

- A Raisin in the Sun, 1959 Reviews

By Roberta Cunha

A Raisin in the Sun premiered at The Mandell Weiss Theatre at the La Jolla Playhouse and it also opened at the Barrymore Theatre in New York on March 11, 1959, running for 530 performances. Hansberry's play was very popular and successful, and she won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play of the year, being the first Black woman to win this award, in 1960, and Hansberry's play was also nominated for four Tony Awards: Best Play, Best Actor in a Play (Sidney Poitier), Best Actress in a Play (Claudia McNeil), and Best Direction of a Play (Lloyd Richards).

One critic for the *New York Times* stated that *A Raisin in the Sun* "changed American theater forever" and represented a huge change for Black artists in the theater. The producers did not expect the play to become this popular and it received many mixed reviews by the audience, arguing that it was only for "African-American Experiences" and that it was not an universal play. In addition to that, in 1979 the play was restricted in a Utah school when it was criticized by an anti-pornography group, and in 2005, the play was also banned in an Illinois high school because principals argued that it is degrading to African Americans.

Marilyn Stasio, a critic from *Variety Magazine*, accentuates the importance of *A Raisin in the Sun* being the first play an African American woman to be produced on Broadway. The article further explains the play's winning of the New York Drama Critics Circle's award for best play, and how that also helps to bring attention to minorities. The review labels the play as extremely moving and motivational, and the "watching and sharing the hopes and dreams and heartaches of a multigenerational family" brings audiences to tears. It is also highlighted how clever and clear the message of hope is portrayed to the audience, with an "warm-hearted affection that you can't help wishing the Youngers all the happiness they can hold". The article describes the well-deserving praise and calls attention to its successes.

In the world of critics, there are always negative reviews. On the website *Broadway World*, the 1959 play has a reader's rating of 6.42 stars out of 10. The *Chicago Tribune* claims that the play can do more harm to segregation in society by using stereotypes and not correctly representing the intended groups. The critic dislikes how the characters Lena "Mama" Younger turns to her daughter-in-law Ruth and "and marvels at how her immature son, having just kicked out a representative from the white residents' association . . . finally has come into his manhood", claiming that this can create harmful influences. The critic does include positive comments about the performance and setting of the play, but questions how much it can negatively or positively influence the audience.

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