OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR
by CHARLES SMITH
directed by CHUCK SMITH

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Of the many plays we at the Goodman have showcased during our annual New Stages Festival, few have sparked the excitement and admiration expressed by audiences two years ago for the developmental production of Charles Smith’s *Objects in the Mirror*. Inspired by the harrowing true story of Shedrick Yarkpai, a young Liberian refugee-turned-actor, Charles’ play chronicles Shedrick’s extraordinary decade-long journey: from his escape from the violent civil wars that plagued Liberia from 1989 to 2003 to his eventual re-settlement in Adelaide, Australia. Along the way, Shedrick was forced to forgo his own identity to assume that of his dead cousin—and that decision, and its many ramifications during the years of his journey, provides the central conflict of what I think is one of the most powerful new works that I’ve experienced during my 30-year tenure as the Goodman’s Artistic Director.

*Objects in the Mirror* is indeed a gripping, powerfully wrought story of a young man’s courageous escape from a world of almost unthinkable violence, capturing in terms both stark and poetic the realities of that violence and the dreams which fuel his odyssey. But more than that, Charles has created a profoundly moving exploration of self, identity, memory and survival—ultimately forcing us to confront, as young Shedrick did, the personally and morally complex questions that result when one is forced to discard one’s own identity to achieve survival under the guise of another.

It is a fascinating question, one without easy answers or definite prescriptions, and Charles explores the complicated ambiguities and heartbreaking alternatives with consummate sensitivity, profound wisdom and striking theatricality. I am very pleased that this premiere production continues Charles’ association with his frequent collaborator (and the director of the New Stages workshop staging), Goodman Resident Director Chuck Smith, whose customary eloquence and focus are a perfect match for this richly resonant story.

*Objects in the Mirror* does exactly what I feel great plays can and should do: use the exploration of a complex contemporary event to elucidate intensely personal and fundamental issues, issues to which we can all relate whatever our own experiences or backgrounds may be. I am very proud to bring this thought-provoking and moving play to the Goodman’s Albert stage—a work which tells, I feel, an essential story of our time, and the crowning achievement of one of the most passionate and accomplished writers now working in the American theater.

Robert Falls
Artistic Director
Goodman Theatre
Creating the *Objects in the Mirror*: A Conversation with Playwright Charles Smith

*Originally Printed in Onstage+

Shortly before rehearsals began for *Objects in the Mirror*, playwright Charles Smith spoke with the play’s dramaturg Jonathan L. Green about the true life inspiration for the story and his enduring partnership with director Chuck Smith.

Jonathan L. Green: Shedrick Yarkpai, the protagonist of *Objects in the Mirror*, is based on a real person—an actor and Liberian refugee now living in Australia. How did you meet Shedrick?

Charles Smith: In 2009, Shedrick was in a production my play *Free Man of Color*, in Adelaide. That play is set in 1815 and about the first African American to attend college at Ohio University, where I now teach. In my research for the play, I realized that the reason they brought this ex-slave to the university, to educate him, was to then be able to send him as a free man to Liberia to stand in receivership of all of these people they had planned to deport. It was the goal of the American Colonization Society to deport freed black men and women, so that if people saw black folks walking the streets in America, they would know they were slaves. So that was my discovery, and that’s the play I wrote. Shedrick was cast in that role and I met him there in Australia. Then I went back the next year. They did another play of mine and cast Shedrick again. That’s when Shedrick started to tell me details about his own story.

JLG: How faithful to Shedrick’s true story did you feel you needed to be in *Objects in the Mirror?*

CS: The first act of the play is the story that Shedrick told me: he left Liberia running from the war and ended up in a series of refugee camps with family. His uncle said, “I can get us out of here.” I wanted to detail those events and that sort of travel. The character of his cousin Zaza is sort of a composite, but the uncle character is real; I never met him and really don’t have an idea of who he is, but I was fascinated with this idea of Shedrick’s dilemma and how his uncle played a part in it.

JLG: In 1996, the Goodman produced your play *Black Star Line*, about Marcus Garvey and his campaign for a black nation in Liberia.
to which black Americans could re-locate. Earlier, you spoke about your play *Free Man of Color*. And in *Objects in the Mirror*, our hero is a young man seeking to flee Liberia in the midst of the civil war there. Could we consider these plays to be speaking from three very different vantage points on the theme of black identity in a colonized world?

CS: That’s an interesting question. I keep discovering more information and the conversation goes in a different direction with each play, so if they are in conversation with each other I think it’s a sort of conflicted and disjointed conversation. With *Black Star Line*, I explored what Marcus Garvey was attempting to do, and found that to be very admirable. And of course then the wheels came off soon after, but I thought his goals were very admirable. Then as I was writing *Free Man of Color*, I understood more of what had been going on. And I thought, “Am I gonna be truthful, or am I gonna follow my original plot?” I ended up having to be truthful, and that play looked at Liberia in a completely different way. *Objects in the Mirror* is a third point of view that is radically different from the first two. If you follow the plays in chronological order, they say something about the influence of America on Liberia. There is this theory that when an oppressor leaves, the oppressed then emulate the oppressor. The French countries have that sort of French flavor and the English countries have that English flavor. In the Congo, we have that violence that King Leopold of Belgium visited upon them, and that violence can still be seen there. And I think Liberia still has the aroma of American corruption and exploitation. I think they are in conversation with each other. I don’t know if it’s a healthy conversation, but there is a conversation there, certainly.

JLG: You and the Goodman’s Resident Director Chuck Smith (no relation) have worked together several times before through the years. Is it true that you not only share a name but a birthday as well?

CS: Yes, we share the same birthday. Not the same year, though. We always call each other on our birthday and give each other our best wishes. And I love working with him.

JLG: How did you two meet?
CS: Chuck was already established in Chicago theater when I got out of graduate school. I remember everybody in the theater always getting excited because Chuck Smith was in the building. “Chuck Smith is coming. Chuck Smith is coming, Chuck Smith is coming!” And then Chuck Smith walked in the door. I’d be at a party and women would come up to me after hearing my name is Charles Smith and they would say, “Oh, you’re Chuck!” and buddy up to me. I’d reply, “No I’m not Chuck, I’m Charles Smith,” and the light would go out of their eyes and they would say, “Excuse me,” and walk away! I remember telling Chuck, “I’m tired of people mistaking me for you. One day people are going to mistake you for me.” Then one day much later, Chuck called me and said, “Hey man, I got a call, somebody was looking for ‘my play.’ They were looking for you! Congratulations.” It was a great moment in my life. Now we call each other periodically saying, “Hey man, a guy called me looking for you.” We still get a big kick out of it.

JLG: Why do the two of you work together so well?

CS: Chuck doesn’t try to write the play, he directs it. When I’m in rehearsal, I want to make sure everything is firing on all cylinders, and there are times when I hear something and think, “You know, that speech is wonderfully written, but is it moving things forward?” And if it’s not, I cut it. Chuck is the only director I’ve worked with who, when I go to cut the speech, says, “No, no, no, wait, wait, wait! Let’s talk about this.” Other directors say, “Fine, fine, you got any more cuts?” But Chuck looks at every word. He looks at the page and says, “This is the play I’m directing.” I’ve worked with other directors who are trying to direct the play they think I’m going to write. They are directing how they think I’m going to change the play. They’re directing the play that they hope is gonna be. Chuck directs the play that’s there; he directs what’s on the page. I just love working with him. He’s down to earth. I like his sensibility when he talks about characters and relationships.

JLG: In your years working together, have you seen your working relationship change?

CS: I don’t think it has changed, but it’s deepened. We’ve developed a sort of shorthand. And when I say ‘short hand’ it’s literal: Chuck does this thing where he says, “Well, you know…” and he waves his little finger and thumb back and back and sideways, and I know exactly what that means. Now we use fewer words to get to a profound understanding of what’s going on.

JLG: Your play is set in Liberia, South Australia, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire, but certainly audiences will find parallels and echoes as we continue to have deep and difficult conversations about refugees, immigration, genocide and racism in our own country. These aren’t new issues, certainly; but how do you think Goodman audiences might relate to the show in 2017, as opposed to a few years ago when you wrote the script?

CS: I actually thought a couple years ago, “Oh man, I’ve sat on this too long. The play is probably no longer relevant.” Man, was I wrong. I think it was during [the play’s first developmental production at the 2015 New Stages Festival] when the situation in Syria started to get much, much worse that I realized, “Oh man, this speaks to everything that’s going on in the world.” The sort of panic that the play captures, as the characters flee horrible violence, the sense of dread being felt by these good, hard-working people who just want to live peacefully without the fear of being discovered – it’s the same. There are Mexicans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans living in this country under the same fear. Where I teach, there is a student from Syria; he’s here with his family, and he’s terrified. He’s so afraid of being deported and being sent back to his death. And if it was only him, his fear wouldn’t be as great. But he has two children and a wife, and he’s afraid they are going to be murdered as well. That is part of what this play is about.

JLG: Have you been in touch with Shedrick as you were writing this play? Does he know it’s going to open in front of 900 people in a few weeks?

CS: We have been in touch. In fact, when I finished a draft of it, I was a little concerned. I wanted to show him, and I thought, “He may not like it. And if he doesn’t like it, hopefully I can address his concerns. But if I can’t address his concerns, what do I do? Do I just put it in a drawer?” But he read it and he was deeply moved and honored. It was a difficult thing to do because I felt the responsibility of telling his story, but ultimately I’m not only telling his story; I have to tell my story as well. To serve both of those masters well, I think, was the great challenge of the play.
Objects in the Mirror’s protagonist, Shedrick Yarkpai, begins his journey in his West African coastal home of Liberia, where the lingering trauma of two connected civil wars (spanning 1989–2003) has left much of the country in physical and economic ruin to this day—parts of Monrovia, the capital city, lost power in a 1989 attack, and remain without electricity. Due to the large death toll, and even larger resettlement figures, more than half of today’s Liberian population is under age 18.

But from this country’s beginnings more than 150 years prior, the idea of Liberia was born from strange bedfellows—and into conflict.

Liberia declared independence in 1847 and became the first of what are now considered the modern African republics. The early 19th century saw the founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS), which was dedicated to the emigration of free people of color from the United States. In what might seem a curious alliance at first blush, the ACS was established by two disparate groups: abolitionists (mostly Quakers and other Methodist leaders, who hoped emigration would put an end to slavery), and mid-Atlantic slaveholders (who feared a growing population of freed slaves could result in revolution). Still others felt that racial equality was a losing bet in America: the only way for black Americans to live free of the binds of racial discrimination was to send them to a black homeland. Abolitionist dissent within the ACS escalated in the Society’s first years, as they realized the slaveholders’ schemes. Still, by 1867, the Society had transported or arranged for the transport of more than 13,000 black emigrants to the “Grain Coast”—the present republic of Liberia, which extends from the Mano River to Cape Palmas and borders Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

For the first 40 years of the republic, every president elected to lead Liberia had been born in the United States—and until 1980, every president had been of Americo-Liberian descent. Those leaders either neglected or disempowered the indigenous Liberian population, even though the Americo-Liberians made up only five percent of the country’s total population. Following years of postponements, 62-year-old Taylor was finally charged with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2012, and sentenced to 50 years imprisonment in a maximum-security facility in the United Kingdom.
Following his resignation, Liberia was handed to an interim government and, in 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the first female president in Africa. Sirleaf was a supporter of Taylor in the 1980s and early ‘90s, but she later became one of his fiercest political opponents.

Today, both because of the wars and an Ebola virus outbreak in 2014, the majority of businesses in Liberia have left, rendering the country with one of the smallest GDPs per-capita in the world, and with nearly two-thirds of its citizens unemployed. Average current life expectancy in Liberia is under 59 years, also among the lowest in the world, with a very high maternal mortality rate. There is some hope of these statistics bettering over the next several years through a burgeoning palm oil industry—enriching a few and leaving many desti-

tute. opulation. In April of 1980, President William R. Tolbert was assassinated in a coup led by a mostly-unknown soldier, Samuel Doe, who, in his first act as the country’s first indigenous Liberian president, promptly (and publicly) executed nearly the entirety of his America-Liberian predecessor’s cabinet. Doe had the U.S. government’s support and financial aid, as the Reagan administration fought to strengthen the country’s ties to the Western bloc and prevent the spread of Cold War era communism in Africa. As Doe’s reign continued, though, his governing style came to resemble that of his predecessor: characterized by greed, corruption and crimes against humanity. Doe initially claimed that he would govern in favor of all native Liberians, but it soon became apparent that he favored the Krahn, his own tribe, and the Mandingo; other tribes, including the Gio and Mano, rebelled. Towards the end of 1989, Gio and Mano military forces—led by Prince Yormie Johnson and Charles Taylor, two officials who fled Liberia years earlier to escape the Doe regime—crossed the Liberian border from Côte d’Ivoire, where they had been building anti-Doe rebel forces. A decade after taking power, Doe was captured and brutally killed in a coup lead by Johnson—beginning a two-part civil war that would last nearly a decade and a half, leaving almost 250,000 dead and more than one million displaced.

In 1990, Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Johnson’s splinter group, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), together struggled to maintain power over the country. Doe supporters and former militants from nearby Sierra Leone and Guinea formed the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO); the brutal fighting between the NPFL and the ULIMO continued for years, despite attempted interventions from the Economic Community of West African States, the United Nations and leaders from other African
countries (including Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana). Notably, and despite its financial and colonial ties with Liberia, the United States did not participate in these intervention attempts.

Taylor’s military tactics and those of his opponents were cruel and extraordinary: they pressed scores of young boys (many aged nine to 13) into service as child soldiers and forced them into drug habits to both maintain physical control and strip them of mental independence. At one point in the war, it is estimated that more than a quarter of Liberia’s fighters were children.

Finally in 1996, the warring factions agreed to disarmament; the next year, Taylor was elected president in a landslide victory. Bloodshed slowed but did not stop; Taylor kept the “blood diamond” trade going in West Africa, buying weapons for his own administration from extremist rebels in neighboring countries.

Less than two years after the official end of the first civil war, displaced Liberians in Guinea (mostly members of ULIMO) invaded Liberia from the north, and alliances between those forces and militias in Sierra Leone led to major aggressions in north and northwest Liberia. They pushed further into Taylor’s Liberia, and in 2003, anti-Taylor forces from another rebel group originating in Côte d’Ivoire began an invasion from the southwest. As rebels closed in on Monrovia, Taylor resigned from the presidency and fled to Nigeria to live in exile.

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GEOGRAPHY:
Africa is the second largest continent in the world in both area and population, covering more than 20% of the earth’s land surface – it is only smaller and less populated than Asia. It is home to the world’s largest desert, the Sahara, and the world’s longest river, the Nile. The continent is cut almost completely in half by the equator, and as a result has a large number of ecosystems, ranging from tropics to desert. It also varies widely in climate, from tropical to subarctic. Africa boasts Mt. Kilimanjaro (in Tanzania), which reaches 19,341 feet above sea level, and Lake Asal (in Djibouti), which, at its deepest, is 555 feet below sea level.

PEOPLE:
Africa is made up of 54 sovereign states and 9 territories. These sovereign states aren’t like what we refer to as states in The United States; each is an independent country. The population of Africa is over 1 billion people, made up of 450 different ethnic groups, and over 900 languages and regional dialects (with most Africans speaking more than one language fluently). That’s almost twice the population of North America, and three times as many languages! Africa’s population is young: in 2012, the median age was 19.7 (compared to a world-wide median of 30.4).

ETYMOLOGY
The origin of “Africa” is not entirely clear. The name Africa could derive from the latin “aprica” or sunny, or the greek “aphrike” (without cold). It’s also possible that the name came from “Afriga” or, the land of Afrigs (a community south of Carthage), so-called by the Romans who once ruled the entire North African coast. British Explorer Lord Henry Stanley referred to Africa as “The Dark Continent,” in the title of his 19th century book. This phrase, along with “darkest Africa” were coined by Europeans, and are inaccurate, pejorative and derogatory.

HISTORY
For most of modern history, much of Africa was under the imperial rule of various European empires. It wasn’t until the end of the World War II that African countries began to gain their independence. Independence was only the first step, however, and many Africans fought for equal rights under white-minority governments. Most notably, perhaps, is South Africa – one of the first countries to gain independence, but racial segregated through apartheid until the mid 1990’s.

For more information, click here for Encyclopedia Britannica’s entry.
Modern Cities in Africa: Size, Population Density, Urbanism
by TERESA RENDE with updates by ANNA GELMAN

It is not uncommon for depictions of Africa in American media to focus on certain images. Photographs of children in need of donations show African children experiencing drought, famine, or illness. Photos from war torn countries show people in pain, suffering the consequences of war, be it local, national, government sanctioned, or civil. These photos serve a purpose, whether it is to accompany a piece of journalism or encourage a mid-afternoon television watcher to sponsor a child in need. The notions they perpetuate are not false, but they are incomplete.

The urban landscape of Africa is growing annually, and has been for some time. A variety of African nations, steeped in manufacturing, travel, and urban development, experience a type of modernity we do not often see in American media. What of these cities on the rise?

It’s important, when considering these major metropolitan areas, to have some sense of size and scope, so let’s use American cities as a jumping off point. According to data from 2016, Chicago is the 3rd largest city in America with a population of 2,720,546 people and an approximate population density of 11,864.8 people per square mile. The two American cities that outrank Chicago include New York, with 8,537,673 people and a population density of 27,016.4/square mile, and Los Angeles, clocking in at 3,971,883 people with a population density of 8,091.8/square mile (data from 2016). Roughly 8 million, near 4 million, and near 3 million people – pretty big cities!

When we think of New York and Chicago it may be easy enough to picture a skyline or some iconic buildings that dots the skyline. The same may even be true of large European cities, Big Ben, The Eiffel Tower, or the Coliseum in Rome may help us identify big cities we’ve never visited. My favorite images are often of skylines at night, their modernity exemplified by their glowing electric buildings, bustling even after the sun sets. It surprised me, then, to see these very same images all over the continent of Africa in a variety of nations. This is nothing like what I’ve seen on TV as a child or teenager. Many people in African nations are not living in huts or swatting flies from their brow.

Keeping in mind the biggest American city, New York, with over 8 million inhabitants, living with just over 27,000 people per square mile, let’s look at some of Africa’s largest cities.

One of the largest cities, with 9.5 million living at a population density of 50,180/square mile, is Cairo, Egypt (January, 2017). This may not surprise you given that Cairo is a place we hear of often both in history class and in the news. But it might surprise you to learn that it’s not just Cairo, but a number of cities in African nations rival most American cities in population. The Nigerian city of Lagos has a population of 13.1 million people (2015)! Kinshasa, a province located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has a whopping 10.12 million people, though their population density is much lower at only 2,618.86/square mile (2014). Abidjan in Côte d’Ivoire boasts 1.93 million inhabitants in the city proper (2015) and Johannesburg in South Africa boasts 4.4 million inhabitants (2016). The list goes on, large cities, sprawling metro areas, in a variety of African nations, not too far off from our own “big cities” of America and Europe. And many of these numbers are taken from censuses from years past, indicating that they’d only be larger today!

While the numbers tell us about the quantity of people living there, it does not speak to urbanism. Nor does it address how many Americans understand Africa, which is largely shaped by the images seen in magazines and on TV. When viewing images of these cities, the related notions of urban development are obvious. Just look at a few of these sprawling urban landscapes and African cities may not seem entirely different, visually, than American or European cities!
The United States and Australia have much in common. Both countries are largely descended from the British and over the course of many centuries, their British and Euro-centric descendants have overtaken much of the indigenous populations of their respective land masses. In addition, over the last few decades, both countries have reformed their immigration policies, especially as conservative populist parties have come into power. While the U.S. has deported tens of thousands of undocumented peoples from Central and South America throughout the Bush, Obama, and now the Trump Administration, Australia has been detaining refugees trying to enter the country via its shores. Termed “boat people” by the way they travel to the country, Australia has been changing its migration policy by entering their “migration zone”. The Atlantic reports on the changing immigration policies in Australia as asylum seekers continuously are sent to detention camps on the island nations of Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Once there, these people could spend up to three years waiting to be resettled and their immigration status to be processed. However, the state of these camps violates human rights. The Guardian has compiled and released the abuses document at the Nauru camp. In response, Australians have begun to see an increase in racism and xenophobia in their country. Two Australians write about their experiences for the New York Times (1) and (2).

Despite protestations from the UN and the international community, the Australian government and their prime minister Malcolm Turnbull continue to perpetuate this xenophobia, tightening their immigration laws. Amidst all of this, U.S./Australia relations still remain strong. The Trump administration reluctantly agreed to honor the agreement that the Obama administration brokered in November 2016 to resettle refugees from the Nauru and Papua New Guinea Manus camps in exchange for Australia to resettle refugees from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador as part of U.S.-led resettlement program in Central America.
As the curtain rises on Charles Smith’s Objects in the Mirror, Liberian refugee Shedrick Yarkpai has been resettled in Australia — one of more than one million refugees displaced when their homes and communities were destroyed in the Liberian civil wars.

A plurality of internationally-resettled refugees ended up in neighboring countries in West Africa: Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, often near those countries’ shared borders. In these areas, refugee camps sprang up in large numbers, often assisted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Rescue Committee and Médecins Sans Frontières. Spare to the point of extreme poverty, these camps sprawled out over large areas; in Kouankan, Guinea, for example, nearly 35,000 displaced Liberians lived, sometimes for a decade or longer, in a two-square-mile camp carved out of the thick forest, filled with mud huts and soil-dyed tents. Food from the UN World Food Programme was rationed parsimoniously, and Guinean regulations forbid international refugees from hunting in or planting on the land of or outside the camps. The refugees existed without occupation and in penury: in Kouankan, there was no work, little education and most had no property other than the clothing on their backs.

The camps were able to provide a sort of safety—in many, there were rules that all non-residents had to leave the camp by nightfall. Still, extremist rebel soldiers snuck into the camps at night under cover of dark, for reasons respectable (visiting displaced family members) and reprehensible (looting and forced recruitment of child soldiers).

An interesting mix of characteristics define these national borders, many first drawn during the early and mid-19th century and sometimes reconfigured later. In a way, the borders are arbitrary, as they don’t signify divisions in ethnic or tribal identities, nor do they necessarily demarcate the lands of the great West African kingdoms and empires of the middle ages. The tribal factions (Krahn, Mandingo, Gio, Mano and more) that played a part in the Liberian civil wars were not constrained by borders on a map; because of that, rebel armies could train and grow in neighboring countries before invading and pushing further into Liberian terrain. There were no major linguistic differences on either
side of these borders, either: the cultures were practically indistinguishable. Still, national leaders protecting—and often embezzling—the wealth of the area’s natural resources, including gold, iron ore and diamonds, kept vigilant guard over the borders. For a civilian, border-crossing risked life, limb and money: a solo crossing risked dangerous interactions with soldiers and guards known to plunder; if one sought assistance, the monetary cost of being smuggled across was incredibly high.

An even greater challenge for these refugees was intercontinental resettlement. Sanctuary countries (including Australia, as depicted in Objects in the Mirror, as well as Canada, the U.S. and a dozen others) admitted Liberian refugees—but demand far outweighed what the countries were willing to accept. According to the UNHCR, eligibility for international resettlement was based on criteria including level of education (preferring refugees with higher education), familial and cultural links to the areas of resettlement and a high perceived likelihood of seamless cultural integration. International resettlement applications also considered the urgency of the circumstances: those who could demonstrate more immediate danger to themselves and their families in their current country of residence (whether Liberia or its neighbors) were more frequently granted refuge. Australia, the sanctuary country where Shedrick is placed, has a separate “Women at Risk” visa class, which supports and protects refugees in female-headed families in immediate danger of victimization and abuse because of their gender; the country reserves more than one tenth of its refugee quota for those in this category.

The “lucky” Liberian refugees granted resettlement in international sanctuary countries were guaranteed a culture shock and made to do with very little. The UNHCR provided these individuals and families a tiny budget and only the most basic job skills training for a 90-day introductory period in their new homes, but after that the refugees were left to earn their own wages, facing often-challenging labor laws for non-citizens. And shifting political stances in the host countries could further upend their lives. In 2007, for example, George W. Bush signed an “enforced departure” order for Liberian refugees granted a temporary protection status; 14,000 people who had resettled in the U.S. had just 18 months to return to Liberia, following the peaceable election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to Liberian presidency. Suddenly, Liberians who had spent nearly 20 years in the U.S. faced deportation, including the possibility of being separated from their young children who had been born U.S. citizens. Of the 16 international sanctuary countries committed to accepting certain quotas of international refugees, Australia has remarkably efficient and generous strategies for assisting resettled refugees as they enter, participate and enrich the communities into which they are placed, and care for their physical and psychological well-being.

In 2004, after Liberia’s disarmament and the resignation of President Charles Taylor, UNHCR began a significant multi-year effort to repatriate Liberians who had been displaced to other countries in West Africa—more than one third of the total displaced. The UNHCR was able to provide minimal remuneration for those repatriating and some modest assistance in rebuilding the country’s crumbling infrastructure, but funding for that effort fell short, and national improvements slowed dramatically. Though the young population in Liberia is growing slowly today, it is estimated that nearly a quarter of Liberia’s pre-war residents, like Shedrick, left the land they called home, perhaps never to return.

“Suddenly, Liberians who had spent nearly 20 years in the U.S. faced deportation, including the possibility of being separated from their young children who had been born U.S. citizens.”
Since WWII, the United States has been accepting peoples seeking refuge from homelands wrought with war and political strife, or “refugees.” In 1980, the number of refugees admitted in the United States reached over 200,000. That number gradually lowered over the next two decades, however, no event affected the intake of refugees and immigrants in the U.S. more than the terrorists attack on September 11th, 2001. This event instigated the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, which following the attacks, put a two month freeze on refugee admissions. In 2002, the U.S. only admitted 27,000 refugees into the country. While none of the 19 terrorists involved with the attacks had entered the U.S. as refugees, the U.S. government intensified the vetting process for these asylum seekers. It became a two year long process with multiple background checks and cross checks with other international lists and databases. Read this article from Carrie Feibel at California’s KQED radio station on the history of refugee resettlement.

For more information on the changes in immigration policy in the U.S. since September 11th, 2001, check out these articles from the Huffington Post and the Migration Policy Institute.

At the beginning of 2017, Trump’s travel ban executive order caused multiple immigration problems across the globe, similar to the effects put in place by the U.S. government after 9/11. CNN has compiled a timeline of the events at the beginning of the year. The Guardian has compiled all of their articles related to Trump’s travel ban and has organized them by date.

This American Life: Refugees
compiled by ELIZABETH RICE

*This American Life* is a weekly radio show hosted by Ira Glass for National Public Radio. Episodes span a variety of topics and each week’s episode is themed. While some episodes contain comedy or essays, most are journalistic in nature. Over the past few years, especially since the rise of the Syrian Conflict, *This American Life* has featured multiple episodes looking at the lives of refugees, especially in relation to the U.S. Below is a list of poignant episodes to help you further discover the trials and tribulations refugees face around the world:
**Episode 592: Are We There Yet?**  
(Aired July 29th, 2016)
A bunch of us from our show went to refugee camps all over Greece. We found people falling in love, kids mad at their parents for dragging them to Europe, women doing their laundry in a baseball stadium locker room, and hundreds of people living at a gas station—sitting next to the pumps, smoking. Also: wild pigs. 57,000 refugees are stuck in Greece, making homes in some surprising locations. We hear what that’s really like.

**Episode 593: Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee**  
(Aired August 5th, 2016)
We return to Greece with stories of people trying to move on with their lives in whatever way they can. We meet a couple who fell in love even though they weren’t expecting anything like that to happen, and even though her family didn’t approve. We also meet a shopkeeper in a camp who’s running what amounts to a cigarette charity.

**Episode 560: Abdi and the Golden Ticket**  
(Aired July 3rd, 2015)
A story about someone who’s desperately trying – against long odds – to make it to the United States and become an American. Abdi is a Somali refugee living in Kenya and gets the luckiest break of his life: he wins a lottery that puts him on a short list for a U.S. visa. This is his ticket out. But before he can cash in his golden ticket, the police start raiding his neighborhood, targeting refugees.

**Episode 609: It’s Working Out Very Nicely**  
(Aired February 3rd, 2017)
This week we document what happened when the President’s executive order went into effect temporarily banning travel from seven countries, and we talk about the way it was implemented. A major policy change thrown into the world like a fastball with no warning. It’s hard not to ask: “What just happened? What was that all about?”

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*Lily Mojekwu (Luopu Workolo/Zaza Workolo) in Objects in the Mirror New Stages Production by Charles Smith, directed by Chuck Smith at Goodman Theatre. Production Photo by Liz Lauren*
The “Mother of Invention” List
by JORGE SILVA

In 2014, after winning the Pritzker Prize (the Nobel Prize equivalent to architecture) Shigeru Ban spoke to the New York Times about his desire to make his designs a humanitarian mission. “I thought we could improve them,” he stated rather simply, referring to his work from the 1994 Rwandan refugee crisis. Ban’s work has been notable for its efficiency, using recycled or reusable materials whether for a luxury condominium or refugee housing. His signature material: paper tubes. Recycled materials makes buildings easy to manufacture and have the advantage of being inexpensive and, if need be, can be recycled again later on. Ban’s paper tubes are also innovative for their versatility; you can easily spot the tubing as a part of the integral structure as well as the filler. Ban’s decision to direct his efforts towards sustainable housing came after witnessing disaster after disaster, both manmade and natural. The effects of these crises on living conditions were so hazardous and dangerous that Ban was compelled to apply his abilities to solving the issues emerging from mass displacement in the most direct matter. His methodology? “[I] always start with a problem.”

Starting with the problem means removing convention as a part of the initial steps and in its stead, arriving to a deductive solution starting with the question of need. It may seem obvious - starting with a need and filling the gap - but when it comes to sustainable housing, the solutions are varied and the industry as a whole continues to adapt to changing climates (both figurative and literal). The following list is a compiled set of designs mean to demonstrate the challenges of creating affordable, durable, and efficient housing for different humanitarian needs.

1. Shigeru Ban and the Paper Rolls

The paper tubes idea came out of the Rwandan refugee crisis. When civil war broke out in Rwanda in the early 1990’s, the genocide of Tutsi people (an ethnic group of Rwanda) forced many Rwandans to seek safety in camps in Uganda and Burundi. Tents provided by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for temporary housing did not last, not because they were low quality, but rather because they were more valuable as currency. The aluminum poles were sold in exchange for other scarce resources and were replaced with wooden branches resulting in deforesta-
A limited UNHCR was aided by Shigeru Ban’s idea to replace the aluminum poles with dense paper tubing. This idea later evolved and served communities in Turkey and India where designs were made so that additional materials could be added or subtracted depending on residents’ needs.

2. IKEA: Ideal For You And Me
Chances are you have come into contact with IKEA furniture at some point either in your home or someone else’s. Aside from Swedish meatballs, IKEA is known to for their inexpensive and “easily” assembled furniture for your home, so it should really come as no surprise that they are also in the business of making the home itself. Rather, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) challenged the corporate giant’s designers to create a home that could be mass produced to replace the short term use tents for long term housing. IKEA’s answer was Refugee Housing Unit (RHU), an 88 square foot shelter that has the capacity to last up to three years and hold a family of five. The RHU was implemented in Ethiopian communities affected by a severe drought in 2014, providing a home that could provide protection from high speed winds while still providing adequate ventilation. These shelters were constructed with modular walls so that windows could be placed in optimal locations of the building and built in netting to protect from malaria carrying mosquitoes. Since then, the RHU has been used in Iraq, Jordan, Djibouti, Greece, and Macedonia. The key to the RHU’s utility and overall continued use by the UNHCR comes not only from its facile assembly, but from the materials’ transportability.

3. Hurricane Proof
Not all sustainable relief housing is meant to be small or short term. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of low-income families found themselves without a home and without means to rebuild. ecoMOD responded to the domestic crisis by collaborating with the non-profit, non-governmental shelter building organization, Habitat for Humanity to create an eco-friendly solution. The concept involved creating several prefabricated pieces that were easily transported and could be put into a myriad of configurations. As opposed to some of the previous housing options, this design was intended to house a family for a lifetime. The ecoMOD’s sustainability emanates from the efficiency of the build. Pieces of the home come pre-assembled and can be made to fit the needs of the family. And with a quick build time, overall
material and labor needs are mini-
mized. Additionally, the home comes
with a system to monitor energy
usage so that researchers can make
conservation recommendations.
These homes have been used in
Charlottesville, Virginia for families
that were forced to leave the Gulf
Coast during Hurricane Katrina and
have been designed to endure vio-
lent winds and precipitation, hope-
fully sparing the resident family from
any future natural disaster.

4. The Future: All Purpose
Reusable short-term designs are the
next venture for designers. Some-
thing easily transportable, especially
inexpensive, durable, and with a low
carbon footprint can provide immedi-
ate assistance from a readily mobile
aid organization. Several designers
have made attempts at providing
the end all be all solution to this, but
final products have the tendency to
come in at a high manufacturing
cost. That is until Michael
McDaniel, along with Reaction Inc.,
created a prototype design that
would meet those very demands.
The Exo unit is a two-piece concept
that is inspired by the everyday cof-
fee cup. There is the ‘cup,’ a dome
like piece that can be stacked one
on top of another. Then there is the
lid: a base board that can basi-
cally snap on to the dome. When
stacked, 20 Exo houses can fit on
a single semi-trailer. And with each
able to sustain two sets of bunk
beds, 80 people can be housed.
For medical needs like an Ebola
outbreak, field hospitals can be set
up in minutes with pre-made con-
tainment measures. But the Exo
unit is only a starting point, offering
a concept with room for improve-
ment. As conflicts, natural disas-
ters, and climate changes prompt
mass population movements, more
designs like these will have to
emerge to fit the needs of dis-
placed peoples and refugees.
What Should I Wear?
For a lot of people, going to the theater is a special event, and they like to dress up for it. Remember: even though you are on a field trip you should dress according to your school’s dress code. The Goodman is air conditioned, so bring a sweater or extra layer in case you get cold.

Be respectful to the artists on stage, and to your fellow audience members. No talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. No use of phones or electronic devices -- the glow from the screen is distracting to your fellow audience members and the actors (and yes, they can see it)!

What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?
Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?
Honestly but appropriately. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance as well. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback, like applause, laughing or gasping, but excessive discussion is distracting. Whether you enjoy the play or not, the actors worked hard to perform for you. Please respect their hard work.

Please remember: no smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theater.
What to do before the show:
When you arrive at the Goodman, you will be given a ticket. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance. If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission. Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program. Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

What to do during Intermission:
Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, use the restroom, get some water, and discuss the play with your friends. We do ask that you remain on the floor where your seat is – there are restrooms on both levels. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times. That is your cue to get back to your seat, because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:
There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that's on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.
As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is an explanation of how to read your ticket, and all of the information that you can get from your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!