Clybourne Park

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BRUCE NORRIS

Norris was interested in theatre from a young age, and attended Northwestern University where he received a theatre degree from the School of Communication in 1982. After graduating from college he worked as an actor, even appearing on Broadway in Biloxi Blues in 1985, but soon became disillusioned with the constant rejection that accompanies the profession. His first play, The Actor Retires (1991) was a reflection on this experience of rejection, and marked a major turning point in his career. Over the next twenty-five years Norris wrote eleven plays, the most famous of which is Clybourne Park (2010), which won the Olivier Prize for Best New Play, a Tony, and a Pulitzer.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A Raisin in the Sun was based on a real court case between Lorraine Hansberry's family and the residents of a white Chicago neighborhood. In the 1940 case, Hansberry v. Lee, white residents sued Lorraine Hansberry's father on the grounds that they had a covenant in place banning the selling of property to black families. The case made its way to the Supreme Court, who ruled that since most of the homeowners in the neighborhood had not signed the covenant, it could not be used to evict the Hansberry family. The Hansberry's specific court case was unique, but their movement as a black family into a white neighborhood was not—during the '40s, '50s, and '60s, black families increasingly moved into urban areas, while white families (who were generally wealthier and therefore had greater mobility) increasingly relocated to the suburbs to escape the influx of minorities. This well-documented and widespread phenomenon is commonly referred to as "white flight." Conversely, the play's second act deals with the influx of white people *back into* urban areas—a phenomenon known as gentrification that began in the late the twentieth century and continues today, raising housing prices and consequently "pricing out" families who have lived in those neighborhoods for generations (again, often people of color).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Clybourne Park is a "spin-off" of Lorraine Hansberry's famous 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, meaning that it centers around some of the play's peripheral events and characters. Specifically, the main characters of *A Raisin in the Sun*—the Younger family—will eventually move into the house in which *Clybourne Park* is set. However, Karl Linder is the only character to appear in both plays. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Karl visits the Youngers to dissuade them from moving into the house because he doesn't want a black family moving into his neighborhood, a scene which takes place directly prior to the first act of *Clybourne Park*. Apart from their related plotlines, both plays deal with the intersecting issues of race and class.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Clybourne Park
- **When Written:** 2000s
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** Premiered 2010, published 2011
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A house in the fictional Clybourne Park neighborhood of Chicago in 1959 and 2009
- **Climax:** Steve suggests that Lena's opposition to his and Lindsey's renovations is racist
- **Antagonist:** Karl and Steve, systematic racism, and gentrification

EXTRA CREDIT

The Raisin Cycle. Clybourne Park is the second of three plays in the so-called "Raisin Cycle," the first being the eponymous A Raisin in the Sun, and the third being Beneatha's Place by Kwame Kwei-Armah, which follows two minor characters from Raisin in the play's aftermath.

Working Actor. Although primarily a working playwright, Norris has appeared in films and television since 1983. Recently he's had bit parts in both *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, as well as in films, including The Sixth Sense.

PLOT SUMMARY

The entire play takes place in the same house in a neighborhood known as Clybourne Park. The first act takes place during a Saturday afternoon in 1959. Bev and Russ Stoller are packing up their house as they prepare to move to a new home closer to Russ's job. Their maid, Francine, has come to help them pack, but is clearly unhappy to be working during the weekend. Following the suicide of their son, Kenneth, a veteran of the Korean War accused of murdering civilians, Bev and Russ's marriage has been deteriorating. Russ is clearly depressed, and Bev has no tools to cope with her husband's

depression. She has asked a local pastor, Jim, to stop by, and Jim tries to talk to Russ about his emotions—to no avail.

Midway through the first act, Bev and Russ's neighbors arrive, Karl Linder and his wife Betsy. Although Karl initially hides his reason for visiting, he reveals he has discovered that the people who have bought the Stoller's house are a black family. He has offered them money not to move into the neighborhood, which they have declined, and so Karl has now decided to convince the Stollers to halt the sale of their house. A violent argument ensues after the conversation turns to their son Kenneth, with Russ and Bev expressing indignation at being called on to protect a community that was unkind and unwelcoming to their son.

Francine's husband, Albert, arrives to take Francine home, but he is roped into helping move a **footlocker** of Kenneth's, and then into a conversation around whether he and Francine would hypothetically like to move into a white neighborhood like Clybourne Park. Russ eventually drives Karl and Betsy out of the house. Then Jim, Francine, and Albert all leave as well. Bev and Russ are left onstage where they consider their future in the leisurely suburbs.

The second act takes place during a Saturday afternoon in 2009. Lena and Kevin, a black couple from the Clybourne Park neighborhood, have made plans to meet with Lindsey and Steve, the white couple that just purchased Lena and Kevin's. Both couples bring lawyers to the meeting. Lena and Kevin's lawyer is named Tom, while Lindsey and Steve's lawyer is named Kathy. Together, the couples and their lawyers try to work through a proposed set of restrictions on what can and cannot be remodeled, put together by a neighborhood committee dedicated to preserving the historic character of the neighborhood's homes.

However, the conversation never gets on track. What begins with small talk spawns an argument over the neighborhood's historical value versus its new economic value. Kevin and Lena are worried that Lindsey and Steve are the beginning of a wave of gentrification that will price them and other black families out of Clybourne Park, while Lindsey and Steve feel attacked for simply trying to buy and renovate a home.

The discussion goes completely off the rails when, prompted by an off-color joke Steve tells, the group begins telling increasingly offensive jokes, which nearly culminates in a physical altercation. Throughout the second act, a contractor named Dan has been digging in the backyard. Dan comes into the house several times to ask questions about a trunk he found buried in the yard. The trunk, it is revealed, belonged to Kenneth, and in the final moments of the play—after Kevin, Lena, Steve, Lindsey, Kathy, and Tom have all exited the house—Dan opens the trunk and reads Kenneth's suicide note. As Dan reads, Kenneth can be seen descending the staircase in the year 1959. He sits by a window and begins to write his suicide note. When Bev enters and asks what he's doing, he tells her he's going to a job interview. She says, "I really believe things are about to change for the better."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Russ Stoller – A white man in his late forties. Russ is married to Bev, and is the father of Kenneth. At the beginning of the play he and Bev are preparing to move from their home in the neighborhood of Clybourne Park so he can be close to his new job. Although once a funny and social man, Russ has become depressed in the wake of his son's suicide. He is withdrawn and uncommunicative, which worries and scares his wife. Although he argues against Karl and Jim's segregationist dreams for Clybourne Park, it is unclear if he actually believes in integration, or simply does not care what happens to the neighborhood as long as he doesn't have to stay. He is played by the same actor who plays Dan in Act II.

Bev Stoller – A white woman in her forties. Bev is married to Russ, and is the mother of Kenneth. Bev is outgoing and peacemaking. She enjoys cultivating friendships in the neighborhood, and is disturbed by her husband's social withdrawal. She criticizes Russ for his new cynical outlook on life, attempting to deal with her grief by putting on a happy face. However, she is clearly still devastated by the loss of her son, and her days are empty without him. Bev is open-minded about the idea of integration, and does her best to treat Francine, her black maid, with respect, but is still ignorant about racial and class differences, and can be unintentionally offensive. She is played by the same actor who plays Kathy in Act II.

Karl Linder – A white man in his thirties. He is married to Betsy, and is the father of Kathy. Karl is the only character to appear onstage in both *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Clybourne Park*. He is the one to discover that the Younger family who has purchased Bev and Russ's house is black, and he goes to their home to try and bribe them into giving up their new house, events which occur in *Raisin* and serve as a backstory for the plot of *Clybourne*. Karl is a doting, protective husband who so deeply cares about this wife's wellbeing that his behavior toward her becomes patronizing. He likes to talk but hates to listen, and so arguments with him are aggravating for all parties involved. He is an aggressive opponent of integration in the neighborhood, and has come to Bev and Russ's house in an attempt to convince them not to go through with the sale. Of all the characters that appears in the play, he is the most openly racist, although his racism is couched in genuine (if misguided) concern for his community. Karl is played by the same actor who plays Steve in Act II.

Betsy Linder – A white woman in her late twenties. She is married to Karl, and is the mother of Kathy. Betsy is pregnant,

which causes Karl to treat her gently and carefully, both because of the pregnancy and because she had previously suffered a miscarriage. Betsy is deaf, but can read lips and communicate through sign language. She is able to speak, but it is sometimes difficult for the other characters to fully understand her. She is good-natured and seems to assume the best of the people around her. Betsy is played by the same actor who plays Lindsey in Act II.

Francine – A black woman in her thirties. She is married to Albert, with whom she has three children. Francine works as a maid for Bev and Russ Stoller, and although she doesn't seem to particularly like the couple, she is kind to Bev, whom she recognizes is often trying to connect with her. Francine is aware that she must remain quiet and respectful around the Stollers and their white neighbors if she wants to keep her job, but by the end of the first act she is clearly fed up with politely tolerating their racism, which is subtle just as often as it is overt. Francine is played by the same actor who plays Lena in Act II.

Jim – A white man in his late twenties. Jim is a local pastor and friend of the Stollers. He has a wife, Judy, who never appears onstage. He is an easygoing man, who genuinely wants to help his neighbors and community members in times of trouble. Although he is not a hardline segregationist like Karl, he espouses racist views such as a belief in certain immutable differences between the races, and is nervous about the prospect of a black family moving into Clybourne Park. Jim is played by the same actor who plays Tom in Act II.

Albert – A black man in his thirties. He is married to Francine, with whom he has three children. Albert is amiable and conscientious. He happily offers to help Bev move the **footlocker**, and is confused by Francine's resistance to staying at the Stollers' home longer than necessary. He has a sharp sense of humor, which is mostly lost on the white residents of Clybourne Park, who react to his jokes uncomfortably. Albert is played by the same actor who plays Kevin in Act II.

Tom Driscoll – A white man in his late twenties. Tom is likely related to Ted Driscoll, the realtor who sold Bev and Russ's home to the Younger family. Tom is a lawyer working with Lena and Kevin on behalf of the Clybourne Park neighborhood. He is an efficient, practical man, and seems to be good at his job. His is gay, which he only shares near the end of Act II to explain to Steve why he was offended by his racist—and arguably homophobic—joke. Tom is played by the same actor who plays Jim in Act I.

Lindsey – A white woman in her late twenties. Lindsey is married to Steve, and is visibly pregnant. She and Steve have purchased the house in Clybourne Park that Bev, Russ, and the Youngers used to live in, and have planned to extensively renovate the house. In her conversations with Lena, Kevin, Kathy, and Tom, Lindsey is bubbly and personable, always trying hard to make sure she is accommodating and inoffensive. She frequently expresses embarrassment at the tactlessness of her husband. In her private conversations with Steve, however, she is more assertive, and it is clear that many of the major decisions in their marriage—including the baby and the renovation of their new home—were her idea. Lindsey is played by the same actor who plays Betsy in Act I.

Kathy – A white woman in her thirties. She is the daughter of Karl and Betsy, who moved out of Clybourne Park before Kathy was born. Kathy is working as a lawyer for Steve and Lindsey. Kathy is talkative, which is unfortunate as she is also clueless and frequently makes unintentionally offensive remarks. Unlike Tom, who is efficient and timely, she's happy to let the conversation wander off track for minutes at a time. Kathy is played by the same actor who plays Bev in Act I.

Steve – A white man in his thirties. He is married to Lindsey, with whom he is expecting a child, and with whom he has purchased the house in Clybourne Park. Steve is outgoing and friendly, but he has no sense of what is and is not appropriate to say in public. As a middle class, or upper middle class white man, Steve is rarely marginalized and therefore rarely offended. As a result, he has difficulty imagining that other people could be offended by the things he says. Throughout the second act, he demonstrates very little empathy for those whose lives are different from his own. Steve is played by the same actor who plays Karl in Act I.

Lena – A black woman in her thirties. She is married to Kevin, with whom she has three children. Lena is the grandniece of the matriarch of the Younger family, after whom she was named. Lena grew up in the Clybourne Park neighborhood and so has an emotional connection to it. She also has a political interest in the neighborhood, which she understands to be gentrifying as wealthier white families move in and displace middle-class black families. Therefore, she hopes to be able to prevent Steve and Lindsey from changing the character of the historic house by renovating it. Unlike Kevin, Lena is not interested in making friends with Steve, Lindsey, or Kathy. Instead, she hopes to communicate to them her deep concern for the Clybourne Park neighborhood and its history. Lena is played by the same actor who plays Francine in Act I.

Kevin – A black man in his thirties. He is married to Lena, with whom he has three children. Although the couple occasionally bickers, he clearly loves his wife and rushes to her defense when she is insulted. Kevin is friendly and personable, with a good sense of humor, and tries his best to relate to Steve, Lindsey, and Kathy, unlike Lena, who criticizes him for his affability. Kevin is played by the same actor who plays Albert in Act I.

Dan – A white man in his late forties. Dan is a contractor working for Steve and Lindsey, who is digging a trench in their backyard during the play's second act. He's well meaning but tactless, often interrupting emotionally charged conversations. Dan is played by the same actor who plays Russ in Act I.

Kenneth Stoller – A young white man and the son of Russ and Bev Stoller. Kenneth is a veteran of the Korean War, during which he was charged with killing civilians. After returning home, he had difficulty reintegrating into society, and killed himself two and a half years before the events of Act I take place. Although clearly unhappy and unstable, Bev remembers him as a thoughtful, if complicated boy, who simply needed people to take time to understand him. In some productions Kenneth is played by the same actor who plays Jim and Tom, but in other productions he is played by an actor employed specifically for this role.

The Younger Family – A black family living in Chicago who purchases Russ and Bev's home. The members of this family are the protagonists in *A Raisin in the Sun*, but they do not appear onstage in *Clybourne Park*. As a result, the audience knows very little about them, though they are referred to frequently during the first act, usually as "the buyers." Lena is the great niece of the Younger family's matriarch, also named Lena.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Judy — Jim's wife, a white woman. She never appears onstage.

Ted Driscoll – The realtor who sold Bev and Russ's house to the Younger family. Karl implies that Ted is self-serving, and prioritizes money over the wellbeing of the neighborhood. He never appears onstage.

Murray Gelman – The Jewish owner of the local grocery store. He never appears onstage.

Don Lassiter – A family friend of Bev and Russ. Russ insists he's a funny man. He never appears onstage.

Mr. Wheeler – A man with a disability who works at Murray Gelman's grocery store. He works there from the '50s until at least the late '70s, judging by the fact that Lena remembers him from her childhood.

Hector – An architect working for Lindsey and Steve. He never appears onstage.

Kyle Hendrickson – A childhood acquaintance of Steve's and a coworker or Kevin's. Kyle ran into Steve sometime before the events of the second act, and told him an off-color joke. Kyle is black.

TERMS

Gentrification – The process of transformation that low-income urban neighborhoods undergo when there is an influx of more affluent residents into the neighborhood. One of the results of gentrification is that the people who have historically lived in the gentrifying neighborhood are no longer able to afford to live there. This often begins with affluent families outbidding poorer families on homes in newly desirable areas, which subsequently raises property values, which eventually guarantees that only affluent renters or purchasers can stay or move into the area. This also leads to changes in businesses, and an eventual change in the culture and demographics of a neighborhood.

Rotary – An international charitable organization with local offices, called Rotary Clubs, which became centers of middle class social life in post World War II America. Rotary Clubs in America were predominantly composed of white men, and women were not allowed until the 1980s unless they were spouses of the members. The Rotary club was central to **Bev** and **Russ**'s social life before the death of their son caused Russ to withdraw.

Chafing Dish – A serving dish composed of a metal tray raised above a set of burners which keep the food warm. It is often used for large-scale entertaining, as it can hold many servings of hot food. **Bev** tries to give **Francine** and **Albert** her old chafing dish, which they do not need.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACE AND RACISM

The first act of *Clybourne Park* is written as a complement and response to Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. *Raisin* chronicles a black family's experience of buying a house in a white neighborhood, and examines the discrimination the family faces from their new neighbors. In 1959, the Civil Rights Movement had yet to make many of its most significant advancements, although it had already overturned *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, putting an end to legal segregation. While it was no longer written in the law, segregation was nonetheless deeply entrenched in communities across the country, as well as in people's hearts and minds. *Clybourne Park* centers around the same events as *A Raisin in the Sun*, but it does so from the perspective of the white homeowners and neighbors at the time—and then follows up in the second act to see how race relations in the neighborhood have changed fifty years later. While in the original play the question of race is central and explicitly spoken, in *Clybourne Park* the characters are often afraid to express their opinions on race directly, although the issue of race constantly simmers beneath the surface. The racism of the first act is overt and destructive, but the lack of direct dialogue about race in the second act is perhaps just as troublesome.

Racism is overt and dangerous in the first act of *Clybourne Park*. Because of the characters' racist attitudes, the Younger family nearly loses their new home, and Francine and Albert are continually condescended to and disrespected. Karl's objections to the new family moving into Russ and Bev's house are entirely motivated by his racist fear of having black neighbors. While he claims he is worried about differences of culture, economics, and behavior, the core of his concern is that black people won't fit into a white neighborhood. Even though his reasoning is racist, he resists being *called* a racist, arguing that "race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it," and that he views it as "a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing [...] that our Negro families are happier when they live in their *own* communities." Although Bev's treatment of Francine and Albert is a matter of race *as well as* class, it is nonetheless painfully patronizing. She does her best to be kind to them, but is consistently condescending in her behavior. Bev repeatedly claims that she and Francine are close friends, and yet she doesn't even know how many children Francine has. Despite her assertion that they are friends, Bev is unable to handle any criticism or dissent from Francine. For example, Bev repeatedly tries to get Francine to take home her chafing dish, which Bev doesn't want to pack up and move. After politely declining multiple times, Albert snaps and tells Bev "Ma'am, we don't *want* your things. *Please*. We got our *own* things." Bev is offended, and seems not to have considered that Albert and Francine are not destitute, reliant on her for handouts and hand-me downs. For her, poverty, blackness, and need are so deeply entwined it is offensive to her that Albert and Francine would not want one of her objects. In this case, however small, racism is hurtful to both characters. While Albert and Francine is clearly more put upon by Bev's condescension and subtle degradation, Bev, by refusing to treat Albert and Francine as her equals, also misses out on a mutually beneficial working relationship, and even a potential friendship.

In the second act, which takes place fifty years after the first, more overt racism has dissipated, but race still remains at the center of the conflict. Although everyone is careful not to offend one another, the act's dissolution into the exchange of racist jokes makes it clear that racial divides still exist, even if the characters are successful in ignoring them for the first half of an afternoon. Even the way the characters view the neighborhood is shaped by race. At the time the second act takes place, the residents of Clybourne Park are primarily black, and Kevin and Lena, a black couple, are nervous about white families moving into the neighborhood and displacing the current residents. They fear the effects that gentrification will have on this historically and personally significant neighborhood, whereas Lindsey and Steve, the white couple moving in, are dismissive of the idea that a single house will make a difference. Kevin and Lena see Lindsey and Steve's proposed renovations as being akin to bulldozing and disregarding history, while Lindsey and Steve see themselves as blameless homebuyers just trying to make the best possible life for their family. Moreover, in seeming to assume that race is no longer an issue, Lena and Steve fail to consider their own racial privilege as they interact with the Clybourne Park neighborhood.

Clybourne Park carefully explores the lives of white and black characters across a fifty-year period. It examines how race relations have changed—and how, in many ways, they have not. Although racism was more overt in the 1950s, and was a much greater threat in the sense that it was supported by federal and state laws, *Clybourne Park* shows that racism exists in changed but equally as alarming forms in the 21st century. In the second act, the characters are hesitant to even bring up race when discussing their neighborhood, although it is a key factor in why Lena and Kevin feel uncomfortable with Lindsey and Steve's proposed renovations. Even well-meaning, intelligent people can struggle to discuss racial differences for fear of offending one another, and as a result they are unable to say anything at all. That isn't to say that *Clybourne Park* is nostalgic for a time of outright, state-sanctioned racism. Rather, the play demonstrates how, although the language around race and racism has changed, little progress has been made towards being able to discuss race productively in America.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND OWNERSHIP

The play presents two different opinions on who "owns" a neighborhood, and who should be allowed to dictate who will move in and how the neighborhood will grow and change. The first argument is that the people already living in a neighborhood should have some agency and control over who moves in next. This is the stance favored by longstanding members of the community who are keeping their houses as others move in and out. The other stance is that no one owns the neighborhood, demographics change with time, and there's nothing to be done.

Both white and black characters in the play argue for their neighborhood to remain as it is—predominantly white or predominantly black. Karl, who is white, is a member of this camp, basing his argument for continued segregation on racist ideas that black and white people don't eat the same foods and prefer to live separately. He's doubtful that Francine, who is black, would even be able to shop at the same grocery store as her white employer, Bev. Jim argues that black and white churches are so different they wouldn't be able to integrate. He explains it's "Not a *value* judgment. Apples and oranges. Just as how we have our organ here at Saint Thomas, for accompaniment, where at First Presbyterian, they prefer a piano and, occasionally...well...*tambourine*." In act two, Lena uses her personal connection to the neighborhood as an argument against Lindsey and Steve's renovations, which will change the look and feel of the house, and make it stand out. Her opposition turns out to be partially against a house she worries

will be lacking in taste, and partly against the encroachment of a white family upon the now black neighborhood. Lena explains that this neighborhood is "just a part of my *history* and my *parents'* history" and she wants to make sure she honors "the *connection* to that history". The neighborhood's history, she implies, resides partially in its architecture and partially in its demographic makeup. Lena remarks, "When *I* was growing up I really don't remember seeing a single white face in the neighborhood," a reversed version of the same argument Karl made fifty years earlier.

The other argument regarding the ownership of the neighborhood is that no one owns it: people move in and out, and there's nothing one can do to stop it from changing over the decades. By this logic, people's feelings about the neighborhood's personal or historical significance are not a basis for determining who should live there. Lindsey and Steve, who are eager to move into their newly purchased home, think they should be allowed to do so regardless of how their presence will affect the neighborhood. Presumably the Younger family, who planned to move into the same house fifty years earlier, felt the same way. Russ and Bev also subscribe to this point of view. Russ, in an explosion during an argument, tells Karl, "I don't care if a hundred Ubangi tribesmen with a bone through the nose overrun this goddam place." Russ and his wife are leaving Clybourne Park in part because they did not feel it was a supportive community, and therefore they feel no obligation to help maintain the demographic of said community.

At the climax of Act II, Lena presents a third choice for who should feel a sense of ownership over the neighborhood. She argues that perhaps no one can really control a neighborhood, but that decades of institutional racism have shaped them to be the way they are, and therefore even if no one can tell anyone else where they can or can't live, it's up to individuals to consider how their behavior impacts a community, and whether they are contributing to a broader pattern of gentrification. Lena understands "The area is *changing*," and that "there are certain economic interests that are being served by those changes and others that are not." In other words, she understands that white people coming into her childhood neighborhood will benefit from the relatively low property value and the proximity to downtown, but she also understands that they're bringing an end to a fifty-year history of black families living in the neighborhood.

After the play's first act, readers might assume that the play advocates for a free market, supporting the viewpoint that a black family should be able to move into a white neighborhood if they want to. In the second act, however, this view becomes more complicated when a white family wants to move into a black neighborhood, and the reader's allegiance switches to the black families who have been living in the neighborhood for generations. Readers might expect the play to come down strongly on one side or the other of the argument—perhaps arguing that gentrification is a universally bad thing, or focusing in on race-based housing discrimination. Instead, *Clybourne Park* shows the nuances and complications in both sides of the argument, suggesting that race and racism are issues homebuyers have to consider—but that in the end neighborhoods change, and a single family cannot prevent these changes from occurring.

COMMUNICATION AND MISCOMMUNICATION

Most of the conversations in *Clybourne Park* break down at a certain point and devolve into trivia, arguments, shouting matches, or misunderstandings. Whether it is literal failures of communications (such as those revolving around Betsy, who is deaf) or more abstract breakdowns (like conversations derailing into crude joke telling), *Clybourne Park* is a whirlwind of words, few of which are picked up and accurately interpreted by the other characters on stage. However, communication—when it is done effectively—can bring people together in big and small ways. Not only can inside jokes and happy memories help unite couples and help families navigate small talk with one other, but communication is essential to resolving conflict and healing wounds. One of the great tragedies of *Clybourne Park* is that rampant miscommunication throughout the play drives all its characters apart.

The second act of the play revolves around a single, continually interrupted meeting, during which the characters attempt to work through a twenty-page document of proposed guidelines for neighborhood renovations. The failure of the group to work through this document (the two couples and their lawyers only make it to page three) is representative of the larger issue of how the characters talk to one another. The conversation ends with everyone feeling personally attacked. The central question of whether or not Lindsey and Steve are gentrifying the neighborhood—and whether there's any way for them to mitigate their impact—remains unanswered. For what feels like half an hour, Lena attempts to make a comment, but is constantly interrupted and brushed aside. The other characters continually apologize for speaking over her and remind her that she doesn't need permission to speak, but in the end it seems she does, because otherwise she'd never get the opportunity. At various points Tom gets up to answer his phone, Kathy spends time listening to voicemails, and Dan comes in with questions about the backyard, but unfortunately none of this helps the group work through the document they assembled to discuss.

Even Kenneth's suicide letter to his parents is unable to communicate what he has been feeling, and why he feels the need to take his own life. Russ reads his son's suicide note, but it only makes him feel more frustrated and more helpless. It's unclear whether Bev has ever read Kenneth's letter, but when

Russ begins to read it aloud her response suggests she has not, or at least has no desire to revisit it. She also wants to literally bury Kenneth's **footlocker**, including his letter, which doesn't seem to indicate that she or Russ desire an ongoing engagement with their son's memory. It's only in the play's final moments, as Dan (played by the same actor as Russ) unearths Kenneth's chest and begins to read his letter that it seems as though Kenneth's message has finally been received by someone. More generally, it seems this is the first time in the play that one character has finally gotten through to another.

Especially central to the play is the communication, or lack thereof, between couples. Although there are five different married couples onstage in the course of the play, each one experiences at least one major failure of communication, whether this means having different goals, different tastes, or different opinions. At the root of this conflict is the fact that each person in a couple is an individual, with their own interests and priorities—and the fact that two people are married doesn't mean they're a united front. When Albert comes to pick Francine up, Francine clearly wants to leave, and has even lied to Bev, telling her she has an appointment and cannot stay all day. Although Francine tries to get Albert to play along, he exposes her lie when he offers to stay an extra few minutes to help Bev move a trunk. Lindsey and Steve are constantly bickering. They argue about Steve's off-color joke and about the renovation of their house, and they clearly argued in the past about having a child. It seems like although they've compromised enough to remain married, they are united on few fronts.

The play's repeated breakdown of communication leads to some humorous situations for the audience, but for the current and soon-to-be residents of *Clybourne Park*, it leads to frustration and even threats of violence. When two people are not communicating, it means that even in the best-case scenario, neither of them gets what they want, and in the worst case scenario, each person comes away thinking the other is a racist, or a bigot, or a violent maniac. A 2010 *New York Times* review of the play noted how "the emptiness of most human communication" is evident in all the characters' interactions. Indeed, much of the stage time is taken up with trivia, small talk, and niceties. Although moments of true connection between characters are rare, the play seems to urge its readers to be patient and learn to listen in order to communicate successfully.

MEN, WOMEN, AND GENDER ROLES

Clybourne Park explores conventional gender roles, the bonds between women, and the dynamic between husbands and wives over the course of a half century. Conceptions of womanhood and manhood are different in 1959 and 2009, and those differences are played out onstage. In the first act especially, men are loud, women fragile, and motherhood highly valued. In the second act, these tropes are extended, but take on slightly different, 21st century forms. From the first act to the second, then, the play explores certain familiar stock characters across time (e.g., the delicate, pregnant wife and the clueless, insensitive husband), and while it never suggests that all men are one way and women are another, it makes use of archetypes to explore gender dynamics across the decades.

Men in the play assume their wives and children need to be protected, both from unpleasant language and from potentially unsavory changes in their environment. In Act I, Karl is always looking out for Betsy. He's worried that Russ will get her sick, upset that Russ is swearing in her vicinity, and anxious when she goes to the kitchen without him. His love and protectiveness of his wife is good-natured, but ultimately infantilizing. He also uses Betsy and her pregnancy as a weapon in the war he is waging against the encroaching Younger family, imploring Russ and Bev to consider his unborn (white) children before they let a black family move into the neighborhood. In Act II it is Lindsey who is concerned for the safety and wellbeing of her child and her family. After they discover that Kenneth committed suicide in the house (a detail that had not been disclosed to them when they purchased it) Lindsey becomes agitated. Steve wonders, "why d'you have to make such a big deal outa" the suicide, to which Lindsey responds that "your child" and "our family" will be living in the house. In this way, the second act disrupts the dynamic established in the first act, in which men are portrayed as the protectors of their families.

Nevertheless, men and women are represented in this play as having different personality traits, and the differences between them remain constant across time. Men, and especially husbands, are portrayed as less emotionally sensitive than their wives, and have less of a sense of what is and is not appropriate to say in public. Women and wives, by contrast, are portrayed as more aware of how they're perceived and more willing to try and maintain peace with their neighbors. Russ and Bev fit this dynamic, as do Lindsey and Steve, and Karl and Betsy. In each couple, the wife is a peacemaker and a diplomat, frequently apologizing for her husband's behavior. The husband, in contrast, is loud, offensive (sometimes accidentally, as in Steve's case) and frequently aggressive. Notably, the two African-American couples have opposite dynamics. Albert and Kevin are much more ingratiating and sociable than their wives, Francine and Lena respectively. Whereas Albert and Kevin seem to be genuinely interested in forming or maintaining positive relationships, Francine and Lena are not. Francine is fed up with the performative politeness she must put on at work, and Lena is unwilling to pretend that she is happy to have Lindsey, Steve, and their renovated house as neighbors.

Bev assumes that she and Francine have a special connection, perhaps because of their gender. Although Francine is her

employee, Bev insists on acting like they're friends, and pretends there is no power imbalance between them (except, of course, when she needs something from Bev, in which case she makes it clear she is the boss). Bev's behavior is well-meaning but misguided. She and Francine have very little in common, and their shared gender cannot make up for differences in their lives based on race or class. Nevertheless, Bev assumes she and Francine are genuinely close, often calling on Francine to recall moments they shared together and using their relationship as an example of how white and black people can get along. In reality, she can think of few shared memories of friendship with Francine, calling an example of a time when a squirrel came into the house through the window and she and Francine had laughed together. Francine, however, clearly thinks of Bev as her boss and nothing more. Near the end of Act I, she tells Albert, "they're all a buncha idiots," continuing, "let 'em knock each other's brains out for all I care. I'm done working for these people". Bev sees that in some ways she and Francine share a gender-based struggle. Life was difficult for women in the 1950s: both Bev and Francine have access to fewer opportunities and are treated with less respect than their husbands. Of course, Francine's life as a black woman is significantly more difficult than Bev's, so it follows that Francine would be more interested in honoring the race- and class-based commonalities she shares with her husband than the gender-based bond she shares with Bev.

Oftentimes, men assume that women are weaker than men, while women assume men are less socially adept than women. These generalizations are harmful for the characters within the play, who see each other as gendered stereotypes, which prevents them from acknowledging each other as full, complex human beings deserving of empathy, appreciation, and understanding.

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

Several characters in *Clybourne Park* deal with illness and disability, both visible and invisible. Especially in the first act of the play, which takes place in 1959, before any widespread conversation about disabilities and mental illness, able-bodied characters are unsure how to interact with those who are not mentally and physically well. Although mental illnesses and developmental and physical disabilities were as common then as they are today, in 1959 there was little social or legal acknowledgment of it. The play's first act takes place twenty-one years before Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was recognized as a condition, and thirty-one years before the Americans With Disabilities Act was passed into law. As a result, people with disabilities and illnesses are tolerated by the characters in the first act, but those people nevertheless remain less-than-fully integrated into society. The one exception to this rule would be for family members: characters are accommodating of the limitations of their loved ones, but fail to extend this empathy outside their families.

Russ and Bev's son Kenneth seems to suffers from PTSD or depression in the wake of his military service and dishonorable discharge. Although his parents do their best to accommodate and care for him, in the end their efforts are not enough to prevent him from taking his own life. In the aftermath, they blame themselves, but they also place blame on their community, which they feel contributed to their child's suffering and feeling of isolation by failing to extend its care and support. Russ laments that his son didn't receive the comfort he needed after returning from Korea, and Bev describes her son as "sick." By contrast, Jim (the local pastor) feels little sympathy. He points out that he was also in the armed service, and didn't snap or return home traumatized—suggesting that Kenneth's suffering was his own fault. At one point, Russ uses an offensive term when he describes how the grocery store was willing to hire a "goddam *retarded* kid, but *my* boy? Sorry. No work for *you*, bub." He uses this as an example of the ways in which the community was not accepting of Kenneth—which is slightly ironic considering how he displays his own troubling lack of acceptance for the disabled bag boy, Mr. Wheeler. Even Russ and Bev, although they understand something changed in their son while he was away, are unable to fully grasp what happened. Bev refuses to believe he killed the people he was said to have killed, and while Russ does, neither seems to know how to handle Kenneth upon his return, and it is unlikely (though unclear) that he received any sort of medical or psychological treatment.

Similarly, Betsy's deafness prevents her from fully integrating into her community. Karl clearly loves her and does his best to accommodate her, but he and other characters constantly talk down to and patronize her. Her husband assumes she's extra fragile, and her friends seem to think her incapable of understanding even basic conversations. Karl appears to be fluent in sign language, so that during group conversations, where it is difficult for Betsy to read lips and interpret the direction of the discussion, he often translates for her. Still, he treats her as though she is constantly in danger, and unable to fend for herself. Some of the characters do their best to accommodate Betsy's deafness. Jim tries to sign to her, and although he is not very good, it's a kind gesture. Later in the act, Bev uses a pad and paper to converse with Betsy. However, in a particularly heated moment of conflict, Russ mocks Betsy for her deafness in response to Karl's assertion that he will not tolerate swearing in from of his wife. Russ makes the point that Betsy can't hear him, but then tells her to "go fuck [her]self," only to have her wave sweetly back. Once again a disabled character and her disability become the butt of a mean-spirited joke.

Russ is likely dealing with his own mental illness. Whether it's grief at the death of his son or clinical depression, his wife and

his neighbors have noticed changes in his behavior. No one understands what is happening to Russ, and no one seems able to help. Russ is in a unique situation because doesn't seem to believe there is anything wrong with him, even though he is acting noticeably erratically—staying up late, lashing out at his wife and his friends, and disregarding proper social behavior. In conversation with Jim he complains about the fact that "a lotta people today have this tendency, tendency to *brood* about stuff, which, if you ask me, is, is, is—well, short answer, it's *not productive*," for which he offers the following solution: "get up offa your rear end and *do* something." In doing so, he shows a lack of regard for or awareness of the study of psychology and the illnesses that psychologists treat. Karl understands that Russ is "indisposed," but worries that he has some kind of infection he could pass on to Betsy because Bev has been telling people that Russ is sick, when really he seems to be struggling with some form of depression. Repeatedly, the people around Russ pathologize and condemn his behavior rather than treating it as a sign that he may need help and support.

Disability and mental illness are poorly understood, particularly in the first act of the play. Characters attempt to accommodate their friends, spouses, children, and neighbors, but in nearly every instance these efforts fall flat. In the late 1950s, understanding of these diseases and disorders is still limited, and as a result even the most open-minded of the residents of Clybourne Park do not know how to interact with Betsy, Kenneth, and others. Just as the residents of Clybourne Park divide themselves according to race—remaining segregated from groups they feel are unlike them—they also segregate themselves more subtly according to who is able-bodied and who is not. Throughout the play, Norris makes it clear how isolating illness and disability can be—and how essential communication and empathy are in bringing *all* the members of a community together.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FOOTLOCKER

In *Clybourne Park*, Kenneth's military footlocker, which contains all of his possessions and his suicide note, represents Kenneth himself, and Russ and Bev's memories of him. As they leave their home and bury the trunk, Bev hopes they will also be able to bury their grief, which would allow them to move on with their lives. Kenneth's footlocker appears both in the first and second act. In the first act, Russ prepares to bury the trunk, and in the second act, Dan (who is played by the same actor) excavates the trunk, and in doing so releases Kenneth's spirit, who then appears onstage for the first time. More generally, the footlocker represents historical and institutional memory. Its burial and subsequent excavation help emphasize the suppression and resurfacing of racism in Clybourne Park, which is explicit in the first act in Karl and Jim's opposition to the Younger family moving in, and more subtle in the second act in the conversations between the Kevin, Lena, Lindsey, and Steve.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition of *Clybourne Park* published in 2011.

Act 1 Quotes

But that's nice, isn't it, in a way? To know we all have our place.

Related Characters: Bev Stoller (speaker), Russ Stoller, Mr. Wheeler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Bev makes this statement in the context of a conversation about Mr. Wheeler, a disabled boy who works at the grocery store, which causes Bev to reflect on how nice it is that he has found his place at the grocery store. Although Bev is referring specifically to Mr. Wheeler in this passage, much of the conflict in the play comes from differing opinions of who belongs where. While the residents of Clybourne Park in 1959 may be able to agree that Mr. Wheeler is a perfect fit as a bag boy, they cannot agree on the appropriate place for black families in their neighborhood. Ultimately, Norris's play could be said to present a challenge to Bev's quaint but hollow notion that "we all have our place"—a vague sentiment that was often used to justify segregation and discrimination on the basis that some people simply don't belong in certain places. *Clybourne Park* shows that the unspoken rules of "who belongs where" have too often been determined out of ignorance by people other than those whose lives the rules most affect.

Tell ya what I think. And I'm not a psychiatrist or anything but I do think a lotta people today have this tendency, tendency to *brood* about stuff, which, if you ask me, is, is, is — well, short answer, it's *not productive*. And what *I'd* say to these people, *were* I to have a degree in psychiatry, I think my advice would be maybe, get up offa your rear end and *do* something.

Related Characters: Russ Stoller (speaker), Kenneth Stoller, Jim

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Bev has invited Jim to come over and talk to Russ. Russ has been acting erratically, and Bev is concerned about his wellbeing. Russ has become depressed following the death of his son, but has no desire to talk about his feelings. Bev believes that the secret to getting better is open communication, and Jim happily embraces the task of trying to get Russ to open up. Russ, however, believes that action and productivity and the keys to wellness, as opposed to conversation or talk therapy. However, Russ seems to be making little effort to "get up offa" his "rear end." Instead, according to Bev, he has spent many hours brooding, which has left him sad, angry, and volatile. No one within the first act of the play seems to have a solid grasp of mental illness or depression and so have no idea how to behave around Russ or how to help him. This includes Russ himself, who is loudly dismissive of psychiatry as a profession, and doesn't seem willing to acknowledge that something may be wrong with him. As a result, no one knows how to act around him, and he doesn't even seem to know what he wants or needs. Russ's depression isolates him from his community, and from his wife.

Bev: Well, you're being ugly, and I don't like *ugliness*.
Russ: — *private* matters, matters that are between me and the memory of my son —
Bev: I think his *mind* has been affected, I really do.
Russ: — and if the two of you want to talk about Kenneth on your own time, if that gives you some kind you *comfort* —
Bev: And what's wrong with *comfort?* Are we not *allowed* any comfort anymore?

Related Characters: Russ Stoller, Bev Stoller (speaker), Kenneth Stoller, Jim

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

After Jim's attempt to get Russ to talk about his feelings regarding his son Kenneth's death, Russ tells Jim to "go fuck yourself," an outburst which shocks and offends the pastor. Bev is upset by the "ugliness" of Russ's speech in this moment—and the way he disrupts her carefully ordered life and household—but also by the previous months of erratic behavior. Neither she nor Russ seems to fully understand his behavior or his grief, and so neither can cope productively or move on. Bev is also upset by Russ's suggestion that they do not deserve comfort. Bev, understandably, wants an easy life with minimal conflict, where she gets along with her husband and he gets along with everyone else. She has done her best to suppress her memories of Kenneth, but Russ's brooding is threatening to disrupt her orderly, comfortable life.

I tell you, I don't know *what* I would do without a friend like Francine here, and on a *Saturday*, I mean she is just a treasure. What on earth are we going to do up there without her?

Related Characters: Bev Stoller (speaker), Albert, Francine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Bev has asked Francine—her employee—to come help her and Russ pack their house as they prepare to move. Throughout the act, Francine expresses frustration at being at work on the weekend, and lies to Bev to guarantee she can leave in the midafternoon. Bev doesn't register Francine's reluctance, and obliviously sees Francine as her friend, who is working as a favor, as opposed to an employee who is working because she needs the money.

Bev chooses to see her bond with Francine as a true friendship, perhaps because they're both women, and are both mothers—and perhaps also out of a naïve belief that her relationship to Francine is not based primarily around money. Francine, however, sees economic and racial divide between them, and knows that although she has a window into Bev's life, Bev in turn knows very little about Francine.

> Now, Russ, you know as well as I do that this is a progressive community.

Related Characters: Karl Linder (speaker), The Younger Family, Bev Stoller, Jim, Russ Stoller

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Karl has recently discovered that the family moving into Russ and Bev's home is black. He is upset by this, and has come to Russ and Bev to try to convince them to halt the sale. Karl doesn't want to come across as racist, and truly believes the neighborhood is "a progressive community," an ironic statement seeing as it comes in the middle of Karl's argument that Clybourne Park should remain a racially segregated community.

Karl does not see himself as a villain. Instead he sees himself as a kind of protector of the neighborhood. He claims his resistance to integration is based on a concern over whether different kinds of people will truly be able to get along. This is coded racial language, but by avoiding talking directly about race, and instead talking about cultural differences, Karl attempts to disguise his racism behind exaggerated sensitivity to different groups' cultural backgrounds.

In Act 2, characters also believe themselves to be living in a "progressive community" and believe themselves to be progressive people. Although nowhere near as regressive as Karl, the residents of Clybourne Park in 2009 fail to communicate with each other and prove themselves to be less open-minded and less able to communicate across racial lines than they would have hoped.

> Karl: It's a colored family.
> Jim: Sorry, don't we say *Negro*, now?
> Karl: I *say* Negro —
> Jim: Well, it's only common courtesy, and I'm —
> Karl: — I say them *interchangeably* —
> Jim: — not trying to tell you how to conduct your business.
> Karl: — and of course I said *Negro* to them — No I think we both know what you're doing.

Related Characters: Jim, Karl Linder (speaker), Bev Stoller, Russ Stoller, Ted Driscoll, The Younger Family

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

After Karl has come to Russ and Bev's house to announce that he has discovered the family about to move into their home is black, Jim immediately pushes back. However, Jim's stance on integrating the neighborhood is not initially clear. He seems to be offended by Karl's treatment of the black family, but also shocked that Ted Driscoll would sell a Clybourne Park home to a black family.

By picking on the term "colored" versus "Negro," Jim derails Karl's argument, and makes him out to be racially insensitive. Karl's insistence that he used the correct term to the Younger family's faces is an attempt to show that he is not intentionally offending anyone. To contemporary ears, neither term seems particularly courteous, and by quibbling over the proper language, the two men demonstrate their concern for maintaining the appearance of politeness without actually being polite at all or graciously accepting the black family into their neighborhood.

> Karl: Bev, they are *one hundred percent*. And if I don't know how much time any of you have spent in Hamilton Park, but Betsy was waiting in the car and I can tell you, there are some *unsavory* characters.
> Russ: Karl?
> Karl: But in the case of Gelman's: I think there was some mistrust at first, having been Kopeckne's Market for such a long time, but in the end of all Murray Gelman found a way to *fit in*.
> Bev: And they hired the Wheeler boy.

Related Characters: Bev Stoller, Russ Stoller, Karl Linder (speaker), The Younger Family, Mr. Wheeler

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Karl argues that his primary opposition to the Younger family moving into Clybourne Park is not racial. Instead, he claims to believe that they will not fit into the neighborhood. He points to Gelman's grocery store as an example of an outsider (Gelman) who managed to fit in. Gelman is presumably Jewish, as opposed to Kopeckne who was not. Gelman managed to "fit in," partially by hiring Mr. Wheeler, of whom the residents of the neighborhood are fond. By contrast, the Younger family's race makes them too

different, in Karl's mind, to fully belong. At its core, therefore, Karl's opposition is based in racism. He thinks the Younger family will not fit in because they are black, and he believes black people to be irreconcilably different from white people.

> And *fitting into* a community is really what it all comes down to...Now, some would say change is inevitable. And I can support that, if it's change for the better. But I'll tell you what I *can't* support, and that's disregarding the needs of the people who *live* in a community.

Related Characters: Karl Linder (speaker), Murray Gelman, The Younger Family, Jim, Bev Stoller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Karl claims that his opposition to the Younger family moving into Clybourne Park is that he worries they will not fit in. He also worries that their presence will change the neighborhood for the worse. He reveals later in the act that he fears the arrival of a single black family will trigger white flight, and eventually the neighborhood will be entirely composed of black families and white families like his, who are too poor to leave for the suburbs. Karl does not want this to happen, and so sees it as his duty to act as a kind of gatekeeper for the neighborhood, making sure it maintains the racial makeup he is most happy with—that is, an all-white, predominantly Christian neighborhood (with the exception of Murray Gelman, the owner of Gelman's grocery store and, it's strongly implied, a Jew).

> Karl: And what happened to *love thy neighbor*? If we're being so principled.
> Bev: They would *become* our neighbors.
> Karl: And what about the neighbors you already *have* Bev?
> Bev: I care about them, too!
> Karl: Well, I'm afraid you can't have it both ways.

Related Characters: Bev Stoller, Karl Linder (speaker), The Younger Family, Russ Stoller, Jim

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

As Karl, Jim, and Bev debate what to do about the Younger family (who recently purchased the Stoller home), Bev tries to be a peacemaker. While Karl is vehemently opposed to the Youngers moving in, and Jim supports segregation but less vocally, Bev tries to argue for the neighborhood's integration. Karl sees allowing the Younger family to move in as an act of hatred toward the community on Bev and Russ's part. A good neighbor, he believes, would do everything in their power to keep the neighborhood white. Bev argues that loving her neighbors means loving all her neighbors, even black ones, but Karl feels that his preferences and those of other white people already living in Clybourne Park should be given priority over the rights of an incoming black family to live wherever they can afford to live.

> Bev: Francine and I have, over the years, the *two of us* have shared so many wonderful—remember that time the *squirrel* came through the window?
> Francine: Yes, I do.
> Bev: That was just the silliest—the two of us were just *hysterical* weren't we?

Related Characters: Francine, Bev Stoller (speaker), Albert, Jim, Karl Linder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Karl and Jim argue that a black family would feel uncomfortable in Clybourne Park because they are inherently different and live inherently different lifestyles. Bev tries to make the point that she and Francine are friends, and have shared wonderful moments together as friends, and therefore black and white people are not so different after all. Unfortunately, Bev's argument falls flat. Firstly, her anecdote doesn't create a compelling portrayal of a true interracial friendship. Secondly, Francine herself doesn't seem to think of Bev as a friend. Although she indulges her employer here, Francine makes it clear in her conversations with Albert that she is happy to be free of the Stoller family when they move out. Bev seems to think she and Francine have a lot in common, but aside from their shared roles as mothers and women, they have very

different lives. For Francine, race and class separate her from Bev more than gender unites them.

Karl: I think that you'd agree, I'm assuming, that in the world, there exist certain *differences*. Agreed?
Francine: What sort of difference?
Karl: That people *live* differently.
Francine: …Yes?
Karl: From one another.
Francine: I agree with that.
Karl: Different customs, different…well, different *foods*, even. And those diff—here's a funny—my wife, Betsy, now, Betsy's family happens to be Scandinavian, and on holidays they eat a thing known as *lutefisk*. And this is a dish, which I can tell you...is *not* to my liking *at all*. It's...*oh* my goodness, let's just say it's *gelatinous*.

Related Characters: Francine, Karl Linder (speaker), Betsy Linder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Karl makes many arguments on the same theme. He believes black and white people are inherently different, and tries to get Francine and Albert to agree that they are not like white people, and would not fit in were they to move to Clybourne Park. Francine does agree that different people live differently, a vague statement that most people would agree with, but is hesitant to take Karl's side, a side which is inherently racist, and equally hesitant to offend any of the white people in the room.

Karl uses the example of lutefisk (a traditional Scandinavian dish) as a cultural artifact that some people love and some people hate. Instead of proving his point that black and white people cannot live in proximity, Karl's anecdote seems petty. Additionally, although Betsy likes lutefisk and he doesn't, they've nevertheless managed to get married and conceive a child. By this logic, black and white people, even if they like different foods or act different, should be able to get along with practice.

Jim: —You do find differences in modes of *worship*. If you take First Presbyterian. Now, that's a church down in Hamilton Park and I've taken fellowship there and I can tell you, the differences are notable.
Bev: Jim?
Jim: Not a *value* judgment. Apples and oranges. Just as how we have our organ here at Saint Thomas, for accompaniment, whereas at First Presbyterian, they prefer a piano and, occasionally…well, *tambourines*.

Bev: What's wrong with tambourines?

Related Characters: Bev Stoller, Jim (speaker), The Younger Family, Karl Linder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Karl and Jim attempt to come up with reasons why black and white people couldn't live together peacefully. Many of their examples seem petty—for instance, citing differences in dinner preferences, or here, differences in the instruments they use in church. Jim and Karl do their best, at first, to use coded language to convey the difference between black and white people. They do not want to outright say that they do not like black people and do not want them in their neighborhood. Instead they try to come up with cultural reasons that a black family would be unhappy if they lived in a white neighborhood.

Here, Jim argues that black churches, which use tambourines, are more lively than white churches, and as a result black people and white people are too different to live in the same neighborhood. Jim claims it isn't a "value" judgment, but it clearly is, from his larger argument that he doesn't want to live around black people, to his dismissive mention of a tambourine, which he seems to think is not an appropriate instrument for church.

Bev: And for all we know this family could be perfectly lovely.
Karl: Well, that's hardly the point, is it?
Bev: Maybe it's a point to consider.
Karl: Bev, I'm not here to solve society's problems. I'm simply telling you what will happen, and it will happen as follows: First one family will leave, then another, and another, and each time they do, the values of these properties will decline, and once that process begins, once you break that egg, Bev, all the kings horses, etcetera—

Related Characters: Karl Linder, Bev Stoller (speaker), The Younger Family

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

As she discusses the possibility of the Younger Family moving into her vacated home, Bev feels obligated to treat all people kindly and to give everyone a chance to prove themselves. Karl, meanwhile, is set against any black family moving in. He is set in his convictions, and refuses to entertain the idea that any non-white family could be "perfectly lovely."

Karl is correct in his prediction about white people leaving the neighborhood, but that doesn't make his opposition to the Younger family any less racist. He doesn't want them to move in because he worries more black families will follow, and he doesn't want to live in an all-black neighborhood. Karl sees it as his duty to prevent the tide from turning. He doesn't want to lose his neighborhood to a group of people who he truly believes are so different from him that they could never live in harmony.

❝ Russ: If you honestly think I give a rat's ass about the goddamn—
Jim: Okay. Okay.
Russ: —what, ya mean the *community* where every time I go for a haircut, where they all sit and stare like the goddamn grim reaper walked in the barber shop door? *That* community?
Karl: My wife is two weeks away from giving birth to a *child*.
Russ: Where, Bev stops at Gelman's for a quart of milk and they look at her like she's got the goddamn plague? That the community I'm supposed to be looking out for?

Related Characters: Karl Linder, Jim, Russ Stoller (speaker), Betsy Linder, Bev Stoller, Kenneth Stoller

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After Karl argues that Russ should consider the community when allowing a black family to move into his house, Russ responds angrily that he doesn't care about the community. When Kenneth was discharged from the military the community was unsupportive of him, which Russ thinks led to Kenneth's death. Now, in the wake of Kenneth's suicide, Russ himself feels like an outcast. In both cases, the community's treatment of the men stemmed from a lack of understanding of difference and mental illness. Kenneth was ill in some way, which is perhaps even the reason why he committed war crimes, was discharged, and eventually killed himself. His illness isolated him, because the residents of Clybourne Park were afraid to interact with him. Similarly, no one knows how to deal with Russ, who has become depressed and isolated after his son's death. Because of this isolation, Russ doesn't give a "rat's ass" about a community which he believes has not supported him, and he therefore refuses to make any effort to maintain racial segregation for their sake.

❝ And Francine walking in at nine in the morning to find him there. You be my guest, Karl. You go ahead and tell those people what kind of house they're moving into and see if *that* stops 'em, because I'll tell you what, I don't care if a hundred Ubangi tribesman with a bone through the nose overrun this goddamn place, 'cause I'm *through with all of you*, ya motherfucking sons of bitches. *Every one* of you.

Related Characters: Russ Stoller (speaker), Jim, Bev Stoller, Kenneth Stoller, Francine, Karl Linder

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Karl and Jim invoke the community as a reason Bev and Russ should reconsider selling their house to a black family. This causes Russ to snap, as he wonders what role the community played in caring for his family when it was in crisis. He believes that if the community had been more accepting of Kenneth, his son might not have killed himself. However, in the wake of Kenneth's death, Russ has cut all ties with his neighborhood. He no longer feels obligated to protect it, or to act as gatekeeper in the way that Karl does. Although this apathy will eventually give way to integration, Russ clearly isn't motivated by a sense of deep care for the black family that will move in. Rather, he is motivated by a sense of resentment and indifference toward the neighborhood, and since a black family moving in will have no impact on his life, he is unconcerned.

I think they're *all* a buncha idiots. And who's the biggest idiot of all to let yourself get dragged into the middle of it? Whatcha gonna be now, the big *peacemaker* come to save the day?...Let 'em knock each other's *brains* out, for all *I* care. I'm done working for these people two days from now, and you never worked for 'em at *all*, so what the hell do you care *what* they do? And now I am going to the goddamn *car*.

Related Characters: Francine (speaker), Bev Stoller, Russ Stoller, Karl Linder, Albert

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Francine and Albert have been forced to stay in Bev and Russ's house long after Francine's work has ended to help settle an argument on whether a black family could potentially fit into Clybourne Park. The conversation is offensive, with Karl and Jim arguing that black people are too different from white people to live in the same neighborhood—an opinion which they try to get Francine and Albert to agree with. The couple has been polite and agreeable, because it is dangerous for them to act any other way, but in this private moment between them Francine makes it clear that she is sick of this conversation, and sick of the Stoller family (even Bev, who believes herself to be Francine's friends). Because of the complicated racial dynamics of the time, she is unable to fully or safely express herself, and is forced to treat her white employers and their friends politely and deferentially.

Bev: What about this chafing dish? Did you see this dish?
Albert: Well, we got plenty of dish—
Bev: Not one of these. Francine told me.
Albert: Well, that's very kind of you, but—
Bev: She said you didn't have one and somebody should take it and—
Albert: But we don't *need* it, ma'am.
Bev: —make use of it, so if you let me just wrap it for you.
Albert: Ma'am, we don't *want* your things. *Please*. We got our *own* things.
Bev: *Well*.
Albert: Trying to *explain* to you.
Bev: Well, if *that's* the attitude, then I just don't know what to say anymore. I really don't. If that's what we're coming to.

Related Characters: Albert, Bev Stoller (speaker), Francine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

As Albert and Francine attempt to leave Bev's house, she offers Albert her chafing dish. She has already offered it to Francine and Albert multiple times through the Act, and they've declined each time. In this moment, Albert finally snaps. He and Francine do not want Bev's hand-me-downs. Although they are poorer than she is, and do not have a chafing dish, they are also not in need. Bev imagines that her gifts to Francine are all deeply appreciated, because her things are nicer than Francine's things. However, Albert makes it clear that he and Francine have their "own things," and that Bev's charity is in fact condescending.

Bev did not understand that Francine and Albert did not want her dish when they politely declined earlier, and even when it is spelled out for her she seems not to fully understand because she becomes immediately offended. She sees the dish as a kind of peace offering, and its rejection seems to her to be a rejection of any potential for racial harmony in Clybourne Park.

Act 2 Quotes

Lindsey: Can I say? We *talked* about renovation. We discussed it. Because these houses are *so* charming and I know it's a shame — but when you figure in the crack in the sub-floor and the cost of the lead abatement — and in a market like this one? It just made more sense to start from scratch.
Tom: Right. *But:* the Owners Association has a vested interest — Kevin and Lena call me up last month, they say Tom, we've got this problem, these people are planning to build a house that's a full fifteen feet taller than all the adjacent structures...and I think we'd *all* agree that there's a mutual benefit to maintaining the integrity — the *architectural* integrity...of a historically significant...neighborhood.

Related Characters: Tom Driscoll, Lindsey (speaker), Lena, Kevin, Steve

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Lindsey and Steve have purchased the Clybourne Park house but have plans to renovate it before they move in.

Kevin and Lena are concerned about their renovations, and worry that both the renovations and the couple's presence will irrevocably change the neighborhood. Lindsey and Steve, by contrast, see their renovations as a purely architectural issue. In their minds, the house was ugly and unsafe.

For Lena, Kevin, and presumably other residents of Clybourne Park, Lindsey and Steve's renovations represent more than a simple aesthetic change. As Tom says, changing the aesthetic of the house compromises the "architectural integrity," and by extension the historical significance, of the neighborhood. By substantially changing the house, Lindsey and Steve will be tampering with the history of a historically black neighborhood. Lena and Kevin fear that by building a new and more expensive house, Lindsey and Steve will be setting in motion a sea change which will eventually force black families out.

Lindsey: And you know, the thing is? Communities change.
Steve: They do.
Lindsey: That's just the reality.
Steve: It is.
Lena: And some change is inevitable, and we all support that, but it might be worth asking yourself who exactly is *responsible* that change?
Lindsey: I'm not sure what you—?
Kevin: Wait, what are you trying to—?
Lena: I'm asking you to think about the motivation behind the long-range political initiative to change the faith of this neighborhood....I mean that this is a highly desirable area...And I'm saying that there are certain economic interests that are being served by those changes and others that are not. That's all.

Related Characters: Kevin, Lena, Steve, Lindsey (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Lindsey and Steve see their move into Clybourne Park as part of the natural evolution of the neighborhood. They argue that communities change with time, and that resistance to change is futile. In their minds they are just a single family who wants to buy a single home—they don't see themselves as being part of a larger process of transformation in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, Lena *does* see Lindsey and Steve as signs that a larger change is about to take place. She believes that as historically black neighborhoods become more desirable, white people will move in and displace the black residents. Although Lindsey, Kevin, and Steve give little credit to Lena's theory, she is supported by political scientists, historians, and economists alike. Gentrification is a real phenomenon, and although individual families are rarely intentionally trying to gentrify the neighborhoods they move into, they are nevertheless doing so. The historical economic suppression of black families, which lowers the values of their properties, and makes it easier for more affluent buyers to come into a neighborhood and drive up the prices, thereby forcing black families out of their homes.

Steve: The history of America *is* the history of private property.
Lena: That may be —
Steve: Read De Tocqueville.
Lena: —though I rather doubt *your* grandparents were *sold as* private property.
Steve: Ohhhhh my *god*. Look. Look. Humans are *territorial*, okay?
Lindsey: Who *are* you?
Steve: This is why we have *wars*. One group, one *tribe*, tries to usurp some *territory* — and now *you guys* have *this* territory, right? And you don't like having it *stolen away* from you, the way white people stole everything else from black America. *We get it*, okay? And we *apologize*. But what *good* does it do, if we perpetually fall into the same, predictable little euphemistic tap dance around the topic?
Kevin: You know how to tap dance?
Steve: *See? See what he's doing?!!*
Lindsey: Maybe quit while you're ahead.
Steve: *No*. I'm sick of — *No*. Every *single word* we say is — is — is *scrutinized* for some kind of latent — Meanwhile you guys run around saying n-word this and n-word that and *whatever*. We all know *why* there's a double standard but I can't even so much as repeat a fucking *joke* that *the one black guy I know told me* —

Related Characters: Kevin, Lindsey, Lena, Steve (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout Act 2, Lindsey and Steve repeatedly assert that by moving into Clybourne Park they are merely acting in their own best interests, and are not actively trying to

change the neighborhood or destroy its history. Steve is especially resistant to any discussion of race or of Lena's personal investment in the neighborhood, arguing that the history of the neighborhood is irrelevant to his actions in the present. Instead of looking at why Lena and Kevin are troubled by a white family moving into a historically black neighborhood and tearing down a historical house, he points out that humans are territorial. Instead of acknowledging the sensitivity of the matter, he attempts to simplify the argument into being about the human species' territoriality.

Lena believes that Steve is missing the point by ignoring the nuances of Clybourne Park, and the nuances of racial dynamics. Whereas Lena is trying to discuss systematic disenfranchisement of black people around America and in Chicago, and the significance of historically black neighborhoods, Steve seems to feel threatened by any mention of race. He feels that because he did not personally contribute to black disenfranchisement in the past, he shouldn't be held responsible for racial tensions that exist today, or punished for the privilege he enjoys as a white person.

> Steve:... Are you "offended"?
> Kevin: Nope.
> Steve: Neither am I.
> Lindsey: You *can't be* offended, you *moron* —
> Steve:...I *can't?*
> Lindsey: — because you've *never* been politically marginalized, unlike *the majority* of people in the world —
> Steve: How can a *majority* be *marginal?*
> Lindsey: — and, by the way, *all women*, *everywhere*, and it's your classic white male myopia that you're blind to that basic fact.
> Lena: Why is a white woman like a tampon?
> Lindsey: Why is what?
> Lena: It's a joke.

Related Characters: Lena, Steve, Lindsey (speaker), Kathy, Francine, Bev Stoller, Karl Linder, Kevin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Steve tells a racist joke after being encouraged by Lena and Kevin, who goad him into telling it after he complains that the world is too politically correct. Like Karl in Act 1, Steve likely believes himself to be a good, progressive person, but he has no awareness of how his actions or beliefs affect other people, and no sense of how other people's experiences are different than his. Because he is not marginalized, and is therefore rarely attacked for his racial or sexual identity, he cannot imagine how it feels. Because he is rarely offended by jokes, he cannot comprehend that someone else might be.

Like Bev in Act 1, Lindsey is trying to keep the peace, and to find solidarity with Lena. Lena, however, like Francine, feels that she and Lindsey have very little in common. Her joke about white women, which greatly offends both Lindsey and Kathy, underscores the difference between them, despite their shared gender. It's noteworthy that jokes, which are often used to make people laugh and bring them together, end up fracturing this group beyond repair.

> Well you're being an *idiot*. And in case you hadn't noticed, the rest of the world has begun a more sophisticated conversation about this topic than you apparently are qualified to participate in at this incredible moment in history. I mean, I used to *date* a black guy. *So what?* I mean, *seriously. Steve. Wake up.*

Related Characters: Lindsey (speaker), Kevin, Lena, Steve

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

Lindsey attempts to show Steve that her politics are more progressive than his. Steve has just told a series of racist jokes, implied that gentrification is not real, and that minorities are oversensitive in the face of offensive behavior. Although Lindsey, on the surface, *is* more progressive than her husband—she finds his jokes offensive and discourages him from sharing them—she, too, lacks a certain empathy for Lena and Kevin. Both Lindsey and Steve see their move into Clybourne Park as a personal decision that will not affect the neighborhood, whereas Lena and Kevin see them as willing participants in gentrification.

Lindsey attempts to display her progressiveness by revealing that she used to date a black man. This is meant to show that she is not racist. However, her argument backfires. By using a former boyfriend as a prop in her argument, Lindsey makes herself seem even more out of touch with contemporary racial politics.

Lindsey: Well, I want to say this: I want to say I feel angry. And I'm basically kind of hurt by the implication that's been made that, just because we want to live as your neighbors and raise a child alongside yours, that somehow, in the process of doing that, we've had our ethics called into question. Because *that* is hurtful.

Related Characters: Lena, Lindsey (speaker), Steve, Kevin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

Lindsey and Steve are upset at Lena's suggestion that by moving into Clybourne Park they are ignoring their role in gentrifying the area. Lindsey especially feels that she is simply making a decision that makes sense for her family, and doesn't want to think about the way in which she is participating in racial and economic systems much larger than her small family and her recently purchased home. Although she and Steve have talked to Lena and Kevin for over an hour, the two couples have failed to communicate, with both sides leaving the conversation hurt and frustrated. Lena and Kevin feel no better about having Lindsey and Steve as neighbors, and Lindsey and Steve fail to understand Lena and Kevin's discomfort with their proposed renovations.

But you know, I think things are about to change. I really do. I know it's been a hard couple of years for all of us, I know they have been, but I really believe things are about to change for the better. I firmly believe that.

Related Characters: Bev Stoller (speaker), Kenneth Stoller

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback, the audience watches Kenneth write his suicide note on the morning of his death. Since returning from his military service his life has been difficult, and he has been unable to reintegrate into society. Both the family and the community have been disrupted by his presence, but Bev hopes things will change for the better.

As some of the final lines of the play, Bev's prediction is deeply ironic. The audience knows things will not change for the better—unfortunately, whatever trauma or illness Kenneth is dealing with has remained unaddressed, and he is about to kill himself. No optimistic words will change that.

Bev's optimistic statement can also be taken to apply to the larger conversation about the Clybourne Park neighborhood. The accuracy of her prediction depends on whether a person sees the integration of the neighborhood as a positive or negative change. For someone like Karl, Bev's statement would seem spectacularly off target, where by contrast Lena, who feels a special connection to the black Clybourne Park of her childhood, might agree. However, the changing personalities of the neighborhood underscore that nothing changes for the better forever—life is full of ups and downs, and the fate and demographics of a neighborhood are never fixed.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The play begins in September 1959. Onstage the audience can see a cross-section of the first floor of a bungalow in the Clybourne Park neighborhood of Chicago. Visible is a living room, dining room, staircase and a series of doors—one that leads outside, one to the basement, and one to the kitchen. The house is well-furnished, but in chaos, with cardboard boxes piled across the stage. It is clear the white couple living in the house, Russ and Bev Stoller, is in the process of moving out.

The play begins with a description of the interior of a house in Clybourne Park. It is well taken care of, indicating that the neighborhood is affluent. This is notable mostly in how it compares to the set for Act 2, when the demographics of the neighborhood have changed, and the house's dilapidated interior reflects the economic depression of the neighborhood.

Russ sits, reading a magazine, eating Neapolitan ice cream out of a carton. Although it is midafternoon, he's barefoot and dressed in a pajama top and chinos. Bev comes downstairs and begins to pack a box. She tells Russ he doesn't have to eat the ice cream, and he responds that it would just be going to waste otherwise.

Russ's clothing and behavior is out of place in the 1950s, when middle class families dressed fairly formally even inside their own homes, and the concept of loungewear had yet to become popular. His strange outfit indicates that there is something wrong with his mental state.

Francine, a black woman dressed in a maid's uniform, enters from the kitchen to talk to Bev. Bev tries to give Francine a chafing dish that she never uses. Although Francine admits she doesn't have that type of dish, she tells Bev she can't accept the gift. Bev continues to insist Francine take the dish, and Francine continues to decline it. Eventually Bev gives up and Francine returns to the kitchen.

Bev's attempts to give her chafing dish to Francine are well-meaning but misguided. She genuinely cannot understand why Francine would not want one of her possessions, not considering that perhaps no one needs a chafing dish, or that Francine sees the offering as a condescending gesture.

Bev continues packing boxes in the living room. She sees Russ's ice cream and considers the name, Neapolitan. She thinks it's funny and wonders what the origin of it is. Russ thinks Neapolitan comes from Naples, Italy, but Bev disagrees. Russ isn't initially engaged in the conversation. When Bev begins considering, out loud, what a person from Naples would be called, Russ grumbles, "Told you what *I* think,"

Bev attempts to connect to Russ but he resists her efforts. His grumbling is an indication that he feels his wife often ignores him or misunderstands him. This is likely true generally in their marriage from day to day, but it also proves true with regard to Bev's treatment of Russ's depression.

Bev looks for grammatical rules that govern the naming of people from cities that end with the letter "S." Russ joins in, suggesting Des Moines, Brussels, and Paris, all of which Bev rejects as good examples, but in a good-natured way. Russ laughs at the word Muscovites (people from Moscow), and Bev jokes that they might be musky. As they talk, Francine enters and exits from the kitchen with packaging, but is either not noticed or actively ignored.

This is the first moment in the play where Russ and Bev seem to be happy to be together, and the first time that they genuinely connect. Conversations and word games related to geography remain a motif throughout the play—often temporarily bringing people together in their shared love of small talk and trivia. Francine, whom Bev sometimes treats as a friend, is ignored when it is inconvenient to pay attention to her.

Riffing on residents of the Congo, called *Congolese*, Russ wonders why people don't say *Mongolese*. Bev tries to correct him, suggesting "Mongol-*oid*," but is immediately embarrassed when Russ reminds her that term is used to refer to people with developmental disorders or learning disabilities. Bev mentions "the Wheeler boy," a disabled boy who works bagging groceries at the local grocery store. There's an awkward silence, before Bev says, "But that's nice, isn't it, in a way? To know we all have our place." Russ agrees.

The word "mongoloid" was used specifically to refer to people with Down syndrome. It is now considered a slur, but in the 1950s it was widely used. Throughout the first act, "the Wheeler boy" is used as an example of someone who knows his place, and was able to integrate into the neighborhood despite his disability. Bev's comment refers specifically to the boy, but also to her general outlook on life, an outlook that privileges order and niceties over complexity and nuance.

There is another silence before Russ starts the game again. He has remembered the capital of Mongolia, which does not impress Bev. It does remind her, however, that Russ was supposed to change the mailing address of their *National Geographic* subscription. Russ pretends he had forgotten, and Bev becomes angry, since she reminded him numerous times, but then he reveals he did it the previous week, and was just joking with her.

Russ attempts to joke with his wife, but his humor falls flat, and she becomes angry instead. Their relationship is rocky, as little disappointments—like Russ forgetting to cancel a subscription—can so swiftly ruin their good mood.

Unamused by Russ's joke, Bev asks if he has moved the **footlocker** down from upstairs like she asked. He says he hasn't because it's a two-person job. She then asks him if he's going to change out of his clothes, but Russ says he hadn't thought about it. After another silence, Bev starts to remember, out loud, a joke Russ told at the Rotary last year. She tells Russ that he's funny, but he rejects the compliment. Bev wonders why Russ doesn't go to the club anymore.

Russ's shabby appearance is an indication of some kind of mental instability or emotional difficulty—but Bev either misses or ignores it. Similarly, she doesn't see his altered behavior or the fact that he no longer goes to the Rotary Club (an organization that he once enjoyed) as a sign that anything is amiss. Although she has noticed and is confused by it, she doesn't seem to understand it.

Bev asks Russ not to shrug off her question and say "what's the point," because, by that logic, there's no point in anything. She tells Russ that although he might want to "sit in a chair all day and wait for the end of the world," that kind of behavior frightens her, and is not the way she wants to spend her life. Russ quietly tells Bev "Not trying to frighten you," before announcing "Ulan Bator!"—the capital of Mongolia, a relic of their earlier conversation.

Although they do not mention it, Bev and Russ are both trying to put their lives together after the death of their son. Russ has fallen into an apathetic depression, and feels as though nothing matters. Bev keeps sane by staying busy, and she cannot understand Russ's behavior. Russ attempts to make Bev laugh by bringing up their earlier conversation, but the moment has passed.

The phone rings and Francine answers. Her conversation with the man on the phone, who announces himself as Karl Linder, a neighbor, is interspersed with Bev and Russ's conversation. Bev tells Francine that she'll call Karl back, and promptly returns to the topic of the Rotary Club. She doesn't understand why Russ refuses to go, and why he doesn't care that people are concerned for him.

Bev still values the Clybourne Park neighborhood and the community it provides her. Although Russ no longer finds joy or solace in the community or in the Rotary Club, Bev cannot understand why his behavior has changed so radically.

Bev takes the phone from Francine and tries to convince Karl not to come visit, explaining that the house is in disarray and Russ is feeling under the weather. Russ is dismissive of Karl, but Bev's phone call continues for several minutes. It is interspersed with Russ's conversation with Jim, a local minister who has just entered through the front door.

Although Russ is dismissive of Karl, Bev is more polite, and humors their neighbor. She still feels like part of the community and works to maintain the family's social status. Russ, meanwhile, is forced to humor Jim, the local minister whose friendship he has no real desire to keep.

Jim is friendly and good-natured, joking with Russ about the state of the house. Russ, listening in on Bev's phone call with Karl, is distracted as Jim tells a long anecdote about how he injured his back moving a piano the previous month. Bev gets off the phone and starts to chat with Jim. She is much friendlier to him than Russ had been, and Jim appreciates the attention. Jim jokes that he was "*trying* to bestow the pearls of [his] wisdom" upon Russ, who insists he was listening.

Bev is invested in the Clybourne Park neighborhood, even though she and Russ will soon be leaving it. She values the connections and friendships she has with members of the community. Russ, meanwhile, has slowly cut himself off from everyone—his extended Clybourne Park community and even his wife, although he cares for her more than he cares for anyone else.


Russ asks Bev if Karl is coming over. She ignores the question and starts talking to Jim about Karl's wife, Betsy, who is very pregnant. As they're talking, Bev remembers her earlier question about the origin of the word *Neapolitan*, and asks Jim where it comes from. He agrees with Russ that it is related to Naples, and he and Russ continue to joke about geography. Bev is exasperated because she does not know enough trivia to join in, but encourages Russ to say "Ulan Bator," which he had been pronouncing in a funny way. Russ refuses to say it, and Jim is left to stand uncomfortably as Russ and Bev bicker.

Russ, Bev, and Jim are unable to connect as a group and fail to have a conversation in which they're all equally participating. Jim and Bev will happily gossip and discuss their neighbors, but that kind of small talk doesn't interest Russ, who would prefer to talk about geography, a subject in which Bev is unable to keep up. Bev and Russ continually return to a joke that brought them together earlier in the act—Russ's pronunciation of "Ulan Bator"—which fails to garner laughs although both use it as a kind of peace offering to the other.

Francine, who had entered from the kitchen and waited patiently for a break in the conversation, asks Bev if she is free to go. Bev asks her to move the **footlocker** she'd asked Russ to move earlier. Francine reminds Bev she needs to leave by three-thirty, which is soon, and Russ tells both women he'll move the footlocker. Francine exits again, gathering her things to leave. Several times throughout the exchange, Jim repeats—to no one in particular—that he would help except that, as he said before, he recently hurt his back.

Francine has come in to work as a favor to Bev, but understandably does not want to spend her weekend working. Bev is not conscientious of Francine's time, and doesn't see that asking her to stay later is an imposition. This underscores the different way the two women see their relationship. Bev sees Francine as a friend informally helping out, but Francine surely wouldn't be there at all if she weren't getting paid. Put more broadly, Bev the white woman sees herself as the magnanimous friend of her black staff worker, but in doing so makes unreasonable demands on that staff worker.


Bev offers Jim lunch, but he declines. She jokes about Russ's ice cream, and Russ responds, "can't pack ice cream in a suitcase," which Bev finds hilarious. Jim jokes you can only do that if you're moving to the North Pole, and Bev responds, "Thank goodness we're not moving *South!*" which leads to a moment of silence. Bev exits to the kitchen to see what food is available.

Bev always tries to participate in conversations and make jokes, but she often misspeaks—as she did earlier, when she referred to people from Mongolia as mongoloids. Here, the joke she makes is revealing: although she means it would be warmer in the South and the ice cream would melt, her joke also alludes to the fact that the southernmost neighborhoods of Chicago have a higher concentration of black residents. The resulting silence then shows how uncomfortable these characters are whenever the subject touches upon race, even accidentally.

Alone again, Jim and Russ make small talk. Jim overheard Bev tell Karl that Russ was under the weather, so Jim asks Russ what's wrong. Russ explains he's just taking time off to help Bev. They talk briefly about Jim's back injury, and Jim confesses in a whisper that he had to wear a truss while he recovered.

Jim misunderstands Russ's depression. Bev tells people he's "under the weather" as a way of explaining his behavior, but it seems his malady is more psychological than physical. Talking about a cold is seen as acceptable, but talking about depression is not. In fact, Jim's whisper about the truss he had to wear suggests that any mention of a man having weakness—physical or mental—is embarrassing.

Russ and Jim then discuss the move, including the fact that it will shorten Russ's commute to just five minutes. Russ also says that he's getting a new, carpeted corner office. Jim asks how Bev is doing, and Russ responds she's fine, but that she worries and gets over excited. Jim wonders aloud if Russ is the cause of her anxiety, which Russ denies before suddenly asking Jim if Bev had asked him to come over.

Russ and Jim's discussion of Bev is influenced by her gender. Jim not only assumes that because she's a woman, Bev is more high strung and anxious—but also that, as her husband, Russ is the cause of her troubles. However, Jim is not only *making an assumption; he's also privy to inside information, and has reason to suspect that Russ is the cause of Bev's distress because of his depressive behavior.*

Russ is clearly uncomfortable, and looks for Bev in hopes she'll come back into the room. Jim tells Russ that Bev cares about him—that in fact, "everybody cares about [him]." Russ responds that, although he's not a psychiatrist, he has noticed people have a tendency to "*brood*," and his advice is to "get up offa your rear end and *do* something."

Russ himself is unwilling to acknowledge that he might be struggling with depression. He dismisses the whole field of psychiatry, and argues that anyone who feels like brooding should snap themselves out of it. Ironically, Russ has spent much of the play so far brooding, and has seemed unable to snap himself *out of it. This is consistent with the play's broader message about the unwillingness or inability of its characters to get to the heart of difficult or uncomfortable realities, whether it's mental illness or racism.*

Jim, hoping to comfort Russ, tells him his son was a hero to his country. This is the first time the audience has heard of Russ and Bev's son, but Russ clearly does not want to discuss him: he talks over Jim. Jim assures Russ his son is in a better place and suggests that Russ might want to talk to someone about his emotions. Russ points out Jim is not a psychiatrist and asks him to mind his own business. Finally, Russ tells Jim "to go fuck [him]self," which surprises and offends Jim.

Russ again dismisses the value of psychiatry. He's uninterested in talking to a professional about his feelings, and equally uninterested in talking to Jim. Jim is just trying to connect with and soothe Russ, but it doesn't work. Russ's rebuke of Jim may seem harsh to modern readers, but would have been even more offensive in the 1950s when codes of conduct were more conservative. His willingness to curse emphasizes the ways in which he is not aligned with polite society.

Bev reenters from the kitchen, and notes the mood in the room has changed. Russ has stood up, and Jim tells Bev he's going to leave. Bev asks Russ what he did to offend Jim, while Jim explains to Bev it's clear Russ wants him out of the house. Bev complains to Russ that he is being ugly and she dislikes ugliness. Russ tells Bev he dislikes Jim encroaching on what he believes are private matters "between me and the memory of my son." Bev and Jim discuss Russ's mental state, and it is clear that Bev invited Jim over to talk to Russ about his emotions and recent troubling behavior.

Bev continues to play the role of the accommodating hostess, a role that is complicated by her hostile husband. Bev and Russ's differences are clear in how they treat Jim, but also in how they treat the memory of their son, Kenneth. Bev remembers him fondly, and tries to stay positive and keep the ugliness of grief out of her life. By contrast, Russ feels that Bev is clinging too tightly to comfort, while he prefers to immerse himself in his despair. The couple's inability to communicate directly about Russ's behavior suggests that they lack the tools or language necessary to speak about the painful traumas of their past.

Russ moves toward the staircase. He tells Bev and Jim they can discuss his son, Kenneth, on their own time if it comforts them. Bev is indignant, and wonders if Russ thinks she doesn't deserve comfort. Russ responds that Kenneth didn't receive much comfort, so why should they. Jim interjects that he also served in the military, but Russ responds that Jim sat behind a desk like a coward. He couldn't understand because he didn't kill anyone. In the silence following this remark the doorbell rings.

No one is able to get through to Russ. Bev feels that he is trying to make her unhappy and take away her hopes for healing and emotional comfort. Jim tries to relate to Kenneth's military service, but Russ rejects this olive branch. Kenneth was clearly misunderstood by the members of his community, and Russ feels that he himself is being misunderstood, too. Neither Kenneth nor Russ, however, seemed to know what they wanted, or what could make them feel better and more included. In this sense, Clybourne Park is deeply concerned with demonstrating the importance to its various characters of feeling seen and recognized by others.

Jim goes to open the door for Albert, Francine's husband, who has come to pick her up. Russ exits upstairs. Jim doesn't know whether to invite Albert in, so Bev does and makes small talk before letting him sit and wait for his wife. Jim, within earshot of Albert, whispers to Bev that he should go. Bev asks Jim to stay because she doesn't want to be alone with Russ. She explains that Russ stays up late and doesn't see the point in things he used to find fun.

Although Bev tries to be a friendly and welcoming hostess, interactions with Albert are awkward. Because he is black, she is less accommodating of him than she is of her white guests, leaving him to sit by himself while she talks with Jim. Russ's emotional outbursts scare Bev, who doesn't know how to cope with her husband's erratic behavior. Having exhausted her resources, she turns to a friend for help.

Albert gets up to wait outside. Bev doesn't understand why he's leaving and calls for Francine, who eventually comes out dressed in street clothes and carrying bags of hand-me-downs. Bev jokes how lucky Francine is to have door-to-door service, and then tells Albert how much she appreciates having "a friend like Francine here, and on a *Saturday*."

Albert likely feels that he is intruding on a private conversation, which is why tries to go outside. Bev's joke to Albert is tone-deaf. Francine only has door-to-door service because the family has a single car, and she needs to be picked up if she doesn't want to walk. Bev's comment that Francine is her "friend" is also oblivious. Francine has come to work for her because she is her employee, not because Francine is doing Bev a favor.

As Bev says goodbye to Francine she mentions the **footlocker**, which still needs to be taken care of. Albert offers to move it, but Francine subtly tries to tell him she wants to leave, pretending they have an appointment for which they are running late. Albert doesn't take the hint. Francine says she can't help because her hands are full, and Albert offers to put her bags in the car. Francine says she can handle the bags herself, and she and Albert go to drop them in the car so she can help him move the trunk.

Although Francine cannot say it aloud, she is unhappy to be working on a Saturday, and is unhappy to be kept late into the afternoon. Her bags are not actually an issue, and are not actually the reason she cannot help with the trunk. Instead, she's angry that her time is not being respected by Bev, and she is angry that Albert doesn't share her indignation.

Once again, Bev asks Francine if she wants the chafing dish, and once again she declines. As Albert and Francine exit through the front door, they pass Karl Linder, who was about the ring the bell. Outside, Albert quietly asks Francine "What is the *matter* with you?"

Bev is unable to understand why Francine doesn't want her serving dish, which is large, impractical, and far from a household necessity. Albert doesn't understand Francine's reluctance to help Bev. Albert, who doesn't work for the Stoller family, has less reason to be frustrated by their dismissive treatment.

Bev invites Karl inside, but he hesitates, revealing his wife is in the car. Bev tells him to bring her in, and Karl disappears to fetch Betsy. Russ takes this moment to cross from the staircase to the kitchen. He's now wearing shoes and a shirt. Bev makes a comment but he ignores her. Bev and Jim turn back to each other. She whispers that she hoped two and a half years since their son's death and a new job would help Russ mourn. She worries she's being silly but Jim assures her she isn't. Russ crosses again, from the kitchen to the basement. Bev asks what he's doing but he gives her no details.

Bev is a polite, conscientious hostess, kindly accommodating Karl and his wife, who are uninvited guests. Russ, by contrast, has put on clothes to look more presentable, but makes no effort to entertain the Linders. Once again Bev explains she doesn't understand why Russ is acting so strangely. She feels that enough time has passed that he should have finished mourning, failing to consider that mourning takes different amounts of time for different people, and conditions like depression have no explicit expiration date. Without the proper tools to communicate about complex issues, the characters in Clybourne Park are often childlike in their helplessness.

Karl and Betsy return. Betsy is visibly very pregnant, and Bev coos over her stomach. Betsy is deaf, and her speech is often difficult to understand. Bev over enunciates when she speaks to Bev. Jim knows limited sign language and so finger-spells a greeting to Betsy. She laughs and signs to Karl, who tells Jim he misspelled, and told Betsy she was expecting a *storm* instead of a *stork*.

Although Bev and Jim make an effort to accommodate Betsy, they don't entirely know how to treat her. Bev over-annunciates, which doesn't actually help with lip reading, and Jim kindly tries to spell words out in sign language, although he isn't very good and it just complicates communication. When Betsy speaks, it is difficult for the other characters to understand her. In the script her lines are translated, but her words might not be completely decipherable when spoken by an actor onstage.

Betsy jokes aloud that she'll need an umbrella, and Bev is happy to understand the joke. Jim responds that he must have rusty fingers, which Betsy doesn't understand at first, and Karl must translate. Betsy responds that Jim must need soap, and Jim laughs politely. Bev then re-explains the joke to Jim, who had laughed politely because he did not find the joke funny, not because he didn't understand it.

The characters come together to laugh about Betsy's joke, but their laughter is forced—likely an attempt to keep the conversation going more than a genuine response. Bev tries to make sure everyone is included and everyone understands, which just makes the situation more awkward—a behavior she repeats throughout the act.

Russ returns form the basement carrying a shovel. He asks Bev about his work gloves but she ignores him. He acknowledges Betsy because she says hello to him, but ignores Karl. Albert and Francine enter through the front door and go upstairs to deal with the **footlocker**. Bev invites Betsy to the kitchen to make iced tea. Karl remembers that Bev told him Russ was under the weather. He asks Russ if he's contagious which takes a moment for Russ to understand, before responding, brusquely, "Not contagious."

Bev refuses to communicate with Russ when she feels he is being rude. For the moment, she prioritizes her guests and her role as hostess over her role as his wife. Karl misunderstands Russ's illness. Bev has been telling people he's sick, but Russ doesn't have any physical ailment—rather, he's depressed. Karl mostly cares about Russ's illness because he is concerned about protecting his wife, Betsy. He does not actually care about Russ's health. Here, as later in Act 2, many opportunities for achieving real understanding are missed because the conversation plays out at a superficial level.

Karl tells Russ he has something he needs to talk to him about. Jim tries to leave but Karl says he thinks Jim's insight could be helpful. Russ is uninterested but allows Karl to talk. He begins a speech several times but Bev interrupts to ask if he wants tea, and then again to deliver the tea. The second time Bev enters, Karl panics, worried something has happened to Betsy, but she's fine. He asks Bev to make sure Betsy takes small, slow sips of her iced tea.

Karl is overprotective of Betsy. Although it is unlikely anything would happen to her, and although Bev is looking after her anyway, he immediately assumes Bev must be reentering the room to deliver some bad news. Karl treats Betsy like a child. As an adult woman she presumably knows how to drink tea without choking, and doesn't need his constant supervision. Repeatedly throughout the play, men and white people are shown treating women and black people as incapable or inferior, when the female and black characters in the play are perhaps the ones least in need of help.

Betsy and Bev go to the dining table where they communicate by writing on a pad of paper. Karl resumes speaking, and explains he's been so concerned about Betsy because her last pregnancy, two years before, ended with the death of the baby during delivery. Russ says he knew that, but offers no condolences. Karl begins to tell Russ he's not trying to compare "*our* little…setback…to what the two of you endured," but Russ interrupts him, asking him to get to the point.

Bev does her best to accommodate Betsy and to communicate with her as a friend despite the difficulties presented by her disability, which affects her ability to participate in normal conversation. Karl attempts to connect with Russ over the deaths of their children, but Russ has no desire to commiserate, and no desire to make small talk.

Karl announces that the neighborhood Community Association has uncovered that the buyers of the Stollers' house are black—or, as he says, "colored." As he speaks, Jim, Russ, and Bev talk over him: Jim is incredulous, and Russ calls to Bev. Neither of the Stollers knew the identity of their buyers, as they sold the house through Ted Driscol, a real estate broker.

Although it was not his business, Karl has appointed himself as unofficial gatekeeper of Clybourne Park, which is, presumably, why he looked into the race of the family purchasing the Stoller house. The fact that they are black is shocking to the whole room, because racial segregation, although technically illegal, is still widely enforced by realtors and homeowners alike. In this moment, the racism that has kept to the margins of various interactions takes center stage.

Jim interrupts Karl, asking if he should be saying "Negro" instead of "colored." Karl responds that he says them interchangeably, "and of course I said *Negro* to them." He continues that the broker, Ted, is the sort of man to put his financial interests over that of the community, and reminds the room of a black family who moved onto Kostner Avenue, nearby.

Jim and Karl's discussion of "Negro" versus "colored" makes it seem as though they genuinely care about African Americans and their feelings. In reality, this is a show of politeness that obscures their deeply racist opposition to integrating their neighborhood. The terms they use matter less than their actual beliefs, which are that black people should be kept out of the neighborhood.

Karl continues to talk, saying that he's gone to meet with the family, and although he believes Clybourne Park is a "progressive community," which has accommodated Gelman's grocery store, which used to be Kopeckne's, this is too far. Murray Gelman, he points out "found a way to *fit in*," and "*fitting into* a community is what it all comes down to." Everyone also agrees that Mr. Gelman integrated more easily because he did things like hiring Mr. Wheeler, who is disabled.

Gelman's grocery store was presumably run by a Jewish family, whereas Kopeckne's which was likely run by Protestants or at least Christians. The group implies they're tolerant of Jewish people, and therefore progressive, but it seems that racial integration is too much to ask. It's worth noting, also, that race—because its definitions are largely socially constructed—has shifting boundaries. In the 1950s, a Jewish man such as Gelman would not have been seen as "white" by most Americans—and therefore, the white characters onstage probably think of their acceptance of Gelman as a sign of racial tolerance.

Karl doesn't think integrating will lead to positive change, and argues that to let a black family move in would disregard the needs of the community. Bev wonders if the family moving in has needs, but both Karl and Jim reject her condescendingly, saying she's right in principle, but is ignoring the commandment to "love thy neighbor," specifically the neighbors she already has. Bev wonders why she can't love these people who would become her neighbors, but Karl says she can't have it both ways, and points out that she's moving, anyway. Bev continues to argue but Karl, frustrated, shuts her down saying, "Darling, I came to talk to Russ."

Karl and Jim see the established white community in Clybourne Park as an important group of people to protect. While Bev thinks every person should be considered, including the black family moving in, Karl and Jim do not see this family as a part of their neighborhood, and as a result, they do not see them as worthy of their empathy. Karl engages with Bev for a while, but eventually brushes her off. He wants to talk to Russ, whom he sees as the man of the house—the patriarch, the one capable of making decisions—despite the fact that Bev is much more involved in the neighborhood and with her neighbors than he is.

Albert comes down from upstairs, his jacket off. He tries to interrupt the conversation but is ignored until a large Army **footlocker** comes crashing down the stairs. Francine, who had been holding on to it, has lost her grip. She comes running down the stairs after the trunk, apologizing. Russ, frustrated that Bev ignored his promise that he would move the trunk, yells that he said he'd move it. Albert offers to move the trunk from where it sits, blocking the stairs, but Russ tells him to leave it, before getting up and storming down to the basement.

As the footlocker careens down the stairs it mirrors the trajectory of the conversation. The assembled neighbors are on a verbal collision course that will soon spiral out of their control, spanning multiple topics and reaching back into the past and Kenneth's suicide. The trunk also reminds Bev and Russ of a continuing argument they've been having: Bev has asked Russ to move the trunk multiple times, and although he has repeatedly said he would, he has not.

As Albert and Francine prepare to leave, Jim intercepts them. He wants to know how they would feel moving into a neighborhood like Clybourne Park. Karl tries to interrupt, arguing they should ask "those who stand to lose," but Jim presses on.

Although Jim is implicitly asking whether Albert and Francine, a black family, would feel comfortable in a white neighborhood, he does not directly ask about race, instead using coded language. It is reflective of the characters' general inability to address uncomfortable subjects directly or productively, instead sowing division and further discomfort.

Francine doesn't want to offend anyone, and keeps repeating how nice the neighborhood is. Bev keeps trying, unhelpfully to rephrase Jim's question, until Albert cuts her off: he understands that Jim is asking how they would feel "living next to white folks." Bev, uncomfortable, recalls how she and Francine "over the years [...] have shared so many wonderful" memories, a reverie Karl interrupts.

After prevaricating for several minutes, Albert finally asks the question Jim has been trying to ask. Jim was afraid to make the conversation explicitly about race, but Albert is willing if it means they will be able to stop talking in euphemisms. Bev tries to argue that white and black people can get along because she and Francine are close friends. Francine agrees in the moment, but has not demonstrated a great love for Bev throughout the play so far.

Karl shares that he believes different groups of people have different customs, for example Betsy is Scandinavian, and eats a dish called lutefisk that he dislikes. Karl wonders if Francine would even find food she enjoyed at the local grocery store. Albert jokes he couldn't shop anywhere that didn't sell pig feet and collard greens, and Francine says, defiantly, that she likes spaghetti and meatballs.

Karl and Jim point to reasons that black and white people are different. Karl tries to get Francine to say she would be unable to shop at the local grocery store, and Albert jokes that he only eats the collard greens and pigs feet, foods that are staples in African American cuisine—suggesting Albert understands perfectly well that he's being treated as a stand-in for all black people.


Jim points out that the local church is more reserved than the First Presbyterian in the Hamilton Park neighborhood.

The Hamilton Park church is primarily black, whereas the Clybourne Park church is predominantly white. Jim argues that because the black church is more lively, its congregation members would not fit in the with the white residents of his neighborhood.


Russ returns, calmer, from the basement, in time to hear Karl bring up skiing as a point of racial division. Karl has never seen a black person skiing, and so concludes "there is just something about the pastime of skiing that doesn't appeal to the Negro community."

All of Karl's arguments regarding racial difference are flimsy, but this one is especially preposterous. He ignores that perhaps black people would also like to ski, but that economic factors prevent them from being able to take such expensive trips. It speaks to a general tendency not to see racial differences as systemic, but rather to take an essentialist view of what makes blacks and whites different.

Russ interrupts Karl, and reminds him the house is sold, and that he and Bev are moving on Monday. Karl reveals that the Community Association made a counter offer to the buyers, who rejected the offer, but he points out that the Stollers could halt the sale and say that Ted had deceived them about the buyers. Bev points out the family "could be perfectly lovely," but Karl thinks that is beside the point. He predicts that once a single black family moves in, white families will begin to leave, and the neighborhood will decline, until it is a primarily black neighborhood with a few white families, like his, that are unable to leave.

Karl attempts to remind the Stollers that even though they are leaving the neighborhood, they still have an obligation to it. He sees the arrival of a black family as something that will irrevocably damage Clybourne Park, and will lead to a complete racial turnover. In the 1950s, as today, black families, on average, were less wealthy than white families, so Karl was in fact correct that an influx of black families would lead to a decrease in neighborhood wealth overall. Still, although he understands the economics of the situation, he lacks any empathy for the black families themselves.

Karl then asks Francine and Albert how they would feel, if white people moved into their neighborhood, reflecting, "that might be to their *advantage*," before Russ asks him to stop speaking. The two argue back and forth about Karl's right to speak before Karl, offended, finally leaves. Betsy, unable to keep up with the conversation, asks Karl what happened as they head outside.

Karl's assumption that Francine and Albert's neighborhood would be enhanced by the addition of a white family is clearly racist. Betsy, who had been included in small talk earlier, was entirely excluded from this conversation, partially because of her deafness, and likely partially because Karl does not feel like these matters concern her. In any case, Karl's treatment of Betsy is reflective of ways in which different characters in the play are excluded because of disadvantages that are outside their control.

Jim rises to leave, and Francine asks Bev if it's okay to go, but before anyone can move Karl bursts back in through the front door. He threatens to tell the new family moving in why the house is being sold below market value. Russ forcefully asks Karl to leave, but Karl continues talking, accusing the Stollers of behaving in their "own selfish interests," instead of that of the community. Russ halts the conversation by calling Karl a "son of a bitch."

Once again, Karl tries to convince the Stollers to consider the neighborhood, and the debt they owe to their community. He feels that allowing a black family to move in ignores the needs of all the white families of Clybourne Park. Karl's accusations of selfishness are particularly ironic because he's selfishly advocating for the forceful exclusion of a black family from his neighborhood.

Russ, fed up, begins an explosive monologue. Throughout, Karl tries to cut him off for the sake of pregnant Betsy, whom he tells to wait in the car (though she does not go). Russ questions the notion that he has a community, explaining that he feels people have treated him and Bev like outsiders for the past two and a half years. He questions the importance of having a community if that community would not even help his son, Kenneth, after he was discharged from the military, accused of murdering civilians. Russ is outraged that Gelman's Grocery would hire a man with a disability but they wouldn't hire Kenneth.

Russ feels that Karl is unfairly asking him to consider a community that has not been considering him, and did not consider his son. Russ has been alienated from the community since before Kenneth's suicide, and seems to blame the community's unkindness for the suicide itself. He has no obligation to a neighborhood that he believes caused his son's death. Karl once again attempts to protect Betsy from offensive speech. This is ironic, as she cannot hear, and has not even been following the conversation.

Bev doesn't believe Kenneth committed the crimes of which he was accused, and remembers how he was a gentle boy, calling on Francine to corroborate. Karl begins to apologize for bringing up this fraught family history, but Bev accuses him of intentionally using the tragedy of their son's death to manipulate them.

Related to their earlier discussion, Bev prefers comfort, which sometimes means she ignores the truth. Russ, meanwhile, has been stewing in the tragedy of their son's death, which has emotionally devastated him. Bev's suggestion that Russ is using his grief to manipulate others implies that she sees his depression as being somehow inauthentic, further reinforcing the notion that men were expected not to exhibit emotion.

As Bev and Karl speak, Russ crosses to the **footlocker** and extracts a letter, which he begins to read. It is Kenneth's suicide note, which addresses his mother and father and tells them not to blame themselves. Bev becomes immediately agitated, and locks herself in the bathroom until Russ stops reading. Jim tells him to calm down, but Russ just swears at him. Karl is upset that Russ is cursing around Betsy, but Russ simply tells Betsy to "go fuck [her]self," which she doesn't understand.

Kenneth's letter, which was meant to communicate his final thoughts to his parents, and to ease their pain, has instead led to greater anguish. It is unclear if Bev ever read the note, and although Russ has, it seems he has not internalized its message. Once again, Karl tries to protect Betsy from hearing offensive language, but she cannot hear it, and does not understand when Russ swears at her.

Russ sarcastically tells Karl he can make copies of the letter and hand it out at Rotary, saying "Rotary news: Kid comes back from Korea, goes upstairs and wraps an extension cord around his neck." He tells Karl he can tell the buyers whatever he wants, but he personally doesn't care if "a hundred Ubangi tribesman" move in: he's through with the neighborhood and all the people in it.

In this explosive monologue, Russ makes it clear for the final time that he has cut all ties with the neighborhood. Kenneth's note, which was mean to bring some kind of peace to his parents, is used as a tool to further alienate them from their community. By using hyperbole and making the jab about "a hundred Ubangi tribesmen," Russ also demonstrates that he isn't necessarily a crusader for integration, that he truly does not care about the neighborhood, and that perhaps he even enjoys the idea of helping spread some chaos in the neighborhood he has grown to hate.

The room is stunned into silence for a moment. Jim suggests bowing heads in prayer and Russ threatens to punch him. Jim backs up and trips over a moving box. Karl, afraid for Betsy's safety, sends her running out of the house to the car.

Russ shows no concern for his reputation at this point. He has worn pajamas in front of friends, he has used curse words, and now he has threatened physical violence. For perhaps the first time, Karl's concern for his wife seems justified. Russ likely wouldn't hit Betsy, but Karl's precaution shows that Russ has crossed a line in the eyes of those around him.

Albert goes to intervene. Francine tries to make him stay out of it, but he puts his hand on Russ's shoulder. Russ then turns on him, offended that Albert touched him in his own home. Karl and Jim take this moment to leave. Albert backs away from Russ, and Francine reprimands him. She thinks "they're *all* a buncha idiots," and Albert was idiotic for trying to get involved. Francine exits to the car without Albert, who is left in the middle of the living room.

Although Albert is just trying to help and Russ has acted as though he is potentially supportive of integration, his response to being touched by Albert makes it clear his views on race are anything but enlightened. Francine is frustrated that she and Albert were brought into this fight. She is not invested in the Stoller family and does not have any interest in helping them work through their problems. In this way, although she is treated as an inferior, Francine remains one of the more dignified characters to appear in all of Act 1.

Bev returns to the living room from the bathroom. She offers to pay Albert for moving the **footlocker**, which he declines. She insists that "it's just money," but he refuses to take it. She tries to give him the chafing dish, which he does not want, and he eventually tells her "we don't *want* your things. *Please*. We go our *own* things," which offends her. As he leaves she tells him she would be "proud" and "honored" to have Albert, Francine, and their two children as neighbors. Albert corrects her: they have three children. Bev continues that maybe people, black and white, could learn from each other if they lived together, but trails off. Albert leaves to the car.

Although Bev tries to be generous in offering Albert her chafing dish, it comes off as thoughtless, as does her dismissal of money, a luxury not everyone has. Even after Albert explains that he doesn't want the dish, Bev doesn't understand why, and takes personal offense. She sees his rejection of the dish as a rejection of her. But even as she tries to prove that she cares about Albert and Francine she reveals she doesn't even know how many children they have. In fact, she does not know them at all. That Bev trails off indicates that she can barely muster enough optimism about race relations in America to finish her sentence.


Russ, who had dragged the **footlocker** out to the backyard through the kitchen, returns with the work gloves he was looking for earlier. He tells Bev he'll dig a hole to bury the footlocker tomorrow. He apologizes for losing his temper, but she tells him it's all right. He then brings up his commute, and how easy it will be to get to the office. Bev wonders what she'll do while he's gone, and the two of them struggle to come up with anything. Bev says, "things." Russ suggests "projects." The lights fade as Russ says, one final time, the capital of Mongolia: "Ulan Bator!"

Bev and Russ calm their nerves with small talk. They don't say anything new to each other, but by repeating facts about Russ's commute and thinking about their daily routines they try to will themselves back into normality. Unfortunately, as they wonder what Bev will do each day, a hole in her life is uncovered. Without a job, a son to care for, of any friends or hobbies, she'll be lonely and bored. Once again Russ uses "Ulan Bator," a phrase which earlier in the act made Bev laugh, as a peace offering. These words could be read as a suggestion that they might learn to get along once again, but might also suggest that they truly have nothing to talk about.


ACT 2

This second act opens in September of 2009. It's a Saturday afternoon. The set is still the interior of the house from Act I, but it is rundown and shabby, much of the floor linoleum, plaster crumbling from the walls. In the center of the living room, six people sit in a circle: a white couple named Steve and Lindsey, and their lawyer, Kathy, and a black couple named Kevin and Lena, and their lawyer, Tom.

Unlike in Act 1, where the house was full of moving boxes but still well taken care of, now it is run-down. It suggests a more general dilapidation of the neighborhood as a whole, and helps suggest the lower economic status of Clybourne Park in the 2000s compared to the 1950s—and why Steve and Lindsey would want to renovate.

The group begins discussing a document of neighborhood guidelines for renovation. Steve and Lindsey have recently purchased the house, and want to make renovations. Specifically, they want to make it much taller than it already is. They have decided to meet with Kevin and Lena to discuss restrictions the neighborhood association has proposed on making changes to the area's historic homes.

Lindsey and Steve at first seem amenable to conversations about the size of their house. They want to be courteous neighbors, or at least appear to be courteous and open to suggestions. Lindsey and Steve go into the meeting seeing it as a problem related only to their house, whereas Kevin and Lena are worried about the neighborhood as a whole, and how a single house can affect a community. That Kevin and Lena are concerned with preserving the history of the neighborhood puts them, ironically, on equal footing with Karl from Act 1, who also wanted to preserve his neighborhood, albeit for different reasons.


The group begins by addressing terminology, discussing what a *frontage* is, and how the way frontage is defined will affect the renovations Steve and Lindsey want to make to the house. Kevin wonders if the language matters, but Steve says he doesn't want to overlook a definition and get "screwed because of the *language*."

The reason for the characters' meeting in Act 2 is to discuss a document that will set the terms of the renovations. The language of this document is very important, as it will determine whether or not the house will violate certain standards. The true purpose of the document is to aid in the preservation of the history of Clybourne Park by prohibiting certain changes—a different kind of conservatism than the conservatism demonstrated by Karl in Act 1, but a type of conservatism no less.

Kathy stands up to take a phone call from Hector, the architect, and Lindsey and Steve briefly argue about whether the perimeter of the house can be changed. Lindsey and Steve turn back to the rest of the group and apologize. They talk about the architect, who is upset that his plans might be rejected. While Kathy talks on the phone, Lindsey tells Kevin and Lena how much she loves the neighborhood, especially the location, which will radically reduce her commute. Kevin and Lindsey realize they work across the street from each other, and Steve and Kevin realize they have a friend in common, Kyle Hendrickson.

Here, communication breaks down for one of many times during this act. Kathy's phone call distracts from the central conversation and the purpose of the meeting. The small talk echoes conversations from Act 1 about reduced commute times. It is unclear why Steve brings Kyle up, but the implication is that it is because Kyle and Kevin are both black men. The suggestion is that Steve, as a white man, feels that he has next to nothing in common with Kevin.


Kathy passes the phone to Lindsey, who wants to talk to Hector. Steve makes a comment about Spaniards, like the architect, and how they are temperamental. Kevin agrees, but Tom says Hector seemed "cool".

This is the first of many strangely racialized comments made during the second act. Steve, who is white and believes the world to be too politically correct, likely feels he is just speaking the truth, and Kevin, trying to get along, agrees. Tom pushes back, but doesn't actually challenge Steve's racially charged statement.

The group discusses trips their families have taken across Europe and Northern Africa—Morocco, Spain, Prague, and Switzerland. Kevin and Kathy do most of the talking. Eventually Lena tries to make an announcement, but Steve cuts her off, wanting to wait for Lindsey. There's a pause in the conversation, and then Tom suggests returning to the document while they wait. Steve immediately derails the conversation by pointing out that earlier Kathy had claimed Marrakech as the capital of Morocco, but in fact it is Rabat. Tom tries to get the conversation back on track, but Steve and Kathy continue to argue.

The discussion of geography mirrors conversations in Act 1 about the capitals of various nations. Everyone is speaking but nothing important is being said, and when Lena, who does have an on-topic comment, tries to say her piece, she is made to wait while the small talk continues. Unlike in Act 1, where both race and class separated the black and white characters, here Kevin and Lena are of the same socio-economic bracket as the white characters, as evidenced by their extensive travels. This suggests that some social progress has been made since Act 1, but—as the play will go on to show—the characters still find themselves unable to communicate about sensitive issues.


Lindsey returns. She explains Hector was upset that he wasn't included in the meeting. Steve asks Lindsey what the capital of Morocco is, and he, Kathy, and Lindsey continue to discuss geography. Steve has the most extensive knowledge of geography and national capitals, and is offended when Lindsey confuses Bali and Mali, as they are "*distinct countries*."

Steve is offended by Lindsey's geographic confusion, claiming that Bali and Mali are "distinct countries." However, his indignation at Lindsey's ignorance is ironic because Bali, while distinct from Mali, is in fact not *its own country, but a province of Indonesia. It's one of many moments in which his character is portrayed in an unsympathetic light.*

Lena tries again to make her announcement, but is again interrupted when Kathy asks to be reminded of Lena's name, prompting everyone to reintroduce themselves. Before Lena can speak again, Dan, a contractor working in the backyard, enters from the kitchen. He's digging a trench and announces there's been an issue, and Steve gets up and goes outside with him to deal with it.

Once again, the conversation is derailed before it can truly begin. Although Kathy is trying to be polite, it would in fact be more polite to allow Lena to speak. Dan, who is played by the same actor who plays Russ, is more explicitly (and literally) an outsider in this Act. Although the characters who are played by the same actors in different acts do not perfectly map onto each other, Dan spends the act focused on excavating Kenneth's trunk, just as Russ spent Act 1 mentally immersed in the past.

Tom briefly gets the conversation back on track. He explains that the neighborhood has tried to put together a set of guidelines for future renovations. Essentially, measurements are based on the average house in Clybourne Park, so that renovating a house to make it taller than average would require the volume of the house to be reduced in other places. Kathy becomes immediately defensive, and argues that there's too much variation in existing house sizes to extrapolate into guidelines for future renovation.

Tom tries to explain that the regulations have been put in place to maintain the integrity of the original neighborhood. Kathy, and by extension her clients, are unwilling to compromise. Although they've come to this meeting, Kathy makes it clear that they have no real intention of changing their house or taking any recommendations unless they are legally mandated to do so. As in Act 1, what matters here is the appearance of civility and politeness, not the character's actual willingness to change or their beliefs.

Tom assumes the Landmarks Committee will pass the neighborhood petition to preserve the neighborhood, which Kathy again pushes back against. Tom doesn't understand why she's being so confrontational. Kathy feels it's too late in the process to be making changes.

Although the group has gathered under the pretense of examining Lindsey and Steve's proposed renovations, it becomes clear they have no real intention of changing their architectural plans, which means all of this has been wasted, ineffective communication.

Lindsey explains that she thinks "these houses are *so* charming," but the house was so run-down she would rather build a new one. Tom explains that Kevin and Lena called him when they realized Lindsey and Steve planned to build a house fifteen feet taller than the surrounding buildings. By pushing back, he, Lena, and Kevin are just trying to maintain the "*integrity*—the *architectural integrity*" of a "historically significant" neighborhood.

Lindsey likes the neighborhood superficially, but she and Steve are not interested in the same aspects of Clybourne Park as Lena and Kevin. Lena and Kevin, along with Tom, feel as though they are the stewards of the neighborhood, and want to preserve its historical significance, partially by preserving the physical houses themselves. The play suggests that it is natural for people to be attached to the history of a place regardless of their race, but that the impulse to preserve history repeatedly comes into conflict with the nature of the world, which is to change.

Tom's phone rings and he leaves the conversation to answer the call. Steve returns from the backyard, and explains the diggers hit something as they started working on a filtration system for a koi pond. Lena suggests everyone turn off his or her phone. Steve suggests getting back to business, but Kevin doesn't want to start without his lawyer. Instead, they discuss Lindsey's pregnancy and Kevin and Lena's three children.

Once again, the conversation is interrupted by a phone call. Lena's suggestion is an attempt to streamline communication and to actually accomplish something, but it doesn't help get Tom back or restart the conversation the group gathered to have. It's worth noting that Lena, like Francince (who is played by the same actor), has three children with Kevin.

Steve and Kevin laugh about how they both know Kyle Hendrickson. Kyle told Steve a joke, which he wants to tell, but which Lindsey thinks is inappropriate. Lena interrupts again, more aggressively. Kathy, who has been checking her voicemails, and Tom, who was still on the phone, hang up and focus on her. She is frustrated that she's had to wait for a turn to speak, and that nothing is getting done. Tom apologizes for being on the phone, and Lindsey apologizes for making so much small talk. Kevin tries to tell Lindsey she's just being friendly. Lena, offended, says "*I'm* being friendly," and points out it would be friendly "for us to respect each other's time."

Lindsey is much more sensitive than Steve. She understands that jokes have the potential to be offensive, whereas Steve seems unable to understand how anyone could be offended by something that made him laugh. Lena has finally become fed up with the cross-talking and chit chat of the past half hour. Like Francine before her, who is played by the same actor, she's very aware of the amount of time that has passed and grows impatient with the idle and often offensive back and forth. However, she remains respectful—likely, in part, because she understands how quickly the dynamic could sour if she showed any resentment toward the white characters (another parallel between her character and Francine's).

Now that the room is finally silent, Lena can say what she's been meaning to say. She explains that she grew up in Clybourne Park, and as a result is concerned with "a particular period in history and the things that people experienced here in this community during that period," and says that she's referring to people who faced obstacles but made a life. Because of this communal history that also, for Lena, is family history, she wants to make sure the neighborhood is respected.

Lena, a lifelong resident of Clybourne Park, feels an obligation to protect her neighborhood from harmful change. Lena's love of her neighborhood is more nuanced than Karl's in Act 1. Whereas Karl just wanted to keep his neighborhood white, Lena is concerned about preserving the history of the marginalized black families who lived in Clybourne Park. She wants to make sure their memory is respected. Nevertheless, both characters are motivated by a desire to conserve their neighborhood as it is.

Steve immediately asks if when Lena discusses the value of the neighborhood she means historical or monetary. Lena clarifies that she means historical. Tom points out that if Steve read the neighborhood petition he should understand.

Even after Lena has explained herself, Steve can only think about the neighborhood in terms of its monetary value. Historical value isn't important to him. Tom suggests that Steve is uninformed about the politics and the history of the neighborhood he's moving into.

Lindsey, trying to be diplomatic, explains she isn't trying to change the neighborhood. In fact, she reveals, she was resistant to move in because of "the way it *used* to be."

Lindsey, attempting to act as peacemaker, accidentally implies that the way the neighborhood used to be was undesirable because it was mostly African American. As in Act 1, however, the characters in Act 2 are equally as incapable of addressing uncomfortable subjects like racism directly or productively.

Lena asks Lindsey to clarify, but before she can answer Steve and Kathy begin to talk about how the neighborhood was originally German and Irish. Steve brings up an article he read about changing demographics and neighborhood decline. Kathy describes it as "trouble," but Kevin responds that drugs and violence are trouble, but that a neighborhood cannot be trouble inherently. He then jokes that he and Lena were crackheads, which offends Lindsey.

Steve clarifies on Lindsey's behalf, but it's a poor cover-up. Steve is interested in general facts and trivia about the neighborhood, but not the emotional value the neighborhood itself has to its current residents. Lindsey is uncomfortable with the conversation, and although Kevin's joke doesn't actually have anything to do with Lindsey, she acts offended perhaps because she feels she should.

Lindsey, trying to maintain some kind of moral high ground, then explains how horrible she thinks policies that disenfranchise black neighborhoods can be. She goes on to discuss housing projects and their deleterious effects on children. Steve agrees that creating an "artificial *semblance* of a community" is creating a ghetto, a word Lindsey rejects, and which spins off into a conversation about Jewish ghettos in Prague, and then to Lena and Kevin's trip to Prague and Switzerland. Kevin wonders if Steve skis, which makes Lindsey laugh. Steve is slightly offended that she finds the idea of him skiing so funny.

Lindsey attempts to be sensitive and politically correct. Like she criticized Steve for wanting to tell an off-color joke earlier, now she feels that his language and his use of the word ghetto is offensive as well. Although the conversation began seriously, once again it veers off into geographical trivia. The brief discussion of skiing calls back to a conversation in Act 1, where Karl argues that an essential difference between black and white people is that black people don't ski. Here, the inverse is true: only the black couple skis. Again, the play suggests that some progress has been made, but that important gaps remain to be bridged between white and black people in terms of mutual respect and understanding.


Lindsey tries to turn the conversation back to the document, but they immediately get off track. Lena apologizes for taking up time, and explains she wasn't trying to "romanticize" poverty, she just has a personal connection to the house, as she grew up in the neighborhood and her great aunt lived in the house they are sitting in currently. Together she and Kevin explain her aunt worked hard for the house, and that during Lena's childhood the neighborhood was predominantly black, with the exception of Mr. Wheeler at the grocery store. Steve and Lindsey are shocked at this revelation.

Lena reveals that she is related to the Younger family who purchased the house from the Stollers in 1959. Not only is she connected to the neighborhood generally because she grew up there and therefore recognizes its historical value, but she is invested in this house specifically because of the memories it holds for her. Steve and Lindsey's shock shows how little they understand about the community they are about to enter into as new residents.


Lena wonders if the house was affordable for her aunt because of the suicide of the son of the previous owners. Lindsey is offended on behalf of Lena's family, but also horrified that she was not notified of the house's history when she purchased it. Lindsey becomes increasingly agitated, and she goes to compose herself in the corner of the room. Steve follows, and although they are talking quietly, the audience can hear as Lindsey argues there should be a law demanding that sellers disclose the history of the home.

Lena's revelation calls readers back to Act 1, when Karl revealed that the Younger family did not know why the house had been so affordable, and threatened to tell them about Kenneth's suicide. For Lindsey, this is the first piece of Clybourne Park history that seems to affect her viscerally and emotionally—because it has to do with the house she just bought, and she therefore feels that it affects her directly.

Dan interrupts again, emerging from the backyard through the kitchen, carrying the **footlocker** from Act I, now covered in mold and dirt. He jokes about it being buried treasure, but leaves when it becomes clear he is interrupting a tense moment.

Just as the actors on stage begin to excavate the past, Dan literally excavates Kenneth's trunk, which contains many historical artifacts, including Kenneth's suicide note. It's symbolic of the ways in which, even as residents change and racial dynamics evolve, the past is inescapable and returns to the scene in ways that nobody could have anticipated.

Lindsey apologizes for losing her composure. She explains that the combined stress of the baby, the money, and receiving the neighborhood petition has sent her over the edge. Returning to the document, Tom suggests reducing the height of the house, but Kathy snaps that it's too late to redesign the house. She reminds Lindsey and Steve that they are not under a legal obligation to change the designs.

Although the assembled characters have spent the past fifteen minutes discussing the importance of Clybourne Park's history, and Lena's personal connection to the neighborhood, when they get back to considering the renovation plans it seems that the conversation has had no effect whatsoever on Steve or Kathy.

Tom disagrees with Kathy, and reminds her that the City Council has recognized the "*historic* status" of the neighborhood and its "distinctive collection of *low-rise single family homes* intended to house a community of working-class families."

This is one of the few moments where the party interested in preserving the neighborhood is an actual legal entity, as opposed to a single person who has taken it upon themselves to conserve and protect the neighborhood.

Lindsey argues that neighborhoods change with time, but Lena asks her to consider who is responsible for changing the neighborhood now, and what the political interests being served are. Lindsey misses the point, complaining that they are discussing single house, but Lena points out "it happens one house at a time."

Lindsey's ignorance here seems willful. She has been so careful to consider her and Steve's impact on the feelings of everyone in the room, it seems absurd—but perhaps not surprising—that she would not be able to practice similar empathy when considering how her home could affect the entire neighborhood.

Steve interjects that Lena should just come out and say what she's trying to say instead of "doing this elaborate little *dance* around it." He thinks her argument is informed by "the issue of…*racism*." Lena and Kevin, feeling that Lena has been called a racist when their issue was the "inappropriately large house" Steve and Lindsey intended to construct, become angry, even when Steve points out his said the word *racism*, not that Lena herself was a *racist*.

Although their discussion of the neighborhood's history presumably includes its racial makeup, all characters are hesitant to explicitly acknowledge they are discussing race. Lena is upset that Steve has insinuated she is a racist, feeling that it distracts from the subtle and complex ways in which race actually does *play into the issue they are discussing. The exchange speaks to a more general tendency of privileged people to see their daily realities as personal rather than political, and to be upset when others remind them that the personal often* is *political.*

Lindsey attempts to distance herself from Steve as he continues to insist race was clearly a factor in the various issues Lena brought to the table. He mocks the "*secret conspiracy*" Lena has brought up, which she insists is real. Lindsey, apologizing for Steve, insists "half of my friends are black!" which Steve takes issue with, forcing her to name all her black friends.

Lindsey's "secret conspiracy" may sound extreme to some, but history supports her claim that the government, both directly through zoning and indirectly through legislation that affected different race's economic and geographic mobility, often decided the racial makeup of neighborhoods. The play is, in many ways, about the struggle of various characters to take personal responsibility for unfortunate realities for which they do not see themselves as being responsible.

Tom tries to get the group back on task, but they're too far gone. Steve believes "the history of America is the history of private property," humans are naturally territorial, and individual "tribes" don't like it when their territory is stolen. When Lena points out that her ancestors were literally private property, Steve offers a grand, insincere apology on behalf of white Americans.

Steve does not understand how the African American experience is different from the Caucasian American experience. He thinks Lena and Kevin are being too sensitive, even though they have spent a long time explaining to him why they feel the way they do about the Clybourne Park neighborhood.


Steve feels like his free speech is being stifled. And complains that "you guys" can say the "n—word" but he can't even tell one joke. Kevin and Lena insist he tell it if he wants to so badly, though Lindsey continues to protest that it offends her because "it's disgusting and juvenile and traffics in the worst possible of obsolete bullshit stereotypes." Steve finally tells the joke, in which a white man goes to jail and has a black cellmate. The cellmate asks if he wants to be mommy or daddy. The white man says he wants to be daddy, and the black man responds, "Okay, well then bend over 'cause Mommy's gonna fuck you in the ass."

Steve has very little empathy for people of other races. Although statistically white men have faced the least amount of oppression of any group in America's history, Steve nonetheless feels his free speech is being impeded because he cannot say every word he wants to say, or tell every off-color joke he wants to tell. Fed up with his whining, Kevin and Lena goad Steve into telling a joke they suspect will be offensive. They understand that there is no hope the conversation will get back on track, and likely understand that by encouraging Steve to tell an inappropriate joke they are only helping him humiliate himself.

Lena says she's not offended, but she finds the joke unfunny, while Lindsey continues to argue that it is offensive. Steve feels that Lindsey is not allowed to be offended, as it doesn't concern her. Tom interjects that he's gay, and therefore the joke offends him. Steve tries to argue the joke isn't about sex, it's about rape, and Kathy adds that her sister was raped, and therefore she's offended.

Steve dismisses Lindsey's claims that she is offended by the joke because she is not personally targeted by it. Still, even when Tom and Kathy point out that they are offended Steve remains unrepentant, and continues to defend his freedom of speech, demonstrating yet again his inability to see that the issue at hand may involve a history and scope that is larger than his personal viewpoint.

The conversation continues to devolve. Kevin tells a joke about white men, and Steve responds with a joke about black men. Neither man is offended by the other's joke, but Lindsey says that Steve can't be offended, as he's never been "politically marginalized" as a result of uninformed stereotypes like the ones these jokes traffic in.

Steve is not offended by Kevin's joke because, as Lindsey points out, the joke is not about him. Offensive jokes can be actively damaging to minority groups who already have to deal with violence, both verbal and physical, because of their minority status. For a white man, however, a joke about his race or gender cannot traffic in the same kind of harmful stereotypes as a similar joke about a black man or a gay man.

Lena ends the conversation when she offers her own joke—how are white women like tampons. Kevin encourages her not to tell it, but she does—white women are like tampons "because they're both stuck up cunts." Lindsey and Kathy are both offended at the "*hostile* joke." Kathy says she feels that she is intelligent, not stuck up. Steve, frustrated, points out that in their earlier conversation Kathy didn't even know the capital of Morocco.

Lena's joke is the final straw for the group. Although previously they had been able to unite against Steve's insensitivity, her joke demonstrates that she feels no solidarity with Lindsey and Kathy. Like Francine in Act 1, Lena is more concerned with alliances based on her racial identity than her gender identity.

Kathy begins to pack up to leave. Steve shares that one of the things that really offends him is "white suburban assholes still driving around with the yellow ribbon magnets on their SUVs in support of some bullshit war." Kevin reveals he has three ribbons on his car, one for each of his family remembers in the military. He asks Steve if that makes him an asshole.

While the other characters are offended by jokes or comments that degrade groups of which they are a part, Steve, who does not face the same kind of discrimination is "offended" by much more innocuous behavior that does not personally affect him. It shows that Steve is much more willing to dole out potentially offensive jokes than he is to be the brunt of one, consistent with his generally inability to exhibit empathy for others.

Lindsey calls out Steve as an asshole and a "regressive." She announces that she used to date a black guy, adding "so what?"

Although Lindsey means for her comment to show how progressive she is, it instead underscores that she is out of touch. Just because she once dated a black person does not mean she isn't still racist, or at the very least still clueless about racial issues.

Tom wraps up the conversation. No one has final thoughts except for Lindsey, who is hurt because she feels her "ethics" have been "called into question." Lena says she isn't questioning Lindsey's ethics, but instead her taste. Tom and Kathy leave, making plans to talk about the house early next week. Lindsey, genuinely offended, asks Lena repeatedly what is wrong with her taste.

Although Lena and Kevin are concerned with larger issues of gentrification, and preserving the history of the neighborhood, the conversation has devolved into petty insults. Lena's line about questioning Lindsey's taste, not her ethics, is funny and cutting, but at its core it is not true: the conversation has not just been about questions of taste, it has also been about the ethics of white people moving into and altering historically black spaces.

Kevin ushers Lena out, and tells Steve and Lindsey they should just communicate through lawyers from now on. Steve remarks to Lindsey, quietly, that Lena is a cunt, which Kevin hears. He barges back in and threatens to slap Steve. Lena urges him to let it go, Lindsey explains they've been under a lot of pressure, and Steve refuses to take any responsibility for what he said, saying "I didn't do anything to you or her" and asking "why can't you chill?"

Through to the very end, characters are unable to communicate in the ways they intend to. Although Steve means to whisper, Lena hears anyway—one unfortunate moment in which information is transmitted with crystal clarity after hours of conversational confusion. Although Lena told a rude joke, her behavior was ultimately no ruder than Kathy's, and certainly no worse than that of Steve himself—suggesting that she is being held to a double standard because of her race.

Dan has entered from the backyard with bolt cutters for the **footlocker**, and now comes forward to try and break up the fight, putting his hand on Kevin's shoulder. Angry, Kevin says "don't you touch *me*," and Dan backs off. Lena and Kevin turn to each other, as do Lindsey and Steve. The two couples engage in simultaneous arguments. Lena complains that Kevin is "trying to make *friends* with everybody," while he complains that she's been unnecessarily confrontational. Lena and Kevin exit as they continue to argue.

In a moment that echoes Russ's dismissal of Albert in the first Act, Kevin is upset that Dan has touched him. It is unclear if Kevin just doesn't like being controlled, if he is angry that a white man is trying to intervene, or if he is upset that someone like Dan, a day laborer of a presumably lower class, is trying to exert some control over him, but the moment complicates the play's portrayal of race relations and shows that no hierarchy is rigid or stable.

Meanwhile, Steve tells Lindsey that he thinks the planned house is too big, and Lindsey tells Steve he doesn't have to move in if he doesn't want to, but she plans on living in the house they've purchased. At this point Kevin and Lena have left, and Steve and Lindsey begin to gather their things and fold the chairs they had been sitting on. Steve complains that Lindsey is always privileging the baby's needs over his, and reveals that before she got pregnant Lindsey had given him an ultimatum: have a baby with her or get a divorce. They leave, still arguing.

Although Steve has just spent the entire act arguing on behalf of himself and Lindsey, it becomes clear in the final moments that Steve is actually not on Lindsey's side. He doesn't want to divorce her, and so has compromised to make her happy. Unlike the more stereotypical husband-wife relationships of the first act, where the man was more domineering, this relationship flips the expected power dynamic. Again the play suggests that while the dynamics between men and women or black and whites may shift, the general dysfunctionality of dynamics across race and gender will remain tense as long as people remain unable to address important issues directly.

As Lindsey and Steve were cleaning up, Dan opened the **footlocker** with his bolt cutters. Kenneth descends the staircase, dressed in a military uniform and carrying a transistor radio. He is invisible to Dan in the present day. He sits by a window and begins to draft his suicide note. From inside the trunk, Dan removes an envelope containing the same note Kenneth is writing by the window, and begins to read it aloud. It begins, "Dear Mom and Dad, I know you'll probably blame yourselves for what I've done…"

The full suicide note is never read aloud, but it is addressed to Kenneth's parents, and presumably goes on to tell them not to blame themselves, as it was not their fault that he felt the way he did. Ironically, although the play never shows his parents truly internalizing the contents of Kenneth's note (it's unclear if Bev has even read it), it is a complete stranger fifty years later who takes the time to sit calmly and read what Kenneth had to say. The suggestion here is that anyone can facilitate healing and catharsis through the simple act of listening attentively.

Bev comes downstairs to see Kenneth. She wonders why he's dressed up and he lies that it is for a job interview. Francine comes in through the front door, greets Bev and Kenneth, and disappears down the hallway. Bev goes back upstairs, but before she does she announces, "I really believe things are about to change for the better." After she exits, Kenneth continues to write, Dan continues to read, and the lights fade to black.

Because the final lines of the play chronologically take place before any of the other events, Bev's premonition can be immediately seen as inaccurate. She is likely referring specifically to her family and to Kenneth, who will not get better, but rather will soon kill himself. Her statement can also be abstracted from the context in which it was spoken to refer to the play's subject of race relations more generally. However, given the fact that characters fail to communicate across racial divides in the first act as well as the second, the play seems to suggest that Bev's prediction is just as naïve in the 1950s as it would have been if she had spoken it in the 2000s.

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