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## Introduction: Notes of a Native Daughter

Daddy died,  
“Raisin” opened  
and yesterday I got a divorce  
all on March 10. 1945; 1959; 1964.

Lorraine Hansberry learned by telegram that her father died.<sup>1</sup> On the same day thirteen years later, her career-defining play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, opened on Broadway. The play catapulted her from obscurity to household name. Just five years later, on another March 10th, she divorced the greatest friend of her mind—Robert Nemiroff, or as she affectionately called him, Bobby.

The shadows that loomed throughout Hansberry’s life cast large impressions. She lived in the shadow of her father’s death; death crystallized his impact on her life. She lived with illness, wondering when she would die. She lived with the social pressure of being the face of Black theater and a Black radical. She lived with the weight of her marriage ending and the social stigma of divorce in the 1960s. Each March 10th established a loss (her father, her anonymity, her marriage) that would serve as an essential moment to her becoming free. Although not all equal in their impact on her development, they each mark key turning points in her life and work.

Lorraine's father, Carl Augustus Hansberry, represented an American type of social and political striving. Born on April 30, 1895, from Gloster, Mississippi, as a young man he migrated to the north after graduating from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College. In Chicago, he began his business and political career. He met and married Nannie Louis Perry, who was from Columbia, Tennessee. She was also a college graduate, having earned her degree from Tennessee State University. Together they had four children: Carl Augustus, Perry Holloway, Mamie Louise, and Lorraine Vivian.

A well-educated middle-class couple, they lived on the South Side of Chicago. Known in the Windy City as the kitchenette king, Carl built his real estate empire, drawing from the Black adage to make a dollar out of fifteen cents. He bought single-unit properties on the South Side and chopped them up into residences for two or three families. He produced single-family dwellings that had their own kitchen but shared a bathroom, and were known as kitchenettes. These tiny units provided housing to the masses of Black migrants relocating from the south to segregated Chicago and helped establish Carl's financial empire. According to Mamie, "He made quite a fortune during the depression because the white landlord simply couldn't collect the rent, and he could. Things just grew from there. Most people were going broke. He was making quite a lot of money and set up our business. We had a maintenance crew and housekeepers, and his half-sister came as a secretary and my mother's niece was a secretary and his half-brother were collector. He'd have to go collect from all the buildings from the housekeepers, and the housekeepers would collect the rest . . . [from the tenants]. That grew and grew and things got better and better." The real estate business supported Carl's political aspirations and helped provide a comfortable life for his family. While he acquired properties, Nannie taught school and served as a ward leader for the Republican Party. Together they formed a power couple that equally invested in reserved respectability and racial uplift. Mamie described them as "stately."<sup>2</sup>

Although the Hansberrys found financial security during the Great Depression and its aftermath, the mass impact of the extended financial crisis caused many families to wonder about American possibility. The Hansberrys' ability to thrive in a financial climate that rendered millions of Americans destitute not only distinguishes Lorraine's family as Black Americans but also as Americans in general. Thanks to her parents' investments, she had a stable childhood, for the most part.

Lorraine enjoyed the comforts of her parents' financial stability, but racism disrupted their domestic tranquility. In 1937, Carl's economic achievements

allowed him to purchase a house at 6140 South Rhodes Avenue, in Woodlawn, an all-white neighborhood near the University of Chicago. There was a racial covenant attached to the property, which set in motion a series of confrontations that shaped Lorraine's understanding of racial justice work. When Carl and his family attempted to move into the building, neighbors responded by spitting on them and jeering at them, and finally throwing concrete through their window.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, the family moved. Carl ultimately filed a lawsuit that ended up confirming his right to buy a home in that neighborhood, although the courts did not find, as he had sought, that the racially restrictive housing covenants were illegal. He won a battle but lost the war that segregated Black people and kept them from purchasing property in general.

Racism worked to keep the Hansberrys in their place by offering a violent rebuke to Carl's attempt to integrate the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago. Lorraine's childhood exposure to civil rights advocacy taught her that freedom required a multi-pronged approach, with financial, legal, social, and cultural change-makers working together. From experience, she learned that when any one aspect of freedom work functioned independently of the others, individuals could experience uplift but not freedom. Freedom, Lorraine deduced, required cultivating a set of practices over time that were coordinated with other members of a movement that addressed intersecting forms of oppression.

Lorraine's parents were the best Americans they knew how to be. They worked hard, amassed wealth, and fought for political change. Carl founded one of the first Black banks in Chicago, Lake Street Bank, but by 1946, he knew that he needed more space. Not physical space, not more land per se, but more breathing room to be at peace as a Black man living in a segregated world. The type of space he sought did not exist in the United States in 1946. With Nannie, he purchased a home for their retirement in Polanco, Mexico, a suburb of Mexico City. Before he made his retirement plans, Carl's high blood pressure showed that he had signs of cardiovascular disease. The Hansberry family hoped relocating to Mexico would help his health. In March 1946, they visited their future home where the two planned to retire as expatriates.

They did not anticipate that he would never return to Chicago. When the telegram arrived to tell Mamie that their father had died, the children must have been stunned; later they learned he had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>4</sup> In a matter of days, Lorraine's world turned upside down. She lost the man who gave structure and stability to her life; the parent she could admire without having to wrangle with a gender comparison. He showed her what political striving could entail. Of course, so did her mother. And in time, Lorraine

would come to understand the political lessons both her parents imparted. But her father's life and work offered her an example disentangled from respectable womanhood. Moreover, the sharp pain of her father's loss left an indelible and immediate impact. The peculiar American landscape that allowed Carl to amass a small fortune and made him a stranger in his own land prompted Lorraine to later reflect, "American racism helped kill him."<sup>5</sup> Later, as her ideas matured, she might have noted, American racism made him singular and, therefore, helped kill him. Hansberry eventually came to understand how isolation facilitated racism's deadly effects.

Carl's death came quickly. The devastation and loss that shrouded the civil rights movement surfaced for Lorraine much earlier than the violence that came later, from the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Lorraine was a movement baby. She saw her parents fight for civic redress through the courts and the pursuit of public office. In 1940, her father ran for Congress, as a Republican, and lost. Both of Hansberry's parents were Republicans, and capitalists, during a period when Black people's political allegiances began to shift. Since 1936, no Republican candidate for president has won more than 40 percent of the Black vote.<sup>6</sup> Carl lived through Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal—a deal that grew the American middle class and maintained racial hierarchies—although he died before Harry Truman ran for election in 1948 with a pro-civil rights platform.<sup>7</sup> An early exposure to the workings of liberalism set the foundation for Lorraine to advocate for a radical shift from the political status quo. As an adult, she not only distanced herself from her parents' politics of uplift, she also challenged white allies to call for transformation rather than reform.

The violence associated with Black striving emerged for Hansberry as a child and crystallized for her as a teenager with the loss of her father. Years later she understood that the slow death racism produces would require a revolution cooked over a slow-burning fire. Or as Walter Benjamin wrote, in 1940, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule." Benjamin's well-known statement appears in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," an essay he wrote just before fleeing Vichy France to evade capture by the Nazi Gestapo. Benjamin, a German Jew, was unable to continue his escape from France to Spain, and, as a result, committed suicide, still fearing Nazi capture.<sup>8</sup> Like Benjamin, Hansberry's theory emerged in close proximity to death. And just as her father's death did not come overnight, neither would the justice that she sought. Her father's life and death taught her that each individual life constituted an interval in the pursuit of freedom. The movement, as Hansberry

conceptualized it, brought these discrete intervals together to form a structured and durable whole.

### HANSBERRY'S RADICALISM

In 1946, when “daddy died,” Hansberry suffered her first great loss. Grappling with loss informed her theories about the world, justice, and freedom. Although she idolized her father, she reflected: “Daddy felt that this country was hopeless in its treatment of Negroes. So he became a refugee from America. I’m afraid I have to agree with Daddy’s assessment of this country. But I don’t agree with the leaving part. I don’t feel defensive. Daddy really belonged to a different age, a different period. He didn’t feel free. One of the reasons I feel so free is that I feel I belong to a world majority, and a very assertive one.”<sup>9</sup> The end of World War II marked a turning point of great global and personal significance, bringing to a close the Nazis’ mass human destruction in Europe, yet also inaugurating the use of atomic weapons by the United States in Japan, and leading to intertwined post-colonial, decolonial, and civil rights pursuits. It also certified that Black Americans’ willingness to fight abroad would not necessarily mean equal access to rights at home.

Hansberry’s early life coincides with the civil rights movement, from the end of World War II until the mid-1960s. Many historians designate the period from the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 as the classical phase of the movement; but they also agree that organizing activities in the 1940s and early 1950s laid the foundation for this decade of civil rights achievements.<sup>10</sup> Hansberry grew up in the midst of this civil rights activism, and it served as the foundation for her political formation. The years from 1946 to 1965 book-ended the maturation of Lorraine’s political consciousness, as she cultivated a theory to guide and find expression in her practice.<sup>11</sup>

Hansberry’s writing, and writing about her, establishes her as an artist and an intellectual fundamentally committed to Black radicalism, feminism, and ultimately human beings’ ability to bend history toward justice. This book proceeds from a single question: How does Hansberry’s art offer a radical political vision for matters and the mattering of Black life in the mid-twentieth century? In the introduction to *Want to Start a Revolution?* Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard argue, “In most historical studies, postwar Black radicalism has been defined by a limited set of principles: self-defense tenets and tactics, separatist organizations, Afrocentric cultural practices, and anticapitalist philosophies, as well as a rejection of the practice of lobbying

the state.” While Hansberry’s work adheres to some of these tenets (self-defense and anti-capitalism), like other Black women radicals, she collaborated with organizations that sought to redress inequality based on sexuality or gender.<sup>12</sup> She worked with white-led gay and lesbian organizations as well as communist-led groups. Her intersectionalist Black radicalism focused on the distinctive qualities of Black women’s liberation and the material conditions necessary in their becoming free.

While Hansberry’s political commitments and personal relationships with Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Louis Burnham, Alice Childress, and others situated her squarely within the Black radical tradition, existentialism, particularly Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, deeply influenced her. Existentialists, including de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Camus, were concerned with the relationship between human thought and action. They considered how experience shaped the individual’s ability to give meaning to life and pursue freedom. Hansberry’s writing affirms existentialist ideas of the individual’s transformational capabilities *and* it challenges one of its central presumptions, that becoming emerges through individual antagonism.

Hansberry’s Black radicalism accounts for Black women’s labor and sexual exploitation and the incommensurability of interracial experiences; together these positions informed her artistic and political practice. She used her art to showcase encounters (political, sexual, personal, and historical) with witnesses, and she purposefully concentrated most of her energies on a form with witness built in—theater. In so doing, she called attention to how one establishes intimacy that leads to collaboration across differences. Political encounters provide the opportunity to work through differences and deepen consciousness. As Lori Jo Marso describes de Beauvoir’s use of encounters, “Without struggle, *sans encounter*, freedom cannot emerge.”<sup>13</sup> Encounter serves as a moment of friction that may result in greater clarity for all, those involved in the encounter and those that bear witness to it. Her art expressed her political vision, a vision that responded to the immense suffering of Black people not only through the act of encounter but also through witness. Her contribution to social movements included acts of imagination that would usher forth new forms of collectivity based in mutual exchange and historical specificity.

Hansberry understood freedom as a process rather than a destination, and existence as a mode of being through action. Her writing (creative and nonfiction) produces an understanding of personal and political becoming and social transformation as a collective endeavor not solely a matter of individual transcendence.<sup>14</sup> A central concept of this book, “becoming free,” names the processual nature of Hansberry’s work, the ideas that underpin it, and its place in a long

history of emancipation. The Black radical tradition emerges through a deep understanding of material history, particularly trans-Atlantic slavery. For Hansberry, the process of becoming free required understanding how daily practices contributed to and sustained the long history of abolition, or what she called “the movement.” At the same time, existentialism taught her about the difficulty of connecting across differences. Hansberry’s experiences (from her middle-class childhood filled with masculine models of leadership to her adult experiences as a woman and a lesbian artist and activist) called into question the unity of blackness and that isolation could be overcome through shared but not necessarily commensurate visions. I mean vision here both in the conceptual and physical senses.

*Radical Vision* explores the contexts, schools, movements, and histories that shaped and distinguish Hansberry’s thought. Necessarily, it takes up her personal life and how the personal impacted her work and politics. Given the distinction between Hansberry’s public self and the one that emerges in her private writing, I refer to the public figure as Hansberry and the private person as Lorraine. Of course the two blended into each other, but part of what this book establishes is how the public image enabled and limited the visibility of her radical vision.

The violence Hansberry saw, coming of age in Chicago, informed her political theory and political and aesthetic practices until her death. This book tells the story of Hansberry’s ideas. Following the great tradition of African American life writing, from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, the book foregrounds Hansberry’s writing to highlight Black self-invention.<sup>15</sup> Black life writing has a long history that intertwines with Black liberation struggles. Lisa Lowe writes of formerly enslaved abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, “The autobiographical genre illustrates how liberal emancipation required a literary narrative of the self-authoring autonomous individual to be distilled out of the heteronomous collective subjectivity of colonial slavery. This is as much a literary critical question of how the autobiography is interpreted . . . as it is a historiographical matter of which archives, events, temporalities, and geographies will be privileged.”<sup>16</sup> Understanding that the archive, the primary source used here, only gives partial access to Lorraine, the book sifts through Hansberry’s rich and vast papers to depict how her writing shaped her public image and reflected her private thoughts, as it acknowledges that the archive does not have the capacity to represent the individual.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, this book differs from the aforementioned autobiographies in that it does not tell the individual’s life story but rather the story that emerges from a life of writing.



Delving deeply into Hansberry's archive offers a fuller picture of her contribution to midcentury thought through her principled investment to resist the angel of death that seemed to shadow her and all Black people. Thanks to the diligent stewards of her papers, Robert Nemiroff, Jewel Handy Gresham-Nemiroff, and Joi Gresham, many of Hansberry's published works, drafts, and unpublished works remain available for consideration. In addition, her personal writing in journals and on scraps of paper, as well as her correspondence, helps to shed light on the intimate details of her life and thought. As a story of her ideas, this book focuses on Hansberry's written work and the work written about her. There are inconsistencies in what she wrote about herself; her journal states that her father died in 1945, although it was actually in 1946.<sup>18</sup> These slippages may reflect a lapse in memory, but they also could be evidence of the active way Hansberry wrote herself into being. She created a timeline, from 1945 to 1964, marked by two historical turning points—the end of World War II and the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Hansberry did not live to see the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, but her work suggests that she knew the movement was shifting direction, from civil rights to Black power. Hansberry's slippage shows the archive as a space of both evidence and invention. A photograph taken in 1959 captures different sides of Hansberry, changing and attending to them through the composition, just as her writing produces multiple versions of herself (through her use of pseudonyms and the demands of different publishing venues) that together do not capture the complexity or compelling interiority of Lorraine but do tell a story about a radical thinker and artist. The writing offers a nuanced understanding of her thoughts, commitments, and desires. As in all life writing, I contend with the types of evidence that remain in the archive. At the same time, I focus on Hansberry's writing specifically because she chose to express herself artistically and politically as a writer. In her work, we find her vision for becoming free.

Her papers, housed at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, reposition her in mid-twentieth century cultural production and thought, demonstrating her deep political investments in Black internationalism and civil rights as they pertained to gays and lesbians, women as well as people of color. In addition to the political stakes of her writing, she also intervenes in formal debates, exploring different modes of realism. In so doing, she seeks to reorient the viewer. Distinguishing her work from that of Richard Wright, Hansberry asserts, "Naturalism tends to take the world as it is and say: this is what it is, this is how it happens, it is 'true' because we see it every day in life that way—you know, you simply photograph the garbage can. But in realism—I think the artist who is creating the



Lorraine Hansberry at 337 Bleecker Street, April 1959, photographed by David Attie for *Vogue Magazine*

realistic work imposes on it not only what is but what is possible . . . because that is part of reality too.”<sup>19</sup> The imposition of the possible speaks not only to Hansberry’s aesthetic vision but to her philosophical and political ones as well. Her use of realism, and her assertion that “every human being is dramatically interesting,” reflected her commitment to the everyday as a source for

transformation in art and politics.<sup>20</sup> Only attending to the published writing constricts her aesthetic and political vision.

Hansberry's vision accounted for how daily and repeated action could build the infrastructure for Black freedom movements *and* the institutionalization of anti-Black racism. Through institutionalization, anti-blackness materializes in laws, policies, and culture. The archive offers an introduction to Hansberry's writing as a practice that she worked to refine over time. But for Hansberry, the act itself served as a form of protest. Therefore, in engaging with the finished and unfinished work, one finds the process at the heart of becoming free requires repeated, incremental, and perpetual action that resisted racism's material impact. Hansberry's understanding of the material costs of racism motivated her to consider how Black people pursue freedom in relationship to and in spite of the state. Although she became a part of what she would call the Black intelligentsia, she often called for a focus on the Black working class. She animated her understanding of incommensurability in collaborations, political and artistic, and her aesthetic choices not to take over but to make room. While Hansberry's fame and class privilege may have limited the potential for state violence, she nevertheless understood the ever present threat it posed for most Black people. And even those shielded from the gross violence of the state suffered uniformly from the slow death racism caused.

Telling the story of Hansberry's intellectual life presents challenges because it requires speculating about her choices, motivations, and investments. Although she amassed a substantial amount of published work while alive, her unpublished work dwarfs the volume of the work in print. Additionally, much of the unpublished work remains unfinished. To wade into the waters of the Hansberry archive and return with a cohesive narrative requires stitching together details, ideas, lines of thought, and historical contexts that were, for the most part, left undone. This work of putting the pieces together must attend to the times, rhythms, and social conventions of the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, writing the story of Hansberry's ideas requires understanding that by every indication she was ahead of her time. The interplay between careful reading, contextualizing, and speculating serves as the basis for this volume, which draws from Hansberry's finished and unfinished work and her personal and public writing. Together these works evidence her ideas, investments, desires, imagination, and thoughts (both well established and percolating).

Although in many ways Hansberry lived her life out loud, never hiding her commitment to radical politics, the success of *A Raisin the Sun*, a family drama, constrained her public image, and facilitated its profitability. The play's success produced a public image of a liberal darling rather than a radical. The

Hansberry you meet in her vast archive, therefore, challenges popular perceptions of her as a one-hit wonder or an accommodationist. The scholarly and biographical work of Margaret Wilkerson and Imani Perry has clarified the breadth of Hansberry's radical political vision and, for Perry, the significant personal impact of engaging Lorraine's life and legacy. In addition, Cheryl Higashida and Mary Helen Washington have chronicled Hansberry's important contributions to the left. Steven R. Carter and Tracy Heather Strain have examined the profound importance of Hansberry's drama. Kevin Mumford has explored Hansberry's sexuality, and Monica Miller's forthcoming work examines Hansberry's internationalism.<sup>21</sup>

I build on and depart from this exciting body of work by offering a vision of Hansberry that attends meticulously to the figure buried in the archive, foregrounding how her writing, published and unpublished, offers a road map to negotiate Black suffering in the past and present, which remains an important part of understanding Hansberry's legacy and freedom dreams and practices. Revealing the breadth and depth of her writing through an exploration of unpublished work that has yet to garner attention situates this book in the history of ideas by accounting for the magnitude of archival evidence and committing more deeply to the intellectual context in which Hansberry was enmeshed. For Hansberry, loss and despair characterized most of her life. She suffered from depression and contemplated suicide. She understood intimately the feeling of being ravaged, physically, politically, socially, and personally, by impossibility. And, nevertheless, she believed in the possibility of transformation. Her intimacy with death and belief in the collective human capacity to transform the world distinguishes her voice and her legacy.

### **DADDY DIED: A CRISIS BOTH SUDDEN AND ROUTINE**

The loss of Carl came quick, but, upon reflection, Lorraine knew it had been on the horizon for a while. She stated firmly that American racism contributed to her father's death. Carl's passing showed Lorraine how racism eats away at Black people, slowly destroying them through the daily onslaught of seeming minor and innocuous attacks. The devastating impact of her father's death transformed the nature of crisis for Lorraine. She saw crisis as a material outcome of systems and structures that required constant cultivation and concealment. The loss of her father prepared her to offer a different context for the Holocaust and the use of atomic weapons by the United States, and therefore a feeling other than despair about these historical events. To quote de Beauvoir, she could not think in terms of despair or "happiness but in terms of freedom."<sup>22</sup>

The cultural impact of the Cold War and the willingness of the United States to use atomic warfare to end World War II recaptured national and international attention on October 22, 1962. That day, President John F. Kennedy told the American people that the Soviet Union was building a missile base in Cuba. The potential of a Soviet-controlled base just ninety miles from Florida that could enact a nuclear attack on U.S. soil turned the simmering international threat of nuclear war into a rolling boil. Over the thirteen days of October 16–28, an international standoff unfolded between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba that would create one of the most frightening political events in modern history. The Cuban missile crisis threatened the complete annihilation of Cuba, parts of the Soviet Union, and an area that housed at least a third of the U.S. population. In addition, military action would result in long-lasting environmental damage. At the time, the United States had a missile base in Turkey that had the potential to strike the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons. The Soviets sought to even the international playing field by capitalizing on the preexisting antagonism between the United States and Cuba over American interference in Cuba's governance as a sovereign nation.

In 1959, Cuba ended a revolution led by Fidel Castro, which ousted President Fulgencio Batista and resulted in Cuba becoming a socialist country. In 1961, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency undertook a military operation, the Bay of Pigs invasion, in Cuba to support Cuba's Democratic Revolutionary Front. In three days, Castro's Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces defeated the invading forces, leaving a bitter relationship between Castro and Kennedy. Given an opportunity to limit U.S. international aggression, Castro welcomed the Soviet military base. He differed with Nikita S. Khrushchev, the Soviet premier, on tactics, however. Khrushchev thought the base should be set up in secret, while Castro believed the sovereignty of Cuba gave it the right to set up the base openly. Ultimately, Khrushchev's plan won the day.

On October 16, 1962, Kennedy's national security assistant, McGeorge Bundy, brought the president photographs of nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. Over the next week, Kennedy contemplated how to respond. His address to the nation on October 22 demarcated the historical period of mass destruction in the twentieth century and articulated a familiar brand of American freedom. Looking to recent history as a point of reference, he claimed: "The 1930's taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war. This nation is opposed to war. We are also true to our word. Our unswerving objective, therefore, must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country, and to secure their

withdrawal or elimination from the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>23</sup> Kennedy’s presentation of America’s opposition to war did not account for the CIA’s subversion of the Cuban government, effectively masking American imperialism by trumpeting national values. His speech established the strength of the United States without conceding his role in stoking the crisis.<sup>24</sup> He assured Americans, “We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth; but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.”

His address, in its final moments, affirmed how American exceptionalism feeds U.S. imperialism and, most important, the ability of the former to cover for the latter. American rhetoric of ever expanding freedom provides the basis for the U.S. government to interfere in the sovereign operation of other states that it deems less free. Demonstrating the ease to export and, therefore, produce the governing logic of the hemisphere, Kennedy speaks directly to Cuban citizens, saying: “Many times in the past, the Cuban people have risen to throw out tyrants who destroyed their liberty. And I have no doubt that most Cubans today look forward to the time when they will be truly free—free from foreign domination, free to choose their own leaders, free to select their own system, free to own their own land, free to speak and write and worship without fear or degradation. And then shall Cuba be welcomed back to the society of free nations and to the associations of this hemisphere.” Ironically, Kennedy offered an ideal of freedom predicated on the limit of governmental interference. His statement established a version of freedom emerging through a curtailed relationship with government. Hansberry had a similar understanding of freedom predicated on limiting governmental interference and understood that the shell game of American political practices required extra-governmental means of becoming free as well.

In the midst of the ongoing crisis, Hansberry gave a speech at a mass meeting at the Manhattan Center on October 24.<sup>25</sup> According to the FBI, the New York Council to Abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee (NYCAUAC) sponsored the event. Although Hansberry later had a meeting with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on May 24, 1963, that is more well known, her invocation of the federal government and the president in 1962 offers an early example of her publicly intervening in a crisis. She said: “I think that it is imperative to say ‘No’ to all of it—‘No’ to war of any kind, anywhere. And I think, therefore, and it is my reason for being here tonight, that it is imperative to remove from the American fabric any and all such institutions or agencies as the House Committee on Un-American Activities which are designated expressly to keep us from saying ‘No!’”<sup>26</sup>

Hansberry used her public visibility for political ends. Her invocation of John F. Kennedy through the call for “we the people . . . to oblige all, the heads of all governments responsible to us, the world’s people” produces an encounter that cultivates the relationship between the speaker and her audience.<sup>27</sup> In so doing, the speech addresses invisible power structures. Hansberry draws into view the ghostly presence of the state in order to make it answerable to the citizens gathered in protest and the global community of radicals that inspired her vision. In her comments, she sought to make the U.S. government and the heads of all governments accountable to the artists that she maintains the House Un-American Activities Committee sought to quiet.

The speech ends with refusal. Hansberry drew force from a counterhistory that she mapped in the preceding moments of the address, asserting, “that maybe without waiting for another two men to die, that we send those troops to finish the Reconstruction in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and every place else where the fact of our federal flag flying creates the false notion that what happened at the end of the Civil War was the defeat of the slavocracy at the political as well as the military level.”<sup>28</sup> Intimately aware of how loss could inform one’s sense of power, she responded to despair by tapping into a long history of Black political thought based on her practice and depiction of *the encounter*. Given the devastating impacts of World War II, human and environmental, feelings of powerlessness and, therefore, despair characterized Hansberry’s political and intellectual age. Instead of conceding to the history of American liberalism that Kennedy used to establish the ethics of American force, Hansberry’s words disrupt.

A moment of encounter also serves as the basis for establishing the other in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon depicts an encounter with a boy on a train. The child’s perception, which he summarizes with the phrase “Look a Negro!” comes to represent for Fanon the implementation of an ontological condition established through the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>29</sup> The exchange of looks followed by the child’s summary evaluation locks Fanon in a history that he cannot yet escape. In *Second Sex*, de Beauvoir writes, “traveling, a local is shocked to realize that in neighboring countries locals view him as a foreigner; between villages, clans, nations, and classes there are wars, potlatches, agreements, treaties, and struggles that remove the absolute meaning from the idea of the *Other* and bring out its relativity; whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but not to recognize the reciprocity of their relation.” In the case of the foreigner, de Beauvoir does allow a reprieve. She writes, “But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to



submit to this foreign point of view.” And asks, “Where does this submission in woman come from?”<sup>30</sup>

The problem, for Fanon and de Beauvoir, resides in a historical condition that situates Black men and white women respectively in a position to submit to the “foreign point of view.” De Beauvoir concludes that material structures and conditions foreclose individual women from achieving “autonomous freedom.”<sup>31</sup> She also criticizes women’s willingness to collude with these structures. De Beauvoir makes a clear case for how materiality—material conditions and the physical body—shapes women’s appearance as the other, and depicts the collective transformation of those conditions as the route to freedom. Nevertheless, in a book review of *The Second Sex* filled with praise, Hansberry criticized de Beauvoir’s failure to “embrace a more far-reaching historical materialist view of life.”<sup>32</sup> Hansberry’s criticism of de Beauvoir calls attention to the difference in their understandings of history, particular histories of political struggle. De Beauvoir depicts collective freedom as a yet to be attained political horizon. Hansberry sees it as ongoing unfolding intervals. Hansberry’s historical materialism accounts for the underground networks that sustain Black freedom struggles in periods of extreme political repression. From the nadir of race relations that ended Reconstruction to the public decimation of the Popular Front following World War II, Hansberry understood how Black activists sustained movements during dark times.

As a result, Hansberry sees the point of encounter as having the ability to disrupt history. In the moment of disruption, she concurs with de Beauvoir that one may feel ambiguity, or what Hansberry would call twoness following the Black cultural tradition of W.E.B. Du Bois. Encounter produces an awareness of one’s self and attention to the other. It has the potential to steward collaboration and, perhaps, mutuality. For Hansberry, the experience of being Black in America already produced twoness; encounter heightened internal and external attention to Black people’s bodies and their collective economic conditions.

Drawing from the Black radical tradition of the commons forged through difference of ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, to name a few, Hansberry’s understanding of being has resonance with “what Jean-Luc Nancy calls being-singular-plural: ‘Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* as the *width* of this singularly plural coexistence.’” Hansberry’s experience in the 1950s working simultaneously with the feminists of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, the Black radicals on the journal *Freedom*, and leftists as a part of Camp Unity materialized her understanding of being together in difference. In *After the Party*, Joshua Chambers-Letson



describes a form of communism “founded in difference, rather than a relation of equivalence.” He explains:

In place of racial capitalism’s market-based commons of race, sex, gender, and class stratified, yet formally colorblind equivalence, a communism of incommensurability is a sphere of social relation structured less by social fictions of possession, equality, and exchange, than by collective entangled, and historically informed practices of sharing out, just redistribution, sustainability, and being together in difference. This kind of communism might take its cue not so much from the failed political parties of historical communism, as from the parties the SNCC activists threw while listening to Simone’s records or the performance-rich parties of queer of color nightlife. Not because these spaces were perfect—they were and are replete with their own violences—but because they were trying to produce *something* else, *something* we don’t even have a vision of. Yet.<sup>33</sup>

Hansberry understood that historical and ideological conditions (from slavery to Jim and Jane Crow) shaped Black people physically (in terms of how they labored and lived) and positioned them economically. Her historical materialist point of view steeped in Black radical thought allowed her to serve as a conduit across political groups with disparate focuses (gender, sexual, racial, or economic liberation) yet entangled histories. Her work to create space in common, public and underground, served the process of becoming free. Hansberry understood “freedom less as a point of arrival, or as a right that one possesses, than as an ephemeral sense and a practice of becoming that is performed into being by the body within tight and constrained spaces.” In a study of improvisatory dance, Danielle Goldman describes performance as a “practice of freedom.”<sup>34</sup>

Riffing on the well-known encounter in *Black Skin, White Masks* that produces alienation both immediate and historical, Hansberry participates in and describes in her work several encounters that challenge the conclusions of Fanon and de Beauvoir. She stages encounters in her plays, fiction, letters, and activism. Although most well known for her writing, “she also marched on picket lines, spoke on street corners in Harlem, and helped to move the furniture of evicted black tenants back into their apartments in defiance of police.”<sup>35</sup> Hansberry’s intervention into existentialist thought produces resistance to racism’s slow structuring death through moments of political emergence that reveal underground forms of grassroots organizing and forecasts of things yet to come. The call in her speech to “empty the southern jails of the genuine heroes, practically the last vestige of dignity that we have to boast about at this moment in our history; those students whose imprisonment for trying to insure what is already on the book is our national disgrace at this moment”

draws the activism of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's "jail no bail" protest into the history of the Cold War, once again staging a politic commons that does not evacuate each coalition of its specificity.<sup>36</sup>

Hansberry's speech in 1962 not only drew on the history of the civil rights activist close to the national crisis of the Cold War, it also called attention to her in order to redirect it to the students on the ground in South Carolina. This tactic of redirection recurred in her meeting with Robert Kennedy in 1963 and set the frame for understanding how her writing offers a Black radical reframing to writing the self. Hansberry's primary mode of becoming was her writing; Hansberry's writing, however, resists the subordination of the collective to the individual by repeatedly drawing attention to and calling forth the voices and experiences of grassroots organizations, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. A true theatrical artist, Hansberry paints the historical backdrop to her story and casts it as an ensemble. Hansberry's writing, when understood as writing her life, challenges the conventions of autobiography, which "encourages readers to understand the emancipation of the individual *as if it were* a collective emancipation."<sup>37</sup> Drawing from a Black radical tradition of mass transformation, Hansberry calls for collective emancipation as a constitutive part of her becoming free.

Throughout her work, Hansberry surfaces histories of Black radicalism to support contemporary justice work and stave off the feeling of isolation, a precursor to despair. For Hansberry HUAC's attacks on her mentor Robeson and the subtler silencing of friend Childress stood in the forefront of her thinking about how the state curtailed artistic expression. When Hansberry moved to New York, she quickly became a part of Black radical and leftist organizations. In chapter 1, I examine her participation in various groups advocating for racial, gender, and sexual rights, including the editorial team of Robeson's periodical *Freedom*. Hansberry's work with *Freedom* served as a training ground for her thinking about Black struggle intergenerationally and internationally. Due to the operation of HUAC, much of the work that Robeson and his generation of leftists undertook necessarily occurred underground. Childhood experiences, intergenerational friendships, and studies specified Hansberry's conception of time. She understood the movement as emerging through the resistance of the enslaved and not beginning with responses to the Cold War.

Given the immediate concern of a potential nuclear missile attack, it seems odd to hold a protest about HUAC. Characteristic of Hansberry's writing, her work often appears to be on the wrong historical register, either belated or too soon. Hansberry's participation in the protest ties the Cuban missile crisis to a longer history punctuated by World War II of U.S. aggression that sought to

reinstate the deteriorating empires of the West by convincing independent nations to side with the United States and Europe in the Cold War. The international game of chicken that could have resulted in nuclear catastrophe posed an undeniable threat to life. The fate of entire nations lay in the hands of three men, leaving everyday people feeling completely devoid of agency and power. Hansberry's speech enters into an atmosphere of doom with a historical lesson that places the current condition in relation to a longer history of state action. Her speech works on history not only as an act of historiography but a political one that draws from her investments in historical materialism as a necessary foundation for daily acts of insurgency. Her work and legacy explore the role of the artist in the ever-present context of American crisis.

Understanding the current crisis as an incident within a longer time frame enabled Hansberry to situate, historicize, and frame the anxiety it produced. Instead of conceding to the powerlessness of the individual in moments of national crisis, particularly in the nuclear age, in the published version of the address, she asserted: "It is perhaps the task, I should think certainly the joy, of the artist to chisel out some expression of what life can conceivably be."<sup>38</sup> Chisel provides a metaphor for revolutionary process: to chisel, to reform rock with blade, to shape the unmalleable. Hansberry sought to recast fixed ideas about society and about race and gender, which many midcentury Americans thought were biologically determined and therefore unchangeable. Hansberry's pen served as her chisel.

Her writing and activism activate the body as a site of meaning. The exchange between speaker and audience, real and imagined, animated and intervened in relationships. In Hansberry's speech, she explained that the contemporary climate of fear "is the direct and indirect result of many years of things like the House Committee and concurrent years of McCarthyism in all its forms . . . the climate of fear, which we were once told, as I was coming along . . . would bear a bitter harvest in the culture of our civilization, has in fact come to pass."<sup>39</sup> Kennedy used his address to the American people to establish the necessity of international governmental action to curb a purported threat to American freedom. Hansberry offered another example of U.S. governmental action that threatened American freedom, but her example is national.

More personally, she began the speech with self-reflection on the mechanisms that have encouraged her silence. She wondered about her recent lack of visibility, which the editors of *A Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States*, volume 7, where the speech is anthologized, attribute to her failing health. Her archive, however, suggests that the struggle to craft a public self, attentive to her political investments and the maintenance of her social

power, greatly informed her limited visibility. Hansberry's popularity and influence traded in her public recognition as a young, beautiful, middle-class Black wife. Her public statements, however, unequivocally express her radical vision for social organization.

In the speech, she explained that political calculations have informed her public absence and that she had been working on a play, likely an early version of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. In the play a German novelist describes to an American how "the better portion of the German intelligentsia" came to "acquiesce to Nazism."<sup>40</sup> The novelist goes on to say that in exchange for silence the Nazis made the German citizens feel separate from and unable to intervene in the conflict. Their sense of futility created comfort. The antagonism between apathetic comfort and politically engaged struggle animated Hansberry's thinking from her childhood until she died, because she understood that in order for U.S. democracy to tout freedom from interference while engaging in imperialism at home and abroad required despondent citizens.

Hansberry questioned the perception that people cannot effect change or challenge the violence being committed by their governments. In the published version of the speech, she writes, "It is [writers], in whom we must depend so heavily for the refinement and articulation the aspiration of man, who do not yet agree that if the world is a brothel, then someone has built the edifice; and that if it was the hand of man, then the hand of man can reconstruct it—that whatever man renders, creates, imagines, he can render afresh, re-create and even more gloriously re-imagine."<sup>41</sup> Referencing Jean Genet's play *The Balcony*, Hansberry categorized the cynical view of society as permanently structured by sexual exploitation in an alluring house of mirrors. In her writing, sex serves as a form of labor, enables human reproduction and situates women in social hierarchies. Here she depicts a type of exploitive labor that perpetuates the artist's alienation from society. She calls for artists to awaken to this dynamic and affirm commitment to politically engaged art.

Hansberry completed her speech by asserting, "if we are to survive, we, the people still an excellent phrase—we the people of the world must oblige the heads of all governments to become responsible to us." The ability to challenge government action expresses a fuller democracy, by attending to civil rights abuses, political persecution, and the unfinished business of Reconstruction. Hansberry saw the threat of nuclear war as a new iteration of a long and familiar American practice of mass destruction. She situated it as a historical extension of the genocide of trans-Atlantic slavery. According to her the government "would not have to compete in any wishful way for the respect of the new black and brown nations of the world" if it fulfilled its democratic

ideals.<sup>42</sup> She saw what this nation had done to her father. Lorraine had context for crisis.

### 1959, *RAISIN* OPENED

Youngest child and bookish, Hansberry learned by watching. Her early work as a reporter for Robeson's *Freedom* helped her refine her ability to bear witness. In her development as an artist and activist, she sought out mediums that she could use to tell the truth about Black people. She knew that in order to do so she would have to chip away at preconceived notions about blackness. After *Raisin in the Sun* opened, Hansberry felt the fervor of newfound fame. Although she had worked for a decade writing for Black radical and leftist periodicals, *Raisin* came to signify the totality of her work. In an interview with Mike Wallace (explored in more detail in chapter 2), Hansberry worked deliberately to reframe his perception of her as a naive housewife. He, however, refused to see her. The encounter with Wallace is one among many that shaped Hansberry's ideas about the transformation Americans would have to undergo to become free. Late in her life, she emphasized the importance of liberals becoming radicals; part of that process required liberals see Black people. The challenge Hansberry posed to liberals also served as self-provocation to move past her upbringing into more revolutionary forms of political practice. She left experiences, like the interview with Wallace, exhausted and frustrated.<sup>43</sup> She turned these moments of misperception into art.

In Hansberry's writing, she uses encounters, real and imagined, to disrupt social scripts and cultural protocols between people. The act of encounter shifted the dynamic between the two engaged in the meeting and those watching as well. In Hansberry's work, for the stage or otherwise, she often carved out room for an audience. The added element of witness accounts for and addresses the alienation implicit in being made other or foreign through the look of another. A knowing or understanding look from a spectator disrupts the totalizing effect of another's gaze and mitigates the impulse, if it exists, "to submit to this foreign point of view."

Fanon and de Beauvoir's renderings of encounter depict interaction between two individuals. Hansberry's encounters required witnesses. Witness functions on multiple levels in her work. Philosophically it serves to triangulate the encounter at the heart of subject formation. Hansberry's writing not only draws from de Beauvoir's conception of women as a class, it also taps into Du Bois's well-known rendering of Black consciousness as doubled. Du Bois writes: "The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with

second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”<sup>44</sup> In Hansberry's accounting, the doubling acted internally for the individual and externally as a shaping societal force. Witness draws from the Black radical tradition of affirmation often necessitated by racism's power to isolate individuals. Witness also taps into the dynamic at the heart of theater. In Hansberry's realist drama, she not only made use of the audience as witness but also staged witnessing in her plays. Consider the scene in *A Raisin in the Sun* when the Younger family watches as Walter Lee, the son of Lena Younger and brother of Beneatha, rejects an offer to sell their new house. In the scene, Walter Lee makes a point to draw his son Travis into the act of witness, in some productions, placing him in the center of the scene.

Hansberry's drama depicts how interactions shape perceptions of blackness, presenting the encounter as a radical act. She, however, does not present a figure locked in a history of degradation that he is yet to overcome like Fanon, nor does she see the body and material conditions as roadblocks to individual transcendence. Her work draws from that of de Beauvoir. It affirms the human necessity of mutuality in the exchange, which Hansberry depicts as building blocks that structure collective freedom.

In Hansberry's most well known play and in her larger body of work, she used realism as a form of witness. The form offered her an opportunity to draw attention to how representation works to produce what we recognize as “true.”<sup>45</sup> For Hansberry, the truth lay underneath belief, history, and desire. Realism sought to call attention to how belief, history, and desire shape how and what we see. Her writing highlighted the distinction between representation and lived reality. Hansberry's work often refuses to submit to the will of the other by drawing on the collective power of witness to reaffirm her perspective as part of a long history of Black insurgency.

For Hansberry, realism sought to redress the political feeling of despair. Her speech in October 1962 functions as part of a continuum of expression that includes essays, plays, short stories, poems, vignettes, journal entries, and newspaper articles. Hansberry's choice to produce in realistic mediums had everything to do with how she experienced life and coped with death. Her



Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Glynn Thurman, Ossie Davis, and John Fielder in the stage production of *A Raisin in the Sun*, 1959 (Photograph by Friedman-Abeles, © The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts)

organizing of the world through her art weaved together political and artistic collaborations with Robert Nemiroff, friends Paul Robeson, Alice Childress, James Baldwin, Nina Simone, and Ossie Davis and organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Communist Party. Although Hansberry well understood the desire to attend to Black suffering, she refused to let that impulse morph into an indulgent philosophy of despair.

### 1964, I GOT A DIVORCE

Similar to many of her intellectual peers, Hansberry turned to theater to work through her philosophical ideas. Many of the existentialists engaged with theater or wrote plays, including Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus.<sup>46</sup> They believed that human existence consisted of a set of negotiations with the world, “a set of tasks, things we need to do. We encounter routes and obstacles to the actualization of certain goals, and make a map for ourselves of the



world which includes these pathways and blocks to these goals.” According to Sartre, emotions emerged as a response to human engagement with the world and its assistance or impediments. According to José Esteban Muñoz: “This notion of emotion being the signification of human reality to the world . . . is deeply relational. It refuses the individualistic bent of Freudian psychoanalysis and attempts to describe emotions as emotions, the active negotiations of people within their social and historical matrix.”<sup>47</sup> The idea of being in relation to another provides the basis for Hansberry’s important contribution to existentialist thought and her understanding of how art facilitates freedom and justice. In art’s ability to act as a conduit for “active negotiations of people within their social and historical matrix,” it tapped into the desires that motivate human action even against material factors.<sup>48</sup>

Departing from other midcentury existentialist thinkers, Hansberry did not understand the transcendental state of an individual coming to consciousness as freedom. She thought that individuals had the capacity to enact transformation but that each individual act participated in a larger movement within a long historical period—working together, resulting in a totality of action that enabled becoming free. She saw individual action in relation to long histories of insurgency. She also thought that being in relation had resonance with the colloquial term having relations, and that community and communion emerged through political and personal intimacies.

The idea of encounter, confrontational, comforting or sexual, informs how Hansberry depicts freedom as a practice. Her work, as an artist, activist, and intellectual blossomed in community and flourished in the rare moments that she found mutuality. As with most people, the individuals that had a deep understanding of Lorraine were few. Her relationships with Bobby, Jimmy, Nina, and her lover Dorothy Secules shaped and sustained her. Although Hansberry remained legally married to Bobby until 1964, throughout her adulthood she had intimate same-sex relationships that formed part of her understanding with Nemiroff. For Lorraine questions of living and dying were not abstractions. They were ever present dilemmas that shrouded her every day with as much force as the threat of nuclear war did for many Americans during the missile crisis. The unconventional way she lived, a Black, radical, woman artist and self-described “heterosexually married lesbian,” reflected her commitment to define living as a set of possibilities and theories yet to crystallize.<sup>49</sup> On March 10, 1964, Lorraine divorced Bobby, but they never had a traditional marriage. Their love blossomed in activist circles and came into full bloom as he curated her artistic work and public image. Bobby gave Lorraine space, support, and feedback, and provided her cover. Her divorce represents a



turning point in the public record of her personal life, but (as explored more deeply in chapters 1 and 5) the social designations of the mid-twentieth century did not capture the lived reality of what we may now call her queer community.<sup>50</sup> Encounters became mechanisms in her work and life to not only call forth histories but also to produce futurity.

Each March 10 marks a turning point in Hansberry's life, but not wholly in the way one would think. Hansberry's divorce marked an official end to her marriage, but the public did not learn about it until after she died. Although her public image laid claim to certain forms of respectable womanhood that sought to capitalize on the approximation of power and cover that proximity provides, her public actions often flew in the face of gender norms and drew from understandings of Black womanhood as transgressive.

Distinct from the other two, Hansberry's third March 10 also required negotiation with the state and a reckoning with how it has shaped the family, her family. For the state-authorized transaction, Bobby traveled to Mexico—the site of Lorraine's father's death and a venue for her early education. In the summer of 1949, Hansberry studied in Ajijic, Mexico, in the University of Guadalajara's art program. She traveled to Ajijic, a rural outpost filled with European and American artists, seeking, like her father, a new landscape. While in Mexico, Lorraine studied with a Guatemalan visual artist, Carlos Mérida. Mérida, an assistant to Diego Rivera, drew from indigenous and European traditions to create abstract art and murals. His ability to draw from and merge traditions certainly must have inspired a young Lorraine, still searching for her medium. She also took classes with Ernesto Butterlin, also known as Linares, an abstractionist painter.

During her time in Ajijic, Hansberry must have reflected on Mexico as a site of possibility and loss; Bobby traveling to the country where her father died to end their marriage, an act of familial reconfiguration filled with mourning and the break of a new day. The trip marked a reclamation as well of life lived outside the mandates of American exceptionalism. At the end of her life, Hansberry let go of the social protection that marriage offered, signaling a transformation in the balance between how her private and public selves would inform her work. The circulation of Hansberry's image, and her association with *A Raisin in the Sun*, produced a public identity that seemed to benefit from what Darlene Clark Hine defines as dissemblance. She explains, "By dissemblance I mean the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors."<sup>51</sup> Although Hansberry made several radical statements during her marriage that articulated her

leftist politics, her association with *the* Black domestic drama of the period and, subsequently, with domesticity, overshadowed her serious analysis of class and gender oppression. Hansberry's critique of capital accumulation and investments in historical materialism had much to do with the traditional ways women were expected to labor in America.

In Hansberry's intimate relationships she did not take on the role of the wife or the mother. Bobby took care of her in the sense of clearing space for her to do her work, but after *Raisin*, she provided financially. Her home and professional life defied mainstream assumptions. Led by radical thought, her friend Nina Simone described Hansberry as "a girlfriend . . . we never talked about men or clothes or other such inconsequential things when we got together. It was always Marx, Lenin and revolution—real girls' talk . . . Lorraine was most definitely an intellectual, and saw civil rights as only one part of the wider racial and class struggle."<sup>52</sup> Given her fame, race, gender, sexuality, and class, Lorraine keenly understood the complexity of collaboration rooted in intimacy. Her work, nevertheless, offered the idea of human connection as a treatment for alienation and isolation that punctuated her life and what she called the movement. "Daddy died, *Raisin* opened, I got a divorce"—each marked a moment of loss, possibility, and clarity, and each served a vital function in her becoming free.