The world is a box of raisins. If the ideal state of life is a fresh grape, full of vigor and creativity, then oppression dries the grape out, dehydrating its skin and leaving a shriveled sun-dried berry. Despite its transformation, a raisin is still a fruit; similarly, those whose freedoms are challenged still fight for justice. In his 1951 poem "Harlem," Langston Hughes writes, "What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?" (1-3) Forces that attempt to challenge intellectual thought by restricting education through book bans try to suppress ambition, but Lorraine Hansberry's characters carry a legacy that cannot be limited. In fact, their dreams only evolve as a result of their resilience, much like the success of Hansberry's work as a Black female playwright despite literary ban attempts.

In Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, the impoverished Youngers, a Black family in 1950s Chicago living in a cramped two-bedroom apartment, clash over individual dreams for business, education, and a new home, all while facing systemic racism that threatens their hopes for a better life in a hostile world. Concurrently, the matriarch Mama nurtures her doggedly growing plant despite a lack of sunshine, similar to how she looks after her family members by giving them constant care in spite of their lack of opportunities.

Upon initial production, the play was perceived as a groundbreaking success, being the first play on Broadway written and produced by an African American woman. The 1959 production won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play of the year and the story was adapted into a movie 2 years later ("A Raisin in the Sun"). Such a historically important and critically acclaimed play *should* be celebrated and studied, but that is unfortunately not the case.

One criticism that has labeled *A Raisin in the Sun* as controversial deals with the novel's complex and mature portrayal of women. In 1979, a Utah school district restricted circulation of the play after facing criticism from an anti-pornography group due to the play's reference to

abortion (“Recently Banned or Challenged Books”). Indeed, the character Ruth briefly considers getting an abortion, but more importantly, this subplot contributes to Hansberry’s masterful portrayal of women as making decisions for themselves, something uncommon in the 1950s. Notably, it is Mama who runs the household, Ruth who works tirelessly for the family, and Beneatha who strives to become an educated woman and doctor. These women are resilient and capable, things the lead male character Walter fails to be. This feminine-led dynamic is unique considering the time period and is a testament to women’s historical accomplishments. What’s more, the discussion of abortion was ahead of its time, predating the second wave of feminism when reproductive rights became pivotal for women’s freedoms. Hansberry was a trailblazer, and while her characters may be fictional, they are indicative of a changing time period for civil rights in America.

Another criticism of the play is its unabashed, frank depiction of racism. In 2004, an Illinois high school challenged the play due to it being “degrading to Black Americans” (Chen), as it includes racial slurs and references atrocious acts of race-based violence. In a world dominated by much hate, it is understandable why parents may want to shelter their children from additional exposure to cruelty. However, Hansberry based the play off her own family’s real working-class struggles, and her raw depiction of characters like Mr. Linder who tries to use the idea of community to mask his segregation agenda exemplifies how inaccessible the idealized ‘American Dream’ was to Black people. Because of these attempts to discount Hansberry’s work, people should read every “controversial” sentence for what it is, embracing the power that stories hold. The tales of Hansberry’s characters lack the glamorization that some audiences may seek, but the depiction is true to the historical experiences of Black people, something overlooked by many other pieces of literature.

Of course, it can be conceded that since this play was written and set over 60 years ago, some of the behaviors portrayed may seem antiquated. Neither the internet nor cell phones had existed back then, demonstrating how much has since changed. However, even today, Hansberry's characters mirror marginalized communities and the challenges they face in contemporary society. This play should be freely available because *everyone* can learn from it: oppressed people whose struggles are overlooked, students uneducated about issues in their neighboring communities, and general society who appreciates literature and the incredible accomplishments of American authors.

A dream does not prune upon deference, and neither does free thought. The force of oppression will never be stronger than the power of creativity, coursing through the minds of people whose thoughts are so valuable, they are feared. Oppressors wish that writers like Hughes, Hansberry, you, or I would simply accept their terms and surrender creative freedom. But, even in the dark, sad state of the Younger's apartment, Mama's feeble plant kept growing, and with strength to nurture it, it will continue to grow, for every revival is born from hope.

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