



DENVER CENTER FOR THE
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INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



Illustration by Kyle Malone

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

After the death of Michael Brown, The Ferguson Unrest shook the nation to its core and put a spotlight on the police brutality and discrimination that plague our institutions. Using extensive interviews she conducted herself, Pulitzer Prize finalist and Obie Award winner Dael Orlandersmith created eight fictional characters to represent the broad spectrum of perspectives that continue to define and divide our country at large.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

DAEL ORLANDERSMITH has written *Stoop Stories* produced by the Goodman Theatre during the 2009/2010 Season. *Stoop Stories* was first performed in 2008 at The Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival and Apollo Theater's Salon Series. Washington, DC's Studio Theatre produced *Stoop Stories'* world premiere in 2009. *Black N' Blue Boys/Broken Men* was developed as a co-commission between the Goodman and Berkeley Repertory Theatre, where it was staged in May 2012. *Horsedreams* was developed at New Dramatists and workshopped at New York Stage and Film Company in 2008, and was performed at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in 2011. *Bones* was commissioned by the Mark Taper Forum where it premiered in 2010. Ms. Orlandersmith premiered *The Blue Album*, in collaboration with David Cale, at Long Wharf Theatre in 2007. *Yellowman* was commissioned by, and premiered at, McCarter Theatre in a co-production with The Wilma Theater and Long Wharf Theatre. Ms. Orlandersmith was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and Drama Desk Award nominee for Outstanding Play and Outstanding Actress in a Play for *Yellowman* in 2002. *The Gimmick*, commissioned by McCarter Theatre, premiered in their Second Stage OnStage series in 1998 and went on to great acclaim at Long Wharf Theatre and New York Theatre Workshop. Ms. Orlandersmith won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *The Gimmick* in 1999. Her play *Monster* premiered at New York Theatre Workshop



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Until the Flood

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY

DAEL ORLANDERSMITH

DIRECTED BY **NEEL KELLER**

MAR 20 – MAY 3
JONES THEATRE

in November 1996. Ms. Orlandersmith has toured extensively with the Nuyorican Poets Café (Real Live Poetry) throughout the United States, Europe and Australia. *Yellowman* and a collection of her earlier works have been published by Vintage Books and Dramatists Play Service. Ms. Orlandersmith attended Sundance Institute Theatre Lab for four summers and is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, The Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, a Guggenheim and the 2005 PEN/Laura Pels Foundation Award for a playwright in mid-career. Ms. Orlandersmith is the recipient of a Lucille Lortel Foundation Playwrights Fellowship and an Obie Award for *Beauty's Daughter*. In 2014/2015 Ms. Orlandersmith wrote and performed a solo memoir play called *Forever* presented at Los Angeles' Kirk Douglas Theatre. *Until the Flood* was commissioned and premiered by the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis in 2016.

IN A 2016 CONVERSATION WITH THE REPERTORY THEATRE OF ST. LOUIS' ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & PUBLICATIONS MANAGER, SARAH BRANDT, ORLANDERSMITH REFLECTED ON HER EXPERIENCE CREATING UNTIL THE FLOOD. EXCERPTS FROM THAT CONVERSATION INCLUDE:

WHY DID YOU WANT TO WRITE THIS PLAY?

Well, actually, The Rep came to me. I said yes because I think it's important. I want to tell a story. I want to go beyond what's right, who's right, who's wrong. How does this shooting affect people? In terms of race, how far have we come? Those are the questions that have come to mind. What does it invoke, provoke in you? What kind of thought?

HOW DID YOU PREPARE TO START WRITING?

[Rep Associate Artistic Director] Seth Gordon and I, we met with Michael Brown, Sr. and a few other people, a lot

of political activists, and people who are just generally in town. I wanted to look at that because you know race is obviously a very...it's high voltage. It's a high voltage situation. I wanted to see exactly how far we've come, which is interesting to me, in terms of, say, from the '40s on. And also, what does it mean to the individual? What does race mean to an individual? How does it affect individuals, and how far has St. Louis come?

What does it mean to be a part of this? And then for me as a New Yorker—I find that a lot of people in St. Louis feel this is nothing new to them. A lot of them just want to put this down. And a lot of other people have said it's just an everyday occurrence. So it's about showing those perspectives.

SO THE PEOPLE WE MEET IN THE PLAY—ARE THESE PEOPLE YOU MET?

They are composite figures. Because I made it very clear to everyone that I spoke with—I don't have a right to invade your life that way. I have a right as a playwright to tell a story. But I don't have a right to dig into someone's life like that. Because that's no longer about theatre—that's perverse voyeurism. A word that I use heavily is "boundary." The role of certain types of theatre, we are supposed to be mental and emotional travelers, but having said that, if I write about someone's life directly, that makes me responsible for them in certain ways that I don't feel comfortable with. And given where that person is within their life, it can invoke and provoke a lot of stuff that they just won't be able to deal with. I'm not a therapist. And I actually said that to everyone I spoke with.

Source:
[Until the Flood Play Guide. Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. 2016](#)

DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

Jules Odendahl-James, a dramaturg and Director of Engagement in the Humanities Department at Duke University investigated the theatrical genre of documentary theatre for *American Theatre* magazine in 2017. *Until the Flood* may be considered as a prime example of this genre in terms of its research, structure, and then in its performance, here at DCPA, by its playwright Dale Orlandersmith. Odendahl-James notes:

“Broadly conceived, American documentary theatre (also sometimes called docudrama, ethnodrama, verbatim theatre, tribunal theatre, theatre of witness, or theatre of fact) is performance typically built by an individual or collective of artists from historical and/or archival materials such as trial transcripts, written or recorded interviews, newspaper reporting, personal or iconic visual images or video footage, government documents, biographies and autobiographies, even academic papers and scientific research... [the first era of the development of this genre] is marked by the work produced under the auspices of the Federal Theater Project (1935-1939), particularly “living newspapers”... while the content of these early American documentary plays was drawn from everyday life, particularly the experiences of first- and second-generation working-class immigrants, their form was decidedly modernist. The second key moment happens in the late 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, global economic upheaval, and the newly dominant televisual mass media invited or compelled a new generation of theatre collectives to explore, employ, and explode the formal and aesthetic properties of documentary. Companies such as the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre, Teatro Campesino,

and the San Francisco Mime Troupe questioned dominant media and state narratives around economic and social oppression, democracy, equality, and the rule of law. [The third evolution of the genre manifests within the late 1980s and into the early 2000s with the] crafting of a theatrical world from real lives, experiences, and places evolve[ing] into a rawer, distinctly autobiographical, artist-driven type of storytelling...particularly in the work of Anna Deavere Smith. In Smith’s work the primacy of written, archival documents takes a backseat to artist-collected, interview-based materials. Smith also functions as performer, presenting painstakingly studied and faithfully rendered bodies and voices (across race, ethnicity, and gender) using her own body as tabula rasa, activating new questions about truth and authenticity. [Along with Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror*] perhaps the most notable script of this third era is *The Laramie Project* [developed at the DCPA in 2000] that takes the murder of college student Matthew Shepard as its catalyst event. We see the history of the play’s construction in its opening moments, as company members describe how they traveled with director/writer Moises Kaufman from New York City to Laramie, Wyo., where they conducted interviews with community members in the wake of an anti-gay hate crime that brought international attention to this relatively small, isolated Western U.S. town.”

Source:

Odendahl-James, Jules. A History of U.S. Documentary Theatre in Three Stages. *American Theatre*. 22 August 2017.

AUGUST 2014: FERGUSON, MO.

NARRATOR

“Black boy – down/ White man – shoot.”

TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18 year old, was shot and killed on **Aug. 9, 2014**, by Darren Wilson, a 28-year-old white police officer, in Ferguson, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. The shooting prompted protests that roiled the area for weeks. On Nov. 24, the St. Louis County prosecutor announced that a grand jury decided not to indict Mr. Wilson. The announcement set off another wave of protests. In March 2015, the Justice Department called on Ferguson to overhaul its criminal justice system, declaring that the city had engaged in constitutional violations.

Aug. 9, 2014, 11:54 a.m. Michael Brown and Dorian Johnson leave Ferguson Market and Liquor. Surveillance video shows Mr. Brown stealing some cigarillos. They walk along West Florissant Avenue and then in the middle of the street on Canfield Drive. Mr. Brown and Mr. Johnson are en route to Mr. Brown's grandmother's house.

Aug. 9, 2014, 12:01 p.m. Officer Darren Wilson arrives, alone in his police vehicle. Speaking through his window, he tells the two men to move to the sidewalk. He sees that Mr. Brown fits the description of a suspect in a convenience store theft.

Aug. 9, 2014, 12:02 p.m. Officer Wilson makes a call to the dispatcher about the two men. He positions his police vehicle to block Mr. Brown and Mr. Wilson as well as traffic. There is an altercation between Officer Wilson and Mr. Brown, who is standing at the window of the vehicle. Officer Wilson fires two shots from inside the vehicle, one likely grazing Mr. Brown's thumb, and the other missing him. Mr. Brown runs east. Officer Wilson pursues him on foot. Mr. Brown stops and turns toward Officer Wilson, who also stops.

Mr. Brown moves toward Officer Wilson, who fires several more shots. Officer Wilson shoots ten bullets at Mr. Brown. A few miss him, but he is hit in the chest, the forehead, and the arm. Later autopsy reports will indicate that, contrary to initial media reports, no bullets hit Mr. Brown in the back. Mr. Brown is fatally wounded.

Some witnesses say Mr. Brown never moved toward Officer Wilson when he was shot and killed. Most of the witnesses say the shots were fired as he moved toward Officer Wilson. The St. Louis County prosecutor says the most credible witnesses reported that Mr. Brown charged toward Officer Wilson. Officer Wilson also said that Mr. Brown charged at him, making “a grunting, like aggravated sound.” Some witnesses say that Mr. Brown had his hands in the air. Several others say that he did not raise his hands at all or that he raised them briefly, then dropped them and turned toward the officer. Others describe the position of his arms as out to the side, in front of him, by his shoulders or in a running position.

Mr. Brown's body is left on the summer asphalt for four-and-a-half-hours as hundreds of family, friends, and community members gather around. In response to his mother Leslie McSpadden's anguish, an officer tells her to “get it together.” This comment seems to have set the tone for how Brown's community would be treated during subsequent days, weeks, and months when they gather in the streets to mourn and to protest. Police bring out dogs, machine guns, and tanks to residential neighborhoods where they use tear gas and threaten both protesters and media with deadly force.

The protests against the police pit the predominantly black community against a nearly all-white police force. Of the 53 commissioned officers in the Ferguson Police Department, four are black. While most of St. Louis County is white, Ferguson and neighboring towns are predominantly black. Blacks were once a minority in Ferguson, but the city's demography has shifted in the last decade after white families moved out to surrounding suburbs.

Confrontations between protesters and law enforcement officers continue even after Gov. Jay Nixon deploy the Missouri National Guard to help quell the unrest. The Ferguson Police Department hands over responsibility for policing protests to the county police department, which is larger and better equipped.

For a more detailed timeline, see: <https://www.ebony.com/news/ferguson-forward-a-timeline-504/>

DARREN WILSON'S TRIAL OUTCOME AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE:

A St. Louis County grand jury, made up of white people and black people, decides in November 2014 not to indict Officer Wilson in connection with the shooting of Mr. Brown. The grand jury's task was to determine whether there was probable cause to believe that Officer Wilson should be charged with a crime, and if so, which one. An indictment would have required nine of the 12 grand jurors to agree. The county prosecutor publicly releases forensic reports, photographs of evidence and transcripts of the proceedings, materials that are usually kept secret. The prosecutor, Robert P. McCulloch, is widely accused of having been soft on Wilson, in part because McCulloch's father was a police officer who had been killed in a shootout with a black suspect. The decision not to indict Mr. Wilson sets off a wave of anger among those who had gathered outside the Ferguson Police Department. As the night wears on, the situation grows more intense. Buildings are set on fire, and looting is reported in several businesses.

In March 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice issues its analysis of the shooting that weighed physical, ballistic, forensic, and crime-scene evidence, and statements from purported eyewitnesses. The report cleared Wilson of willfully violating Brown's civil rights, and concluded that Wilson's use of force was defensible. It also contradicts many details that the media had reported about the incident, including that Brown had raised his hands in surrender and had been shot in the back. The evidence supports Wilson's contention that Brown had been advancing toward him.

Sources:

Halpern, Jake. *The Cop*. *The New Yorker*. 3 August 2015.

<https://www.ebony.com/news/ferguson-forward-a-timeline-504/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html?auth=login-email>

2015 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION INVESTIGATION OF THE FERGUSON POLICE DEPARTMENT, SELECTED FINDINGS:

“Ferguson’s law enforcement practices are shaped by the City’s focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs. This emphasis on revenue has compromised the institutional character of Ferguson’s police department, contributing to a pattern of unconstitutional policing, and has also shaped its municipal court, leading to procedures that raise due process concerns and inflict unnecessary harm on members of the Ferguson community. Further, Ferguson’s police and municipal court practices both reflect and exacerbate existing racial bias, including racial stereotypes. Ferguson’s own data establish clear racial disparities that adversely impact African Americans. The evidence shows that discriminatory intent is part of the reason for these disparities. Over time, Ferguson’s police and municipal court practices have sown deep mistrust between parts of the community and the police department, undermining law enforcement legitimacy among African Americans in particular.”

“The City’s emphasis on revenue generation has a profound effect on Ferguson Police Department (FPD)’s approach to law enforcement. Patrol assignments and schedules are geared toward aggressive enforcement of Ferguson’s municipal code, with insufficient thought given to whether enforcement strategies promote public safety or unnecessarily undermine community trust and cooperation. Officer evaluations and promotions depend to an inordinate degree on “productivity,” meaning the number of citations issued. Partly as a consequence of City and FPD priorities, many officers appear to see some residents, especially those who live in Ferguson’s predominantly

African-American neighborhoods, less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue. This culture within FPD influences officer activities in all areas of policing, beyond just ticketing. Officers expect and demand compliance even when they lack legal authority. They are inclined to interpret the exercise of free-speech rights as unlawful disobedience, innocent movements as physical threats, and indications of mental or physical illness as belligerence.”

“Not all officers within FPD agree with this approach. Several officers commented on the futility of imposing mounting penalties on people who will never be able to afford them. One member of FPD’s command staff quoted an old adage, asking: “How can you get blood from a turnip?” Another questioned why FPD did not allow residents to use their limited resources to fix equipment violations, such as broken headlights, rather than paying that money to the City.”

“Enough officers—at all ranks—have internalized this message that a culture of reflexive enforcement action, unconcerned with whether the police action actually promotes public safety, and unconcerned with the impact the decision has on individual lives or community trust as a whole, has taken hold within FPD. One commander told us, for example, that when he admonished an officer for writing too many tickets, the officer challenged the commander, asking if the commander was telling him not to do his job. When another commander tried to discipline an officer for over-ticketing, he got the same response from the Chief of Police: ‘No discipline for doing your job.’”

“Ferguson’s law enforcement practices overwhelmingly impact African Americans. Data collected by the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014 shows that African Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson’s population.”

“Since the August 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown, the lack of trust between the Ferguson Police Department and a significant portion of Ferguson’s residents, especially African Americans, has become undeniable. The causes of this distrust and division, however, have been the subject of debate. Police and other City officials, as well as some Ferguson residents, have insisted to us that the public outcry is attributable to “outside agitators” who do not reflect the opinions of “real Ferguson residents.” That view is at odds with the facts we have gathered during our investigation. Our investigation has shown that distrust of the Ferguson Police Department is longstanding and largely attributable to Ferguson’s approach to law enforcement.”

“FPD engages in a pattern of excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment. Many officers are quick to escalate encounters with subjects they perceive to be disobeying their orders or resisting arrest. They have come to rely on ECWs, specifically Tasers®, where less force—or no force at all—would do. They also release canines on unarmed subjects unreasonably and before attempting to use force less likely to cause injury. Some incidents of excessive force result from stops or arrests that have no basis in law. Others are punitive and retaliatory. In addition, FPD records suggest a tendency to use unnecessary force against vulnerable groups such as people with mental health conditions or cognitive disabilities, and juvenile students. Ferguson’s pattern of using excessive force disproportionately harms African American members of the community. The overwhelming majority of force—almost 90%—is used against African Americans.”

Source:

United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*. 4 March 2015.

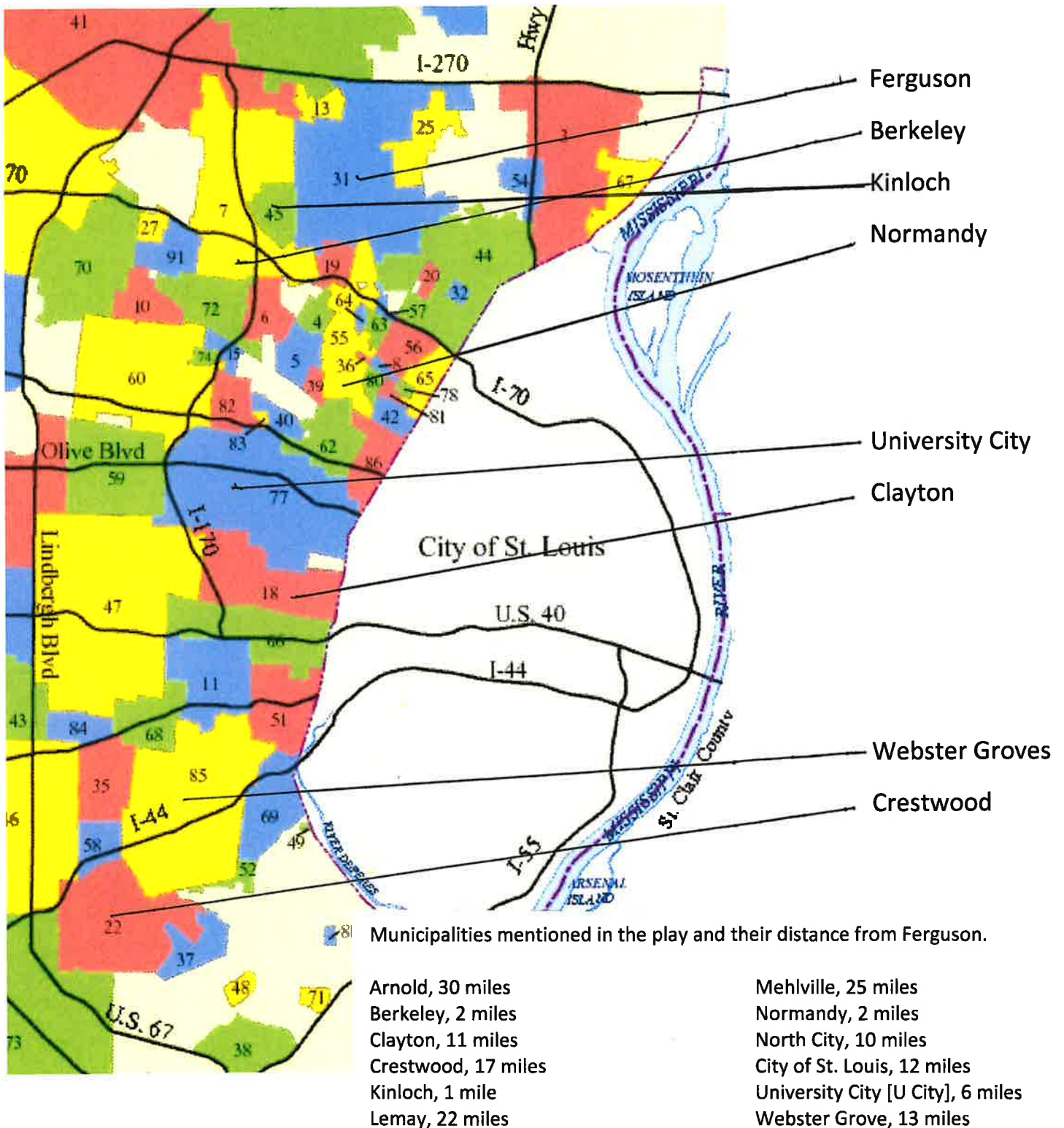
ST. LOUIS, MO AND ITS MUNICIPALITIES

St. Louis is a rare “independent city”—not located within a county, that is, but existing as its own separate entity. Baltimore and some cities in Virginia are also organized this way, but few others. St. Louis was once part of St. Louis County. In 1876, however, city officials, unhappy with the county government, managed to push through a secession in which a newly enlarged city was carved away from the county. Practically speaking, the independent city of St. Louis was equivalent to a combined city-county government. In 1950, its peak population year, St. Louis was the eighth-largest city in the United States, with a population of 856,796, which even today would make it our 18th-largest

municipality—bigger than Seattle, Denver, or Boston. Its land area of 62 square miles exceeds those of San Francisco and the District of Columbia. For a long time, independent St. Louis thrived, and separation from the county looked like a smart move. But after 1950, St. Louis fell into steep decline. Apart from the puzzle of its municipal boundaries, which range from villages with a few dozen people to full-service cities with 40,000 or more residents, St. Louis County comprises more than 50 police departments, about 80 municipal courts, and 52,000 pages of local government ordinances.

According to United States Census Data from 2017, Ferguson is home to roughly

FERGUSON AREA MUNICIPALITIES



21,000. The City of Ferguson is one of the 89 municipalities in St. Louis County. Ferguson is approximately 12 miles from St. Louis. In 1990, 74% of Ferguson's population was white, while 25% was black. By 2010, African Americans made up 67% of the population.

Source:

<https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/01/st-louis-missouri-city-county-consolidation-vote-2020/579436/>

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND BLACK COMMUNITIES

In his still influential work, *Blaming the Victim*, that refutes many of the assumptions of race, poverty, and the poor, William Ryan cites research regarding law enforcement discovering, “there are really two quite different functions that the police carry out: order maintenance and law enforcement... presumably we hire them to do what they in fact do: arrest black people and poor people. In functional terms, it would be hard to evade the conclusion that the major task we give to our police is to control potentially disruptive or troublesome groups in the population. Typically an incident begins when a citizen shows lack of respect or obedience to the forces of authority (usually embodied in the policeman himself) which inflames the policeman. There appears to be an almost ritualistic process – sometimes involving assaulting the citizen – which always ends with an arrest on a charge such as “disorderly conduct” and, if the citizen shows visible signs of having been beaten, “resisting arrest.” The extensive use against the poor of vague, catchall charges – “loitering, “vagrancy,” “breach of peace,” “suspicious conduct,” – is well known. It was the acknowledged excuse for arresting civil rights workers in the South; it is a major tool for exercising police control in the North today.”

Current research on this topic, published by the American Psychological Association, confirmed, “with more than 15,000 law enforcement agencies across the country operating at the federal, state and local levels, there is no “typical” police department. Still, evidence for

racial disparities is growing. Most of those data focus on the treatment of black civilians by white officers. In an analysis of national police – shootings data from 2011–14, for example, Cody T. Ross, a doctoral student in anthropology at the University of California, Davis, concluded there is “evidence of a significant bias in the killing of unarmed black Americans relative to unarmed white Americans.” The probability of being black, unarmed and shot by police is about 3.5 times the probability of being white, unarmed and shot by police, he found. Other studies conflict with that finding. Harvard University economist Roland G. Fryer Jr., PhD, examined more than 1,000 shootings in 10 major police departments and found no racial differences in officer-involved shootings. Fryer did, however, find that black civilians are more likely to experience other types of force, including being handcuffed without arrest, pepper-sprayed or pushed to the ground by an officer. Those disparities don’t seem to arise from the fact that black Americans are more likely to commit crimes. Supporting this point is research by Phillip Atiba Goff, PhD, a social psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity. Goff, Glaser and colleagues reviewed data from 12 police departments and found that black residents were more often subjected to police force than white residents, even after adjusting for whether the person had been arrested for violent crimes.”

Maurice Berger’s reckoning with the complex and troubling issues of race in his autobiographical, *White Lies*, notes,

“what is most dangerous about the myth of racism’s impending end is that it fosters a false sense of complacency and assurance. At a time when the problems of racism are clearly not about to disappear, falling back on the myth that things are so much better than they used to be seems ill-advised.”

Until The Flood, its subject an exploration of a community reckoning with aspects of this very myth, threads a myriad of themes within and around the conceit of policing – the policing of self and the policing of others.

Exploring the connections between eradicating racism and eradicating sexism in her book, *Killing Rage*, bell hooks, observes, “black people are routinely assaulted and harassed by white people in white supremacist culture...it is necessary for the maintenance of racial difference... indeed, if black people have not learned our place as second class citizens through educational institutions, we learn it by the daily assaults perpetuated by white offenders...we live in a society where we hear about white folks killing black

people to express their rage...white rage is acceptable, can be expressed and condoned, but black rage has no place and everyone knows it. Renewed, organized black liberation struggle cannot happen if we remain unable to tap collective black rage...moving it beyond fruitless scapegoating of another group, linking it instead to a passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible.”

As with any theatre scaffolded within informed yet objective content and performance, *Until the Flood* does not prescribe one lesson from the many events and personal experiences it presents but it might be thought of as an insight into the power (and powerlessness) of rage.

Sources:

Berger, Maurice. *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*. 1999.

hooks, bell. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. 1995.

Ryan, William. *Blaming the Victim*. 1976.

Weir, Kirsten. *Policing in Black & White*. *Monitor on Psychology*. December 2016.

VOCABULARY | ORGANIZED BY CHARACTER

LOUISA

“And I remember my father saying how racism causes SELF hate... LEGACY is the word that comes to mind . . . the things we are taught. The things we remember. All the things we can’t stop knowing/can’t stop knowing in our bones.”

Sundown Laws

Until the 1960s, Ferguson was a “sundown town” where African Americans were banned from after dark. From Maine to California, thousands of communities kept out African Americans (or sometimes Chinese Americans, Jewish Americans, etc.) by force, law, or custom. These communities are sometimes called “sundown towns” because some of them posted signs at their city limits reading,

typically, “N***er, Don’t Let The Sun Go Down On You In ____.”

Ferguson would block off the main road from Kinloch, which was a poor, all-black suburb, with a chain and construction materials but kept a second road open during the day so housekeepers and nannies could get from Kinloch to jobs in Ferguson. African-American residents from this era recalled that, for them, Ferguson was “off-limits.”

Ferguson of half a century ago is not the same Ferguson that exists today. Many residents—black and white— express pride in their community, especially with regard to the fact that Ferguson is one of the most demographically diverse communities in the area. Pride in this aspect of Ferguson is well founded; Ferguson is more diverse than most of the United States, and many of its surrounding cities.

Some residents within Ferguson still have difficulty coming to terms with Ferguson's changing demographics and seeing Ferguson's African American and white residents as equals in civic life. While total population rates have remained relatively constant over the last three decades, the portion of Ferguson residents who are African American has increased steadily

but dramatically, from 25% in 1990 to 67% in 2010. City officials and residents [contacted within the Department of Justice's 2015 report] explicitly distinguished Ferguson's African-American residents from Ferguson's "normal" residents or "regular" [white] people. One white third-generation Ferguson resident observed for the report, that in many ways Ferguson is "progressive and quite vibrant," while in another it is "typical—trying to hang on to its 'whiteness.'"

Sources:

Loewen, James W. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. 2005.
https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf

RUSTY

"I ALSO say if a cop is a good man – what difference does the color make?"

Colored Folk

The founders of the National Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) used the term, Colored People, when they organized the NAACP in 1909. Colored Folk is a variant of the term and its relationship to the work of NAACP. The NAACP is the nation's foremost, largest, and most widely recognized civil rights organization. NAACP's more than half-million members and supporters throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, leading grassroots campaigns for equal opportunity and conducting voter mobilization. The NAACP's mission was and is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and eliminate race prejudice. The NAACP seeks to remove all barriers of racial discrimination through democratic processes. The term was preferred until the 1920's when the term, Negro, replaced it as an identifier for the African American

community. This term was not always a comfortable label for the community – particularly in how its pronunciation can be very close to the epitaph, ni**ger. Negro was replaced in the 60s and 70s with the terms Black, and later in the mid-1980s, African American. Writing the term with a hyphen (African-American) is considered insensitive as no other US ethnic group names are now generally represented with a hyphen.

Sources:

Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk*. 1994.
<https://www.naacp.org/nations-premier-civil-rights-organization/>

[Uncle] Tom

A negative reference to an African American suggesting that s/he is a sellout to African American causes. The term comes from the name of the character Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* published in 1852. The novel (and subsequent unauthorized theatrical adaptations of it) had lasting impact on

attitudes regarding slavery. Uncle Tom put his master's wishes and life before his own. The term also roots itself in the Southern tradition of whites addressing all African Americans as 'aunt' or 'uncle', a tradition often received with resentment.

Source:
Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk*. 1994.

Tiparillos

Made famous in its commercials from the late 1960s, Tiparillo cigars are still widely known, widely smoked, and widely loved for a quick, affordable smoke. These machine-made cigars sport a unique plastic tip and are available in a wide array of flavors. Tiparillo cigars are produced in the United States in the city of Dothan, Alabama.

Source:
<https://www.seriouscigars.com/cigars/machine-made-cigars/tiparillo/>

Schnuck's

Founded in north St. Louis in 1939, the family-owned grocery company has nearly 100 stores in five states: Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa.

Source:
<https://www.schnucks.com/History/>

Honkey

A derogatory term for a white person. Most likely derived from the name-calling by settled European Americans against central and eastern European immigrants who were negatively referred to as *hunkies* (for Hungarian). The term supposedly gained currency within the African American community in the first half of the 20th century when the community was in competition for jobs, status, and position with these very immigrants. The term has since evolved into an identifier of insult for all Caucasians.

Source:
Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk*. 1994.

HASSAN

"I wonder why I was thinking that? Thinkin' like this all fluid/like water, man. Just comin' man like a river – ya feel me? All these thoughts."

Fluid | Flow

These terms refer to one's ability to write and perform spoken word (rap or any of its variants) with insight and ease.

Throwing Shade

A term generated within the gay male African American community denoting the ability to insult (also known as 'reading') with wit and brevity. The term gained mainstream currency following the success of Jennie Livingston's 1990's documentary, *Paris is Burning*, on the ball culture of New York City and the African

American, LatinX, gay, and transgender communities involved in it as well as the on-going television program, *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Cracker

A derogatory term for a white person. Possible that the term came from the sound of the master's whip during enslavement.

Source:
Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk*. 1994.

Fronting

The term 'front' has many meanings within the African American community including, one who is or presents as false, to pretend, and to confront someone about something they supposedly are doing or should have done. To 'front on someone' is to deceive (or try to). Fronting can also be in reference to being on public display in either a vulnerable or proud way.

Source:

Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk*. 1994.

Redneck

A derogatory term for whites of lower economic position or those partaking in events or celebrations deemed 'poor white trash.' The term has its genesis in the red neck gained in outdoor work – a sun burned neck. "You know how 'redneck' actually got its name? Back in the mining wars, when the coal miners

were going up against the government or whatever, they took red bandannas around their necks, so they wouldn't shoot one another. A 'redneck' can mean a snitch, too. You redneck on somebody, you just straight told the law what people was doing." As with white trash and hillbilly, the term has recently been inverted to one of pride.

Source:

Kranitz, Stacy. *What It Means to Be a 'Redneck' or a 'Hillbilly'*. Vice.com. 28 April 2016.

Wine Bar

Probably Cork Winebar. The bar is located less than 3 miles from the site of Michael Brown's shooting.

Liberal Guilt

Connie is implicitly referencing the conceit of 'white privilege' of which liberal (or white) guilt is an outcome. White privilege is often described through the lens of Peggy McIntosh's essay.

CONNIE

"I believe they BOTH were afraid."

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. Originally published in 1988, the essay helps readers recognize white privilege by making its effects personal and tangible. For many, white privilege was an invisible force that white people needed to recognize. It was being able to walk into a store and find that the main displays of shampoo and panty hose were catered toward your hair type and skin tone. It was being able to turn on the television and see people of your race widely represented. It was being able to move through life without being racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped. Because white privilege is both a legacy and a cause of racism, white guilt is an outcome of recognizing that white privilege is the result of conscious acts enabled by historic inequities.

Source:

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

Northwestern

Established in 1853, and located in Evanston, IL - 12 miles north of Chicago. Northwestern is approximately five hours from Ferguson.

9 Murders

Reuben is most likely referring to the deaths of Eric Gardner, 43 (Staten Island, NY, July 2014), Ezell Ford, 25 (Los Angeles, CA, August 2014), Laquan McDonald, 17 (Chicago IL, October 2014), Akai Gurley, 28 (Brooklyn, NY, November 2014), Tamir Rice, 12 (Cleveland, OH, November 2014), Walter Scott, 50 (North

Charleston, SC, April 2015), Freddie Gray, 25 (Baltimore, MD, April 2015), Brendon Glenn, 29 (Los Angeles, CA, May 2015) and Christian Taylor, 19 (Arlington, TX, August 2015),

Young black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers in 2015, according to the findings of a Guardian study that recorded a final tally of 1,134 deaths at the hands of law enforcement officers.

Sources:

Funke, Daniel and Tina Susman. From Ferguson to Baton Rouge: Deaths of Black Men and Women At The Hands Of Police. *Los Angeles Times*. 12 July 2016
Swaine, Jon, Oliver Laughland, Jamiles Lartey and Ciara McCarthy. Young Black Men Killed By US Police at Highest Rate in Year of 1,134 Deaths. *The Guardian*. 31 December 2015

DOUGRAY

“There will be a great storm. A great rain storm making it all clean. Making the town Clean. Making Ferguson clean like it must have been once.”

Tuskegee

Located in Tuskegee, Alabama, Tuskegee University was founded in a one room shanty, near Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, as the Tuskegee Institute in July 4, 1881 with Booker T. Washington as its founder and first teacher. Tuskegee rose to national prominence under the leadership of Dr. Washington, who headed the institution from 1881 until his death in 1915. Tuskegee attained University status in 1985. Tuskegee University has become one of the nation's most outstanding institutions of higher learning. While it focuses on helping to develop human resources primarily within the African American community, it is open to all. Tuskegee University is a Historically Black College/University (HBCU).

Source:
<https://www.tuskegee.edu>

Tower Grove South

Neighborhood in South St. Louis. Tower Grove South is 17 miles from Ferguson.

A Moveable Feast

Ernest Hemmingway's 1964 memoir regarding his experiences as an expat journalist in 1920s Paris.

White Trash

Author of *White Trash: The 400 Year Untold History of Class in America* (2016), Nancy Isenberg, identifies the term white trash, as first appearing in newspaper print in the 1820s. "...but it has a much older meaning, because, if we go back to some of the leading promoters of British colonization, when they imagined what were they going to do with the new world, the new world, first of all, was imagined as a wilderness, what they

REUBEN

“I don't want preferential treatment. I just want my right as a hardworking, honest man like my white counterpart. That's EVERYBODY'S right.”

called a wasteland. And it was the perfect place for literally dumping the idle poor. And these were referred to as waste people.” Temple University professor, Matt Wray, adds, “...white [suggests] purity, cleanliness, even the sacred, while trash is about impurity, dirtiness and the profane... contradiction exists because white trash is used to describe a contradiction - white people who don’t act like white people. We have all these racist stereotypes about black and brown people that they are poor and lazy and violent. But those same stereotypes don’t exist for white people. So they’re put into a whole different category. [White trash] is a term that really has white supremacy baked into it because it’s kind of like it’s understood that if you’re not white, you’re trash.”

Sources:

The Origin Of ‘White Trash,’ And Why Class Is Still An Issue In The U.S. Public Broadcasting Service: News Hour. 16 August 2016.

Why It’s Time To Retire The Disparaging Term ‘White Trash’. National Public Radio: 3-Minute Listen. 30 July 2018.

Charleston, West Virginia

Charleston is the capital and most populated city of West Virginia. Dougray is implicitly implying his knowledge that Charleston has a violent crime rate that is 141% higher than the West Virginia average and 83% higher than the national average. West Virginia has the highest age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths involving opioids. In 2017, there were 833 drug overdose deaths involving opioids in West Virginia—a rate of 49.6 deaths per 100,000 persons. Officials say the number of methamphetamine cases in West Virginia is making a deadly comeback “...but long gone are the days of cooking the potent stimulant in trailers or in backpacks beside the road. The production of meth is now being outsourced to sophisticated laboratories in countries like Mexico and China and then carted into the state. The result is a more powerful drug that goes hand-in-hand with West Virginia’s ongoing battle against opioid addiction.”

Sources:

Crum, Travis. “Meth Making Deadly Comeback in WV, Officials Say,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail*. 23 September 2018.

<https://www.areavibes.com/charleston-wv/crime/>
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/opioid-summaries-by-state/west-virginia-opioid-summary>

Hillbilly

There is some debate as to the origin of this term. There is thought that it is derived from the term “Billy Boys,” which was a name given to Scottish followers of King William III and linking it two older Scottish expressions, “hill-folk” and “billie” which was a synonym for fellow—as we, today might use, guy or bloke. “Hillbilly means from the hills, the mountains of Appalachia. What history focuses on a lot of times is the Hatfields and McCoys and the feuding, but at the same time, there were unions striking. And there was a different mix of races involved in that: Irish, black, people from China, Italians, Greeks, Germans ... [Appalachia] was a real melting pot. People would come here from all over the world to work in the mines. That’s how the music, bluegrass, came about. People from the South came up—and the banjo is an African instrument, they brought that—and their music mixed with the mountain music, fiddles from Ireland, and so on . . . Hillbilly is a state of mind. It’s metaphysical and ephemeral and contradictory.

Source:

Kranitz, Stacy. *What It Means to Be a ‘Redneck’ or a ‘Hillbilly’.* *Vice.com*. 28 April 2016.

Tender is the Night

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1934 novelization of his experience with his wife Zelda’s diagnosis and treatment for schizophrenia. It is Fitzgerald’s final work and for him, his greatest work.

Packing

Packing is slang for possessing or carrying. Dougray is referring to his ownership of, and willingness to use, a gun.

Al Sharpton

Rev. Al Sharpton is the founder and President of the National Action Network (NAN), a not-for-profit civil rights organization based in Harlem, New York, with over 47 chapters nationwide. Rev. Sharpton is an outspoken and sometimes controversial political activist, working to lead the fight against racial prejudice and injustice. He is also an MSNBC radio/television talk show host for 'PoliticsNation.' Upon hearing of Darren Wilson's resignation from the Ferguson Police Department, Rev. Sharpton observed, "reporters started calling me, saying the officer had resigned from his job and said that he hopes it would lead to healing the city. But you can't heal leaving the injured out of the process... [Michael Brown's family] have open wounds. The fight's not over. Justice will come to Ferguson."

Source:

Chumley, Cheryl K. "Al Sharpton on Ferguson: 'We lost the round, but the fight ain't over'." *The Washington Times*. 1 December 2014.

White Rage

Much of Dougray's frustrations and responses could be thought of as representative of "white rage". White rage is not only an emotion (as with much of Dougray's frustrations) it also manifests as an on-going tool of systemic and socially sanctioned racism – especially toward African Americans and African American communities. Carol Anderson, the Charles Howard Candler professor of African American studies at Emory University and author of *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* wrote a *Washington Post* editorial in response to the events of Ferguson, articulating her conceit of white rage. Selections of Professor Anderson's article follow below:

"When we look back on what happened in Ferguson, Mo., during the summer of 2014, it will be easy to think of it as yet one more episode of black rage ignited by yet another police killing of an unarmed

African American male. But that has it precisely backward. What we've actually seen is the latest outbreak of white rage. Sure, it is cloaked in the niceties of law and order, but it is rage nonetheless . . . [this] rage smolders in meetings where officials redraw precincts to dilute African American voting strength or seek to slash the government payrolls that have long served as sources of black employment. It goes virtually unnoticed, however, because white rage doesn't have to take to the streets and face rubber bullets to be heard. Instead, white rage carries an aura of respectability and has access to the courts, police, legislatures and governors, who cast its efforts as noble, though they are actually driven by the most ignoble motivations."

"White rage recurs in American history. It exploded after the Civil War, erupted again to undermine the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision and took on its latest incarnation with Barack Obama's ascent to the White House. For every action of African American advancement, there's a reaction, a backlash."

"So when you think of Ferguson, don't just think of black resentment at a criminal justice system that allows a white police officer to put six bullets into an unarmed black teen. Consider the economic dislocation of black America. Remember a Florida judge instructing a jury to focus only on the moment when George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin interacted, thus transforming a 17-year-old, unarmed kid into a big, scary black guy, while the grown man who stalked him through the neighborhood with a loaded gun becomes a victim. Remember the assault on the Voting Rights Act. Look at Connick v. Thompson, a partisan 5-4 Supreme Court decision in 2011 that ruled it was legal for a city prosecutor's staff to hide evidence that exonerated a black man who was rotting on death row for

PAUL

“The policeman fidgeted. I could tell he felt real stupid. Real stupid. And we stood there staring at each other for a minute and I was scared. I didn’t know what he was going to do.”

14 years. And think of a recent study by Stanford University psychology researchers concluding that, when white people were told that black Americans are incarcerated in numbers far beyond their proportion of the population, ‘they reported being more afraid of crime and more likely to support the kinds of punitive policies that exacerbate the racial disparities,’ such as three-strikes or stop-and-frisk laws.”

Source:

Anderson, Carol. “Ferguson Isn’t About Black Rage Against Cops. It’s White Rage Against Progress.” *The Washington Post*. 29 August 2014.

Schindler’s List | Amon Goeth

Schindler’s List is a 1993 film directed by Steven Spielberg based on a book by Thomas Keneally and adapted as a screenplay by Steven Zaillian. The film, which won seven Academy Awards – including Best Picture – recounts the transformative story of Oskar Schindler who turned his enamel works factory into a refuge for Jews during the height of Nazi occupation of Poland. Both the film and the novel are based on the true story of Oskar Schindler who managed to save about 1,100 Jews from being gassed.

Dougray references a scene in the film wherein Nazi guard Amon Goeth’s well-documented sadistic cruelty is unleashed on the camp’s prisoners. Goeth was a commandant at Płaszów, located in the Kraków suburb of the same name. Płaszów was originally a forced-labor camp and later became a deportation concentration camp within the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center network. Poles and Jews were segregated within the camp. The largest number of people confined in Płaszów at any one time was over 20,000. Thousands were killed there, mostly by shooting. At the 1946 trial at the Supreme

National Tribunal of Poland in Kraków, Goeth was found guilty and convicted of the murders of tens of thousands of people. Goeth was hanged for his crimes on September 13, 1946.

Sources:

<http://www.oskarschindler.com/12.htm>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/plaszow>

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108052/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl

Canfield Apartments

Michael Brown was shot in the street outside of this 37-acre, 414 unit apartment complex.

Art Department/Art History – UC Berkeley

From the university’s website: The Major in History of Art [at UC Berkeley] is designed to give students solid grounding in the artistic traditions, practices, and contexts that comprise historical and contemporary visuality. Equally, it introduces the discipline’s history, methods, and debates. It prepares students to do independent research, to evaluate evidence, to create coherent and sustained arguments, and to develop skills in academic writing.

Source:

<http://guide.berkeley.edu/undergraduate/degree-programs/art-history/>

Leonardo Da Vinci

Italian High Renaissance artist, inventor, and scientist.

Elizabeth Catlett

20th Century African American sculptor, painter, and printer.

“I prayed for both those young men. Some people got mad but that’s how God speaks to me. That’s how MY God speaks to me.”

Romare Bearden

20th Century African American artist, activist, noted for his acrylic and collage works.

Universalist ministry

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religious tradition that was formed from the consolidation of two religions: Unitarianism and Universalism. In America, the Universalist Church of America was founded in 1793, and the American Unitarian Association in 1825. After consolidating in 1961, these faiths became the new religion of Unitarian Universalism through the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

Source:
<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are/history>

Shiva

One of the main deities of Hinduism, whom Shaivites worship as the supreme god.

Kali

Hindu goddess commonly associated with death, sexuality, violence, and motherly love.

Muhammad

Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim is the founder of Islam and the proclaimer of the Qur’ān.

Jehovah

Latinized rendering of the name of the God of Israel.

Allah

Allah is the standard Arabic word for God and is used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews as well as by Muslims.

Gentrification

In *Governing* (a publication of e.Republic, the nation’s only media and research company focused exclusively on state and local government), Executive Editor Alan Ehrenhalt writes: “Gentrification is a word that urban politicians do not like and try hard not to use. In the past few years, as demographic rearrangement in central cities has become ubiquitous and impossible to ignore, scholars and local activists have struggled to understand just what is happening and which forces bring it about. Vibrant downtowns and safe, placid neighborhoods are the much-admired product of urban social change in the 21st century. Gentrification is the concept onto which all the negative consequences of this change have been loaded. The idea that gentrification and urban revival are essentially the same thing is one that even some of the most sophisticated students of city life prefer not to discuss. But it is the reality that lurks just beneath the surface.”

Source:
Ehrenhalt, Alan. “What, Exactly, Is Gentrification?” *Governing*. February 2015.

National Guard

The National Guard is a unique element of the U.S. military that serves both community and country. The Guard responds to domestic emergencies, overseas combat missions, counterdrug efforts, reconstruction missions and more. Any state governor or the President of the United States can call on the Guard in a moment’s notice. Guard Soldiers hold civilian jobs or attend college while maintaining their military training part time. Guard Soldiers’ primary area of operation is their home state.

Unlike the other branches of the military, Guard Soldiers can be deployed by the governors of their resident states to support communities stricken by natural disasters like floods and hurricanes. Guard Soldiers can also be deployed by the president of the United States to defend our country or support our allies overseas. This dual role for the Guard is what makes the Guard unique.

The National Guard, in its modern form, dates from 1903, when Congress passed a law to regulate state militias and coordinate them with the regular Army, in the wake of the Spanish-American War and the ensuing Philippine insurrection. Militias themselves have existed almost since the beginning of European settlement, and the term “National Guard” appears to have been in popular use for them since before the Civil War.

There is a long history in the United States of governors, and at times even the president, deploying the National Guard to help put down riots or seemingly uncontrollable demonstrations. Events in Ferguson were an echo of some of the tensest moments of the Civil Rights Movement — and hearken back to some of the most notorious moments in recent American history. Reasons for the Guard’s presence is indicated in parenthesis. 1957: Little Rock, Arkansas (Little Rock Central High School - integration): 1962: Oxford, Mississippi: 1964 (university of Mississippi - integration): Rochester, New York: 1965 (allegations of police brutality): Selma, Alabama: 1965 (civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery): Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Washington, D.C. 1968 (Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination): Kent, Ohio: 1970 (anti-Vietnam protests) 1992: Los Angeles, California (police acquittal - Rodney King incident): 1993: Waco, Texas (Branch Davidian compound siege): 1999: Seattle, Washington (World Trade Organization meeting).

Sources:

Bender, Jeremy. “The Unnerving Precedent of Using the National Guard to Quell Civil Unrest.” *Business Insider*. 19 August 2014.

Flippen, Alan. “Not Just Ferguson: National Guard Has a Long History With Civil Unrest.” *New York Times*. 18 August 2014.

<https://www.nationalguard.com/guard-faqs>

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-Performance Questions

1. What is documentary theater and what are the elements that make it a unique theatrical genre?
2. How does our personal age, race, gender, and other factors influence the lens(es) we look through to make sense of events or a progression of events? How does geographical proximity effect our assessments of these events?
3. What is the difference between a stereotype and an archetype? Do stereotypes only reinforce negative images or are there stereotypes that reinforce positive images?
4. How is racism passed down from generation to generation? How can this loop be disrupted and quelled?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the scenic elements of set design, costuming, lighting, and sound help tell the story? Which are the most effective and why?
2. Explain the power of one actor engaging with historical events by becoming multiple characters
3. In what ways, in language and behavior, do the characters define themselves? What themes do they represent?
4. How do the different characters describe their situations and what they have experienced?
5. How does the playwright show the different attitudes toward racism around St. Louis in 2015?
6. Louisa describes the “self-hate” that people feel. How does she explain the way that it manifests in people?
7. How does Connie describe what happened to her relationship with her friend, Margaret?
8. How does Dougray describe his feelings about his surroundings and the people that populate the city?
9. How would you define “white rage?”
10. How does Paul’s experience contribute to the play?
11. How do the characters feel they are being judged and how do they judge other people? What does the Narrator contribute at the end of the play?

Until the Flood

ACTIVITY

Personal Narrative Interview

In this oral history-based activity, students engage with the theatrical practices of active listening, theatrical adaptation and performance. Have students:

1. Interview a parent or a grandparent about the town, city or neighborhood where they grew up. Were there any places in the town that most of the town gathered such as a store, post office or church? What do they remember about these places and the people that gathered there? How did these places change over time? How did these people and places impact them and their relationship with the town, city or neighborhood?
2. After the interview, identify key themes and character choices that they will to: can be adapted into a monologue for the stage.
3. After writing the first draft, have students read the draft aloud to peers.
4. After hearing the first drafts, discuss the differences between theatrical adaptations (narration, reportage, etc). Inquire of students as to what they did to convey the characters and story?
5. Ask the students, in what ways did they have to invent, delete, or change anything within the source material for the monologue?
6. Raising the bar: Following the first theatrical adaptation, invite the students to change a point of view. What changes would have to be made to clearly show that the events found in the first draft are now being described from a different character's perspective?

History PG: The historical method of inquiry to ask questions, evaluate primary and secondary sources, critically analyze and interpret data, and develop interpretations defended by evidence from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends these library resources to enhance your theatre experience.

Read

***Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* by Mira Jacob (book, 2018)**

How do you answer the question “Are white people afraid of brown people” when your biracial six-year-old asks? Mira Jacob had to answer that question, along with others about Michael Brown and about family who have different political views. As her son asks question after question, many about identity, Jacob thinks about her own family and experiences back when she was young, when she was hopeful for a better future America. While some of the conversations are painful and some are absurd (for example, picking who is better between Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan), all are working toward answers rooted in love to help navigate the current world.

Watch

***Whose Streets?* (2017, Magnolia Pictures)**

After the August 2014 shooting of Michael Brown by Ferguson police the city of St Louis, MO roiled with unrest, anxiety and anger. Sabaah Folayan and Damon Davis, co-directors of this powerful documentary, wanted to show a street-level view of what was happening in Ferguson, not the clean cut and whitewashed version that was being disseminated by the media. So they filmed protests and protestors, capturing brutal moments of the militarization of police who stood hundreds strong in shows of overt power in response to peaceful protest. As one activist says in the film “We’re trying to mourn, and you came here with 300 cop cars and riot gear and canine units...This is the same thing that pretty much got us here.”

Listen

***Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* by Lezley McSpadden (Audiobook, 2016).**

This incredibly honest memoir of Lezley McSpadden paints a picture of her struggles as a single mother and her commitment to raising four strong African-American children despite the hardships in her path. McSpadden’s journey begins with her pregnancy at age fifteen and her decision to drop out of school to raise her first son, Michael Orlandus Darrion Brown. This is the story of a mother doing her best, and the story of the family she struggled to support and nurture. McSpadden also speaks of Michael’s struggles, but there is nothing here out of the ordinary for any teen. McSpadden’s was a normal family with ups and downs; Michael Brown was a normal kid until police gunfire cut him down. Audiobook read by the talented Lisa Renee Pitts.

Download

***American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* by Terrance Hayes (ebook, 2018).**

In a sequence of sonnets that all share a title, all written during the first 200 days of the current presidential administration, Hayes grapples with the folding and unfolding of time and consequence that’s gotten us to this fraught political and undeniably personal moment. His words tap into the same waters of fear and feeling that Until the Flood does, and he so slyly underlines so much of what’s crazy-making in our world today, from police brutality and its fallout to the long-reaching effects of traditional notions of masculinity. As in Until the Flood, the victim confronts their aggressor head-on -- and more than once the victim and the aggressor may seem to swap roles. Beautiful, formidable, and, ultimately, full of love: “If you think a hammer is the only way to hammer / A nail, you ain’t thought of the nail correctly.” Let Hayes explain.

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