

# **Hansberry, Lorraine (1930-1965)**

## **Encyclopedia Article**

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## Hansberry, Lorraine (1930-1965)

A black American playwright who produced only two plays before her death from cancer at 34, Lorraine Hansberry nonetheless made a tremendous contribution to the American stage and to African American culture. Her first and best known play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), winner of the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, is now considered a landmark of American drama. The story of the struggling Younger family, who aspire to a better life, *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first Broadway production by a black woman, and its commercial success opened the stage doors to other black writers. *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, Hansberry's challenging but commercially disappointing second play, followed in 1964. Posthumously produced plays *To Be Young, Black, and Gifted* (1969), *Les Blancs* (1970), and *What Use Are Flowers?* (1972), adapted by her ex-husband and literary executor Robert Nemiroff, confirm Hansberry's great ability to combine artistic integrity and skill with commitment to social reform.

### Further Reading:

Carter, Steven R. *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment amid Complexity*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1991.

Cheney, Anne. *Lorraine Hansberry*. Boston, Twayne, 1984.

Leeson, Richard M. *Lorraine Hansberry: A Research and Production Sourcebook*. Westport, Connecticut Greenwood, 1997.

Scheader, Catherine. *They Found a Way: Lorraine Hansberry*. Chicago, Children's Press, 1978.