

Hope Kelley

Dr. Trifonov

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### **Evaluative critical analysis of Lorraine Hansberry**

The artifact I intend on analyzing in this paper is the speech “The Black Revolution and The White Backlash”. This speech, which was part of the forum, was given by Lorraine Hansberry in the town hall of New York City. The forum took place on June 15, 1964 and was sponsored by the Association of Artists for Freedoms. The immediate audience was both white liberals and black activists who were within the auditorium. The event that prompted this forum was the general separation of the civil rights movement strategies and how there was a big increase in the difference of plans among activists of how to create discourse for the movement.

This artifact is definitely rhetorical. It is trying to answer the exigence of the division between groups of activists in the civil rights movement. The division was the differences between the white liberals thinking that the different methods black activists were taking were unraveling the goal of the movement. The speech Lorraine gives tries to address this and explain to the white liberals why the movement has shifted to bigger things and explain why it is acceptable by putting it into context. The main target audience would be white liberals within the movement who are opposed to the shift in activities, as it simply calls them out. The secondary audience would be those opposed in general to the movement; the speech really does a good job at calling out people opposed and lending very good examples as to why they were hypocritical in thinking that way. The effect, at least mentioned by American Radio Works, was that several

newspaper columnists wrote and spoke out about the forum, some in agreement and some not.

I believe that this is something worth studying as this was a prominent black woman speaking against white liberals. Even though this was the point of the forum, it struck me how she was able to get the point across so well. She was a well-known playwright and was speaking up in a way that could potentially hurt her. I really think her words are something that still relays issues with not just white liberals then, but also others who are still not understanding at least the current BLM protest. Additionally, I find it rather striking that this might have been her last piece of speech like rhetoric, as she passed away not even a year after giving this at the age of 34. Lorraine Hansberry being a successful playwright, using that celebrity status along with her background fighting for civil rights with writing, was able to make a prominent headway and argument dealing with the split between white and black liberals and thus creating a strong argument about the hypocrisy whites show and have that would resonate with generations to come. Lorraine creates an argument so strong and radical for the time, with her different elements and examples, about the white liberals, that it creates a buzz so that a wider audience at that time can be reached and educated at that current moment in time.

In order to correctly analyze this artifact I will use the method of rhetorical criticism for this essay. Using this type of analysis allows us the chance to see and dig for information and see the whole story. It allows us to see and read things like we never would before; we see them in a different light. In order to use this I will use Campbell's critical equation and the seven elements of descriptive analysis. The critical equation

makes a claim, provides proof and then analyzes it all (Campbell, 34). The seven elements of descriptive analysis that I will use in this essay are: Purpose, Persona, Audience, Evidence, Structure, Strategie and Tone (Campbell, 29-33).

In order to gain insight and to use rhetorical criticism I need resources and background on the speaker and event. The first source I used to gain more context was Anne Cheney's 1984 book *Lorraine Hansberry*. This gives a very descriptive background on Lorraine. It starts the book by talking and describing her early life as a child in great detail. It starts off really describing her childhood when she is about 8 describing her life as an affluent girl amidst the depression era. It then goes on explaining her numerous roles she took on. It describes her life as a playwright very in depth, as that what Lorraine was known for. The book gives a chronology of Lorraine's life and also a bibliographic description of it.

This book allowed me to provide relevance to influential people early in Lorraine's life. As it told about the many people that visited Lorraine's home and influenced her. Additionally it allowed me to provide insight and description of her early childhood. This was useful in showing that she had a very affluent early life, allowing her to have more education and opportunities. This was also useful in allowing me to describe the struggle her father went through in order to fight the restrictive convenience to get his family their home. Also, it allowed me to show early instances that Lorraine had dealt with racism, with her neighbors throwing bricks through their families home windows. And lastly it allowed me to show the ways she had already been involved with race relations and civil rights early on.

The next book that was helpful was William T. Riches book *Civil Rights Movement*. This book gives a great description of the civil rights movement starting from the forty up until the 70s. It deals a lot with JFK's relations with the movement then the shift onto LBJ. It also gives a great view in the divide within the movement at the time and to see how that occurred. It also includes recent speeches and analysis of those speeches from former President Barack Obama. Additionally, it provides background on the Black Lives Matter movement up until 2016.

This book gave my analysis a lot of background to understand the forum and the events and history surrounding it. It was useful in showing the divide Lorraine was talking about within the movement of the white liberals. It allowed me to show this divide with the legislative action of former President John F. Kennedy. It also allowed me to put into perspective why this forum was a big deal in calling out the white liberals, as it allowed me to provide more context on why they were so necessary for the movement to be successful. This piece was overall useful in helping me to set up a small timeline of the event leading up to this forum where Lorraine gave her speech.

The next source that was helpful was Imani Perry's book *Looking for Lorraine*. This book gave a biographical look into Lorraine's life. It did explain her early life briefly. The book mostly was centered around Lorraine's life as a radical in her field. It talked a lot about the different views and ideas she related or agreed with and where she had been influenced from with these. Additionally, it went pretty in depth on the numerous plays she had written and the extent of that made her famous. It also touched on events or groups she had been a part of in her life.

This was useful as it allowed me to show the background of the forum event. It had a lot of context surrounding before, during and after the forum where Lorraine gave her speech. It allowed me to name all the speakers at the events as well as gain more knowledge of the constraints of the audience after having more background on them. This piece allowed me to gain more insight and to show how active Lorraine was with her writing, as she was pretty active with getting pieces published in the New York Times. But additionally, the issues she had with getting some of her more “radical pieces” published in that.

The next helpful source was Robert’s Graettinger’s article “Raisin in the Sun as Commentary on Hansberry v. Lee, A.”. This article published in a journal was a commentary about the Hansberry v Lee case. It gave background surrounding the case. It also gave quotes from both Lorraine and her father regarding the fight the father put up during the case. It explained how Lorraine had taken this experience and wrote her play “The Raisin in the Sun”.

While only used once in my analysis this was a very useful commentary article. It allowed me to gain more insight into the fight Lorraine’s dad put into the restrictive covenants case. Additionally, how this case affected their family and Lorraine specifically. Having this information was useful in directing my information surrounding Lorraine.

The last source used to help provide context was Brian Norman’s Journal *Neo-Segregation Narratives : Jim Crow in Post-Civil Rights American Literature*. This piece examines Jim Crow and other depictions of racism through the works of different

writers at the time. Lorraine's "The Raisin in the Sun" is one that is analyzed for these themes. Other famous writers' work was analyzed for the same.

This piece was useful in showing the ways that Lorraine showed themes of racism and Jim Crow ideals in her other pieces of work. But in addition to showing them, they were shown to be personal to her. This is useful in the fact she keeps these themes similar throughout her work. Both in her plays and this forum she uses her personal experiences with racism to push to the front of the idea of trying to fix it.

In order to rhetorically analyze Lorraine Hansberry's Speech "The Black Revolution and the White Backlash" at the Forum in New York city, I will first discuss the background and historical context around the time of the speech. In this section of analysis I will examine Lorraine's background, discuss the surrounding events near the time of the forum, and additionally comment on the audience for this event.

So, where are we? In this section I will describe the overall context surrounding the forum. There were so many events that led up to this forum. A big thing going on at the time was the division in the movement between white liberals and black activists. You can kind of see this division with how JFK responded and acted in relation to the movement. In his few years of Presidency, he was more promise over action, as said by Riches "he refused any attempt at legislation action at home, certain it would be futile with a conservative Congress" (Riches 58). In some regards his not intervention might have been helpful, but the slow-moving promises were no help to end the suffering of Black Americans. There was a pull or lull with the white liberals helping. They were not exactly pushing the movement forward but were still being tolerated. But of course, they were needed, to gain the trust of the opposed as said "[the] movement needed nor

required white aid and allies, yet its success required white liberal support in the Democratic party” (Riches 76). So, the white liberals were unhelpful but helpful all at the same time and that needed work to push the movement forward. Before the forum there was a lot happening. There were sit-ins and Marches in cities and states all over the country. Still dragging on from those acts, many more blacks would suffer the racist treatment or even possible murder that sparked anger within the movement. Later, JFK would announce his attempt at the Civil Right Act and the leader of the NAACP would be shot and would cause an uproar (Riches 72). The death of that leader with the addition of JFK and many more innocent lives would wound people's hearts and continue to outrage the movement. All of this helped lead to the forum where Lorraine would speak. The event was a forum for the AAF whose motto was “speak to the conscience of the American people” (Perry 170). So, the forum wasn't exactly answering a specific event exigence, but rather a continuation of the AAF's campaign and ideas. There were many people in attendance, about 1,500 and mostly white, and the key speakers were Paule Marshall, John Killens, Lorraine Hansberry, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, and LeRoi Jones (Perry 171). Additionally, it had writers for big name news outlets there that would eventually make this forum be talked about later.

The speaker of this rhetorical act is playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Lorraine Hansberry came from a decently wealthy, self-made family which allowed her a lot of opportunity and exposure to many different influential people. Her father was able to make a big purchase on property in 1938 during The Great Depression Era, as he bought the family a dwelling in “a predominantly white community” (Cheney 4). Their family being so wealthy and friendly drew in visitors as “The Hansberry home had long

been a mecca for black leaders in the arts, society, and politics. One of the most distinguished visitors was Dr. W. E. B. Dubois.” (Cheney 4). Additionally, Lorraine had other factors of wealth to expose her to opportunity. Her family had a huge book collection and as Cheney recalls it to be “complete with classics, works of black writers, and an encyclopedia” (Cheney 4). Having a family stay afloat during a Great Depression and being able to provide a home packed with influential black leaders and artists as well as literature helped shape Lorraine Hansberry’s early thoughts on the world and race. Lorraine would suffer the plight of racism early on that would structure how she thought on race relations and fuel fire in her career. Early on, she was exposed to racism in her own neighborhood at the foot of her home. Her father who had bought the home had to go to the Supreme Court and fight “restrictive covenants” of the neighborhood of the house (Cheney 4). The case, *Hansberry V. Lee* did win and was “the first case in which the United States Supreme Court essentially denied the broad enforcement of a racially restrictive covenant” (Graettinger 30). Before this decision the family would deal with their home being surrounded by racist neighbors and have bricks thrown at their dwelling when Lorraine was eight years old (Cheney 4). After seeing her father having to fight for his right to stay on his property and having to experience her aggressive, white neighbors terrorize her home; Lorraine came to understand the need to fight against racism.

Lorraine was very vocal on her thoughts dealing with politics and thoughts on civil rights. Before her success and popularity with her plays, she was a writer for the *Freedom Magazine* where she wrote many articles that dealt with the “state of women's rights, the arts and African history and politics” (Cheney 14). After writing for *Freedom*

Magazine, she shifted to her role of playwright. One of her most famous plays *A Raisin in the Sun* allows her to show people a peek into living with segregation. Brian Norman says Lorraine's "portrays with precision and ferocity the frustrations, joys, and dignity of a family living under racial segregation in the urban north" (Norman 23). This gave people willing to watch a viewing in a comfortable setting for them to face the realities of a family dealing with the pressures of a racist society. And in addition, she writes numerous New York Times articles and opinion pieces (Perry 154-158). Her plays are what gave her a bigger platform to the eyes of the U.S. Her larger number of articles within the various news outlets as well as popular plays within the media gave her a strong and credible platform to speak out on. And thus, allowed her to assert her political and ideological ideas out to the public and try to create some change within the societal climate at that time.

The severing or ever more divide in the civil rights movement group between the white liberals and the blacks was lending down as pressure on the rhetoricians at that forum. The audience was almost 1,500 whites, and the fact is these 6 black speakers were about to have a very difficult conversation (Perry 171). This did create restraints. The speakers had to choose they're words and examples creatively. Dealing with white liberals who fundamentally didn't understand what they were doing wrong, could be hard for any person to scold them for. I think the immediate audience wasn't expecting arguments to go fundamentally against them. Another constraint within the immediate audience was the presence of reporters and columnists (Perry 171). These constrained how the speakers could talk about certain things, and how they should talk about things that wouldn't be taken totally out of context and hurt their end goal. The audience it was

intended for was white liberals who were not doing their best to help blacks get full equality.

In this section I will analyze Lorraine Hansberry's speech "The Black Revolution and the White Backlash". This will be done by analyzing the text through the seven elements of descriptive analysis from Campbell mentioned before. The main ones discussed are purpose, audience, persona, and tone

Lorraine's purpose with the short speech is to make her audiences actually listen and think about the issues going on then. She must make a quick but impressionable stance with her audience and get this idea through to them. She is limited in how she can approach her one audience in hope to change the way they think. She can't flat out call the white liberals ignorant for not understanding, but rather find examples in the world with other themes to translate to the current situation. She desires for the white liberals to understand why things are how they are, and how they can help, but also reassure the black radicals to not give up. She also has another limitation in her allotted time to get her purpose out to her audience. We can see this in the beginning and end of speech when she says, "How do you talk about 300 years in four minutes?" and "I don't want to go past my time. Thank you."

Next I will discuss the element of audience in the text. Lorraine's target audience for this speech is both the white liberals and the black revolutionaries. She constructs these groups as her target through her structure, strategy, and evidence. She targets the black revolutionaries first in her speech. In the opening of her speech, for a couple paragraphs Lorraine strategy is only using "I" and showing her own, personal ways she has not been able to get the message out to white liberals or in this case "The New York

Times". In this she is separating Black Americans and White Liberals for those couple of paragraphs from herself by using the terms "White Liberals", "Negros", and "I". She then switches her subject to be mostly "we" or "we've" in the context of talking about Black Americans after saying "that is the reality that I'm faced with when I get up and I read that some Negros my own age and younger say we must now lie down in the streets, tie up traffic, stop ambulances, do whatever we can". She wants the blacks radicals to stay radical and be an agent of change through finding ways to tell the white liberals to stop being the way they are and to help. She does this when she says "the problem is we have to find some way with these dialogues to show and encourage the white liberal to stop being a liberal and become a American Radical". She double down on this idea to keep the black radicals an agent of change when she says "The American Society is the thing that has the Negros in the situation that they are in and never let us lose sight of that". Here she reminds this audience that the only thing holding the White Liberals to the way they act is American society. This would make the idea of "encouraging the white liberal to stop being a liberal" easier as it is a changeable part of them.

She first names the white liberals as the target in the text by saying "I would like to submit that the problem is that, yes, there is a problem about the white liberals". This is more like the attention grabber to them. While this is not directly talking to that audience yet, she then moves through the speech using other structured patterns to call them out as another target audience. Her repetition of the phrase "you see" is used after many examples of trying to relate the hypocrisy of the white liberal to things that are separate from the idea. This is also trying to evoke a reaction mentally for this particular

audience to really think about it. The agent of change for this particular group is to think about it and change their ways. This can be seen pointedly in her last few seconds of her speech when she says “you have a different viewpoint... The point is that we have a different viewpoint because you know, we’ve been kicked in the face so often and the vantage point of Negroes is entirely different and these are some of the things we were trying to say”. Here she is leveling with them in her last few seconds and capturing her last target audience and inferring what they must do.

Onto the persona of the speaker. In this speech Lorraine takes on the persona of a teacher and does so through the use of her supporting materials and tone. Her first instance of this persona can be seen in her opening line “How do you talk about 300 years in four minutes?”. She's insinuating that she is going to teach or talk to the audience through history to get to her thought process. Another way she shows her teaching persona is again through the use of the repeated phrase “you see”. This phrase is used extensively throughout this speech to clarify the direction of the information or question whether the audience “sees” what she is relating the topic to. Her argument she uses have supporting material that she explains out in a way to see how the white liberal are being hypocritical. This can be seen in one of her examples when she says “[Norman Podhoretz] a distinguished American thinker can literally say that he is more disturbed at the sight of a mixed couple or that anti-Semitism from Negroes - and anti-Semitism from anybody is horrible and distinguishing and I don't care where it comes from - but anti-Semitism, somehow, from a Negro apparently upsets him more than it would a German fascist, you see”. Here she points out the double standard within the system of how white liberals think. While using this persona, she set her

credibility up by mentioning the fact she had been published in the New York Times before, or had a relationship with the paper. She uses this particular piece of evidence tied with the evidence about her writing to the NY Times multiple times to establish her credibility with the audience. Having credibility of being published in a newspaper helps to boost her teacher persona.

Next, onto the tone Lorraine excused in this speech. Her overall tone is informal and frank. She asserts the two phrases of “you see” and “you know” throughout her entire speech. This does a lot of things as we have seen from above, but it also resonates at an informal level. It gives the listener a way in, that they are involved and invited into the conversation and give the speech an overall informal role. We can really see this when she talks about her dad “my father, for instance, who was, you know, real “American” type American”. Here she not only demonstrates the informal tone with the “you know” but also in the manner she describes her father. It's like she is speaking on a level of comfort like a friend to the audience using this type of language. While informal, her tone also is frank in her supporting material. This can be seen in one example again explaining her father when she says, “my father died a disillusioned exile in another country”. This sentence came after her explaining the extent that her father went to get the restrictive covenants passed to live where he wanted to. It's a very upsetting and frank example she uses here. Another example quoted in the paragraph before is the logical allusion about American writer Norman Podhoretz and the comparison with the anti-Semitism contributes to this frank tone. This is using a very intense theme example making it sound very frank. It is a strategy she employs in order to shock the audience for the short time period she has with them.

As we can see Lorraine Hansberry puts out a very frank and radical argument about the division between white and black liberals at that time. She sets up this argument with her tone, persona, and perfectly targets her audience. This particular forum would just have been another forum, if it weren't for her strategic rhetoric. In which she elevates the discussion by digging deep, and trying to create a disturbance to be talked about. She wanted word and exposure about this forum. To reach an audience bigger than the auditorium in New York. While not specifically having a major effect on the state of relations at that movement. I believe Lorraine with her frank words, background with leaders, and celebrity like status was able to convince a small number to rethink their ways. To see things with their eyes open. To believe there was a split ever stretching into a chasm, that needed to have a bridge. I believe a woman struggling with the effects of cancer, soon to pass, would give out her passionate words and try and succeed to change a few peoples minds and create a small change in the weeks after that forum.

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