



## **CLASS DISCRIMINATION OF PROPERTY IN *CLYBOURNE PARK* BY BRUCE NORRIS (2010)**

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### **Abstract**

This abstract examines the theme of class discrimination of property in Bruce Norris's play "Clybourne Park" through the lens of Marxist theory. The play depicts the socio-economic tensions surrounding the sale of a house in a racially transitioning neighborhood. By analyzing the characters' interactions and conflicts, as well as the historical context of urban development and gentrification, this abstract demonstrates how Marxist principles such as class struggle, commodification of property, and exploitation manifest in the dynamics of property ownership and exchange. Through the characters' actions and dialogue, Norris illustrates how capitalist structures perpetuate inequalities, reinforcing the divide between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The play serves as a critique of the capitalist system and its impact on housing, revealing how class discrimination intersects with race and property ownership, ultimately reflecting broader societal issues of power, privilege, and social hierarchy.

**Key words:** *Clybourne Park, Class discrimination, Property, Marxist.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In social interactions, disparities in power frequently lead to discriminatory behavior. Discrimination involves intentionally treating certain groups or classes unfairly based on factors such as religion, ethnicity, or race. It often occurs when the majority group discriminates against minority groups. Discrimination differs from ethnic prejudice, beliefs, or racism, as it may also result in ethnic disadvantage (Quillian, 2006). While discrimination can be driven by prejudice or racism, its definition does not assume a singular underlying cause.

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Tarunabh Khaitan (2015) argues that the legal regulation of discrimination is fundamental to how countries define themselves. Discrimination can be described as the unequal treatment of similar individuals in identical situations but differing in one or more characteristics, such as race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or other categorical statuses, due to a lack of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Numerous studies have explored the experiences of discrimination among African Americans and other racial minorities in various settings, including the workplace and housing searches (Schuman et al., 2001). Discrimination in property refers to the unlawful practice of treating buyers or tenants differently based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, family status, or disability. People may be denied housing opportunities not only because of their skin color but also due to factors such as nationality, religious beliefs, or family structure.

Various studies have examined the encounters of African Americans and other minority groups with discrimination in various domains such as the workplace, housing search, and everyday social interactions (Schuman et al., 2001). Discrimination in housing, defined as the unlawful act of treating individuals differently based on factors like race, color, religion, national origin, sex, family status, or disability, has been observed. People have been denied housing opportunities not solely due to their skin color but also because of factors such as nationality, religious beliefs, family composition, among others.

Defining discrimination as the entire causal effect of signals helps to address two key issues. Firstly, it prevents confusion between discrimination and unconditional inequality. By understanding discrimination as the causal effect of signals, such as characteristics like color, ethnicity, or sex, which may be perceived as fixed from early stages of life, we can distinguish it from inequality (Greiner & Rubin, 2010). Secondly, characterizing discrimination as a total causal effect helps avoid conceptualizations that focus solely on direct effects, which are often proposed as a solution but may not fully capture the complexity of discrimination (Imai et al., 2013). Direct impacts of discrimination are significant only when considered alongside the quantity and nature of accompanying indirect effects, thus aiding in a clearer differentiation between discrimination and inequality.

Discrimination manifests as unfair treatment based on certain characteristics of individuals or groups, resulting in the restriction of opportunities and rights for one group compared to another. Racism, a common form of discrimination, involves the belief in the superiority of one's own race and the inferiority of others. It entails the illegal treatment of individuals based on their race, color, or religion. As noted by Macionis (2011), racism is defined as "the belief that one ethnic group is inherently superior or inferior to another" (p. 326).

In the diverse landscape of America, racial issues persist as individuals often perceive others as less worthy due to differences in skin color. This stems from a historical context where one race has asserted its superiority over others, leading to manifestations of discrimination such as racial prejudice, racist ideologies (racism), and stereotypes that perpetuate feelings of inferiority (Quillian, 2006). Racism, stereotyping, and prejudice can all fuel discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

The notion of white superiority is deeply rooted in history, particularly evident in the era of slavery where white Americans enslaved black individuals. Gillborn (320) highlights the concept of white supremacy, which asserts that white people are inherently superior and must maintain dominance over other races. This belief system has led to prejudiced views of black individuals as lacking in morals, education, and social customs, perpetuating unfair treatment and disadvantages across various aspects of life, including education, politics, employment, healthcare, and property ownership.

Discrimination in real life is mirrored in literary works, as seen in Bruce Norris's play "Clybourne Park," which draws inspiration from Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun." Norris, influenced by Hansberry's play during his formative years, explores themes of racial tension and discrimination through the portrayal of a white family selling a house to a black family.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

Design research utilizing qualitative methods, particularly content analysis, is well-suited for investigating content or issues within literary works due to its emphasis on delving into deeper meanings. Sugiyono (as cited in Kim, 2014) characterizes qualitative research as rooted in the philosophy of post positivism, focusing on examining natural phenomena without manipulation. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, data sampling is purposeful and often involves snowball sampling, data collection techniques employ triangulation, and data analysis is inductive and qualitative, prioritizing the interpretation of meanings over generalization.

Qualitative researchers engage in studying phenomena within their natural contexts, aiming to interpret them based on the meanings attributed by individuals involved (Kim, 2014). Additionally, Creswell (as cited in Creswell et al., 2007) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process aimed at understanding social or human problems, wherein the researcher constructs a comprehensive and holistic view, presents detailed perspectives of participants, and conducts the study within natural settings. These definitions underscore the importance of qualitative research in uncovering nuanced understandings and meanings inherent in literary works and other social or human phenomena.

To conduct this research, data were taken from several stages as follows:

1. Reading the entire *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris.
2. Collecting relevant data to the main discussion in this study from the novel. The relevant data can be the quotations, phrases and words from the novel itself.
3. Using elements that exist in literary works such as characters, plots and settings to see the issue of *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter delves into the issue of class discrimination, particularly in the context of property ownership. It highlights how certain individuals are unjustly

deemed inferior simply because they are not white, a sentiment that traces back to the era when black individuals were enslaved by white people. White Americans historically positioned themselves as superior, a notion that persists to this day. Black people continue to face racial discrimination in various aspects of life, including housing, employment, education, and public spaces. Furthermore, their protests against such discrimination are often dismissed as mere excuses or laziness.

## **1. Research Finding**

### **1.1. *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris**

"*Clybourne Park*" by Bruce Norris is a thought-provoking play that intricately examines class discrimination within the realm of property ownership. Set across two acts, the play offers a historical perspective on society's attitudes toward race and class. The first act serves as a sequel to Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun," depicting events leading up to an African-American family's move into a predominantly white neighborhood in 1959. The tensions surrounding the sale of a house to this black family unveil deep-seated prejudices and underscore the prevalence of class discrimination during that era.

In the second act, set in 2009, the play explores the neighborhood's evolution and the consequences of demographic changes over the years. Themes of gentrification, urban development, and shifting property values take center stage. Characters grapple with the complexities of these changes, shedding light on how class discrimination persists, albeit in more subtle forms, even in ostensibly more progressive times.

Norris skillfully employs witty dialogue and interconnected narratives to delve into the intricacies of class dynamics. Both past and present characters confront their own prejudices, challenging the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about societal norms. The play serves as a mirror of contemporary society, prompting viewers to reflect on their own beliefs and biases, and sparking crucial discussions about the enduring impact of class discrimination on personal relationships and broader community dynamics.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis extends beyond mere prejudice to explore the symbolic significance of property as a marker of social status and power. The house becomes a metaphor for the broader social structures that perpetuate class distinctions. Norris adeptly utilizes this symbolism to enrich the play's depth and tone, encouraging audiences to contemplate the far-reaching effects of class discrimination.

With its layered narratives and nuanced characters, "*Clybourne Park*" emerges as an impressive theatrical work that not only captures the complexity of the human experience but also provokes a critical examination of social norms and values. As the play unfolds across time, it highlights the cyclical nature of discrimination, challenging us to confront and disrupt these patterns in pursuit of a more just future.

#### **1.1.1. *Black as poor social status***

Black only deserves to be a servant, they deserve jobs like white helpers. White people believe that black lives with a low economy. White called itself Occident and Black which is by white called Orient. Albert's wife works as a maid in



Bev's house. Bev is a representation of white people; she is the employer of Albert's wife. Albert is a representation of black people.

*BEV: What about this chafing dish? Did you see this dish?*

*ALBERT: Well, we got plenty of dishes.*

*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: (overlapping). But we don't need it, ma'am.*

*BEV: (Continuous)- make use of it, so if you let me just wrap it for you.*

*ALBERT: (Finally raising his voice) Ma'am, we don't want your thing, please. We got our own things. (Pause. Bev is shocked.)*

*BEV: Well." (page 41, act 1)*

The dialogues above reveal how Whites are considered as rich people. For Bev black who works as a house keeper must live in poverty. Bev explained that the solution for that the black couple should know what the others eat, so they can sit down together. The rich people in a city would show their richness by eating expensive food and they think they should be provided with equal opportunities as a low class. Society considered differentiates whites and blacks economically, it shows in the quotation, "September 1959. Three o'clock, Saturday afternoon. The house is in disarray. Cardboard boxes are stacked in corners. Some furniture has been removed; shelves empty. Pictures have been removed from the walls and the carpets have been rolled and stood on end. Not far from the fireplace, Russ sits alone reading a copy of National Geographic. He is dressed in pajama top and chinos, socks, no shoes. On a table next to him sits a carton of ice cream into which, from time to time, he dips a spoon. Music plays softly on the radio next to him.

After some time, Bev descends the stairs carrying linens to place in a cardboard box. As she packs, she stops to look at Russ." (stage direction act 1) Russ and Bev are a white couple of people who live in Clybourne Park and have black servant. The property is a sign described in the state of being packaged for moving that they are a wealthy, White is always considered rich while Black is believed to be the poor.

### **1.1.2. White group as high class communal**

After white residents departed the neighborhood, black families moved in, but now white residents aim to return, potentially displacing the black population. Karl Lindner, depicted as a racist in the initial act, expresses concern about a black family relocating to Clybourne Park. Lindner consistently interrogates Francine, the housemaid, in an attempt to demonstrate his belief that cohabitation between white and black communities is untenable.

*KARL: Francine, may I ask? Do you ski?*

*FRANCINE: Ski?*

*KARL: Downhill skiing?*

*FRANCINE: We don 't ski, no.*

*KARL: And this is my point. The children who attend St. Stanislaus. Once a year we take the middle schoolers up to Indianhead Mountain, and I can tell you, in*

*the time I 've been there, I have not once seen a colored family on those slopes. Now, what accounts for that? Certainly not any deficit in ability, so what I have to conclude is that for some reason, there is just something about the pastime of skiing that doesn't appeal to the Negro community... you'll have to show me where to find the skiing Negroes. (1.1)*

The quotation above highlights Karl's argument that sport like skiing is not interesting to African Americans and it means that this homeland for white people only and not black people. It believes by the white that they should not live side with black neighbor. This emphasizes the fact that they cannot live together in harmony. In Act two, Lindsey says "Half of my friends are black". She tries to appear non-racist by using the sentence as a tool to communicate non racist but actually Lindsey is a racist character because throughout the play Lindsey tries to renovates the house in Clybourne Park without caring about the history or culture of the African Americans.

### **1.2. Property discrimination fought back in *Clybourne Park***

The statement "Ma'am, we don't want your thing, please. We got our own things," reflects the pride within the black community. It demonstrates that black individuals have their own sense of identity and dignity, and they are not reliant on what white people offer. This assertion also showcases the inherent goodness and integrity present within the black community.

In Act 2, Lena and Kevin's discomfort with Lindsey and Steve's proposed renovations illustrates how black individuals resist against the actions and decisions imposed by the white community. This resistance is a manifestation of the ongoing struggle against property discrimination depicted throughout "*Clybourne Park*."

The play sheds light on the fight against discrimination concerning property ownership, addressing issues such as gentrification and urban development. It portrays characters challenging societal biases and attempting to challenge the status quo in different time periods, highlighting the complexities and persistence of discrimination in various forms.

Through its dialogue and interconnected narratives, "*Clybourne Park*" encourages audiences to confront and question discriminatory norms, advocating for more inclusive and equitable property practices. It emphasizes the cyclical nature of societal struggles and the importance of continued activism and awareness in creating a more just and inclusive future.

Additionally, the play explores the perception of black individuals as solely suited for roles like servants, contrasting this with the reality of black individuals having their own aspirations and capabilities. Characters like Bev represent the white community, while Albert symbolizes the black community, with Albert's wife working as a maid in Bev's house, highlighting the dynamics of race and class within the play.

*BEV: And let me offer you some money for your help.*

*ALBERT: Oh no, ma'am, that's all right.*

*BEV: Ohhh, are you sure?*

*ALBERT: Yas ma'am*

*BEV: (Finding her purse.) Well, here, then. let me at least give you fifty cents.*

*ALBERT: No, now keep your money.*

*BEV: Or, how about dollar? take a dollar. I don't care.*

*ALBERT: ma'am?*

*BEV: Or take two. It's just money.*

*ALBERT: Happy to help.*

*BEV: Or take something. You have to take. something*

*ALBERT: No ma'am. But-*

White considered as the rich person. For Bev black who works as a house keeper must live in poverty. Bev explained that the solution for that the black couple should know what the others eat, so they can sit down together. The rich people in a city would show their richness by eating expensive food and they think they should be provided with equal opportunities as a low class. But, in the sentence, "Ma'am, we don't want your thing, please. We got our own things," shows that black people have a pride. It also shows that black has behavior and a good heart.

Society considered differentiates whites and blacks economically, it shows in the quotation, "September 1959. Three o'clock, Saturday afternoon. The house is in disarray. Cardboard boxes are stacked in corners. Some furniture has been removed; shelves empty. Pictures have been removed from the walls and the carpets have been rolled and stood on end. Not far from the fireplace, Russ sits alone reading a copy of National Geographic. He is dressed in pajama top and chinos, socks, no shoes. On a table next to him sits a carton of ice cream into which, from time to time, he dips a spoon. Music plays softly on the radio next to him. After some time, Bev descends the stairs carrying linens to place in a cardboard box. As she packs, she stops to look at Russ." (stage direction act 1)

Karl always showers Francine, the housemaid with questions to prove that the white and black cannot live together:

*KARL: Francine, may I ask? Do you ski?*

*FRANCINE: Ski?*

*KARL: Downhill skiing?*

*FRANCINE: We don 't ski, no.*

*KARL: And this is my point.*

Russ and Bev are a white couple of people who live in Clybourne Park and have black servant. The property is a sign described in the state of being packaged for moving that they are a wealthy. White is always considered rich while Black is believed to be the poor. White group as high-class communication. White people moved out of the neighborhood, black moved in, and now white want to get in again in the neighborhood, meaning black will probably get pushed out. Karl Linder is the racist In the First Act. He is the one who is concerned about the moving of a black family to *Clybourne Park*.

## 2. Discussion

Marxist literary theory emphasizes the conflict between social classes as a central theme in literature. In "Clybourne Park," this conflict is evident in the struggle over property ownership. The initial conflict arises when a white couple seeks to purchase a house in a predominantly African American neighborhood. The resistance they encounter highlights the entrenched social and economic barriers that dictate who can access and control property. This struggle reflects the Marxist notion of the bourgeoisie (represented by the white couple) seeking to assert their dominance over the proletariat (represented by the African American community).

Marxist theory posits that society is divided into two primary classes: the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor to the bourgeoisie. In "Clybourne Park," this class division manifests in the struggle over property ownership. The white couple, representing the bourgeoisie, seeks to purchase the house as an investment opportunity, aiming to capitalize on the changing demographics of the neighborhood. On the other hand, the African American residents, representing the proletariat, resist this encroachment, asserting their right to remain in their community despite economic pressures.

The conflict over property ownership reflects deeper power dynamics within society, where those with economic capital seek to assert their dominance over those without. The white couple's desire to purchase the house is not merely driven by a desire for shelter but also by a quest for economic gain and social status. Conversely, the African American residents' resistance to the sale stems from a desire to maintain their sense of belonging and autonomy in the face of economic exploitation.

Furthermore, the negotiation over the sale of the house highlights the unequal distribution of power inherent in capitalist societies. The white sellers hold significant leverage due to their economic privilege, enabling them to dictate the terms of the transaction to their advantage. Meanwhile, the African American buyers are placed in a vulnerable position, forced to navigate a system that is stacked against them.

Through the lens of Marxist theory, "Clybourne Park" underscores how property ownership serves as a battleground for class struggle, where economic disparities and power imbalances perpetuate social injustices. By analyzing the play in this context, we gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which class discrimination operates and the ways in which individuals navigate and resist these systemic forces.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

*Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris weaves a complex story that explores the ongoing struggle against property discrimination. Some people more inferior than the others, just because they are not white, when black became a slave to white people. Black only deserves to be a servant, like white helpers. White people believe that black lives with a low economy. White called itself Occident and Black which is by white called Orient.



Norris uses the art of dialogue and interconnected narratives to create a powerful platform for the characters to explore and deconstruct discriminatory norms around property. The symbolism of the house, representing specific social status and power, adds depth to the study of class dynamics. This symbolism forces viewers to think not only about the immediate struggles depicted in the play, but also about the broader impact of discriminatory practices in real estate transactions. The play, which shows the resilience of these challenging discriminatory practices, is not only a reflection of historical struggles, but also a call to action for a more just and inclusive future. It inspires viewers to consider their role in shaping a society that values fair real estate and fosters a community where anti-discrimination struggles are not mere historical narratives, but ongoing stories of progress and change.

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