

--Langston Hughes

LORRAINE HANSBERRY



Born May 19, 1930 into a well to do black family in Chicago.

Grew up among prominent African-American leaders: W.E.D. DuBois, Langston Hughes.

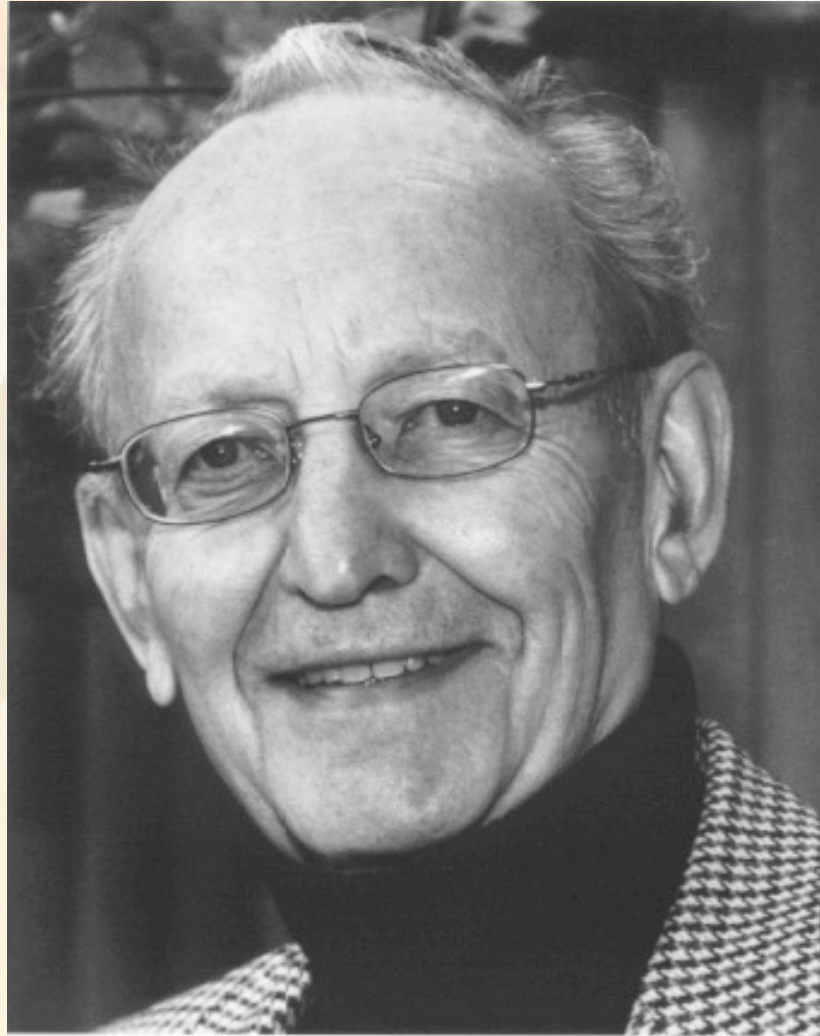
While still a child, her family bought a house in a white neighborhood. The family encountered racism, but filed an anti-segregation case before the Illinois Supreme Court, which they won (autobiographical element).

- **Married Jewish writer and activist Robert Nemiroff in 1953.**
- **Became involved in the Civil Rights movement. With the help of James Baldwin and others met with Robert Kennedy to discuss equal rights.**
- **Died of cancer at the age of 34, the same night her second play 'The Sign in the Sidney Brustein's Window' closed on Broadway.**
- **After her death, her husband published her autobiography, 'To Be Young, Gifted and Black.'**

PRODUCING 'RAISIN'

- **PHILIP ROSE – PRODUCER**

“YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON BROADWAY!”





*From left: David Cogan, Lorraine Hansberry, Lloyd Richards,
Philip Rose, and Sidney Poitier*

QUOTES: 1,2,3

a raisin in the
sun



by
LORRAINE HANSBERRY

A RANDOM HOUSE PLAY

PRODUCING 'RAISIN'

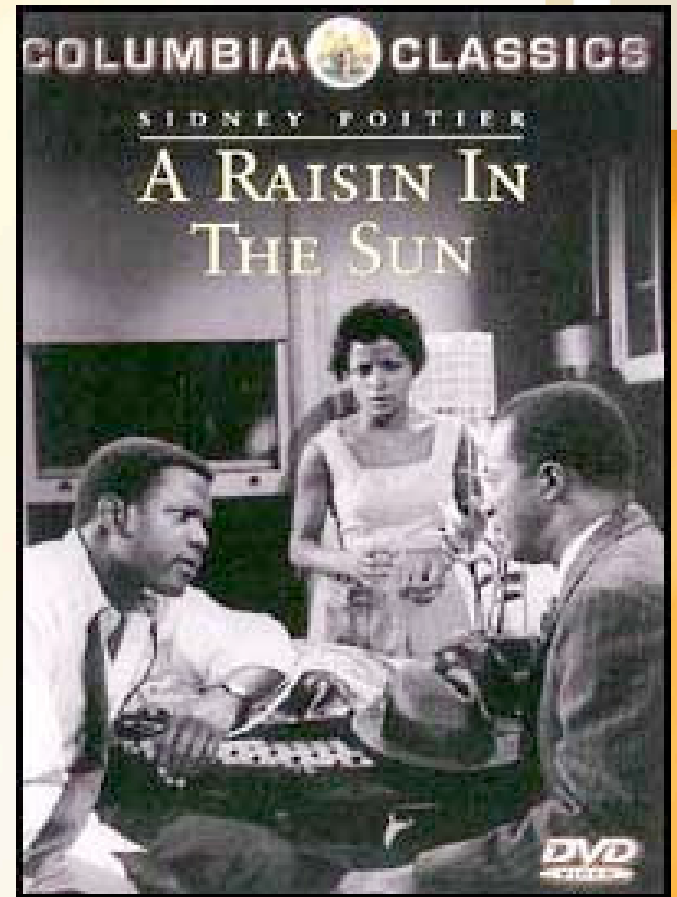
Listen: Cheryl Corley on NPR:

<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/raisin/>



PRODUCTION HISTORY - FILM

- In 1961, *A Raisin* was adapted on film with the same leading cast. The film won a special award at the Cannes Film Festival.
- Hansberry's screenplay was nominated for a Screen Writer's Guild Award.
- Director Daniel Petrie was nominated for Directors Guild of America Award.
- Sidney Poitier and Claudia McNeil were nominated for Golden Globe.
- Ruby Dee won National Board of Review Award for Best supporting Actress.



PRODUCTION HISTORY –TV

In 1986, the play was made into TV movie, directed by Bill Duke, with Danny Glover portraying Walter. It was nominated for 3 Emmys.



REVIVAL - 2004



- The recent revival on the Broadway featured Sean ("P. Diddy") Combs as Walter and Phylicia Rashad as Lena.
- The show won 2004 Tony Awards for Best Leading Actress in a Play (Rashad) and Best Featured Actress in a Play (Audra McDonald for the role of Ruth).

RAISIN IN THE SUN, 2004

4 Tony Award Nominations

- Best Revival of a Play
- Best Performance by a Leading Actress - Phylicia Rashad
- Best Performance by a Featured Actress - Sanaa Lathan
- Best Performance by a Featured Actress - Audra McDonald





2004

RAISIN –NOW AND THEN



Listen: Michael Eric Dyson Commentary: 'A Raisin in the Sun'
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1961517>



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

- 1948 President Truman issues executive order integrating armed forces.
- 1949 Supreme Court rules that local “covenants” enforcing segregated neighborhoods are unconstitutional. National Housing Act addressing substandard housing.
- 1950 Ralph Bunche wins Nobel Peace Prize for Palestinian peacekeeping mission.
- 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that “separate but equal” doctrine regarding school segregation is unconstitutional.
- 1955 Bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.
- 1957 School desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- 1959 **“A Raisin in the Sun”**
- 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, while leading civil rights demonstrations.
- 1964 Martin Luther King Jr. wins the Nobel Peace Prize.
- 1963 Malcolm X assassinated.
- 1967 Black Power conference held in Newark, NJ.
- 1968 Civil Rights Act of 1968 guaranteeing fair treatment in housing.
- Martin Luther King J. assassinated.

HOUSING

PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY OF RACIAL SEGREGATION

“The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of sub-standard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the Nation.”

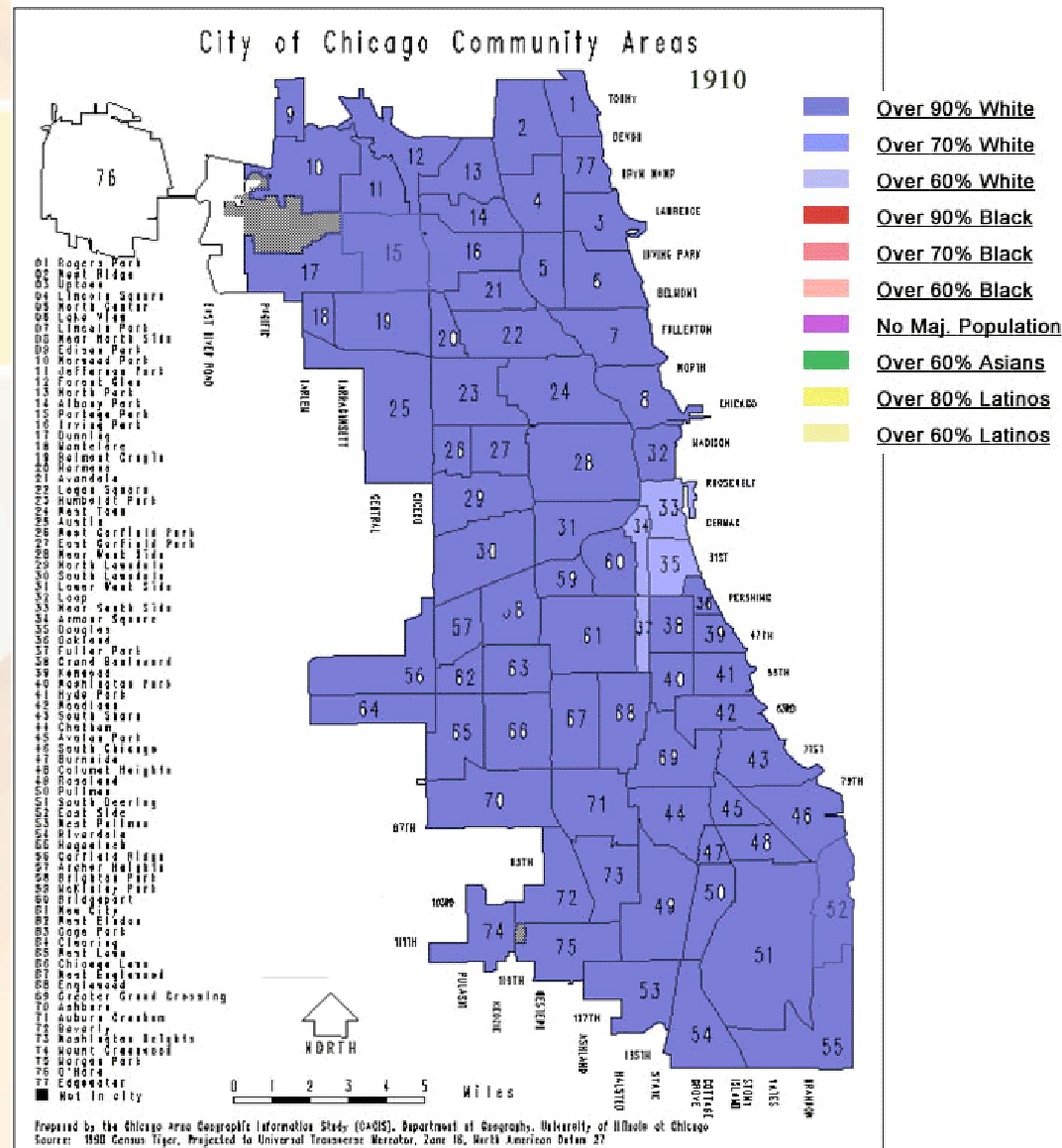
“Housing Act of 1949” Eighty First Congress – Sess. 1, Chap. 338, 1949 – “Declaration of the National Housing Policy”

HOUSING

“Beginning in the late 1950s, when mainstream opinion blamed either black pathology or white hysteria for the decline of racially changing neighborhoods, a small number of activists worked to reveal both the massive profits made by speculators who sold overpriced home to blacks on contract, and the dire impact that high monthly payments were having on black communities. [...] In the late 1950s and early 1960s dozens of black homeowners – many of them recent migrants to [Chicago] who listed occupations such as laundry worker, janitor, and unemployed machinist – filed suit against the real estate brokers, attorneys, and bankers who were involved in these schemes. In most cases, they lost”

Beryl Satter, “The Million-Dollars-A-Day Cost of Being Black”

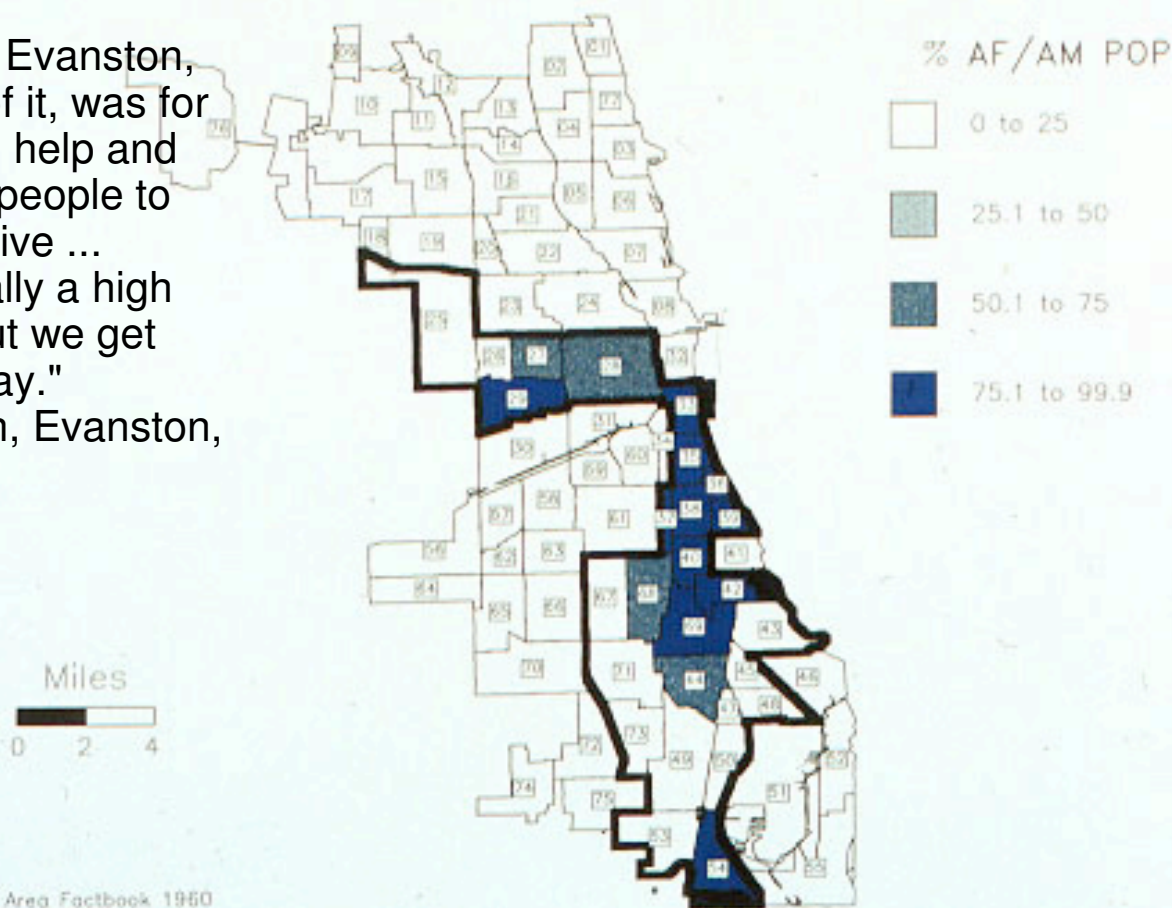
HOUSING - CHICAGO



MAP 5

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY AREAS IN CHICAGO, 1960

"They said that Evanston, the beginning of it, was for rich people and help and not for colored people to come Out and live ... Evanston is really a high place to live, but we get here and we stay."
Caldonia Martin, Evanston, Illinois, 1972.



Source: Local Community Area Factbook 1960

CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE

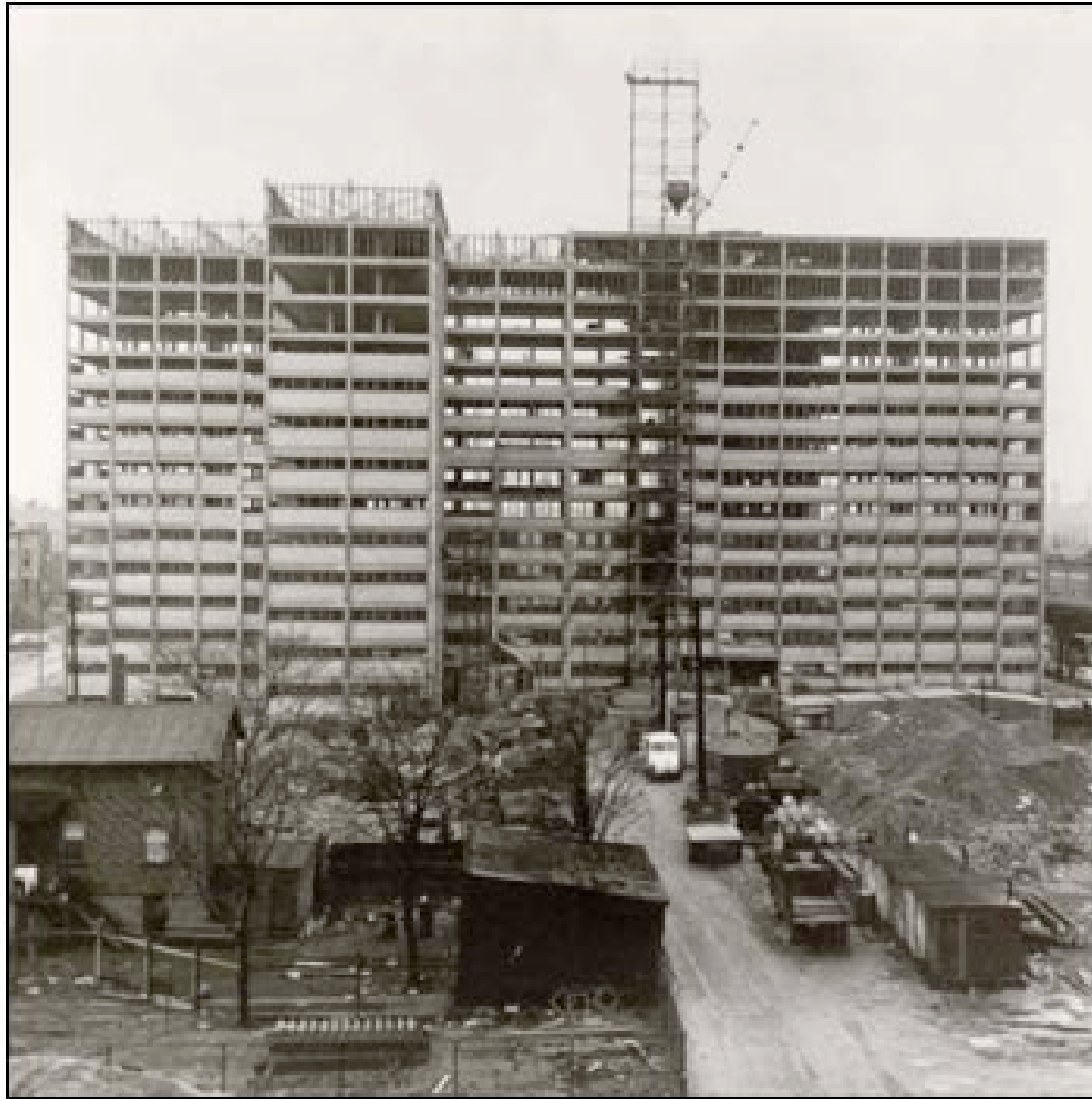


CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



Children on front steps of their unit, Altgeld Gardens. Circa 1940s.

CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



Constructing Henry Horner Homes. Circa 1950s

CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



Photographing Harrison Court, shortly before completion. 1950

CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE



CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE, 1973



CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE

BLACK EXPO, 1973



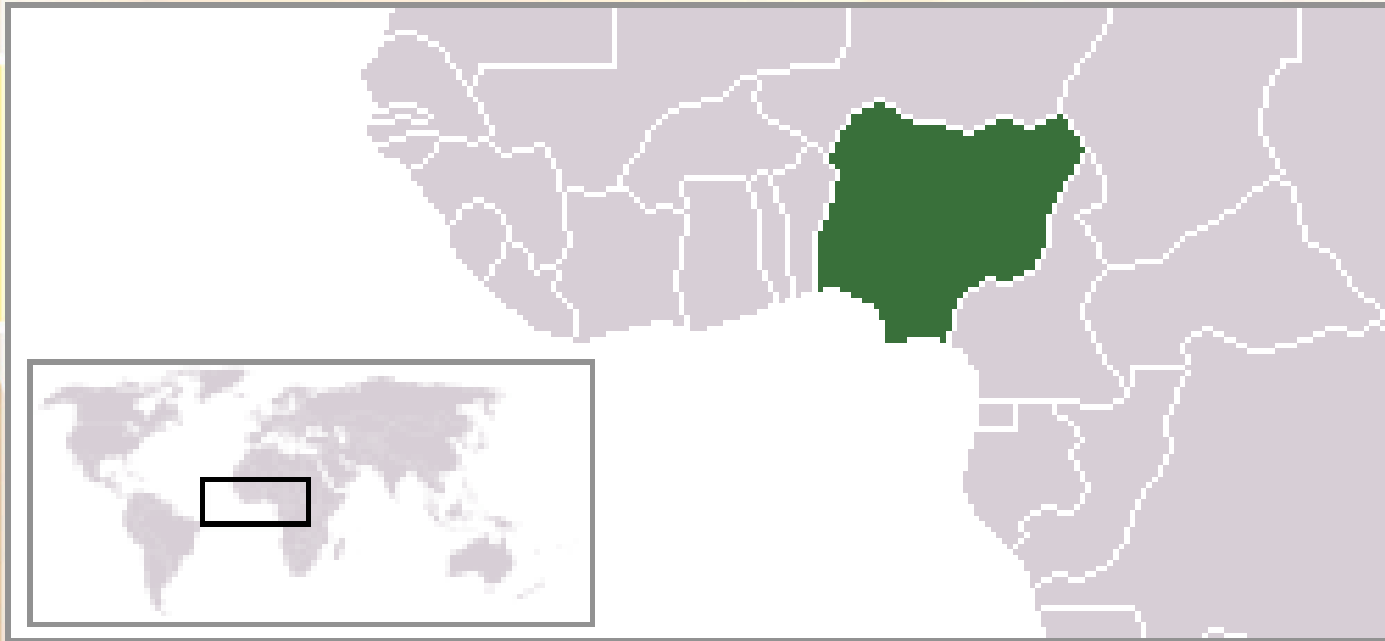


AFRICAN – AMERICAN IDENTITY

AFRICA'S INDEPENDENCE - TIMELINE

- **1960** **Nigeria granted independence.**
- **1962** **Uganda and Tanganyika attain independence.**
- **1963** **Kenya becomes independent.**
- **1964** **Northern Rhodesia becomes independent and is renamed Zambia.**
- **1965** **Gambia becomes independent.**
- **1975** **Portugal grants independent to its African colonies: Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome.**
- **1990** **South African government lifts ban on all anti-apartheid groups. Two weeks later Nelson Mandela is released from prison.**
- **1991** **All of the laws relating to apartheid are abolished.**
- 1994** **South Africa's first non-racial elections are held. Nelson Mandela becomes President.**

NIGERIA



"In the face of devastating campaigns of inferiorization, prejudice and oppression, Afro-North Americans have had to forge a united front and generate pride in that which white racism has declared to be evil, that is the possession of an African ancestry" (Forbes 1990:34).

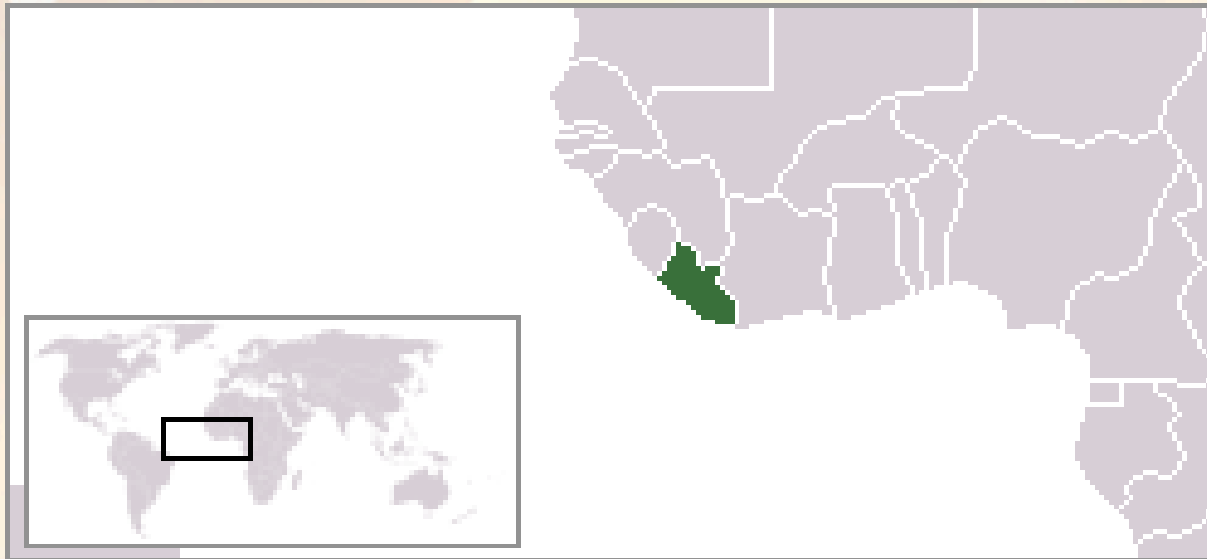
LIBERIA – BACK TO AFRICA


“Let Africa be our guiding Star—OUR STAR OF DESTINY.

All of us may not live to see the higher accomplishment of an African Empire—so strong and powerful, as to compel the respect of mankind, but we in our life-time can so work and act as to make the dream a possibility within another generation.

Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa! Let us work towards the one glorious end of a free, redeemed and mighty nation. Let Africa be a bright star among the constellation of nations.

No one knows when the hour of Africa's Redemption cometh. It is in the wind. It is coming. One day, like a storm, it will be here. When that day comes all Africa will stand together.” - Marcus Garvey





What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?

*One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?*

Countee Cullen, *Heritage*



'BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL'

- Starting in 1960's - a growing number of African American youth celebrated their "blackness" and their historical and cultural ties with the African continent.
- Black Power movement – "Black is Beautiful" – cultural identity separate from white America.
- Redefining cultural heritage – finding oneself in one's past.
- "African-American" - the term expresses African pride and a sense of kinship and solidarity with others of the African diaspora —an embracing of the notion of pan-Africanism earlier enunciated by Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Dubois.
- Everyday choices became ideological and deeply contentious :
 - Hair style – Afro vs. Straight
 - Wardrobe
 - Music – African vs. American
 - Language
 - Religion



DRAMATIC TENSIONS

- Beneatha - “Alaiyo,” “One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough”
- between Joseph Asagai and George Murchison
 - Symbolism: Africa vs. America
 - Ideology: Idealism vs. Pragmatism
 - Visions of the future
- Beneatha vs. Mama
- Modern vs. Old fashioned
- African vs. American
- Religion vs. Atheism
- Ruth as negotiator
- Walter on the crossroad



"For I am my mother's daughter, and the drums of Africa still beat in my heart." - Mary McLeod Bethune



FAMILY STRUCTURE

GENERATION GAP

- **MAMA**
 - Matriarch of the family
 - Stereotype?
 - Symbolism
 - Value system
 - Religion
 - Work ethics
- **Beneatha**
 - Education
 - Afrocentrism
 - Atheism
- **Walter**
 - Vs. his Father
 - Material success
 - Dignity vs. pragmatism





AMERICAN DREAM?

AMERICAN DREAM

- House
- Material goods
- Moral values
- Work ethics
- Symbols of status
- Entrepreneurship
- Education
- Economy vs. Dignity
- Survival vs. Self-worth
- Symbolism:
 - Check vs. Father
 - Liquor store
 - Hat
 - Plant





GENDER ISSUES

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- **Models of Femininity**
 - Beneatha vs. Ruth
- **Asagai vs. George**
 - Relationship with Beneatha
 - Models of family
- **Walter – crisis of black masculinity**
 - His view of women
 - Beneatha
 - Ruth
 - His view of himself as a man
 - Crisis of black masculinity
 - Fear of effeminization
 - Breadwinner fantasies
 - Masculinity vs. American dream
 - Business model
 - What is at stake for Walter?





DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

- **THE CHECK** – what it does?
- **THE MOTIVES** – what drives everybody?
- **REVERSALS** – what makes Ruth happy doesn't make Walter happy
- **CLIMAX** – which scene?
- **DENOUMENT** – Walter's transition?
- **ARISTOTELIAN PLOT?**
- **MELODRAMA?**



CHARACTERS

- Check
- Beginning vs. the end
- Circumstances make men vs. men make circumstances
- How do you both honor and escape the legacy?
- Whose play is it anyway?
 - Mama vs. Walter
 - What's the difference?
 - Walter vs. Willie Lohman
 - Walter as a tragic character
 - Walter as a heroic character
 - Inner transformation
 - Inner conflict
 - Fighting for life



HOW TO STAGE IT?

- **Set – reflects state of mind:**
 - Claustrophobic, cluttered,...
- **Pace – reflects the changing fortune:**
 - Tensions, reversals, silences, ...
- **Motivations and stakes:**
 - Clear inner motives for each characters
 - Stakes: fighting for life....
- **Commenting vs. living it**
- **Humor vs. tragedy**
- **Ambiguity vs. Clarity**



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