

Impact Statement

Mina Fujii, Grade 12

***Writing America's Reality*, 2025**

Acrylic, Marker, Mixed Media, Paper, Pastel on paper, 13 x 15 inches

Abington High School, Abington, PA

Unsung Hero: Lorraine Hansberry

Through musical theater, I see glimpses of myself and my own experiences being brought to life on stage. I relate to Elle Woods' feverish ambition in *Legally Blonde*; I understand the familiar struggle to identify with a culture in the plot of *In The Heights*. Born into a diverse society in the U.S., I've had ample exposure to artists who make me feel seen and understood. However, this experience was unfathomable for people not even a century ago. In the early 1900s, Black individuals in America were living with restricted freedoms enforced by a government that was built on their oppression. It became necessary to challenge this systemic racism and introduce the public to their untold stories. Lorraine Hansberry, a brilliant writer and activist, finally addressed the lack of representation of the Black American experience by creating the play *A Raisin In The Sun*. Her production, centered around the Younger family, brought attention to the unattainability of the American Dream for Blacks living in a racist society. I naturally chose Hansberry as my Unsung Hero because she worked tirelessly through writing and activism to advocate for communities whose stories had so long been ignored.

I deeply admire Lorraine Hansberry's lifelong commitment to activism and her courage to directly challenge racism, knowing that she was subjecting herself to hate and violence. She lived by the sentiment that remaining resilient in the face of hate was the only way to enact change. As a child her parents were active participants in the Civil Rights Movement, and a defining moment in the Hansberry family's lives was the decision to move into an all-white neighborhood. This act of defiance, which was brought to the Supreme Court in *Hansberry vs. Lee*, sparked the fight to ban restrictive covenants and begin integrating communities. Lorraine Hansberry continued her family's legacy by choosing to go to the all-white University of Wisconsin-Madison, rather than a university that Black students typically attended. She eventually went on to write *A Raisin In The Sun*, changing history by being the first Black woman writer to have a play on Broadway. As James Baldwin remarked about *Raisin*, "...never before, in the entire history of the American theater, had so much of the truth of Black people's lives been seen on the stage. Black people had ignored the theater because the theater had always ignored them" (*American Radio Works*). Hansberry's creation of the play, which gained unprecedented success, depicted an honest story that so many Black people related to. It showed society that Black lives deserved to be represented in the media just as much as those of white peoples. Nonetheless, her activism did not stop even after fundamentally changing the culture of American art. Before her tragic passing

from pancreatic cancer, Hansberry advocated for feminism and Civil Rights Laws, even writing articles against homophobia under an alias. She fearlessly helped create the changes that allow American citizens of all backgrounds to enjoy the freedoms they have today.

To express Hansberry's true disposition, I knew I had to use bold colors when I began sketching the composition of her portrait. The bright shades of red, yellow, purple, and blue communicate Hansberry's proud and unflinching nature regarding activism and openly supporting what is right. Being bold was how she garnered attention and enacted change. I collaged with papers I gelli-printed, an additive process that reflects Hansberry's multifaceted nature. Her portrait is then framed by billowing curtains to indicate her contribution to diversifying American theater. To depict her impact through this piece, I reacquainted myself with the storyline of *A Raisin in the Sun*. The background is a collage of real pages taken from an extra copy I had of the play. I intentionally chose pages that showed the significance of *Raisin*; for example, the cast list shows a predominantly Black cast, a revolutionary act in a previously white-dominated art form. There are pages of dialogue between Walter Younger and Lindner, who spoke for the white residents who were discouraging the Younger family from moving into the neighborhood. The central plot of the story focused on the Youngers grappling with the effects of institutional racism on employment, economic status, and housing. However, interactions with Lindner were necessary to also represent the direct racism they experienced from white people, which would have been relatable to Black audience members. Finally, to explicitly show what causes Hansberry stood for, I researched 1960's protest signs for civil rights and feminist movements and emulated their styles in the signs that surround her figure. Her colorful presence in front of the curtains and between the signs portray her as the strong woman she was.

Researching Lorraine Hansberry and creating this piece have inspired me to use my art practice as a tool to progress the world's embrace of inclusivity. I realize the impact of art on people's perceptions of each other, and I am grateful to have the same opportunity as Hansberry did to make the world a little more understanding. Like Hansberry, I intend to create pieces that represent my Asian American community, whose members can relate to the stories I tell. Besides this, Lorraine Hansberry inspires me to unapologetically support the causes I care about. It's convenient to be a bystander as others are oppressed in the country but putting personal comfort aside and speaking out against injustices are what truly cause change, a message this project has enforced in me. As I move forward, I will share my project and a synopsis of Lorraine Hansberry's story with my school's newspaper as well as social media to enlighten my peers of her impact. No matter what their background, anyone can benefit from learning about the artist and revolutionary that was Lorraine Hansberry.

References:

"Lorraine Hansberry - Death, *A Raisin in the Sun* & Facts." *Biography*, 16 Aug. 2023, www.biography.com/authors-writers/lorraine-hansberry.

Media, American Public. "American Radioworks - Say It Plain, Say It Loud." *APM Reports - Investigations and Documentaries from American Public Media*, americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/lhansberry.html.

Rothberg, Emma Z. "Biography: Lorraine Hansberry." *National Women's History Museum*, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/lorraine-hansberry.