HOW TO CATCH CREATION

School Matinee Series Study Guide
“I’m not a creative person.”

“I’m not an artist. I don’t know how to be creative.”

When I start to work with new students – regardless of age – this is the first thing I hear. Young people in PlayBuild, our free summer theatre program for teens, tell me they are not writers, that they don’t know how to act, or that someone has told them they are not good at comedy or improv.

Third-agers, the 55-and-older students that I teach in our storytelling program, GeNarrations, invariably begin the first session by telling me they have no stories to tell, that they are not writers.

The reality is everybody is creative. Like intelligence, it is a trait that everyone – not just “geniuses” like Kehinde Wiley or Kendrick Lamar – possesses in some capacity.

Creativity is the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions.

Being creative means taking risks, ignoring doubt, and facing fears. It means breaking with routine and doing something different for the sake of doing something different. It means mapping out a thousand different routes to reach one destination. It means challenging yourself every day. Being creative means searching for inspiration in even the most mundane places. It means asking stupid questions. It means creating without critiquing. Being creative means you know how to find the similarities and differences between two completely random ideas.

Creativity is not just the ability to draw a picture or design a product. We all need to think creatively in our daily lives, whether it’s figuring out how to make dinner using leftovers or fashioning a Halloween costume out of the clothes in your closet. Creative tasks range from what researchers call “little-c” creativity: making a website, crafting a birthday present, or coming up with a funny joke – to “Big-C” creativity: writing a speech, composing a poem, or designing a scientific experiment.

So...how do you catch creation?
The present,” wrote author and folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston, “was an egg laid by the past that had the future inside its shell.” Witness Christina Anderson’s *How To Catch Creation* — with its overlapping time frames and intersecting lives — and that metaphoric musing makes all the sense in the world.

The story of a couple drifting apart, of a once-imprisoned man determined to adopt a child, and a single female academic who has lost her way professionally and personally, *How To Catch Creation* takes place in the present. But the action is shadowed by the past, in the form of a writer and her partner.

“Like the most commanding ritual, Christina’s theater demands all our senses,” says Niegel Smith, Artistic Director of New York’s The Flea Theater, who helms the Goodman production. “She does this by structuring her play like a great symphony. Themes are built and repeated, they develop and evolve. What’s thrilling is how these stories and characters fall into arcs and rhythms that sometimes complement each other or diverge. In her hands, life becomes more real; it becomes poetry.”

The seed of the show, for Anderson, was Griffin, a wrongly convicted—forty-something man — who lost a chunk of his life to prison and is struggling to start over. The Kansas-born playwright was living in San Francisco in 2011, marveling at the transformation of the city and wondering what it would be like for a man re-entering a city that had changed dramatically since his incarceration. “What would he want that he felt was taken away from him? Then I thought: fatherhood. And I started researching the challenges facing a single man who’s trying to get a kid. People just don’t trust men who want to raise kids by themselves.”

Anderson’s work—which includes
pen/man/ship and The Ashes Under Gait City—has been performed at New York’s The Public Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, and Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, among other places. An early version of How to Catch Creation was first presented at the Goodman’s 2017 New Stages Festival. “I didn’t know what to expect,” shares Anderson. “My reading was at 10am, and I thought there might be about 15 people there. But there was a huge audience—and they were super awake for 10am!”

Anderson’s first foray into playwriting began in high school, after a field trip to the youth focused Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, Kansas. “They had a program where you went for whole day and learned the fundamentals,” she recalls. “I knew about Shakespeare, I had seen plays, but it didn’t click that there were people alive, writing plays. I was like, Holy Smokes! I can do this? I can put people on stage?”

After that, Anderson was invited to submit something for a writing group that met twice a month. “They let me in and I just kept going after that. I was hooked.”

After taking her undergraduate degree at Brown University, Anderson went on to earn an M.F.A. in playwriting from Yale School of Drama. A key influence on her development was Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director of The Public Theater. “I remember him saying in class, how, when you go to the movies, if the theater is totally empty, you might be elated that the space is empty and you can watch the film by yourself,” she relates. “But when you walk into a theater to see a play and it’s empty, you feel kind of anxious. That’s because an audience is watching performers on stage and they want to share that energy, that breath. That always stuck with me as playwright. I am thinking about this thing being in front of an audience—celebrating theatricality and really embracing live performance. With Netflix and Amazon, there’s really good TV happening right now. So it’s important to celebrate the power of what we do, as theater makers. And encourage audiences to participate in that.”

Thomas Connors is a Chicago based freelance writer and the Chicago Editor of Playbill.

Costume Designer Jenny Mannis’ costume sketches for “How to Catch Creation.” Image originally used in Onstage+ Article “Creation: What’s the Catch?”
The setting for How to Catch Creation, as described by playwright Christina Anderson in her script, is “a place that resembles San Francisco and the surrounding areas”. So though the geography lives somewhere in-between fact and fiction, there is great inspiration, for a play about multiple meanings of “creation,” to be found in the creative history of the Bay Area—a locale whose population exploded during World War II (as a seemingly endless supply of war-time manufacturing jobs became available) and after (as the “Greatest Generation” settled into the temperate cities by the Bay and did some “creation” of their own: the Baby Boom).

For some, to think of radical mid-century literature in San Francisco is to think of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Frank O’Hara, and City Lights Publishers—all part of the San Francisco Renaissance. But the renewal of American literature at that time intersected the Civil Rights Movement: throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, Bay Area citizens organized and protested racial discrimination and inequalities in housing and hiring in rallies, pickets, and sit-ins. In 1968, the nation’s first Black Studies department was created at San Francisco State College, attracting a new generation of creative scholarship. In the years following City Lights’ opening, Marcus Books—one of America’s first bookstores dedicated to the writing of black authors—opened and thrived. Renowned poet and novelist Al Young moved to San Francisco in 1961 and wrote book after book reflecting the black experience in the Bay. The major black, lesbian, feminist poet Pat Parker began to write and perform her poetry in Oakland and San Francisco in the mid- and late-1960s; in the decade that followed, writers and activists such as Angela Davis and Alice Walker moved to the area and created some of their finest work.

At the same time, the popularity of Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead in the 1960s soared, and those bands, and others like them, became the soundtrack of the 1967 “Summer of Love” in San Francisco. But they were preceded by the black San Francisco jazz scene in the 1940s and ‘50s. During and after the Second World War, the black population boomed in the Fillmore District—to such an extent that it was nicknamed “The Harlem of the West” for its black, mixed-class population, jazz clubs and flourishing culture. Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday and John Coltrane were mainstays in the Fillmore’s clubs. Coltrane was so beloved that he was named the patron saint of a long-standing area African Orthodox church, newly renamed the St. John William Coltrane Church, whose Sunday services’ duration stretched into the four- and five-hour marks and featured liturgy interspersed with jazz jam sessions.

Unfortunately, the redevelopment and gentrification of San Francisco’s most prominent black neighborhoods in the years after the Summer of Love yielded inflated property costs and displaced many of its residents—into public housing and into nearby Oakland and other East Bay cities and suburbs. The diverse, creative city by the Bay of the 1960s has homogenized in recent decades, a result of skyrocketing real estate costs in Silicon Valley, where creative practices have shifted from art, music, and literature to software development and design.

Jonathan L. Green is the Literary Manager at Goodman Theatre and Dramaturg for How to Catch Creation.
Manifesting a moment into a melody. Transforming a tragedy into a staged trilogy. Penning the pinnacle of a movement into poetic justice. When the frequently blurred lines of artistry and activism intersect, the concept of creation goes from work/life balance to becoming your life’s work. The characters in How to Catch Creation grasp this notion with an intensity similarly reflected by the visionaries behind the production. I had the opportunity to inquire about their creation process, relative to their respective canvases.

Niegel Smith (Director)
“My work alongside my collaborators allows a play to breathe with the heightened energy of life. So I consider the life around me while thinking about the play—considering what time of day a scene might take place, or the rhythm of the language in a lover’s exchange. I believe that you should be able to pause a production at any moment and see a compelling stage composition. I also love to immerse myself in music, and so much of this play is about musicality, repeated themes and a symphony of sounds and voices. The production has to rock and flow, but I also need to find moments of pacing—when the play will groove, when it will climax, when will there be moments of simultaneity?”

Justin Ellington (Composer)
“I tend to approach each project like I’ve never done it before. It allows me to make mistakes—and in the imperfection, I find the gems. I riff off of the error. I walk around and absorb people and places; as I am more of a sponge than a creative. If I’m composing a piece set in the 60s, it is immersed in what’s going on at that time. Protest music in the 1960s turned people into activists. I turn artists and activists into my peers; I don’t want to copy anyone’s music. Today’s music has a lot of similar threads. It’s not necessarily copying, it’s more people are giving the world what it wants. I feel comfortable just living in the 60s [in terms of artistry] and being honest in my output—the instrumentation, tempo, how music extinguishes and starts fires.”

Allen Hughes (Lighting Designer)
“Lighting is sometimes one of the last elements thought of during a production. This is because it is ephemeral. It is not easy to talk about because it is invisible—until it hits something. I listen and organize my way into a production. By reading and analyzing the play, and talking to the director about approach, I learn the needs of the production. One of the functions of lighting is selective visibility. Experience and my sense of theater tell me the performers are the most important deliverers of the story; we mostly want to see them.”

Jenny Mannis (Costume Designer)
“I catch creation through observation and research. I’m always people watching: on the bus, on the street. I notice people and I try to guess who they are—and what they love or hate or want. I like to read, and I always have a picture in my head for the characters in books. And I’m always drawing. Sometimes I discover it on the page, but the main thing is to constantly be looking – the world will always surprise you.”

Joy R. Lee is the 2018 Communications Apprentice for Goodman Theatre.
The Artists Behind *How to Catch Creation* on Creation
Shot & Edited by CODY NIESET

We asked *How to Catch Creation* playwright Christina Anderson and director Niegel Smith about their process in creating, and what advice they have for young people interested in artistic creation. Watch the video to hear their perspectives!

Want to learn more about artists in the act of creation? Click [here](#) to check out a 2014 deep dive into Christina Anderson’s thoughts on writing plays and the American theatre, and [here](#) to read the website Greater Good’s series on why artists create.
“In The Criminal Justice System...”
by JORGE SILVA

If you have ever watched a police procedural like Law & Order, you have seen that the drama that plays out on TV is usually revolving around a criminal offense tried by a jury of peers. Once we hear “guilty” or “not guilty”, the episode ends: on to the next case. To a certain degree, the reality of the criminal justice system does have a rhythm that favors expediency, so an episode of Dick Wolf’s beloved long-running series unknowingly mirrors the formulaic nature of the judicial system. However, the drama of post-conviction life is hardly depicted in popular culture, so we are generally unaware of the pains and complexities that follow someone trying to navigate their way out of the criminal justice system. The system is founded on decades and decades of protocols, customs, public desires, and bureaucracy. It would take a long time to unravel why our judicial system is the way it is, so let’s instead focus on some of the court proceedings that don’t get the same airtime as the trial: 
exoneration and expungement.

Exoneration is the long process of reversing a guilty verdict and overturning a conviction with release from jail/prison, whereas expungement is the removal of a minor crime from one’s permanent record.

One of the goals of a court system seeing thousands upon thousands of cases and litigants is efficiency. The constant motivator in any county court is the need to get as much done as possible with the little resources available, while seeking justice. In some cases, justice can mean that an innocent party receives full reparations for a wrongdoing, personal or historical. In other cases, because of the system, justice can mean that an innocent party is arrested, spends days in jail, pays fees, and loses work hours with no compensation whatsoever all because said party was ultimately found not guilty. Therefore, efficiency does not always favor a holistic definition of justice, and can result in someone being tried in a court of law and held accountable for an offense committed by someone else, or even not committed at all.

The exoneration process usually begins with a submission for an appeal: a petition to a higher court to reexamine the evidence and arguments of a case for error or misinterpretation. This usually starts from a lower level such as the circuit county court and can easily go to a state’s supreme court; from there an appeal can be made in federal court and, if need be, can also be petitioned at the nation’s Supreme Court. From the start, the procedure for appealing is tedious and complicated if the appellee is representing themselves. Even the slightest error in paperwork, like having the wrong color of cover sheet, can cause the paperwork to be rejected. Rejection means re-submission, and any number of submissions can require fees, which can be challenging, depending on a defendant’s resources.

Exonerations are less likely to happen as cases climb the judicial ladder from higher court to higher court, since an overturned conviction essentially implies that a court has performed in error, which can dilute the public’s trust in the judicial system. Additionally, federal courts are tried by either a judge or a set of judges as opposed to a jury of peers. Thus, if a case manages to make it to the federal circuit courts, the stakes become just as high for prosecutors as the appellee, since prosecutors must defend their case and their court’s decisions. The higher the stakes, the more resources required from an appellee - resources most people don’t have.

In criminal cases, the court is obligated to provide legal representation for any person suspected of an offense - that’s what arresting officers in movies and TV are referencing when they say, “You have a right to an attorney.” However, the same is not necessarily true for someone who is appealing a court’s decision. The Office of the State Appellate Defender is an Illinois state agency created and designated to offer legal representation in criminal cases to those who do not have the ability to obtain representation or to defend themselves, but defendants are only eligible for representation when appointed by the Illinois Supreme Court, the Appellate Court, or the Circuit Court. Often, the appellee must be considered ‘indigent’ (usually
meaning someone who does not have access to financial resources) to be eligible for appointed defense. If they are not granted this assistance, they have to learn the law and its accompanying protocols (while in prison) in order to represent themselves, increasing the potential for an unjustified stay in a correctional facility.

Exoneration remains a rarity, as the University of Michigan College of Law reports that the state of Illinois has exonerated 275 cases since 1989, with the average person spending more than 9 years in prison. That’s a total of 2,615 years of life spent behind bars unjustly. Notably, this statistic does not include any jail time spent before the trial and during sentencing, which can often total more than a year. Moreover, the statistics show that the people fighting wrongful convictions are disproportionately Black. This is not surprising in many ways, as the population of the state facing jail time is also disproportionately Black and Latinx. According the Illinois Department of Corrections, during the 2018 fiscal year (July 1st, 2017 to June 30th, 2018) there were 23,668 admissions into the correctional system, rounding out the total prison population to 40,872 inmates in IDOC. 55.9% of those currently held in IDOC are Black and 30.6% are Hispanic. It’s important to note that Cook County is the majority sentencing county in Illinois, meaning that the majority of cases in the state of Illinois are processed and sentenced from Cook County courts. These sentences range from misdemeanors (offenses whose penalties carry no more than 1 year in jail) to all classes of felonies (offense that carry more than 1 year in jail) and murder.

Often, those seeking exonerations are facing lengthy prison terms for felony charges. Felonies in Cook County of Illinois have varying degrees starting from a class 4 (the lowest), 3, 2, 1, and class X. Class X encapsulates a larger swath of crimes that are more serious (including aggravated kidnapping, home invasion, aggravated criminal sexual assault, armed robbery, and possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver), and carry greater prison sentences. Murder is not included in Class X, and is treated as its own category and carries terms of 20 - 60 years in jail.

Meanwhile, misdemeanors

From left: Yusef Salaam, Korey Wise, Kevin Richardson, and Raymond Santana; four of the “Exonerated Five” who spent thirteen years incarcerated for a crime they did not commit. Their sentences were vacated by the New York Supreme Court in 2002. “The Central Park Five at the Dempsey 11/25/2012” by Maysles Documentary Center is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
(which also have different degrees starting class C through A) have the ability in some cases to be sealed from public record or even expunged. **Expungement** is the total erasure of a conviction from public record, meaning that if some entity was to look into someone’s criminal history, what could be considered a minor offense wouldn’t appear in the search and thus wouldn’t preclude that person from opportunity. For example, if someone is applying for a job, something like a traffic violation wouldn’t appear in a background check. Certain felonies are also eligible for expungement in Cook County, but those are few and far between.

Someone convicted of a misdemeanor may also be eligible for a **sealed record**, which means that a conviction is removed from the public record, but is available to agencies, law enforcement departments and certain employers (as allowed by law). Usually a sealed record addresses a higher class of misdemeanor offense and does not equal total erasure of the conviction. It should be noted, however, that an arrest on its own appears on the record, meaning if someone is arrested and nothing comes of it thereafter, the arrest still can appear in searches. An arrest can be expunged, but that also has its own complications and is not common. Frequently, exoneration and expungement are pursued simultaneously when someone is looking to move forward from a wrongful conviction.

If a wrongful conviction can be proven, it means that something went wrong in the original judicial process that the state failed to catch, such as forced confession(s), incorrect witness testimony or testimonies, inadequate counsel, or misapplication of forensic science. There is a strong motivation by state agencies to prevent exonerations, since these can result in civil suits, possibly costing the state millions of dollars in reparations. This misapplication in law resulted in the wrong people ending up in jail in a recent Illinois case: In 2018, Cook County finally admitted to corruption by former Sergeant Ronald Watts, which saw the first-ever mass exonerations from the state of Illinois. Watts and his tactical team framed at least 23 young men for crimes that they did not commit, and because Watts represents the law as an enforcement officer, it took several years and many efforts (including from the FBI) to bring some semblance of justice to the lives of the people who were wrongfully convicted.

Perhaps this story contains enough drama to be portrayed on TV, giving the public a clearer picture of how damaging wrongful convictions can be, how difficult it is to prove innocence in a court of law, and how complex it is to move on with life thereafter. The story doesn’t just end with a handful of people having a tumbler of scotch in a dimly lit office contemplating the virtues that make up justice, a catchy one-liner surmising the lessons learned, with a fade to black. Rather, the story is an ongoing battle, one which lives in our neighbors and our communities, as we all seek some likeness of balance and justice.

Special thanks to Dick Wolf.

**Sources**


Every year for at least the past decade, between 600,000 and 650,000 people have reentered society from state and federal prisons. **Reentry** is the process of transition from incarcerated life—in juvenile detention centers, jails, or prisons—to life in the community. People who go through this process may be referred to as **returning citizens**.

As when in prison, returning citizens have fundamental human rights upon their release. Because they have been imprisoned, they often still experience prejudices that make transitioning from prison into community difficult, and there are real barriers that hinder their participation in daily life. The most common barriers are access to stable housing, opportunities for education, lack of resources for mental and physical health and social services, and employment support. Research has indicated that few individuals receive health or substance abuse treatment or job training while in prison, and thus the carceral, or prison, system at large does not support the future transition of these citizens.

Almost half of formerly incarcerated individuals are expected to return to incarceration within three years of release. This is called **recidivism**. **Recidivism** occurs when a person who was formerly imprisoned is rearrested or goes back to jail or prison within a certain time period of getting out. Without proper resources, training, and support,
The following is a list of myths and facts related to returning citizens and their federal rights in areas of employment, housing, and social services. This information comes directly from the Reentry Myth Buster toolkit from the Federal Interagency Reentry Council.

### Employment

**MYTH:** People with criminal records are automatically barred from employment.

**FACT:** An arrest or conviction record will NOT automatically bar individuals from employment. If an employer is aware of a conviction or incarceration, that information should only bar someone from employment when the conviction is closely related to the job, after considering:

- The nature of the job,
- the nature and seriousness of the offense, and
- the length of time since it occurred.

Since an arrest alone does not necessarily mean that someone has committed a crime, an employer should not assume that someone who has been arrested, but not convicted, did in fact commit the offense. Instead, the employer should allow the person to explain the circumstances of the arrest. If it appears that they engaged in the alleged unlawful conduct, the employer should assess the conduct.

**MYTH:** The Federal Government’s hiring policies prohibit employment of people with criminal records.

**FACT:** The Federal Government does not have a policy that prohibits employment of people with criminal records from all positions. The Federal Government employs people with criminal records with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**MYTH:** An employer can get a copy of your criminal history from companies that do background checks without your permission.

**FACT:** According to the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), employers must get one’s permission, usually in writing, before asking a background screening company for a criminal history report. If one does not give permission or authorization, the application for employment may not get reviewed. If a person does give permission but does not get hired because of information in the report, the potential employer must follow several legal obligations, as seen below.

#### Key Employer Obligations in the FCRA

An employer that might use an individual’s criminal history report to take an “adverse action” (e.g., to deny an application for employment) must provide a copy of the report and a document called A Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act before taking the adverse action. An employer that takes an adverse action against an individual based on information in a criminal history report must tell the individual – orally, in writing, or electronically:

- The name, address, and telephone number of the company that supplied the criminal history report;
- that the company that supplied the criminal history information did not make the decision to take the adverse action and cannot give specific reasons for it; and
- about one’s right to dispute the accuracy or completeness of any information in the report, and one’s right to an additional free report from the company that supplied the criminal history report, if requested within 60 days of the adverse action.

A reporting company that gathers negative information from public criminal records, and provides it to an employer in a criminal history report, must inform the individual that it gave the information to the employer or that it is taking precautions to make sure the information is complete and current. If an employer violation of the FCRA is suspected, it should be reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The law allows the FTC, other federal agencies, and states to take legal action against employers who fail to comply with the law’s provisions. The FCRA also allows individuals to take legal action against employers in state or federal court for certain violations.

### Housing

**MYTH:** Individuals who have been convicted of a crime are “banned” from and not eligible for public housing.
felons, and only eleven states have kept the ban in place in its entirety. Most states have modified or eliminated the ban. Section 115 of P.L. 104-193 (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) imposed a lifetime ban on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (known as TANF or cash/public assistance) benefits for people with felony drug convictions after August 22, 1996, unless their state passes legislation to opt out of the ban. In some states (Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, Nebraska, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and West Virginia), you currently cannot receive TANF if you have a felony drug conviction. All other states have modified the ban or eliminated it entirely.

**FACT:** Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) have great discretion in determining their admissions and occupancy policies for people with criminal records. While PHAs can choose to ban ex-offenders from participating in public housing and Section 8 programs, it is not policy to do so. In fact, in many circumstances, formerly incarcerated people should not be denied access.

**FACT:** There are only two convictions for which a PHA MUST prohibit admission – those are:

- If any member of the household is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a State sex offender registration program; and,
- If any household member has ever been convicted of drug-related criminal activity for manufacture or production of methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing.

**Social Services**

**MYTH:** Eligibility for Social Security benefits cannot be reinstated when an individual is released from incarceration.

**FACT:** Social Security benefits are not payable if an individual is convicted of a criminal offense and confined. However, monthly benefits usually can be reinstated after a period of incarceration by contacting Social Security and providing proof of release.

**MYTH:** A parent with a felony conviction cannot receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) or welfare.

**FACT:** The 1996 Welfare ban applies only to convicted drug felons, and only eleven states have kept the ban in place in its entirety. Most states have modified or eliminated the ban.

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Thirteen states (Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wyoming) have enacted laws that allow people with drug felony convictions to receive TANF.

Nine states (California, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Tennessee, and Utah) have amended the ban to allow individuals who are receiving or have completed drug or alcohol treatment to receive benefits. Other examples of state modifications to the ban include:

• Providing assistance to individuals who have been convicted of drug possession while banning those convicted of manufacturing, selling, or trafficking drugs (Arkansas, Florida, and North Dakota).
• Restoring an individual’s eligibility after a certain time period if they do not violate the terms of their supervision or become convicted of a new crime (Louisiana and North Carolina).
• Imposing successful completion of drug-testing requirements as a condition of eligibility (Minnesota, Virginia, and Wisconsin).

MYTH: Individuals convicted of a felony can never receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) benefits.

FACT: This ban applies only to those convicted of drug felonies, and only thirteen States have kept the ban in place in its entirety. Most States have modified or eliminated the ban.

MYTH: An individual cannot apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) benefits without a mailing address.

FACT: A person can get SNAP benefits even if they do not have a mailing address.

MYTH: A person with a criminal record is not eligible to receive federal student financial aid.

FACT: Individuals who are currently incarcerated in a federal, state, or local correctional institution have some limited eligibility for federal student aid. In general, restrictions on federal student aid eligibility are removed for formerly incarcerated individuals, including those on probation, on parole, or residing in a halfway house.

Returning citizens have many rights, and there are federal policies in place to support them. Often times this information is not made readily available, nor are other services and resources which contribute to the difficulty of transitioning from prison to life in the community. Other citizens may also not realize the rights of returning citizens, or how best to support them. When community members do follow federal policies in place to support formerly incarcerated people, such as eliminating questions like “Do you have a criminal record?” from job applications, returning citizens are more easily able to re-integrate into community and restore life for themselves and others who may depend on them.
“I hate lawyers. I hate the legal system. I hate the paperwork, the forms, the files. Even the got-dang paperclips, the folders. Three hundred and eighty-two days ago, when I made my first step as a freeman, I said never again would I get caught up in that system. And this morning I’m on the phone calling a law office.” – Griffin, How to Catch Creation, Act 1, Scene 6

From the inside, the American legal system can seem insurmountable; from the outside, it can feel indecipherable. In the third season of her hit podcast, Serial, Sarah Koenig attempts to provide some clarity about how this system functions (or, more often, how it fails to function) through the lens of Cleveland, Ohio. Rather than focus on the extraordinary, Koenig examines a series of everyday cases - bar fights, drug crimes, and parole violations – and considers what they can tell her listeners about the criminal justice system in the United States.

In episode four, “A Bird In Jail Is Worth Two On The Street”, Koenig tells the story of Davon Holmes, a nineteen year old whom the Cleveland police arrested for the murder of a five-month-old baby. Like Griffin in How to Catch Creation, Holmes was ultimately found innocent. Nevertheless, he spent an entire year behind bars. Sarah Koenig tries to get to the bottom of how an innocent man wound up accused of murder and why it took so long for the police to change their mind.

The following episode, “Pleas Baby Pleas” explores how the case against Davon fell apart, and takes a deeper dive into the power of prosecutors in the court room.

Every episode of Serial’s third season gives listeners a window into the deeply ingrained dysfunction of the American legal system. To listen to or read the transcripts of more episodes, click here.
Reflecting the Times: 1966, 2014 and the History Behind How to Catch Creation

by LIAM COLLIER

“We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar. And we will not grow weary.” - Barack Obama speaking in 2015 at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches.

Throughout the 2010s, politicians and journalists alike invited Americans to look backwards. Prompted by the fiftieth anniversaries of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” Speech, the Vietnam War, the moon landing, and countless other momentous historical events, writers examined and reexamined the parallels between the turbulent 1960s and the world we live in today. In How to Catch Creation, Christina Anderson adds her voice to this conversation, crafting a story that shifts back and forth between two essential, often overlooked years in civil rights history: 1966 and 2014.

Black Power

“I think just the declaration ‘Black lives matter’ is everything that the Panthers were about. Just saying that black people are worthy of defense, that black people are worthy.” – Ashley Yates, BLM Activist speaking to Newsweek in 2016.

Following the moderate success of anti-lynching campaigns in the 1940s and the triumphs of Browder v. Gayle and Brown v. Board of Education in the 1950s, major civil rights organizations including The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) wielded the national spotlight and their growing numbers to exert enormous pressure on the federal government to pass major civil rights legislation. With the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the civil rights movement had effectively dismantled legal segregation in the southern United States.

Because of its focus on apartheid in the south, the civil rights movement did less to help impoverished Black Americans in the rest of the country. Black Americans who moved to urban centers like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago in search of wartime jobs in the 1940s found themselves unemployed by the 1950s as those jobs followed white workers into the suburbs. People of color were largely left behind to live in heavily policed ghettos. As the limits of the civil rights movement became clear, the Black Power movement emerged as a new front in the fight for justice and equality.

In 1965, a year before GK Marche and Natalie’s story unfolds in How to Catch Creation, Black Americans living in the heavily policed Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles revolted. Protesters destroyed property and looted stores in a mass rejection of the status quo; some took up arms, firing at passing planes and attacking law enforcement. The Watts Riots lasted for days. The CBS Reports TV broadcast referred to them at the time as a “virtual insurrection probably unmatched since” the Civil War.

The next year, the Black Panther Party held its first official meeting in Oakland, California. The BPP’s platform, known as the ten-point program, advocated for the economic self-sufficiency of Black Americans, an end to police brutality, and reform to the criminal justice system. Founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Panthers patrolled Black neighborhoods, monitoring police activity and carrying loaded guns. Over the course of two years, Newton and Seale built a following in part by publicly confronting police officers.

Black Panther Party leadership discussed American racism in imperialist terms; Black America was a colony and the police were the occupying army. This framework helped the Panthers build solidarity with socialist revolutionaries overseas, but also won them support from the anti-war movement at home. By 1966 public support for the Vietnam War had plummeted. The conflict, which began in the early 1950s as a mission to contain the spread of communism in Asia, had transformed into a
seemingly unwinnable battle costing thousands of American lives. Reports of American atrocities abroad appeared in newspapers alongside stories of law enforcement officers in the south “keeping the peace” with hoses and dogs. Before long, the movement against the Vietnam War began to expand into a more general movement against state-sponsored violence.

The Panthers were unapologetic communists who sought to dismantle the economic roots of oppression in Black communities. To do so, they set up “survival programs” including free health and legal clinics in Black neighborhoods, a free breakfast program in elementary schools, and a cooperative housing program in poor communities. The radical nature of the Black Panther Party made them immediate targets. Over the course of the late sixties and early seventies, the FBI closely monitored BPP activity, spread falsified stories to sway public opinion against them, and aided in the assassination of BPP leadership. By the late 1970s, the Black Panther Party had essentially disappeared.

But they were not forgotten.

In 2013, #BlackLivesMatter first emerged as a “movement-building project” after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager. Co-founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the movement’s initial goals were to “build local power and to intervene when violence was inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”

In 2014, the murder of another unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri prompted massive protests. News outlets at the time quickly drew connections to the Watts Riots. In response to the shooting, Patrisse Cullors organized the Black Lives Matter “Freedom Rides,” which brought over five-hundred people from cities across the country to stand in solidarity with the Ferguson protesters. BLM’s involvement in the Ferguson demonstrations propelled the organization into the national spotlight.

Unlike the Black Panthers, Black Lives Matter consistently
particular night some patrons chose to fight back. The raid triggered five days of violent protests in Greenwich Village, New York, and became the flashpoint for LGBTQ activism across the country. Although pivotal to the movement, the Stonewall Riots did not occur in isolation. They were preceded by years of organizing in the face of legal discrimination, police harassment, and state violence.

After World War Two, the United States was engulfed in an era of political repression and fear mongering known as the Second Red Scare. Beginning in the 1940s, the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) led by Joseph McCarthy, monitored, questioned, and advocated for non-violent solutions to America’s racist present. This has not stopped political pundits from accusing the movement of promoting violence and extremism.

Since its founding, Black Lives Matter has joined the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of more than fifty anti-racist organizations organizing in response to state violence against Black communities. The Movement for Black Lives platform calls for an end to the “war against black people”, “repairs for past and continuing harms”, “investments in the education, health and safety of Black people”, “divestment from exploitative forces”, economic justice, community control of community institutions, and “independent Black political power and Black self-determination”.

Queer Liberation

“There is nothing to say that a homosexual cannot also be a revolutionary... Quite the contrary; maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary” - Huey Newton writing in 1970 “to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements”

Historical accounts of the movement for LGBTQ equality often begin with the Stonewall Riots of 1969, when the New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in Greenwich Village. While this sort of harassment was commonplace at the time, on this particular night some patrons chose to fight back. The raid triggered five days of violent protests in Greenwich Village, New York, and became the flashpoint for LGBTQ activism across the country. Although pivotal to the movement, the Stonewall Riots did not occur in isolation. They were preceded by years of organizing in the face of legal discrimination, police harassment, and state violence.

A mural in Clarion Alley in San Francisco commemorating the Compton’s Cafeteria Riot.

“In memory of Compton’s Cafeteria Riot” by phantom is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.
arrested thousands of Americans suspected or accused of being communist sympathizers. By the 1950s, McCarthy had expanded his hunt to individuals or organizations that did not conform to his heteronormative, patriarchal notions of Americanism. Across the country, laws outlawing homosexuality were enforced with a fervor unseen since the 1800s.

Police in major cities targeted gay bars, openly flirting with patrons before arresting them for solicitation whether or not they reciprocated these advances. Some bars were shut down altogether under new laws which outlawed serving alcohol to gay people; others were smothered by strict curfews and raided for minor legal infractions. As communal gathering places were infiltrated, new organizations formed as safe spaces for queer individuals to gather in safety and solidarity. The most famous of these organizations, The Mattachine Society and The Daughters of Bilitis, were founded in the 1950s in San Francisco. Both groups published periodicals promoting gay writers and advocating for the acceptance of queer individuals in American society.

By the 1960s, these relatively moderate organizations had spawned other more radical offshoots. Inspired by the increasingly prominent civil rights and Black Power movements and spurred by the constant policing of the gay community, these groups, led by Black and Latinx activists, decided to confront anti-gay discrimination head-on.

In 1966, just across the bay from the Black Panther headquarters, San Francisco law enforcement raided Gene Compton’s Cafeteria in the Tenderloin district, a known hang-out for Black and Latinx drag queens. As police attempted to arrest patrons for violating “masquerading laws” - which outlawed “cross-dressing” of any kind in the state - one queen threw a cup of coffee in an officer’s face, setting off an hours-long riot against the police. The next day, gay teenagers from the radical queer youth organization, Vanguard, gathered to picket outside the restaurant. Susan Stryker, a prominent trans author and academic, describes the events at Compton’s as “the first collective, organized queer resistance to police harassment in US history”.

In the fifty years since the Compton’s Riots, the LGBTQ community has seen tremendous progress; however, in the wake of Obergefell v. Hodges - the 2015 Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage on a federal level in the United States - it can be easy for some to forget even the recent history of anti-gay violence in this country.

In 2014, the same year as the Griffin and Tami’s scenes in How to Catch Creation, over one-thousand individuals in the United States were the targets of hate crimes motivated by their perceived sexual orientation. Even as appeals courts in six states tried cases that would lead to the legalization of same-sex marriage on the federal level, over three hundred thousand LGBTQ youth in the United States remained homeless.

Today, LGBTQ individuals are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual youth. Legal discrimination against the LGBTQ community continues in other forms as well, often targeting trans individuals whose rights have frequently been left unproducted by the Supreme Court.

Still the fight for equality continues. In the United States, the Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, and the Trevor Project continue to organize and advocate for the LGBTQ community on the national level; and in Chicago the Transformative Justice Law Project, The Night Ministry, Project Fierce, and other organizations work to improve the lives of members of the LGBTQ community through community organization.

The Definition of an Artist

“An artist’s duty, as far as I’m concerned, is to reflect the times... How can you be an artist and NOT reflect the times? That to me is the definition of an artist.” - Nina Simone

How to Catch Creation does not claim to be a history lesson; however, the specificity of Christina Anderson’s setting encourages the audience to consider the parallels between two key periods in American history.

How do the stories Anderson tells in her play reflect the history that surrounds them?

Why is it important to tell these stories today?
The Origins of Black Queer Feminism

by JENN M. JACKSON

Feminism is the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. In the United States it is closely associated with the efforts of white suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and others to win the right to vote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1920 the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed, securing voting rights for “all women.”

Unfortunately, “all women” did not include women of color. The feminism of white suffragists failed to fully account for the (ongoing) limitations on the full citizenship and freedoms of people of color. In particular, Black Americans struggled then - and now - against voting disenfranchisement, segregation, unfair working conditions, unequal employment access, and the constant threat of lynching and mob violence at the hands of white civilians and police authorities alike. Women like civil rights worker Sojourner Truth, educator and sociologist Anna Julia Cooper, and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett sought to highlight the specific forms of violence and discrimination facing Black women.

Unlike middle-class white women, Black women in the early twentieth century were frequently employed in the homes of white families as domestic workers, and the differences in the daily experiences of Black women and other women were clearly visible in their interactions with white families. In these environments, they were often subjected to surveillance from white women and men who frequently enforced their power over Black women by keeping them from their own families and paying them very little. Institutional racism and discriminatory systems regulated not just the professional opportunities for Black women but also their abilities to have personal freedom.

Even as the fights to obtain civil rights and freedoms for Black Americans increased in the 1940s and 50s, Black women’s condition was still ignored. These efforts were often tied to Black men’s leadership and political needs, and they overlooked the unique experiences of Black women within the existing political system. Moreover, the effort to empower Black men sometimes hid the ways that Black men also harmed Black women in their families and communities. And, as political leader Malcolm X once said, “The most disrespected woman in America, is the Black woman.” Organizers like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker were critical in drawing attention to the social and political concerns of women within anti-racist and anti-sexist movements.

In the 1970s, a group of Black

1 Wells-Barnett, Ida B. Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases, 1892.
Lesbian Feminists in Boston, Massachusetts, named the Combahee River Collective, came together to develop both a new theoretical model of Black queer feminism and a way to understand how this model shaped the daily lives of women of color. The Combahee River Collective Manifesto, published in April 1976, was the first document published in the United States which explicitly detailed the multiple forms of oppression facing Black women and other women of color, especially those who were also poor and working class, and queer. In the Manifesto, the Combahee River Collective members declared that, “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression.” They established the idea that identity politics were a valid and important form of political organizing. More importantly, they highlighted the critical ways that Black women’s lived experiences had been excluded from white women’s movements against sexism and Black men’s movements against racism.

The work of Black queer feminist theory emerged most prominently in 1989 and 1991 when legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” and explained that “the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism.” While Crenshaw provided a name for this concept, scholars and activists like Angela Y. Davis, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks have long described the complex relationships between race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and other personal characteristics that affect the lives of women of color, Black women in particular. Scholars like Cathy J. Cohen have shown how intersectionality and Black Queer Feminism, together, can better account for the types of oppressions many Black Americans experience when they are considered “deviant” or less “normal” than others.

Today, activists and organizers like Chicago’s Charlene Carruthers, founding Director of BYP100 — a national chapter-based organization of Black 18-35 year olds committed to the liberation of all Black people, have integrated Black Queer Feminism (BQF) into their political organizing processes and tactics, thus centering the experiences of queer people and trans and cis Black women in their very notions of freedom.

For many of today’s activists and organizers, social movements and initiatives that do not account for the full lived experiences of all Black people are insufficient.

The idea of focusing on the least among us can be traced to Black Queer Feminist theory. These thinkers taught us, as Fannie Lou Hamer said, “nobody’s free until everybody’s free.” This is a crucial lesson that pushes us closer toward liberation everyday.

**Reading List/Bibliography**


Wells-Barnett, Ida B. Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases, 1892.
While *How to Catch Creation’s*,
G.K. Marche is fictional,
playwright Christina Anderson
might have drawn inspiration
from any number of writers,
novelists, and thinkers who have
shaped the history of American
writing and fiction. Looking for
a new book to read? Below are
short biographies and selected
works of Black women whose
work might inspire you like
Marche’s inspires Stokes!

**Toni Morrison**
Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford
in Lorain, Ohio in 1931, Toni
Morrison has authored 11 novels,
not to mention her contributions
to short fiction, theatre, opera,
nonfiction, and children’s
literature. The recipient of over
25 awards, including the Nobel
Prize for Literature in 1993,
Morrison is perhaps best known
for her novel *Beloved*, which won
the Pulitzer Prize and American
Book Award in 1988. Her most
recent novel, *God Bless the Child*,
came out in 2015. She continues
to write today. **Selected works:**
*Beloved* (1998), *The Bluest Eye*
(1970), *Sula* (1973)

**Maya Angelou**
Poet and civil rights activist Maya
Angelou was born in St. Louis,
Missouri in 1928. Best known
for her poetry, Angelou also
wrote essays, screenplays, and
seven autobiographies (works
that are sometimes considered
autobiographical fiction). Angelou
recited her poem “On the Pulse
of the Morning”, at President Bill
Clinton’s inauguration in 1993,
and was the recipient of the
Presidential Medal of Freedom
in 2011 (presented by President
Barack Obama). She passed away
in 2014 at the age of 86. **Selected works:**

**Octavia Butler**
The first-ever science fiction
writer to receive a MacArthur
Fellowship, Octavia Butler (born
in 1947 in Pasadena, California),
authored three major series, as
well as several stand-alone novels,
short story collections, and essay
collections. Over the course of
her career, she was a multiple-
time recipient of the Hugo and Nebula Awards, literary awards specifically for the genres of science fiction and fantasy. Until her death in 2005, she taught at the Clarion Science Fiction Writer’s workshop, the very same workshop she attended as an up-and-coming writer. **Selected works:** *Kindred* (1979), *Patternmaster* (the first of the *Patternist* series, 1976), *Fledgling* (2005).

**Lorraine Hansberry**

Born in Chicago in 1930, Lorraine Hansberry was the first Black woman to have a play performed on Broadway. In her short life (Hansberry passed away in 1965, at just 34 years old), she changed American theatre, becoming the first Black dramatist, and the youngest playwright to receive the New York Drama Critics award. In addition to her most famous work, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry wrote essays, other plays (notably *Les Blancs*, which was unfinished at the time of her death), and contributed to the radical New York newspaper, *Freedom*. **Selected works:** *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (1965), *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (Posthumous, 1969).

**Angela Davis**

The third woman to ever be listed on the FBI’s Most Wanted List, Angela Davis (born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1944) is a political activist and author who has twice been a Vice Presidential Candidate as a member of the Communist Party of the United States. Davis became a divisive political figure in the 1970s, and today continues to speak out about the prison industrial complex, the United States’ broken immigration policies, and other human rights issues. Recently, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute rescinded the Fred Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award they initially awarded Davis, partially because of her staunch support of Palestine and boycott of Israel. In response, Davis said it was “not primarily an attack against me but rather against the very spirit of the indivisibility of justice.”¹ **Selected Works:** *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (1971), *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003), *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (2015)

**N.K. Jemisin**

N.K. Jemisin is a contemporary fantasy and science fiction author (born in Iowa City, Iowa in 1972) and a psychologist. Her debut novel made waves, and earned Nebula, Hugo, and World Fantasy Awards nominations, eventually securing the 2001 Locus Award for Best First Novel. She has authored three distinct series of novels, and became the first author to ever win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel in 2018. **Selected Works:** *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010), *The Killing Moon* (2012), *The Stone Sky* (2017)

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¹ As of January 29th, 2018, Davis’ award was reinstated. Read more [here](#)!
We tell the story!
Life is why —
We tell the story
Pain is why —
We tell the story!
Love is why —
We tell the story!
Grief is why —
We tell the story!
Hope is why —
We tell the story!
Faith is why —
We tell the story!
You are why — Why we tell the story,” sings the bridge of the final song, “Why We Tell the Story”, of the Broadway musical Once on This Island. This was the first play I’d done in high school, nearly one of the first musicals I knew other than Annie, The Lion King, and Aladdin, and the show that got me into theatre. It felt very black with its drum and dance breaks and awareness of colorism in the Black community. My 16-year-old-self fell in love with it and how it made me see the power of theatre. I also got into theatre because I didn’t see enough other stories, “real” stories of people who looked like me, who shared my identities at the time: girl, black, socially conscious, bookworm. I recognized the power of both telling your stories and having them witnessed, and I wanted there to be more black, girl, bookworm storytellers. Once on this Island still feels very black, but its writers aren’t. 16-year-old me didn’t see anything wrong with this; I didn’t consciously understand the problem with the lack of Black stories being written not just for and about, but by Black people.

In 1967, producer and actor Robert Hooks along with playwright Douglas Turner Ward and theater manager Gerald Krone opened the Negro Ensemble Company in New York because they shared my sentiments. They felt there was no space for Blacks on Broadway stages and sought to cultivate a space to nurture black playwrights, directors, and actors. In 2018, the situation feels to have shifted. Major theatres across the country have been diversifying their seasons with playwrights of color, many helping to develop these works in their initial staging, such as How to Catch Creation at the Goodman.
In recent years, I, as a Black woman, have felt more seen and heard by the influx of nuanced, complex works of Black writers on American stages. I had the opportunity to interview Judy Tate on this subject. Judy is an American playwright, Emmy-award winning screenwriter, producer, actor, and teaching artist. She is the founding artistic director of Manhattan Theatre Club’s Stargate Theatre Company, a workreadiness theatre project for court-involved young, and producing artistic director of the American Slavery Project, a theatrical response to revisionism in American discourse about slavery, the Civil War and Jim Crow. Below, she shares her thoughts on the relationship between American theatre and works by Black writers.

Quenna L. Barrett: In your opinion, what has been the role of Black work in American theatre historically and what is it currently?

Judy Tate: Black work in American theatre has historically served several purposes. First, I think it’s been a repository of our own stories. One of the most elemental human yearnings, I believe, is to bear witness and be witnessed. If someone other than you saw or experienced something, it becomes “real”. Black people’s history of oppression in this country, white denial of that oppression, the exploitation of our images as cartoons and our erasure from mainstream culture, made creating our own work imperative. Someone had to bear witness to what was going on around us and in our own communities. And plays vitally do that. Very much like Jacob Lawrence, Archibald Motley, and Romare Bearden visually documented Black life in America, yet had very different styles and points of view about what they saw, it was important that they bore witness to the richness and complexity of Black life. And their statements about that life were important too. The reality of Black life was all but erased from mainstream culture in the first half of the 20th century, so the role of Black work during the late 19th and early 20th was, an essential testament to our own existence. For ourselves, by ourselves.

I think, later, when integration started happening, some of our stories became educational vehicles for the edification of the dominant culture. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. Because to take your place at the table, you’ve got to help an audience understand who you are, where you come from and why you demand a spot. I’m not talking about “selling out” or anything. (Which was a big accusation during the ‘70s and ‘80s towards our pioneer playwrights.) Lorraine Hansberry’s Raisin in the Sun was skewered badly in the ‘80s by George C. Wolf in The Colored Museum. It’s because Raisin in the Sun had become “the Black play”—nearly a religious phenomenon. But that’s what happens when only ONE playwright is recognized. One of the things that George Wolf did by skewering this time honored, icon of a play was say to the theatre powers that be, “we have more writers here” and “she’s not the only voice in the room”! Things really opened up after that. I mean it was a confluence of events—social forces, theatre progress, but certainly that was a seminal time.

Currently, I don’t think Black theatre has a single driving engine. And that’s fine. There are writers who are historically driven, some socially conscious, some explorative of other genres. It’s a wide open field. I do think that many Black playwrights still feel an obligation to show us the world through their own particular current lens and that lens in a still racist society is going to be tinted. After all, it is hard to ignore the body you’re living in. But the conversation has changed and writers are challenging themselves to explore these things on a wider slate. There is no monolithic way to explore the Black experience. For example, I just saw Yale student, Jeremy O. Harris’ bitterly smart Slave Play. Its theme is about the point at which violence and desire meet and how inextricable those two impulses can be. It asks a lot of questions, personal and socio-political. He seems to think it is impossible to separate the personal from the political. He’s brave and young and brilliant. He has a section that skewers the jargon that wafts around Ivy League campuses like the dust around the Charles Schulz character, Pigpen. It is absolutely hilarious. And serious. He plays with forms and feels liberated enough to poke fun at the very sensibilities that probably got him accepted to Yale. It’s absolutely subversive. And necessary. Just his way of writing is an example of his own liberation.
QLB: How has the relationship between American theatre and works by black playwrights shifted since you’ve been writing? How has this impacted your career?

JT: When I started writing, it was in the 1990s. I had been an actor. Not being able to take my daughter on the road once she was school aged, I started writing. At the time mainstream theatre was just beginning to look at Black writers. I remember being in a group of “new” writers at Playwrights Horizons. In it were Kia Corthron, Lynn Nottage, Lynn Martin, Charlotte Gibson and a few others. It’s clear where Kia and Lynn went – Lynn has earned 2 Pulitzers and Kia was one of the most produced playwrights in the late 90s. Lynn Martin, Charlotte and I went into daytime TV. We were 3 out of the only 5 Black writers in television at the time. It was kind of amazing. Now there are a lot more Black voices on the scene. It’s very, very exciting. Lynn is now the grand dame of the theatre, I’d say. And the new generation following are the Dominique Morrisseau’s and of late the African women – like Mfoniso Udofia and Jocelyn Bioh. Things have shifted in this way: when I had a window open up for me, it was a narrow and fleeting time. White theatre-makers seemed to have just discovered Black writers. There was grant money to diversify their theatre fare and we were the most available to start that diversification. But then, established theatres discovered Latinx and South Asian and African writers. It’s all good. But there is a window. And I’d say, when it opens for your group, jump through that bad boy! Actually, that advice will be dated when theatres stop ticking diversity boxes because our society is so damned integrated. A girl can dream, right?

As for how Black playwrights’ relationship with the American Theatre has shifted, it’s twofold. We have been integrated into mainstream theatres, so there isn’t really a place for a Negro Ensemble Company, or full-fledged Crossroads season anymore. That’s good and bad. Good, that wider audiences are seeing work, bad because those companies were vital to the life and growth of Black artists. My own playwriting career has been impacted mostly, I’d say by my own actions. I’m not one who pursues...and I’ve always...
represented myself. So, I’ve had work produced through my own personal relationships with theatres that believe in my work and I’ve made my own work.

QLB: What are the challenges with “Black theater” or doing “Black plays” in mainstream American theatre?

JT: When I talk to people whose work has been produced at white theatres, the main complaint has been one of speaking the same social/political language. That can be in the way the script is interpreted by the director (or notes by Artistic Director) or even PR choices. I remember when a major theatre in New York had to learn that Black churches had to be courted, relationships made to get Black audience members out. I remember a story about someone being called “high yellow” in a play and the white director told the actors that he took it to mean “fragile and dry and withered”. It’s a very specific ethnic reference. But then again, that’s just a lack of research. And directors, Black or white, can lack curiosity!

QLB: Can you talk about your experiences with American theatre, both as a black and woman playwright? How do these intersecting identities impact the scope and reach of your work?

JT: It’s funny, I haven’t really thought much about the “intersectionality” of my life as a theatre-maker. But when I look around at the staff of The American Slavery Project, we’re all women! Black women! Isn’t that funny? We always laugh and say “Black women, we get things done!” But it’s true! By the way, The American Slavery Project (ASP) is a theatrical response to revisionism in this country’s conversation about Slavery the Civil War and Jim Crow. We support writers who write about those eras with readings and productions, have educational workshops and panel discussions with scholars and artmakers in the community. Our original piece, Unheard Voices is a monologue play with music and drumming that brings to life some of the Black men, women and children who lived in New York during the 17th and 18th Century and are buried in the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan.

QLB: Do you feel like you, or other Black playwrights, have to speak to the “Black experience”?

JT: Some Black writers do, some don’t. I happen to be working on a piece about Lady Godiva. And I write about 19th Century American AND, I write a lot of other stuff. But, as I said, we’re living these very specific experiences in this country – you kind of can’t escape it. So if a Black writer is going to write about their own experience, they can’t escape it being a “Black” experience, can they?

QLB: Is there anything else you’d like to share on the topic of American theatre’s relationship to black work?

JT: Yes. To the playwrights: write, write, write. Send your work out. The only way American Theatre can have a relationship with you is for you to start the conversation—with your work. And also, start a company! Then you are the theatre establishment.
Over the past several decades, adoption has become more prominent in mainstream American culture, as reflected in high-profile movies like Instant Family and Juno. Moreover, adoptions now account for approximately 2% of the United States child population. Still the adoption and foster care systems remain daunting and mysterious for many Americans hoping to create their families through adoption, and for people who are simply curious about the process.

**Adoption** is a permanent legal agreement which grants an adoptive parent all of the same rights and responsibilities granted to a birth parent. Prospective parents may choose to adopt for any number of reasons, such as not being able or not wanting to conceive biologically, wishing to raise children without contributing to overpopulation, wanting to legally blend their family by adopting a stepchild, and myriad other reasons. **Adoptees** (people who are adopted) can be adopted from inside the United States (domestic adoption) or outside the United States (international adoption).

**Foster care** is a temporary legal arrangement in which a family provides care to a child in their home, typically with the plan of reunification with their birth parent(s). In about half of all cases in Illinois, a child is reunited with their birth parent(s) within 12 months. The goal of foster care is to act in the child’s best interests. In cases where a judge decides that reunification with the birth parent(s) will not be most beneficial to the child, a family who fosters a child may then adopt that child if they wish to do so. If the foster family does not adopt the child, then the child returns to the foster care system and waits to be put into the care of a new foster family. This is a stressful and traumatic process for the child.

From award-winning artists to legendary activists, many celebrities throughout history were adopted as children. Top row: Lana Condor, Colin Kaepernick, Eartha Kitt. Bottom row: Frances McDormand, Keegan-Michael Key, Malcolm X. Learn about other famous adoptees at AmericanAdoptions.com/famous_adoptions.
In the United States, a wide range of people can foster and adopt, including both married and single people. In Illinois, “any reputable person of legal age [21 and older] who has resided continually in Illinois for at least 6 months” can adopt.

While specifics vary by case, here are the typical steps for pursuing adoption:

1. **Contact an Agency**
   Adoption agencies work with prospective parents to guide them through the legal process of fostering and adopting. Some agencies are public, which are low-cost and focus on foster care as a pathway to adoption, and some agencies are private, which are higher cost and focus primarily on adoption without foster care as a component.

2. **Application and Screenings**
   Prospective parents must complete an application through their agency, receive a criminal background check, complete a health screening with verification of up-to-date immunizations, prove financial stability, and provide letters of reference that speak to their character and social stability.

3. **Complete Training**
   If Illinois parents are intending to foster a child that they are not related to, they must complete approximately 30 hours of trauma-informed parenting training through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Adoptions without foster care do not typically require this training, although orientations and parenting trainings are widely recommended to ensure adoptive parents are prepared to support their children’s specific needs.

4. **Home Study**
   In some states, such as Illinois, home studies are required in order for prospective parents to foster children. A caseworker from the prospective parent(s)’ agency will investigate the safety and fitness of the parent(s)’ home. They will also learn about the parent(s)’ personalities and lifestyles, which they take into great account when matching parents with children.

5. **Wait to Be Matched with a Child/Children**
   Based on a variety of factors, caseworkers will match children to a family. Whenever possible, caseworkers will attempt to keep siblings together within one adoptive family, which has been proven to be the most beneficial to children’s social and emotional health. Depending on the specific circumstances, children will either be immediately adopted by their forever families, be fostered...
by a family and then be adopted by them, be fostered by a family before returning to the care of their birth parent(s), or remain in foster care until they age out of the system. The path for each individual child is determined legally by the courts and is generally meant to be in the best interest of the child, although the experience of being in the foster care system is universally traumatic for young people, particularly for those who are never adopted.

**Barriers to Adoption**

While the range of people who are legally capable of adopting is wide, several factors can stand in the way of individuals choosing to adopt. Some of these factors prove to be legitimate barriers for many families, while some factors are simply misunderstandings based on tired myths around adoption. Still other discriminatory barriers are imposed on prospective parents.

**Financial**

Adoption can be expensive, depending on where in the world parents are adopting a child from and what type of agency parents are working with. An international adoption can cost as much as $50,000, while domestic adoptions through private agencies cost an average of $45,000. Comparatively, adoptions through the foster care system have almost no expense, typically costing no more than $2,500, which is primarily from the cost of conducting the home study and other legal fees. The low cost of foster care is meant to incentivize families to choose to foster, due to the staggering number of young people in the US foster care system and the social stigma against these young people, who many people grossly mislabel as damaged or unlovable. However there are a few financial benefits which can offset some of the costs of adoption or incentivize families to adopt who may be concerned about their financial ability to do so. In May 2018, Illinois included a $5,000 tax credit for adoptive families in the state budget to provide financial relief to families. Additionally, all United States children who were adopted at age 13 or older can complete their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as an independent student, rather than as a dependent. This allows them to forego counting their adoptive family’s income on the form, which can grant them access to significantly more financial aid.
making college more affordable.

Legal
The legal process of foster care and adoption can be a confusing and daunting journey through mountains of paperwork, but caseworkers can knowledgeably guide prospective parents through the process. However there are even more legal barriers to overcome for certain individuals pursuing adoption, like LGBTQ people and returning citizens.

In the state of Illinois, an individual who has been convicted of committing or attempting to commit certain offenses, such as child abuse and neglect or any crime involving violence, is immediately disqualified from adopting or fostering, except in cases of exoneration and expungement. Lower-level offenses could be waived in court if the offense occurred 10 years previous to the prospective parent’s application to adopt or foster, or for other reasons determined by the court and caseworkers.

However, some of the lower-level offenses which would disqualify a prospective parent from adopting are notably vague in wording. Two of the most vague disqualifying offenses include “a drug-related offense” and “obstructing justice”, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway. In the United States justice system, vaguely worded offenses often leave room for discriminatory decisions made by law enforcement. For instance, although marijuana is used about equally by Black and white Americans, Black people are almost 4 times as likely to be arrested for possession. This disproportionate rate of arrests also results in a disproportionate rate of convictions. In Illinois, where Black people account for 14.7% of the general population, a staggering 58% of the prison population is Black. Not only do discriminatory rulings affect Black individuals; they affect black families. This high incarceration rate results in more Black children who enter the foster care system due to a parent being incarcerated, and fewer Black adults who are able to foster and adopt due to previous convictions of lower-level offenses.

While married same-sex couples are legally permitted to adopt in all states in the United States, just as married different-sex couples are, it can be more complicated for unmarried LGBTQ couples to adopt. Only a few states have anti-discrimination laws in place to ensure that private agencies cannot bar an unmarried same-sex couple or LGBTQ individual from adopting.

Social
Although adoption has become more prominent in American culture in recent years, there is still a great deal of social stigma associated with it. Many people view adoption as an inadequate substitute for having children biologically, inappropriately question the choices of adoptive families, or view adoptive parents as saviors.

A startling photo project by photographer and adoptive mother Kim Kelley-Wagner captures the ignorant comments and questions she and her daughters receive on a regular basis. The comments captured in the project provide a snapshot of common misconceptions about adoptive families, as well as displaying racist, sexist, ableist, and xenophobic assumptions that many people make related to adoptees. These false ideas about adoption also take a mental and emotional toll on adoptive families, according to Psychology Today.

Despite the vast amounts of misinformation surrounding adoption, it is important for the greater culture to value adoption as a valid and attainable way to create a family. Adoption offers the possibility of loving homes to children of all ages and backgrounds, which provides a great social good. And while adoption is more attainable than it may at first seem, we must continue to ensure that it is an option that is equally available to all qualified and loving families legally, financially, and without social stigma.
We Are Family: Adoption and Kinship
by ROSEMARY S. MULRYAN
Mulryan and York Law Firm, Chicago

From my usual seat in the jury box, I watch as each adoptive family comes before the bench at the courthouse to ask the judge to declare that a child become their child. In legal terms, that a child becomes “for purposes of inheritance and all other legal incidents and consequences shall be the same as if she had been born to the petitioners (the adoptive parents).” f.1

An active duty soldier, stationed in Illinois carries a newborn infant in her arms, accompanied by her own mother, soon to become the baby’s adoptive grandmother. A young man comes into court, holding the hand of his 7-year-old foster son, clearly bonded as father and son. An aunt and uncle have dressed their niece in her Sunday best. The child’s parents can no longer care for her, so aunt and uncle will raise her as their own child.

In Adoption Court in Cook County, the children and their families reflect the tremendous diversity of the city and surrounding suburbs. All are asking the court to create a family: a permanent and unassailable legal parent-child relationship.

While adoption is by law the creation of legal parent-child relationship, it is also the beginning of a kinship network. “We define adoption as a means of providing some children with security and meeting their developmental needs by legally transferring ongoing parental responsibilities from their birth parents to the adoptive parents, recognizing that in so doing we have created a new kinship network that forever links these two families through the child who is shared by both.” f.2

We witness these undeniable connections between the biological and the adoptive families in myriad ways: a 55-year-old woman completes a DNA search and is contacted by a biological cousin. The cousin tells her that her mother is alive, living across the Atlantic in another country. Teenagers post their adoption status as children of an anonymous sperm donor, who agrees to meet them and their parents. Social media makes possible communication between “diblings” - donor siblings. Their families begin to plan reunions, gathering to acknowledge the powerful link of kinship.

For more than thirty years, adoptive families have been the brightest light in my law practice. What could be more moving than helping to build and protect adoptive families? I have watched adoption change from solely two-parent/infant adoption to include foster parents, single parents, and same-sex couples.

Adoptive families have evolved. Many now include biological relatives, previous foster parents, and siblings in their family celebrations - a recognition of the importance of honoring and strengthening their children’s connection to all of those who have known, loved, and nurtured them.

f.1 750 Illinois Complied Statutes (ILCS) 50.

Predominantly, American culture and media show us a singular portrait of family: the nuclear family, a family structure of two married parents who have children that are biologically their own. However, as we are increasingly seeing in modern pop culture, human interest stories, and our own lives, families can be created in any number of ways, shapes, and structures. Read below for personal accounts from a wide variety of people who have each approached creating their family in their own unique way!

Many single adults are pursuing parenting partnerships with a non-romantic partner who shares their goal of raising kids. Some partnerships may be formed by close friends with children, while others may be formed by people who meet based on their common goal of creating and raising a child together.

- **Huffington Post: Why My Best Friend I Decided to Move In Together and Co-Mother Our Children**
- **New York Times: Seeking to Reproduce Without a Romantic Partnership**
- **New York Times: Adoption and the Single Guy**
- **The Longest Shortest Time: Becoming a Single Dad While Trans**

An increasing number of children in the US are being raised by a single parent, many of whom are single parents by choice. Single parents by choice pursue parenting outside of a romantic partnership for varied reasons, often because they do not feel that they need to wait to be in a partnered relationship in order to successfully raise a child.

Parents looking for a way to cut living costs while experiencing a greater sense of community might consider forming a multi-family household, in which several
families share common spaces and all contribute to child-rearing and housework.

**The Atlantic: Eight Parents One Shower**

This podcast shows a relationship structure comprised of several families linked together by their parents’ romantic relationships with each other, called a polycule (a portmanteau of “polyamorous” and “molecule”). Polyamorous relationships are formed by mutually consenting adults who have ethical, non-monogamous relationships with multiple partners. Polyamory is different from polygamy, in which one man has multiple wives, and is different from cheating, as polyamory requires trust, communication, and mutual consent.

**The Longest Shortest Time: The Polycule.**

Other families are formed unexpectedly, and grow through a combination of adoption and biological children, as in the “Accidental Gay Parents” series.

A note that this podcast was originally produced in 2015, and contains some language around trans people that we have since moved away from.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that Trystan is absolutely free to describe his own experience as a trans person however he likes, and that he has also specifically consented to talking about his body in this podcast. However in everyday conversation it would not be appropriate to ask trans people personal questions about their bodies, and we should always strive to use the most respectful and updated language, outlined below.

When describing the sex that a doctor determines a baby to have based on their genitalia or other sex characteristics at or before birth, we would now use the phrase “Trystan was assigned female at birth”.

We also hear Trystan’s body referred to as a “female body”, because he has not elected to have gender-affirming surgeries. However, now in conversations about trans people we always want to refer to the gender that a person currently identifies with, regardless of whether someone has or has not had gender-affirming surgeries. In this particular context, both Trystan and the podcaster mean to inform the listener that Trystan has specific body parts commonly associated with people who were assigned female at birth, such as ovaries and a uterus, which could allow him to become pregnant.
**THEATRE ETIQUETTE**

**What should I wear?**
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 in the theatre.

**What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?**
You should only leave the theatre if it is an **emergency**. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

**How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?**
Honesty and appropriately. Attending a theatre performance is different from watching a movie at home; In a theatre, you are in a room full of people who can hear your responses just as you can hear theirs. Most importantly, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback to what is happening onstage (laughter at jokes, gasps at surprising moments) but might be distracted if it is inappropriate (laughter at the wrong time, talking when it is not warranted). Whether we enjoy the play or not, we owe respect to the actors.

**Eating, drinking, and smoking** are not allowed while inside the theatre.

**Be respectful** to the artists onstage and to your fellow audience members. Wait until intermission and after the performance to talk, and remain in your seat during the performance. Be mindful of others seated next to and in front of you. Wait until after the show to use **phones or electronic devices**. The glow from the screen is distracting to your fellow audience members AND the actors, who can see your phone from onstage!
What to do before the show:
When you arrive at the Goodman at 10:30am, you will wait to enter the theatre with your group. Once your group is called, a staff member will lead you to your seats. 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 (located on both floors), get some water, and discuss the play with your friends. 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 any respectful questions you might have about the play, the job of the artists, or behind-the-scenes secrets.
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