Contents

2 Introduction to the Study Guide
3 An Interview with Tracey Scott Wilson
5 Director’s Note
7 Gèto or Ghetto
8 Crown Heights, Brooklyn; A Community in Flux
10 Gentrification! What Is It and Why Does Everyone Hate It?
12 Spotlight on History: W.E.B DuBois, Sociologist
14 A Genetic Myth, A Social Reality
17 White Privilege: Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack
21 Hell’s Kitchen/Heroin(e)
24 White Privilege: A Webcomic
26 Theatre Etiquette with Jessica Thebus
28 Reading Your Ticket
29 Writing Your Response Letter

This study guide is published by Goodman Theatre’s Education and Community Engagement Department for participants in the Student Subscription Series.

For more information related to Buzzer activities, lesson plans and resources, please visit the Goodman’s Education website at: www.goodmantheatre.org/engage-learn
I am having a debate in my office and I am curious to hear what you think about it. So a bit of a disclaimer... I am a romantic at heart. I mean that in the more literary sense that I am pulled to works of art that evoke strong emotion rather than rationalism. I want the happy ending, and the two plays Goodman is producing now – *Luna Gale* by Rebecca Gilman, and Tracey Scott Wilson’s *Buzzer*, which you will be seeing – have both given me endings that I am wrestling with.

The two plays running concurrently on our stages have a common thread of drug use in them. In *Luna Gale*, the two teen parents are meth users whose eponymous infant is taken away until they can prove themselves to be fit parents. In *Buzzer*, Jackson allows his childhood friend, who is in the very tentative early stages of recovery (not for the first time) to move in as a way of helping him stay sober.

But the more interesting connective issue for me however is that of noble sacrifice. In each play, a character makes a life-altering decision that is costly to them personally but benefits another character. In *Luna Gale*, Karlie walks away from her baby to make it possible for the infant to be with her father. In *Buzzer*, Don lies to protect his friend from the truth of a betrayal, thereby losing that friendship.

This idea of a protagonist making sacrifices for the betterment of others heightens the emotion and raises the stakes in play. We ask ourselves if we would be willing to walk away or give up something we desperately need to protect a friend or to do what's best for someone else. And with that sacrifice, there is a bit of redemption for the character. Neither Karlie in *Luna Gale* nor Don in *Buzzer* can be considered heroic. They have engineered the situations they find themselves in, not just because of their drug use, but also because of deep scars of insecurity, fear and betrayal. Audiences debate whether Karlie’s leaving at the end of *Luna Gale* is indeed even a sacrifice or her unwillingness to take responsibility. You may ask yourself the same questions about Don at the end of *Buzzer* as well. Both playwrights leave us to struggle with this question and to decide for ourselves how to interpret the actions of these characters.

We all make choices in our lives and often we make decisions that are not in our best interest, not healthy for us, not the best that we can make. Sometimes we choose the wrong people to be in our lives, sometimes we turn to drugs or alcohol or destructive behavior to try to soothe feelings of loneliness, depression or fear. Does this mean we are incapable of a single act of heroism? Of one small gesture of sacrifice?

I’ll be curious to hear what you think after you see the show.
An Interview with Tracey Scott Wilson

By Neena Arndt

Longtime Goodman audiences are familiar with the stirring work of playwright Tracey Scott Wilson: her play The Story was a highlight of the 2004/2005 Season, and The Good Negro captivated audiences in the 2009/2010 Season. Both directed by Goodman resident director Chuck Smith, these explosive dramas dealt with issues surrounding the African American experience. Now, Wilson returns to the Goodman with Buzzer, a play about three young adults whose beliefs and assumptions about race and socioeconomic collide when they move into an apartment together. With only three characters and a single set, Buzzer is an intimate story, but its themes resonate just as powerfully as those in Wilson’s other works. A few weeks before rehearsals began, Wilson spoke with the Goodman’s Associate Dramaturg Neena Arndt about what inspired the play, and the complex conversations we have—or don’t have—about race, class and how best to treat each other.

Neena Arndt: What was the impetus for Buzzer?

Tracey Scott Wilson: It was a story someone told me about gentrification; it happened when Columbia University was expanding into surrounding neighborhoods. I heard a story about some girls who were attacked in their building when they let an African American man in the building, even though they felt unsure about it because they were afraid. They didn’t want to be racist. That story stuck with me as inspiration.

NA: And why was it important for you to write a play about gentrification?

TSW: I just couldn’t stop thinking about it. Also, living in New York, I’ve lived in neighborhoods that have been gentrified and I have gentrified neighborhoods, so the issue is always there. It’s always on your mind in New York because everyone’s constantly in search of cheap housing. And that only usually happens in neighborhoods that are being gentrified. There’s an obsession with the real estate.

NA: In Buzzer, all three characters are gentrifiers. Jackson, Suzy and Don have just moved into the neighborhood, which is primarily African American. Jackson, who is black, grew up there, but went away to an elite prep school, then attended Harvard. He’s not interested in going back to his neighborhood to give back, but rather to get in on the ground floor of gentrification. Can you talk about what inspired this character?

TSW: To me he’s an amalgamation of many people that I know, including myself: many people who want to make good. They want to go back and prove themselves, or get what they never had when they were in high school. And this apartment is sort of the epitome of that. There’s a natural tendency people have to want to go back, but of course you can never really do that.

NA: Then there’s Don. He’s Jackson’s friend from prep school, and he grew up very wealthy. But unlike Jackson, he hasn’t taken his education seriously, and has been in and out of rehab. He rejects his family’s lifestyle, and in many ways identifies more closely with this neighborhood than Jackson does. Is he an amalgamation of people as well?

TSW: Yes, he’s an amalgamation, too, of people that I’ve known in recovery, and people that I’ve known who have grown up privileged and can put it on and throw it off when they feel like it.

NA: And the third character, Suzy, is Jackson’s white girlfriend—a teacher who works with primarily black students. She has never lived in a neighborhood like this before and is intimidated by some of the black men who talk to her on the street. What is her relationship to race?

TSW: I think that she has all kinds of perspectives: She has a perspective on the school she works in, on what she was taught in school when she was a child, and the perspective of home life. I think up until the start of the play she was able to separate her school life and her home life, because her home life was so different and so far removed from her school life. But once she’s in the neighborhood, she’s forced to see it in a different way. And what does that do to your ideas? What is your idea of race versus what is your reality?

NA: Is the characters’ age group very significant for you? Was it a specific choice to make them all mid-20s?

TSW: Definitely. This generation has been taught how to deal with race in a

SYNOPSIS: Jackson is a young, successful African American attorney determined to build a life in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of his youth. When he returns “home” with his girlfriend and troubled best friend—both white—in tow, the trio are soon forced to confront the simmering racial and sexual tensions that exist both inside their home, and outside their apartment.
very different way than people who were born the generation before that. This is a generation that has been raised on the Disney Channel, in a very multicultural world where Beyonce and Jay-Z are considered the biggest stars. It’s very different from someone who grew up when there were not many black characters on TV. You have a very different experience of race and the way that you can ignore it and not see it as an issue.

NA: One of the things that strikes me about all three characters is that they seem so aware of race and socioeconomics in the world, but less aware of how those things affect their relationships with one another.

TSW: I have to say that that’s the way people function, especially in the “post-racial Obama age” we’re entering. People compartmentalize their political beliefs from their personal lives, and from their emotional responses to race. There are the things that we are supposed to say, the things that we do say and the things we really believe. A lot of times we go through life without those things ever coming into conflict. But when you put three people in an environment like in the play, then they have to come into conflict.

NA: You used the term “post-racial Obama age,” which is a concept that gets thrown around a lot. With Buzzer, you seem to suggest that “post-racialness” is either not possible or certainly hasn’t been achieved yet.

TSW: Yes, it’s a term that has been around for a long time, and when Obama was nominated, it was something that was getting thrown around every day. The idea is that now somehow we’ve moved beyond race. I’m not trying to minimize the significance of Obama being elected. But all that’s happened is that discussions have become more coded: if you don’t say certain words, then that means you’re okay. It’s being coded in class, in discussions of poverty and discussions of who deserves what. And I think it’s all tied up in sexism and classism; it’s all sort of meshed together. Nobody wants to acknowledge that, and it’s couched in a way that is much more insidious because it prevents us from having a discussion.

NA: This play was produced at Pillsbury House Theatre in Minneapolis. How did the audience respond? Was there anything that surprised you in their responses?

TSW: Pillsbury House is in a neighborhood that is gentrifying, so people were very passionate about it. It was very personal for them. Lots of people emailed me after the show, or got in contact with the theater. They developed a lot of community events around it. I was very honored and humbled by their responses, but it was partly because gentrification is happening all around them.

NA: And how do you anticipate it being different with Chicago audiences?

TSW: That’s what I’m curious to see, because I know Chicago is very segregated in many ways. I grew up in Chicago, and I know it’s very different there. But at the same time, Chicago has a lot of transplants. There are a lot of people who come from other places and end up in Chicago, so I feel like that’s an audience that will understand it, because a lot of times they’ve come from other places.

I know a lot of New Yorkers have moved to Chicago because it’s cheaper, because you can buy a house in a safe neighborhood. But Chicago itself is very segregated—both economically and racially—and it has been that way for a very long time.

NA: You know a lot of New Yorkers have moved to Chicago because it’s cheaper, because you can buy a house in a safe neighborhood. But Chicago itself is very segregated—both economically and racially—and it has been that way for a very long time.

NA: This will be your first major collaboration with director Jessica Thebus. But you did work with her briefly when we did a staged reading of Buzzer last year as part of our New Stages Festival. What was that experience like, and what excites you about this collaboration?

TSW: We only worked together for two days, but I thought she was really smart about the play, really passionate about the play and I was really impressed with what she was able to do in a short period of time. So I’m very excited about the chance to work more with her.

“People compartmentalize their political beliefs from their personal lives, and from their emotional responses to race.”
–Tracey Scott Wilson
Director’s Note
BY JESSICA THEBUS

I had the pleasure of directing the reading of Buzzer last season as part of the New Stages festival. It was fun to work on: sexy, funny, tough, uneasy. Then we did the reading, and I was on stage with Tracey Scott Wilson and Tanya Palmer for the talkback. It was the most tense discussion I have ever had the privilege of trying to manage, filled with tough, agitated questions from a racially mixed audience. “Why did Suzy not just smile at the guys on the corner?” one lady asked. “Why did Jackson have to take them on?” wondered a couple on the side. “Why did Don have to lie?” inquired the young man down front. Why could they not just get out of this situation? Different people had different suggestions about what clearly should have happened among the characters, instead of what did. The room felt volatile, stuck and afraid.

I thought — OK. This is what I have been looking for. This is a new play about America.

The America I live in, and where I am raising my white daughter of Irish and German descent, who has black classmates but no black friends. The America where I went to prom with Tom Greene, and was friends with Kerensa Mabwa — and no one thought that was odd — but where I never would have sat at the school lunch table with Carol Patterson or Tyrone Wilson. I would have been afraid.

The America where I danced in the streets with the rest of Chicago the night Obama was elected to the presidency, when I watched a young white woman yell in celebration to a young black man standing on the top of a dumpster, “Can I take your picture?” He posed for her doing the black power salute against the Chicago skyline. I cried.

The America where I know why the George Zimmerman verdict horrifies me, but I found I could not explain it properly to my daughter the next day when a group of grade-school kids passed us in a tiny, homemade parade, each carrying hand-drawn crayon portraits of Trayvon Martin.

This is the America where I first met Tracey Scott Wilson for coffee in preparation for the New Stages reading of Buzzer. She said the N-word during our conversation — in reference to how often you hear it yelled in the American theater — and I could not myself use the word in our conversation. And wondered if I should — or if I should be able to?

What are we doing on our stages if not trying to talk about this America? Vincent Harding is one of the architects of the civil rights movement and was a speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During an interview on the radio show On Being, Harding said: “As we the people of the U.S., our main job is not to compete with China, not to give Russia another blast from our great horns, and certainly not to teach anybody else what democracy is. Our main job is to create a more perfect union, to develop within this country a recognition that we have been in a state of arrested development as a country. We have been in a state of arrested development as a country because we began by talking about establishing freedom and democracy and, at the same time, built into our Constitution the protection of human slavery — we built arrested development into our very beginnings.”

Which brings us to three young people in a large apartment, trying to grow up.

Love holds Jackson, Don and Suzy together. These three start out passionately entangled with each other, like so many groups of old friends in their early to mid-20s. But they are adults now, and they mean to grow up. Jackson is serious about his success and serious about Suzy. Suzy is in love with Jackson, and ready to live with him. Don’s done; he wants to get sober for good. And here they are. In a beautiful apartment that will someday be worth an almost unimaginable amount of money. It has big windows and lots of room.

Now — what do we think? Would everything play out the same way if they’d been living somewhere else? Seems like it might. But no — the neighborhood that completely surrounds them is the new element — the neighborhood that is changing at a blistering pace, and also seems frighteningly still.

All three of them should be able to handle it. Jackson grew up here. So did Don, really; he’s seen worse. And in a way Suzy is the toughest of the three — she holds her own in a bad school and has done it for years; it does not faze her.

But then they enter and leave this building every day,
and they sleep with the noise at night, and they make a thousand little choices to look at, or not look at, people on the street. The tension outside the beautiful windows meets the tension inside the beautiful windows, and suddenly, there’s fear. The Perfect Storm.

This fear is embodied in our culture and the way we’ve all moved through our world. It is silent, not even aware of itself. This fear lives in our bodies — even when we know we should be done with fear, that it’s unnecessary or unhelpful or unrealistic.

This fear leads to the last, most powerful moment of the play — people trapped on one side of a door or the other. We look at that and we are looking straight at America: simultaneously still and hurtling forward. The country is changing as fast as that neighborhood, but stuck at the same time in the fearful attempt to move past history.

A recent article in American Theatre magazine suggests that “The theater might be the best place for a conversation about race, that even with a black man in the White House, the nation is still struggling to have.” I hope so.

In the interview with Harding, the interviewer observed that “We take up the subject of race and of difference at extremely fraught moments — like the trial of George Zimmerman — but we don’t know how to take up this huge exploration in an active way as an ongoing thing.” This is how. Because we show the audience our America on our stage. Our young America, determined to grow up. But splintered by class and privilege and history, unspeakable words and unmet eyes, assumptions and fear. Our theater is a beautiful big room, and we are all in it together, sitting in the fierce eye of the Perfect Storm.

One giant leap for mankind … Hey! What about the women?

To read bios and learn more about Jessica Thebus and her work, visit www.goodmantheatre.org
Gèto or Ghetto
BY RAVEN STUBBS

Think of the word ghetto and it won’t be long before images of impoverished blacks in the “hood,” a blighted place where the sound of gunshots replace the cliché chirping of the birds, dominates as the picture. In fact, Webster’s dictionary will have the reader believe that the ghetto is the poorest part of a city. Though this may be a contemporary usage of the word, the origin of the ghetto actually was formed in Italy.

In 1516, Venice, Italy, saw an influx of Jewish immigrants. The word gèto (original 16th century Italian spelling) was used to mean “slag,” or a factory that produced metal castings. One was located on the same island as the Jewish confinement. Venice was a devout Catholic nation; thus its citizens separated a section of their Cannaregio sestieri (northernmost district) for the Jewish immigrants to have their own community and practice their Judaism freely.

During World War II, the term ghetto was used to describe city districts where the Germans forced social outcasts, such as Roma gypsies, non-Aryan Poles, and most notably the Jewish population, to live. The first ghetto was established in Poland in October 1939. The Germans would allot ghetto inhabitants a food ration of 253 calories, in comparison to the 2,613 calories that German citizens were allowed. In the close quarters of the ghettos, where sometimes more than 63,000 Jews would live in a 0.1 square mile area, residents would smuggle food, weapons, intelligence and medicine in an attempt to survive. Most of the apartments were devoid of sewers, piped water and sanitation. Thousands of people died from disease and hunger in the thousands of ghettos established throughout WWII.

In 1941, Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler crafted a plan to rid Europe of all its Jewish population, called the Final Solution. SS troops would go into ghettos and execute its residents at random. Or they would force the inhabitants onto trains where they were brought to concentration camps, or worse, extermination camps. Later, to aid the surviving Jews, several countries set up international ghettos as protection sites.

The idea of the modern-day ghetto began in the post-industrial era of America. During the Great Migration, 1914-1950, a large population of blacks moved from the racist and segregated South to the North in search of equal treatment and job opportunities, predominantly in manufacturing. However, between 1967 and 1987, economic restructuring caused a huge decline in manufacturing jobs. Consequently, urban areas in the north (cities such as New York, Chicago and Detroit) that were mostly populated by African Americans were left economically devastated. To further exacerbate the economic decline, white community members began leaving urban neighborhoods for the middle-class lifestyle of the suburbs, a phenomenon known as white flight. The range of jobs in the North was further altered by the arrival of European immigrants, who filled more unskilled labor positions than did their black counterparts.

Currently, ghetto is used to describe inner-city urban areas that are populated by impoverished, homogenous ethnic communities. Because of the slow rate of advancement of African American and other minority communities, these ethnic groups are an automatic presumed element of an area marked as ghetto.
Crown Heights, Brooklyn: A Community in Flux
BY KELLY REED

_Buzzer_ takes place in an unnamed gentrifying urban neighborhood where tensions rise between longtime residents of a lower socioeconomic class and the new “urban pioneers” who move in around them. Mixed with a layer of racial tension between the primarily African American established residents and the typically white “gentrifiers,” this makes for a pretty volatile cocktail. Playwright Tracey Scott Wilson intentionally does not name the place in which _Buzzer_ is set, but much of her inspiration came from a real place: Crown Heights, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York City.

During the early 1900s when New York City grew from a collection of townships to an independent city, Crown Heights was a posh residential neighborhood where members of Manhattan’s growing upper class (at that point, mostly of British descent) lived. By the 1920s, many immigrants from Jamaica and the Caribbean had moved to the city due to increased poverty in their homelands caused by the collapse of the sugar industry. Many of them made Crown Heights their home, as did numerous African Americans arriving from the South during the period of time known as the Great Migration. Beginning in the ’40s, many middle-class Jews emigrated from Nazi-occupied Europe and settled in the neighborhood, escaping the growing anti-Semitism in their home countries. Even today Crown Heights is home to the highest concentration of Lubavitch Hasidic Jews in the country.

By 1950, 89 percent of people living in Crown Heights were white, with about half of those residents being Jewish (in faith and ethnicity). Seven years later, the number of black residents (of mostly African American and Caribbean descent) had increased and constituted a quarter of the area’s population. In the ’60s and ’70s, the phenomenon known as white flight made its way through Crown Heights. Because white residents perceived the increasing numbers of nonwhite community members as a threat to their way of life, they vacated the neighborhood. Soon the only white people still living in Crown Heights were Lubavitch Hasidic Jews, encouraged to stay and continue investing in the community by their leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

During the mid-1960s, rising violence and racial tension in the area was exacerbated by the U.S. government declaring Crown Heights a “primary poverty area” because of its high unemployment and crime rate. This came to a head in 1991 with a series of violent outbreaks now collectively called the Crown Heights Riot. The riot, which lasted three days, began after a car in the motorcade of a well-known Hasidic rabbi struck and killed the 7-year-old son of Guayanese immigrants. A Jewish ambulance arrived on the scene and picked up the driver of the car, but not the child pinned underneath it. Violent conflict between blacks and whites in the area began soon after the ambulance left the scene, ultimately resulting in 190 injuries, 129 arrests, $1 million in property damage and at least two murders.

**The Crown Heights Riot in Movies and Theaters:**
- “Crown Heights,” a 2004 television movie about the aftermath of the riots, starring Howie Mandel
- _Fires in the Mirror_, a play depicting 29 real-life interviews with people involved in the riots, written by actress, playwright and professor Anna Deavere Smith
- “Brooklyn Babylon,” a fictionalized retelling of the neighborhood unrest in the 1990s, starring Tariq “Black Thought” Trotter and The Roots

Map of Brooklyn with Crown Heights darkened in center. Photo courtesy of JasonS. via Wikimedia Commons.
Crown Heights had a bad reputation for many years because of its violent past, from which it is still recovering. However, crime has deteriorated significantly since the late '90s. Undeniably, the process of gentrification has much to do with this change. Police presence has increased, new businesses have opened, and even though Crown Heights is still a culturally diverse place to live — most residents are West Indian or African American, and one of the largest communities of Hasidic Jews outside of Israel still lives a few blocks off of Franklin Street — rising rent prices and property taxes are forcing many longtime residents out.

The economic forces at play in Crown Heights come from our capital-driven economy, and will continue to shape the faces of urban neighborhoods across the country. Just like the neighborhood in *Buzzer*, the future of Crown Heights is evolving and uncertain. As more people move to the area and rent prices increase, diversity of income and ethnicity will gradually decline. If gentrification, which seems to be the fate of all urban neighborhoods at some point, is ever going to look differently for lower-income residents, the people themselves will be the driving force of change. Responsibility falls into the hands of communities to find new ways of re-energizing their surroundings without outside intervention. The burden also falls to them to resist the economic forces seeking to push them out once improvements are made. Without this type of empowerment, the “building up” of neighborhoods such as Crown Heights will come at the detriment of the people who lived there before it was “up and coming.”

Chicago Case Study: Pilsen

The neighborhood of Pilsen, which sits on the Lower West Side of Chicago, has garnered increased attention from the media and the Chicago community at-large because of the gentrification taking place there. Throughout Chicago’s history, immigrants from Ireland, Germany and the Czech Republic have called Pilsen home. During the 1950s and 1960s, Mexican immigrants moved to the area after the city forcibly removed them from their homes in the Lower West Side to make way for the University of Illinois at Chicago campus. Once in Pilsen, they established the strong and vibrant cultural scene for which the neighborhood is known. Because of the same forces at work in Crown Heights, the future of this community is increasingly uncertain. In the early 2000s, its appealing cultural scene and comparatively low rent prices drew artists, students and recent graduates to take up residence there. Since then, both the average rent price and the cultural landscape have changed significantly. Arguably, these changes have benefited the area in some ways — namely, crime rates and infrastructure have improved — and it is certainly reasonable that people outside the Mexican community would want to move to Pilsen. However, the fact remains that the people who called this place home (and invested the time, money and manpower to enhance it) for decades are being pushed out once again by rising rent prices, precisely because their neighborhood was “discovered” as a cultural enclave. Meanwhile, new residents are not necessarily interested in integrating themselves, making Pilsen feel less and less like an actual community. Is it the fate of all urban neighborhoods to undergo gentrification at some point — look at Pilsen, Wicker Park and Logan Square — or is there an alternative?
Even the roots of the word “gentrification” are steeped in resistance. The word was coined by 1960s Marxist urban geographer Ruth Glass. A sociologist, she believed it was her duty to use her research to influence government policy and bring about social change. She created the term to describe what was happening in London during the ‘60s, when growing enclaves of the upper class were gradually squeezing longtime residents out of their homes in the traditionally poor neighborhoods of East London.

Gentrification continues to be a controversial topic today. It sits at the intersection of two very sensitive issues — race and class relations — and seems to be an unavoidable phenomenon in the growth of cities, at least judging by our history so far. Opponents of gentrification cite displacement, loss of social diversity and community conflict as key drawbacks. Supporters say that gentrification revitalizes neighborhoods, making them safer places to live and increasing local economic activity.

The chart below summarizes the most common arguments for and against gentrification as cited by various studies in the UK, where the concept originated (Atkinson).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displacement through rent/price increases</td>
<td>Psychological costs of being displaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas experiencing economic and social decline are stabilized</td>
<td>Community resentment and conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased property values</td>
<td>Loss of affordable housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More people living in the area</td>
<td>Increase in property prices out of pure speculation by outsiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased local revenue</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the area increases, is encouraged and funded</td>
<td>Only those with power to lobby/articulate their interests benefit from increased spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of suburban sprawl</td>
<td>Displacement of existing businesses and industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased social mix</td>
<td>Increased cost and changes to local services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased crime</td>
<td>Displacement + demand for housing = pressures on surrounding poorly-resourced areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if gentrification is a problem it is small compared to issues of: — Urban decline — Abandonment of inner cities</td>
<td>Loss of social diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gentrification has been a destructive and divisive process, aided by disinvestment to the disadvantage of poorer groups in cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in this chart, the same effects can be used to support either side of the argument. Whether an effect is positive or negative completely depends on who is experiencing it. Those who benefit from the process are often in favor of it and vice versa.

Opponents of gentrification cite displacement as a major effect: the pushing out of people who lived in the neighborhood before it was “revitalized.” Displacement is a result of rising rent prices and property taxes, caused in turn by the higher demand for housing in the area. Once residents can no longer afford to live in their homes, they must move elsewhere to places where they have little history and which may have fewer resources. The effects of displacement disproportionately affect lower-income residents, female-headed households, the elderly and working-class households (Atkinson). Because of the way resources are divided in our country, these residents are often people of color as well.
It is interesting to note that the word “gentrification” usually brings to mind rich white people moving into a neighborhood and displacing residents. Gentrification at the hands of nonwhite rich folks, which can and does happen, does not receive the same level of negative attention. A good example of this is the neighborhood of Bronzeville in Chicago. Bronzeville has been undergoing revitalization for more than a decade as residents climb the income ladder or as middle-class families return to the area. Perhaps no one has blown the “gentrification whistle” because what is happening there is unprecedented. A historically black neighborhood, Bronzeville seems to be improving itself and keeping its sense of community identity, since the people gentrifying the area are from the area (Badger). If members of a community can participate in the gentrification of their own neighborhood — if they can reap and sow the benefits of it — then the effects may be truly revitalizing.

Actually, a process as revitalizing as what is happening in Bronzeville might not be “gentrification” in the truest sense of the word. In coining the term, Glass intended to capture the inequality and injustice created by capitalism in a city setting. The rising costs of housing for lower-income and working-class households, and the personal catastrophes of displacement, eviction and homelessness: These are all symptoms of a set of arrangements that favor the need to accumulate money and wealth over the social needs of home, community and family (Slater).

From its very beginnings, the concept of gentrification always has been about exposing economic injustice: The fact that people with more resources continue to be able to displace those with less just by sharing the same space. Those who experience the benefits of gentrification most likely will support it, and also find it difficult to acknowledge the privilege that allows them to do so. Ultimately, gentrification is such a thorny topic to address because it plays out the all-too-familiar forces of inequality: issues of power and privilege, rich versus poor, resourced versus marginalized.

WORKS CITED


Can you believe that once upon a time there were black leaders who felt that African Americans should be complacent with white privilege in society instead of fighting for equal treatment? Those same leaders thought that it would better serve the black community to only acquire trade skills instead of seeking to be formally educated for white-collar occupations. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois went against the grain and encouraged African Americans to seek fair treatment as equal humans and to engage in education. W. E. B. Du Bois believed education provided the economic and intellectual advantages that would serve as tools for blacks to become respected vocal citizens of society.

Born in 1868, Du Bois grew up during a turbulent time in American history. With the end of the Civil War, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson began pushing moderate policies to upgrade rights to the newly emancipated slaves, especially in the South. Besides sharecropping, African Americans predominantly worked as railroad workers, mill workers, maids and laundresses. Du Bois wanted them to strive for more. He attended Harvard University, where in 1895 he became the first African American to ever earn a Ph.D. from the school.

As a social scientist (sociologist), Du Bois wrote several books discussing the black struggle: issues of identity crisis; economic, political and social prosperity; and the state of religion and spiritualism in the black community. His most famous work, “The Souls of Black Folks,” was published in 1903. “Souls” expounded on Du Bois’s views on the need for blacks to have the right to vote, to be treated equally and to receive a good education. “Souls” not only pioneered the 20th century’s intellectual argument for the black freedom struggle, it introduced one of the most seminal ideas in culture studies: double consciousness. Du Bois described this as “a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

Double consciousness explains the state of blacks being “constantly aware of how much their own sense of identity and value conflicts with the identity and value imposed upon them by white America.” In his essay on double consciousness in “Souls,” Du Bois explains how double consciousness also works as a privilege for black folks, by allowing them to see how society really works. As the group subjected to the privileged’s power, black America must understand the privileged’s position, while simultaneously being conscious of their own underprivileged role, and the relationship between the two. The privileged group continues on believing society works on their terms.

Double consciousness can be seen best in Buzzer through Jackson, when he acknowledges the difference in privilege between he and Don. He explains to Suzy, “If I had gone down there and approached them the way Don did, those brothers would have laughed at me then tried to kick my ass. But they are not going to kick Don’s ass because if they touch white boy they will end up
under the fucking jail.” (Act II) This statement articulates Jackson’s own lack of privilege to be confrontational without being identified as threatening, Don’s privilege to be confrontational without authoritative consequences, and the difference in the reception of him in comparison to Don from the guys on the corner. The lack of privilege that Jackson expresses is a part of the black struggle that Du Bois wrote about.

Du Bois’ push for the understanding of the black struggle created what we today call the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP. In 1905, the Niagara Movement began as a radical organization with the purpose of advocating for African Americans’ civil rights. Led by Du Bois, the Niagara Movement opposed Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist policies, such as the Atlanta compromise, that guaranteed southern whites that southern blacks would not agitate for justice, equality or integration. The Niagara Movement only lasted four years due to push back from Booker T. Washington’s National Afro-American Council, southern whites and Washington’s popularity among southern blacks. However, in 1909 activists gathered to address the needs of the black community’s civil rights. This came after a 1908 riot in Springfield, Ill., caused the destruction of black businesses and homes when white community members found two accused black criminals had been moved for their own protection from a mob. From the conference, the NAACP was formed.

The civil rights movement, the expansion of historically black colleges and universities, and even Barack Obama as president can be contributed to pioneering efforts of Du Bois. It was his progressive thoughts of African Americans’ entitlement to human and civil rights, deserving need of higher education, ownership of property and leadership positions that enabled the push for equity and modern-day equality.

Shane Kenyon (Don), Lee Stark (Suzy) and Eric Lynch (Jackson) in rehearsal for Buzzer at Goodman Theatre. Photo by Liz Lauren.
Race is a social construct. It is important that you read that sentence exactly as it is written.

Race is a social construct.

Often, when asked to speak or write on this topic, folks will ask an anthropologist to describe “race as a social construct,” explain how race might be socially constructed or speak to the elements of race that are biologically fallible, indicating that some elements of race are biologically certain. It is important at this point in the dialogue or piece of writing to cease use of the word “as” and instead embrace the word “is,” because race is a social construct.

For many years, race was perceived to exist among both the public and the scientific community; in fact, the scientific community went to great lengths to prove race, and certain races’ superiority or inferiority, through analysis of behavior, measurements of the human body and, most notably, visible physical differences among groups of humans. It wasn’t until May 1998 that the American Anthropological Association issued its official statement on race, clarifying its stance — shared by most practicing anthropologists — that race does not exist as any provable genetic entity.

The visible physical differences we can easily see among humans do indeed exist. We can see variations in skin color, hair type and eye, lip and nose shape. These phenotypic variations, however, do not equate to isolated and definable human races. As explained in the AAA’s statement on race, “... it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups. Conventional geographic ‘racial’ groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes. This means that there is greater variation within ‘racial’ groups than between them. In neighboring populations there is much overlapping of genes and their phenotypic (physical) expressions. Throughout history whenever different groups have come into contact, they have interbred. The continued sharing of genetic materials has maintained all of humankind as a single species.”

Physical differences are inherited independently of one another, so the presence of certain physical traits does not predict others, and such traits tend to vary gradually across regions as opposed to abruptly. To borrow again from the AAA’s statement, “For example, skin color varies largely from light in the temperate areas in the north to dark in the tropical areas in the south; its intensity is not related to nose shape or hair texture. Dark skin may be associated with frizzy or kinky hair or curly or wavy or straight hair, all of which are found among different indigenous peoples in tropical regions. These facts render any attempt to establish lines of division among biological populations both arbitrary and subjective.”

Society has given weight to certain physical traits and proceeded to use such traits as justification for slavery, persecution and death. Functionally, since race served favored groups for hundreds of years, it follows that those looking to maintain this hegemonic structure would do “research” to prove race’s existence. Such research and the repeated enslavement or killing of other ethnic groups have shaped our world and continues to shape our understanding of race and unrelenting interest in phenotypic variation, primarily skin color, as some type of hyper-important human characteristic.

It is not. In an April 2001 article titled, “The Genetic Archaeology of Race,” published in the Atlantic Monthly, prominent anthropologist Steve Olson writes “the genetic variants affecting skin color and facial features are essentially meaningless — they probably involve a few hundred of the billions of nucleotides in a person’s DNA. Yet societies have built elaborate systems of privilege and control on these insignificant genetic differences.” Some biological anthropologists have researched how skin color differences evolved, their evolutionary function or lack thereof, and although they have a few solid theories, there is no absolute determination of why, evolutionarily speaking, skin difference evolved. As Steven Jay Gould, author of “The Mismeasure of Man,” explains in a 2003 California Newsreel interview: “We don’t really know what causes different skin colors, and I don’t think anyone should claim we do. There are competing ideas.

The strict Darwinian selectionist theory would claim that different colors are advantageous in different environments. The old argument — and it’s not a stupid one, it may be right — is that having fair skin in a tropical climate doesn’t do you a whole lot of good with respect to vitamin D deficiencies and that darker skin color is
How odd is our system of racial classification?

My favorite trivia question in baseball is, “Which Italian American player for the Brooklyn Dodgers once hit 40 home runs in a season?” Nobody every gets it right, because the answer is Roy Campanella, who was as Italian as he was black. He had an Italian father and a black mother, but he’s always classified as black. You see, American racial classification is totally cultural, and it’s based on the unfortunate and sad legacy of racial distinction based on this ridiculous metaphor, the purity of blood.

You’re identifiable as having black ancestry because we can see it. I mean, who’s Tiger Wood, who’s Colin Powell? Colin Powell is as Irish as he is African, but we don’t classify him as that. No, we have a really screwed up classification. To think it’s biological is just plain wrong. It’s based, flat-out, on the legacy of racism and the metaphor of the purity of the blood. It’s a very troubling issue. — Stephen Jay Gould

an adaptive advantage there. And that white skin is advantageous in high latitudes where there isn’t intense sun and you need to get vitamin D with the help of sunlight. That may be so.

Interestingly, that wasn’t Darwin’s own suspicion. Darwin’s own suspicion was that most of the visual ‘racial’ differences are due to what he called sexual selection and have no adaptive significance in terms of physiology or anatomical adaptation. He said, Look, humans are just enormously various in their preferences. For capricious reasons different standards of beauty arise among different groups of isolated people, and then in the process of mate selection certain cultures favored one skin color, one body form, and others favored others. And so those differences arise for a reason. But the reason is the capricious aesthetic preferences of different groups throughout the world.

And another possibility, of course, is that some of these founding populations were very small and so you can get just random differences arising from them.

We don’t really know what causes differences in skin colors is the honest answer. And they’re not, in an evolutionists’ sense, at all significant. Obviously it’s been significant historically and culturally. But I think an evolutionary biologist tends not to be enormously troubled about it because skin color differences are so minor with respect to the immensity of evolutionary change.”

When skin color variations don’t satisfy, folks often linked other shared traits to phenotypic variations as proof of race’s existence. Wrong again! Many such associations are nonconcordant. In “Race and Gene Studies: What Differences Make a Difference?” author Larry Adelman gives a fine example of one such misunderstood confluence and how it actually plays out, genetically and geographically:

“Take sickle cell. Doctors were long taught that sickle cell anemia was a genetic disease of Negroes, a marker of their race. Yet sickle cell is found among peoples from central and western Africa, but not southern Africa. It is also carried by Turks, Yemenis, Indians, Greeks, and Sicilians. That’s because sickle cell arose several thousand years ago as a mutation in one of the genes that codes for hemoglobin. The mutation soon spread to successive populations along the trade routes where malaria was common. It turns out that inheriting one sickle cell allele confers resistance to malaria and thus provides a selective advantage in malarial regions (inheriting sickle cell alleles from both parents causes sickle-cell disease). In other words, sickle cell, like tandem repeats in the Science study, is a marker not of skin color or race but ancestry, or more precisely, having ancestors from where malaria was common.

Like sickle cell, most traits are influenced by separate genes and inherited independently one from another. They are said to be “nonconcordant.” Someone with brown hair might carry A, B or O blood. Sub-Saharan Africans tend to have dark skin. But so too do Dravidians from India, Aborigines from Australia, and Melanesians from the South Pacific. Large numbers of West Africans are lactose intolerant as are Japanese, but East Africans aren’t. German and Papua New Guinean populations have almost exactly the same frequencies of A, B and O blood. At one point on the genome an individual might share a gene form common in Africa, at another site East Asia, and still another, Europe. Jared Diamond and others have pointed out that for each trait we can classify people into ‘races’ by that trait, each giving us different and overlapping races depending on the trait selected.

Indeed, the Rosenberg team found they could cluster the individuals in their sample into several different statistically significant groups, only one of which corresponded to five continents. They also found that no matter which clustering scheme they used, individuals could be placed in more than one group.

The reason for all this within-group variation is because unlike most other species, modern humans, Homo sapiens sapiens, are young, only about 150,000 years or so old, and we’ve always moved. As humans migrated
around the globe, populations bumped into each other and shared their mates — and genes. Sometimes genes flowed across great distances — through trade, war, slavery, piracy, exile and migration. More often they flowed from village to village. Human populations just haven’t been isolated from each other long enough to evolve into separate sub-species, or races.”

Folks will point to many things to try and assert the existence of race. It’s important to note, even if you can find other frequently repeated traits among folks sharing a particular shade of skin color, that such classifications change throughout history and place. In a 2003 California Newsreel interview, Alan Goodman, professor of biological anthropology at Hampshire College, explains the issue in trying to cobble these shared phenotypic variations together as evidence of race:

“We’ve developed a universal system for thinking about hat size that’s measurable, for example. So you can go into Sao Paulo Brazil and the hat merchants there have the same scale that the hat merchants do in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And we can have universality because it’s objective, it’s measurable, we’re just measuring the circumference around the head. It doesn’t change culturally from one place to another.

But think about race and its universality or lack thereof. Where is your measurement device? There is no way to measure race first. We sometimes do it by skin color. Other people may do it by hair texture. Other people may have the dividing lines different in terms of skin color. What’s black in the United States is not what’s black in Brazil or what’s black in South Africa. What was black in 1940 is different from what is black in 2000. Certainly, with the evolution of whiteness, what was white in 1920 — as a Jew I was not white then, but I’m white now, so white has changed tremendously.”

Although race might not be a biological or genetic fact, it is still very much a lived reality. Racism exists even if race doesn’t have a scientific classification because racism is exercised through human actions. As Adleman explains later in his “Race and Gene Studies: What Differences Make a Difference” piece, “Race may be a biological myth, a social construction, but it nonetheless remains very real ... The likelihood that toxic waste has been dumped in your neighborhood, your ability to get a home loan, the quality of your kid’s education, connections to job opportunities, whether or not you’re likely to be followed in a department store or pulled over by police, are all influenced by your race. Race does matter ... The factors that lead to differential outcomes between races live not in any ‘racial’ genes but in our social institutions and practices.”

We, as scholars and students of the earth, must accept race as a lived reality while simultaneously asserting that it is not a biological one. It is not easy to unlearn something that has been taught as biological fact for hundreds of years, but it absolutely necessary and possible. When we demystify the myth of race, and look at what is actually under the skin, we find far more shared among us than not — once we know that, we can work toward making the same true of our day-to-day experiences.
White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

BY PEGGY MCINTOSH

Through work to bring materials from Women’s Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women’s status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women’s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women’s Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about white privilege must ask, “Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?”

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don’t see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow “them” to be more like “us.”

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

10. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.

19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

23. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me, white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these prerequisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made inconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word “privilege” now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one’s race or sex.

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power
from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what will we do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color, they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of
meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won’t be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a “white” skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.
In Buzzer we learn of Don’s heroin addiction and his battle to stay clean. The recent death of Philip Seymour Hoffman has also illuminated the tragedy of heroin addiction. In these two excerpts from “Hell’s Kitchen” and “Heroin(e),” originally written for live performance, storytellers Bobby Biedrzycki and Khanisha Foster recount their own experiences with the extraordinarily addictive and debilitating drug that is heroin.

HELL’S KITCHEN

I guess the entire thing started with Ty. Ty was this beautiful club kid who I’d met at Tunnel, and before I go any further, let me answer: Yes. Tunnel Night Club in New York City. Made famous in films like “Party Monster,” the mecca of the New York club scene. In 1998 I moved to New York City with a scholarship to film school and the idealistic hope that someone could teach me how to be an artist. It’s laughable now, because it’s the same cliché you’ve seen in a million movies. Young boy moves to the big city and the big city eats him alive. But at 20 years old I didn’t know it was a cliché. I mean shit, I didn’t even know I was living it. Back then things just seemed to happen. I didn’t sit around and think about outcomes and consequences. I had seen Ty around the club many times, but because he sometimes presented as male, shirt off, broad shoulders, bangs hanging over his forehead, and other times as female, pigtails, bright neon eyeliner and lipstick to match, the neon G-string exposed over his hips, I hadn’t put it together that he was one person, until my friend Kittie introduced us...

Over the next few months, with Ty as my escort, I was legitimized in the New York club scene. He knew everyone, and me being with him meant I got to know everyone. We got into clubs and rooms and parties I didn’t even know existed. Limelight, Sound Factory, Twilo, we went everywhere together, and that’s when the benders started. Ty loved to do speed. High grades of crystal methamphetamine were his favorite, but he’d do anything from coke to pills if he had to, so mostly we would mix, snorting, popping and of course main veining, as Ty called it. If I was a drug addict in training before we met, Ty brought my game to a pro level. We would stay up two, three, four days in a row tweaking and laughing and even sometimes having sex, although sex quickly exits most relationships between addicts. That was fine because it wasn’t really the sex I was interested in — it was having a partner. See, the companionship I felt with Ty was exactly why I had started using drugs at age 14.

HEROIN(E)

I began drinking because of intense loneliness; I mean I always felt different from people around me even as a kid and I wore that feeling as a shield. Part of the allure to me with all drugs was the social aspect, although this is the great irony of addiction: that ultimately, most addicts end up isolated and alone.

One Sunday night in February, after I had been up for like two days doing low-grade meth, Ty called and told me to meet him on the Lower East Side. When I finally found him on the third floor of some rat-infested, walk-up brownstone that was crumbling to pieces (the kind of building that doesn’t even exist in Manhattan anymore), he was so sketched out that it was hard for me to understand what he saying. He was pacing around the dirty apartment and talking about his mom, so I knew it was bad. Ty’s mom lived in Texas and usually when he started talking about how beautiful his mother was, how she looked like an old black-and-white movie star and could sing like Patsy Cline, I knew he was really fucked up.

Suddenly he grabbed both my shoulders and shook me, “Robert!” He was one of the few people who got away with calling me that “Oh. My. God. I’m so glad to see you! When did you get here? You have to try this shit. You are gonna explode!”

“Do you have clean needles?” I asked, and he produced three needles from thin air the way a magician shows you a dove.

“Sit down” he said, pushing me against the wall and to the floor. Then he sat cross-legged in front of me and laid my arm on his knee while he started to cook up on an old spoon. When he was done, he looked up, “Robert,” he said. “Have I ever told you how beautiful my mother is?”

HEROIN(E)

Sheridan had climbed a pillow mountain, and she leapt off flinging herself into a Bruce Lee 360 through the air. Ever since the flexibility test in P.E., Sheridan thought she was some sort of super gymnast. I guess that’s what happens when you hold the record as the most flexible kid in school as a first-grader. I couldn’t even reach my toes.

Her black banana curls helicoptered around her honeyed
face. Her eyes grew wide with joy like the kids from Willy Wonka when they enter the top-secret, candy-making factory, and a loud “HEeeeeeeEHaaaaaWWW!” galloped from her mouth. I must have been distracted by the actual Bruce Lee on the television, because I’d moved the pillow just far enough to the right to leave my round belly open as an empty target. Sheridan’s foot wedged under my ribcage, full force, and catapulted me onto the blanket throne.

The wind was knocked out of me momentarily and then my body convulsed into the fetal position. My lungs could no longer stand to be without air and they syphoned the oxygen around me into my body, making a huge sucking sound. When I breathed it all out, a howl of laughter and pain accompanied it.

My sister’s laugh topped mine. A bit of concern was quickly taken over by pleasure at her own power. She hopped from leg to leg balancing like she was Ralph Macchio himself. Her Shirley Temple smile grew into a devil’s grin. My teeth shoved past my mouth. I let out the most delicious groan I could muster to prove to Sheridan just how much it hurt. I couldn’t get her attention, though. The real pain in my belly was giving in to the burning in my chest at being laughed at. I jumped to my feet.

“I’m telling Dad you kicked me on purpose!” I yelled pointedly, wrapping my arms around my belly and pushing in hard, so hard that I tumbled forward tripping over myself through the dining room and into the kitchen. Grace never was my strong suit.

My mom stood at the sink. I wouldn’t tell her. She didn’t know how to punish us. In fact we had no rules at all, and whenever she tried to yell, she’d only break out in a fit of laughter.

This was a job for my dad. When he wanted to scare us he’d put on his prison voice, deep, confident and a bit maniacal. Sometimes he’d even go so far as to take his leather belt and pull the edges making a crisp snap. That was the dad I needed this Sunday afternoon.
With an immodesty that fit my years, I stormed into the bathroom to announce Sheridan’s crime. In a flash of the pink tile, before my dad shut the door back on me, this is what I saw:

My father sitting on the toilet lid, tighty whities still on, a tan rubber cord wrapped around his bulging brown skin. His veins were swollen, especially the one with the needle sticking out of it. His eyes closed as his breath drew his chin up toward the ceiling. On the pink swirled counter just beyond him — tin foil, a spoon, his orange plastic Bic lighter and his open black duffel bag on the floor. Hearing the creak of the door, his chin shot down and his eyes flashed quickly, directly, into mine. Then he slammed the door into me, pushing me back.

The quick slam left me right in my mother’s glazed view, so I cleared out of the doorway, and stood by the corner of the dining table where neither my sister nor my mom could see. My father would see me, though, as soon as he opened the door. I squared off with the bathroom, 5 feet away. I tilted my chin up so that my dad would have to look in my eyes. I was waiting to ask a question.

I’d started to notice in kindergarten that none of the other parents acted like my dad. They didn’t have five different jobs that lasted a few months at a time; they had one and they stayed there. They didn’t disappear for months only to show up with no explanation. Mostly, they never walked out of a door with tender eyes, only to come back through it with fevered ones.

I wanted to know what it was, the needle. He was training to be a nurse, so it wasn’t unusual that he had one. What was unusual, was that when I’d cuddle up in his arms to watch TV, the creases of his elbows were covered in tiny holes, a scarred brown, darker than his skin color.

When he opened the door, he had on a pair of khaki work slacks and a crisp white T. The smell of Old Spice wafted out alongside him. He was direct as he approached me and curved around to sit in a hard wooden chair to my left. His look was simple — he wasn’t waiting — but he did seem ready for something.

I thought I’d better ask him about the needle quick. He had a way of talking people out of what they’d seen and I wanted the proof fresh in my mind, the picture of where everything sat on the counter.

“Daddy, what were you doing in there?” I asked. I had a sudden impulse to stop asking questions and pretend I hadn’t seen anything at all.

“Getting ready, baby.”

The plainness of his response felt like a trick. My brow bunched up.

“No, no ... not that part,” I replied, rubbing my right eyebrow, which was starting to sting. “The big rubber band around your muscle, and the needle. It was sticking in you.”

He licked his lower lip and bit down on it.

“That’s my medicine, baby,” he said, smoothing my straight black hair out of my face. The roughness of his hand felt soothing on my cheek, and he left it there when he said, “Daddy’s sick, and he needs that to feel better.”

My heart twinged like a metal coil was being turned inside it. I didn’t think he was lying, but it sure didn’t feel like he was telling the truth either.

He got up and walked past me to the trundle bed, where he stumbled and started folding up his blanket throne. Sheridan ran up to him mouth opened ready to explain herself, but stopped quick when she could see the shift in his eyes. She slid easily back into her ninja moves.

I didn’t know the word heroin then, but I would.
HI THERE EVERYONE!

I'M WHITE!!

LIKE REALLY WHITE. LIKE SO WHITE THAT I CAN'T TAKE PICTURES OF MYSELF WITH THE FLASH ON!

I STILL BENEFIT!
FROM INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION!

NOW, I'M A GOOD PERSON...

I DON'T CONTRIBUTE TO RACIST AGENDAS...

I DIDN'T ASK TO BE BORN WHITE...

I TRY MY BEST NOT TO BE RACIST MYSELF...

BUT.

THESE BENEFITS I RECEIVE ARE COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS

WHITE PRIVILEGE!

...WHICH I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT I NOW HAVE TO EXPLAIN THIS TO YOU ALL IN COMIC FORM, BECAUSE NO ONE ON THE INTERNET SEEMS TO OR EVEN WANTS TO UNDERSTAND THIS PAINFULLY SIMPLE CONCEPT!

WHEN IT COMES TO SCHOOL, I'M 71% MORE LIKELY TO BE ADMITTED INTO A UNIVERSITY BECAUSE OF MY RACE. A POC WITH MY EXACT SAME GRADES ONLY HAS ABOUT A 29% CHANCE.

AND ONCE I'M ADMITTED, I'M MORE LIKELY TO RECEIVE MY DEGREE.

PERCENTAGE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES:

71% 29%
WHITE PEOPLE OF COLOR

IF THAT WASN'T BAD ENOUGH, HERE'S SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

A WHITE MALE WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD, IS 55% MORE LIKELY TO GET A JOB OVER A MAN OF COLOR WITH A CLEAN RECORD.

WHITES 11%
POTENTIAL PRISONERS 88%

ALTHOUGH MY FAVORITE STATISTIC IS THAT

82-91% OF HOMICIDES ARE INTRARACIAL
(WHITES KILLING WHITES, POC KILLING POC)

BUT

MAJOR NEWS OUTLETS FOCUS ON INTRARACIAL HOMICIDES MORE THAN 60% OF THE TIME!

(75% MORE IF IT'S A BLACK MALE KILLING A WHITE FEMALE?)

*FBI CRIME STATISTICS (2010)
YOU’RE RACIST!

WHITE PRIVILEGE DOESN’T EXIST!

BUT WHITE PRIVILEGE DOES EXIST.

IT EXISTS EVERYWHERE AND WHEN YOU SEE IT IN ACTION, YOU’LL UNDERSTAND WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT.

AND I NEVER SAID THAT I WAS A PERFECT HUMAN BEING!

TO BE HONEST, I CATCH MYSELF BEING RACIST EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.

BUT PART OF BEING A DECENT HUMAN BEING IS CATCHING YOURSELF WHEN YOU NOTICE YOUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS ARE HURTFUL!

WHITE PRIVILEGE IS THE PRIVILEGE TO BE IGNORANT OF THE WORLD AROUND US.

SO MAKE A CHANGE!

THE ONLY WAY TO NOT BE IGNORANT IS TO OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE PRIVILEGE YOU HAVE.

AND FU**ING EDUCATE YOURSELF!!

Jamie Kapp is a 19 year old Education Major from West Palm Beach, Florida. The author of a few web-comics concerning relationships and online friendships, her comic on social justice and white privilege has been the topic of controversy after a string of death threats and hate mail led to her closing down her main blog. While not making comics about social justice, she enjoys doodling and writing, and plans to release a fiction comic on smackjeeves.com sometime this summer.
What should I wear?

Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

What should I bring?

Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as **PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers** are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don’t bring anything you don’t need.

(Please remember):

No smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theatre.

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.

Have respect for other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking. (For your safety and others’!)
How should I respond to what’s going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don’t laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. 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. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feed back but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors for having given it a try.

What to do during Intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors.

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.

What to do before the show:

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. 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.

And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:

Theatre artists are paid professionals. When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect yours.

Enjoy the Show!
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 a seating chart—a map of all the seats in the Albert Theater—and an explanation of how to read your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you!

---

**Reading Your Ticket**

**BY GOODMAN EDUCATION**

---

**Goodman’s Albert Theatre**
After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with Buzzer whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer, the playwright or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Send us your letter within one month of seeing the show, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

Important information to include:

- Your name, age and school
- Your mailing address (where a response may be sent)
- Any questions or special observations you want to share with the artists!

Send your letters to:
Education and Community Engagement
Goodman Theatre
170 North Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60601

Or email us at:
education@goodmantheatre.org

Writing Your Response Letter
BY GOODMAN EDUCATION

Here is an example, a great student letter we received in response to Animal Crackers:

Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of Animal Crackers, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of Animal Crackers very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of Animal Crackers proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director’s vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of “The Flash.” I though the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give Animal Crackers two thumbs up.

Sincerely,
A CPS student

Goodman Theatre Education & Community Engagement is also online!

Check us out on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/goodmaned

Or Twitter:
http://twitter.com/GoodmanEd

We love hearing your thoughts, so don’t be afraid to drop us a line, comment, tag us in a note, @reply, or retweet us. Also check out our online educational resources for more information regarding the play you’ve seen, or anything else you’d like to know about how our programs (and theatre) work!

Keep checking in for updates online!