



—THE **UNMUTED** COMPANION—

**THE HOUSE
OF THE NEGRO INSANE**

BY TERENCE ANTHONY

A WORLD PREMIERE

— SPONSORED BY BETH K. BATDORF AND JOHN S. BRESLAND —

UNMUTED COMPANION

for *The House of the Negro Insane* by Terence Anthony

CREATED BY THERESA M. DAVIS, DRAMATURG

THE UNMUTED COMPANION is a dramaturgical component designed to enhance your **CATFUNMUTED** experience. We've designed the UC Volumes to act as counterparts to the six BOLD, NEW PLAYS, in this year's digital experience. You can sample, survey, or study these online offerings—with no fear of spoilers!

Each companion will give you—

- A sneak peek into the 2021 Season
- An introduction to the creative teams
- An exploration of the world of the plays
- A deep-dive into the new play process

Come and join us as we **thinktheater** and **talktheater**.

We promise not to “give you all the 2021 goodies” – just enough to make you eager for more.

A LETTER FROM ED HERENDEEN

Can you imagine a world without LIVE theater? The theater is an art form performed by living artists witnessed by a live audience in the very specific HERE and NOW. The artists and the spectators come together in communion and perfect harmony with each other in the same moment. Somewhere during this sacred moment, the spectator's consciousness is awakened and enlightened. Together this community of audience members becomes one with the artists on stage. Live theater is an awesome experience. Live theater is urgent and simply indispensable. The energy created in a live performance can change lives. The power emanating from a live work of art is SPELLBINDING!

So I ask you: Can you imagine a world without live theater?

It is impossible for me to imagine a world without live theater. I miss casting and callbacks. I miss face to face, in-person collaborations with designers. I miss the back and forth, lively discussions of production meetings. I miss finding creative solutions to the budget challenges. Most of all, I miss the rehearsal room and the rehearsal process: that first Company Read Thru, those inspirational "break-thru" and "AHA" moments, sitting next to the living playwright...listening to their every breath as they respond in the moment.

Yes, I miss rehearsal. And I miss the audience – our ultimate collaborator and partner in producing and developing new work.

I cannot imagine a world without live theater.

I would miss the risks, the challenges, the emotions, the thrill and excitement of transporting a living audience to those special places...sacred places that only exist in the imagination.

Live theater, live storytelling provokes philosophical and political ideas. Ever since the Greeks invented drama on stage, the theater has shaped, stimulated, provoked, and entertained humans.

Yes, I miss live theater. BUT – we want to connect with you NOW! We cannot wait. We want to share our creative process with you NOW! **We are CATFUNMUTED!**

This digital – **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** is an exciting prelude of what is to come in our 2021 Theater Festival. Our next season begins here! An innovative online experience that begins the process of creating the future of LIVE contemporary theater next summer in our beloved SHEPHERDSTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA.

I am honored to introduce you to six contemporary playwrights. Artists that have the extraordinary ability to converse with the voices of the past. Terence Anthony confronts oppression, incarceration, and human rights in his historical play *The House of the Negro Insane*. Jacqueline Goldfinger and Victor Lesniewski imagine the voices of the future in their plays *Babel* and *The Fifth Domain*. Their plays warn us about government control, abuse of power, and cybersecurity. Kevin Artigue, Chisa Hutchinson, and Caridad Svich imagine the pain and the horror of our fragile present in their plays: *Sheepdog*, *Whitelisted*, and *Ushuaia Blue*. Plays truly set in the present...in the here and now... that hold us accountable for racism, gentrification, greed, and climate grief.

Yes, this is a prelude of a new repertory of six new plays that listens to the past, examines the present, and imagines an uncertain future.

Yes, I can imagine sharing our **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** with you. This digital repertory invites you to escape and engage by surrounding yourself with new works that deserve your attention...new work that is **alive** and **dynamic**...the **heart** and **soul** of what makes the **Contemporary American Theater Festival** compelling and necessary – right now and forever.



Ed Herendeen
Founder & Producing Director

INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME

"If history were past, history wouldn't matter.
History is the present . . . You and I are history.
We carry our history. **We act our history.**" –James Baldwin

Terence Anthony is a playwright, an artist, a communications specialist, and a devoted activist. And like several Black artist-activists – some mentioned in this UNMUTED Companion – Terence is a culture-carrier. He boldly embodies, transmits, and represents our history. In *The Fire This Time: African American Plays for the 21st Century*, Harry J. Elam describes three plays as "looking through the mirror backward." In the introduction, *Getting the Spirit*, Elam states August Wilson's *King Hedley II*, Robert O'Hara's *Insurrection: Holding History*, and *Crumbs From The Table Of Joy* by Lynn Nottage all symbolize "The Presence of the Past." Terence Anthony and these other potent and powerful wordsmiths "see history not as static fact, but as malleable perceptions open to interpretation." In *The House of the Negro Insane*, Terence juxtaposes the harsh realities of oppression and brutality against the style and symbols of magical realism. He creates "a place to envision the past as it ought to have been in order to understand the present and to achieve the future [he] desires."

The House of the Negro Insane tells the story of Attius Grimes and touches on a neglected and too often forgotten subject and period in American history. "The year is 1935, and the Taft State Hospital is one of seven psychiatric facilities in the U.S. built exclusively to care for 'insane and idiotic negroes,' where the homeless and downtrodden are housed alongside the criminally insane and diseased. Attius builds coffins at Taft Hospital, where he has been locked up for years, but when two new patients ask him to help them escape, Attius dares to dream of a life beyond the hospital walls."

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF THE PLAY & THE PLAYWRIGHT

The House of the Negro Insane is set during the Great Depression.

Why did you choose the year 1935?

Terence Anthony (TA): Well, the main decision was that I wanted to set it in Oklahoma. When most people think about historical racism and oppression in America, it's often centered around the South. So, I set the play someplace where the audience wouldn't automatically expect institutionalized racism exists. Since Taft was the last of the "colored" hospitals built [1930 - 1934], I decided to set it in 1935.

Do you have an established writing process, or do you approach each project differently?

TA: James Baldwin described the act of writing as trying to find out something which you don't know, and what you don't want to know, and that's always stuck with me. I'm always jotting down ideas I want to explore, and the ones I keep coming back to and fleshing out tend to be the stories or characters that make me the most uncomfortable.

With this play – with all my plays, it's about taking the [audience] someplace unexpected. Whether it's telling history that



"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots." –Marcus Garvey

"When I was young, and my family lived in a white neighborhood, I often felt like we were crazy. We were the only family getting hassled by cops, receiving threatening phone calls, and having their car set on fire. Eventually, I figured out that we weren't the crazy ones, but the feeling still lingers. *The House of the Negro Insane* is a story I need to tell to uncover the history of how sanity and mental health have been weaponized to control black folk." –Terence Anthony

continued on page 5

is underrepresented or focusing on a character whose experience has been marginalized. The journey is of the play - that's what most important to me. Having the audience undeniably connect to the characters and go through that experience and come out really thinking about ways that they can make a difference.

Do you hope the audience will recognize the connections between the play and what is happening in the world today?

TA: Definitely! To me the period between post-slavery and pre-civil rights history in this country and the systemic harm experienced by Black folk during that time really serve to shine a light on what we are going through today. And are still impacted by these systems today...the way capitalism functions to keep Black people down, the growth of mass incarceration, and the attacks on our voting rights? These plans were all laid out in those years. The United States reinvented itself in a way to maintain power over Black people beyond the institution of slavery, and we are still living in those systems today.

What do you want audiences to take away from your work?

TA: I want audiences to come away feeling like they've gone on an incredible journey and spent time with characters they'll never forget. I want the work to challenge their assumptions in some way, through the lens of some common themes that run through my work: race, class, trauma, violence. But I like to embed themes into a larger narrative, rather than build a script around an idea or message. Having the audience connect with the story, the characters, is my number one goal.

"In addition to my creative projects, I work to win social and economic justice for Black, Brown, and low-income communities. Whether working as an activist or an artist, I've learned that no matter what the issues are, sharing experiences through stories is the most effective way to create empathy and understanding. In theatre, a unique, communal kind of intimacy is created when an audience connects with characters on stage that makes it a vibrant vehicle to challenge our perceptions and spark social change. I write plays that aspire to be both exhilarating and idea-driven, about people that dwell on the fringes of the inequitable system that binds us." *-Terence Anthony*

BACKGROUND INFO

Taft State Hospital opened in 1934 to treat only African American patients. It was unique as it was run entirely by African American staff. Taft was one of seven psychiatric facilities in the U.S. built "exclusively to care for insane and idiotic negroes," however the homeless, poor, and senile were housed with Taft's population of the criminally insane, epileptic, and mentally retarded in violation of state and national psychiatric standards."

-Asylum Project, Taft State Hospital

HEALTH CARE & RACIAL BIAS

"We know for a fact that Whites looked at Blacks differently in terms of the medical field."

-Dr. Errol Phillip

"From its inception, there was inhumane treatment of clients at Crownsville Hospital Center. They were not treated with dignity or respect. They were warehoused."

-Jackie Allsup, Psychiatric Aide

In November 1867, Superintendent Peter Bryce of the Alabama Insane Hospital admitted **John Patterson**, a forty-five-year-old Black laborer, who suffered from what Bryce diagnosed as acute mania. Bryce reduced the source of Patterson's derangement to one word: freedom. But amazingly, on the very next line of Patterson's case history, Bryce reported that Patterson had been considered insane for at least twelve years. He had been free, however, for less than five years.

This contradictory diagnosis of Patterson reveals more than Bryce probably realized. First, it shows that he candidly embraced a notion, which was emerging throughout the South, that freedom was pathological for Blacks, whereas bondage had been salutary.

-Labeling and treating

Black Mental Illness in Alabama

They were admitted because they sassed a police officer; they were admitted because they didn't get along with an employer; they were admitted because they were on the wrong street...The first person admitted was a woman named Edith Smith, and she was admitted because she was old and had no place to go.

DEEP DIVE INTO THE SCENE

What or who inspired the characters in this play?

TA: I found the character of Attius while I was doing research and came across a photo of the basement of one of these institutions. [It] was filled with old wooden coffins, where they buried the patients that didn't make it through all the treatments in this institution. And seeing that picture...I wondered who built these coffins, who was in charge of placing the bodies in the coffins. And that's when I came up with what Attius was. He's the coffin builder in the institution...

As I was writing the play [Attius'] father became a fifth character that never makes it onto the stage. In creating Attius, I really needed to know who this father was, where had Attius come from, how has he been able to survive in the way that he has - had he been harmed. I was considering the circumstances before the play begins - before Attius was incarcerated. I started thinking about this Black man [Attius' father], who is a teacher that loves Stravinsky. I imagine he must have been very frustrated living during [Jim Crow], unrecognized for his intelligence. He's a man who named his son after a Roman military leader who waged war against the Romans. So, Attius's father is a character that we never see in the play, but whose specter hangs, throughout. *continued on page 8*

"I find my characters and stories in many varied places; sometimes they pop out of newspaper articles, obscure historical texts, lively dinner party conversations and some even crawl out of the dusty remote recesses of my imagination."

—Lynn Nottage



THE HOUSE OF THE NEGRO INSANE- ATTIVUS
COSTUME DESIGN BY SHELLE BALLARD

Racial Bias, continued from page 5

While mental health care has improved dramatically in the intervening century...African Americans are still diagnosed with severe mental illness more than any other demographic group. That was true in 1870, 1970, and 2010...even to the point that the diagnosis is greater than one could accommodate statistically, so you know that probably it's a false diagnosis."

—The Alcade

None of these patients arrived voluntarily; all underwent standardized commitment proceedings that resembled criminal trials. Since the invention of insane asylums in the seventeenth century, the power of commitment lay in the juridical - not the medical - system. The potential asylum inmate, then, became a suspect in commitment proceedings, rather than a patient. Indeed, court documents for the Central Lunatic Asylum [in Virginia] referred to African Americans on trial for insanity as "suspected lunatics."

—"Lunacy under the Burden of Freedom," Mary Wingerson

"When you're writing, you're trying to find out something which you don't know. The whole language of writing for me is finding out what you don't want to know, what you don't want to find out. But something forces you to anyway." *—James Baldwin, The Art of Fiction No. 78, Paris Review*

"Such assaults on the vote are designed—with "surgical precision" according to one court ruling—to curtail the growing political power of voters of color as they emerge into the new American majority. Unfortunately, these attacks have been part of this nation's defining story since its inception."

—"The Grassroots Fight for the Right to Vote," The Advancement Project.

EXCERPT FROM THE SCRIPT

SCENE SETTING

Time: 1935.

The Taft State Hospital created during the Jim Crow era for 'insane and idiotic negroes,' is overcrowded and understaffed - a toxic mix of the downtrodden and the mentally ill. Attius - an inmate resigned to his fate - has carved himself a safe haven from the mayhem, taking pride in his woodwork, when the fierce and defiant young Effie invades his sanctuary and radically alters his future.

Place: A workshop located on the far edge of the property of the Taft State Hospital for the Negro Insane in Oklahoma.

Taft State Hospital is one of the seven psychiatric facilities in the U.S. built exclusively to care for "insane and idiotic negroes." Overcrowded and understaffed, these county almshouses are dumping grounds for African American adults and children, where the homeless and downtrodden are housed alongside the mentally ill and diseased.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ATTIUS

African American male, 38. Tall, imposing, with a simmering, hidden intelligence. He moves like a man who has been confined too long.

EFFIE

African American female, 27. Strong and sturdy, she carries herself without fear.

HENRY

White male, 45, ragged. Intense.

MADELEINE

African American female, 10. Her hair is long and braided. Wears an eye patch over her right eye.

THE EXAMINATION MOMENT

(Note: At the beginning of the scenes the "patient" is introduced with the voice of a physician... these are called examination moments.)

SCENE ONE

*A COFFIN standing upright. There is no bottom to it, only vast darkness. **ATTIUS GRIMES** stands in front of the coffin, squinting at the bright SPOTLIGHT shining in his face.*

PHYSICIAN (VOICE)

Patient's name is Attius Grimes, thirty-eight years old, born in Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Twelve years ago, he was charged with assault with intent to commit rape. An inquisition of lunacy declared him insane, dangerous and incompetent to defend himself. Following several successful therapeutic procedures, Mr. Grimes was deemed fit for labor and is currently a productive member of the community.

Attius steps back into the coffin. He's swallowed into the bottomless Dark, disappearing.

SCENE TWO

***EFFIE LITRELL** stands in front of the BOTTOMLESS COFFIN, staring defiantly at the bright SPOTLIGHT shining in her face.*

PHYSICIAN (VOICE)

Patient's name is Effie Littrell, twenty-seven years old. Born in Bacon County, Georgia. Indications of insanity include an utter repugnance to labor, a tendency to wander, and claims that she is not a human being because she has not been allowed to vote. The first round of treatments have not yet achieved the desired outcome. If better results are not evident in the following week, other procedures will be implemented.

Effie steps back into the coffin. She's swallowed into the bottomless Dark, disappearing.

Effie moves to the stacks of wood. Looks at the coffin, admiring the handiwork.

EFFIE

You make this yourself?

ATTIUS

No. Yes. Mostly.

EFFIE

Which is it, boy?

Attius glares. Clenches his fists.

EFFIE

You ain't much for talking, are you?

ATTIUS

I ain't no boy, not to you. I reckon I'm your elder by a bit.

EFFIE

Don't mean you're not a boy. A coffin-building boy.

She flips the lid of the coffin shut.

EFFIE

Plenty work for you 'round here.

ATTIUS

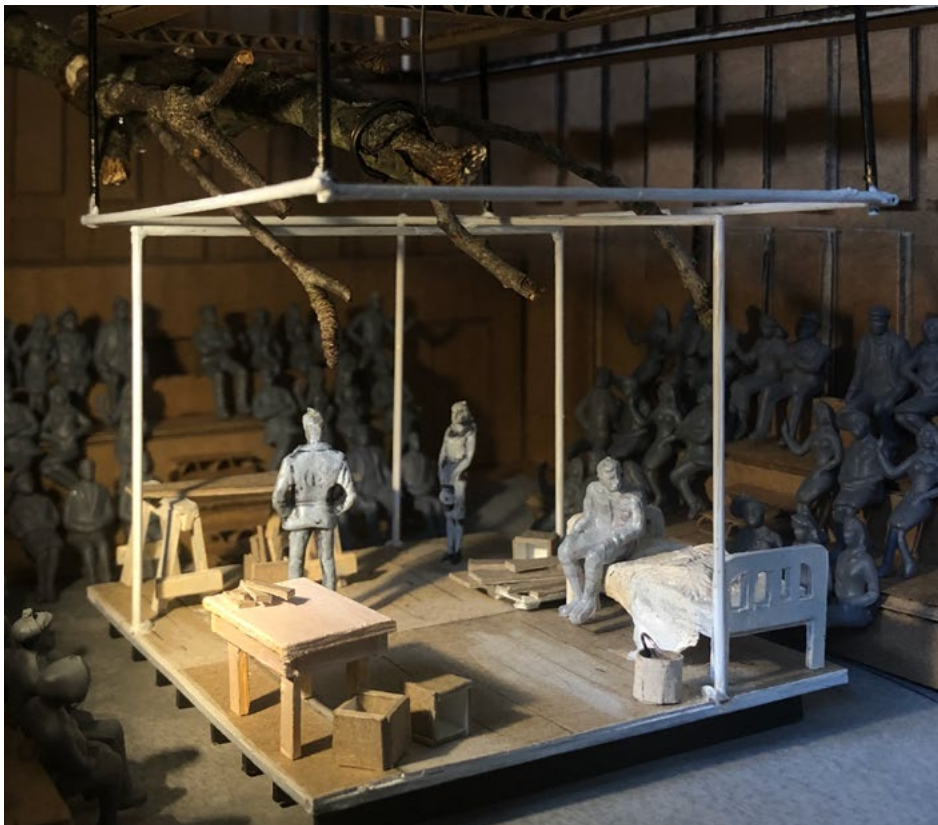
What business do you have back this way?

When you are writing the play, do the characters speak to you?

TA: No, they don't speak to me. They kind of ignore me. In the process, I find myself watching them and listening in on their conversations while I'm in the thick of it. Their voices bounce around in my head. In the beginning, I make an outline of where I want the script to go. I plan what they're going to be doing, or shouldn't be doing, but then they decide to do something different. And then I have to reckon with all that mess. I wish they would speak to me more. It would make my process a little easier. Instead, they ignore me, do what they want and you know, they really mess up my head.

Can you talk about handling the creative process remotely?

TA: The process definitely has been a challenge. But it's also been pretty amazing. CATF has invested time and resources into moving ahead with the production - despite all the setbacks. I feel really grateful to be able to work with all these talented people, at a time when so much theater is...just gone right now. And none of us know when it's coming back. So, it's been pretty amazing to have these Zoom calls with the team, everybody's in different cities and times zones. One of my most favorite parts of the whole production process is when the environment comes together. When the set and costumes, and the characters, finally climb out of my head. Those "characters that aren't listening to me," finally enter the world. These artists - costume and scenic and sound and lighting designers - are bringing my imaginary world into existence. And you start to imagine what the production's going to look like and what it's going to sound like. It's been a fantastic process so far. And I'm really looking forward to the time we can all be in the same room together. ■



ORIGIN OF CHARACTERS:

Attius Tullius was a political and military leader of the Volsci in the early fifth century BC, who sheltered the exiled Roman hero Gaius Marcius Coriolanus, then incited a war with Rome, in which he and Coriolanus led the Volscian forces.

-Attius Tullius

Effie through the eyes of Terence Anthony: With [Effie's] backstory and her experiences, I felt like she has always been like a big fish in the little pond. She has blazed trails through all these stops in the South, places where maybe you've been, or you may have heard of from the ancestors, from cousins, from family. Effie's been put in the hospital because she doesn't settle down - she doesn't, act the way people, men in particular, think she should. She's been able to keep moving until, until now, until this.

"There's a character Effie who one might say is Attius' foil in the play. And she is just this hot potato of sass and resiliency. She is indomitable, and we laugh, not at her. We laugh for her. We laugh because we'd like to be like her. We want that level of audacity."

-Tamilla Woodard

SCENE THREE, PAGE 32

EFFIE

Been moving most of my life. My Momma was maid to a singer in a tent show until I was twelve. When she married and stopped working, I couldn't stop moving so I cut out on my own. Been roaming ever since - till now. If I hadn't slowed down for a fine tall daddy who owned a store in Muskogee, I'd still be moving now. He thought I was gonna marry him, get myself stuck in Oklahoma. When I told him no, he got a doctor to throw me in here, can you believe it?

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CREATIVES

"Everything that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination, because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed." –Joseph Addison

A CONVERSATION WITH DESIGNER **CLAIRE DELISO** The Freedom to Imagine

Can you talk about how life has been since March?

CLAIRE DELISO: Well, it's been difficult, as humans, but also as artists. We are figuring out how to use our voices in this time...when our art is kind of on pause. That's been the first wave – how do we figure out how to maneuver in the world when it feels like art has been ripped out of our hands. But, for a good reason, the pandemic is obviously something serious. I live in New York City and left when the epidemic hit to come to live with my mom in Massachusetts. She lives alone. So, it felt like a good time to come here and be with her and also, to get out of the city when things were looking a little bit shaky. So, I and my partner and my brother came up here, and I've been here this whole time. I've felt a little removed from everything that's been going on with the protests because I wanted to be there to support. I felt guilty that I wasn't in the city that I call home. But it's gratifying to be in a community that I don't really call my own necessarily and still, show up and see how people here were protesting. It's been very informative, and it has fueled something inside of me – it sort of clicked my brain back into action.

Being in a different place has been a learning curve. I'm here with my partner. She's also in theater. I'm happy that we're not separated and that we're able to talk daily. We've gone through a sort of mourning theater as we knew it and we're figuring out how to be better allies in the industry. Yes, it's been a big learning curve and a roller coaster of emotions.

Thank you for sharing that. Is this your first time designing at CATF?

CD: Yes. And I have to say with everything happening in the world right now, designing for CATF has been a perfect little escape...a creative hub. The two plays that I'm working on are very fulfilling. And the conversations in the design meetings are keeping my creative brain going so, I'm very thankful that work is continuing at CATF.

What were your first impressions when you read the play?

CD: I think one of my first impressions of Terence's play, which I believe to be so, beautifully written and so rich with subtle themes. It flows so well. And there are a lot of surprises. The characters are so well carved out, that by the end, you're thoroughly invested, especially with Attius. There is a slow

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The Creative Team

DIRECTOR

TAMILLA WOODARD

SCENIC DESIGN

CLAIRE DELISO

LIGHTING DESIGN

**JOHNATHAN D.
ALEXANDER**

SOUND DESIGN

SHARATH PATEL

COSTUME DESIGN

SHANE BALLARD

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SCENIC DESIGNER

The scenic designer also called a set or production designer, helps create the visual world of the play. Working with the director and other designers, the scenic designer decides what the stage will look like, from large or abstract scenic elements to furniture and backdrops. Scenic designers present their ideas as sketches, which can be done by hand or with computer drafting software. Most know how to make scale models of their sets, and understand the basics of carpentry, welding, and other techniques that will be used to build the sets they design. Most scenic designers have an undergraduate or graduate degree in their field. They are hired on a per-show basis as contractors, and usually work with more than one theatre. –Center Theatre Group

SCENOGRAPHER

Designer responsible for all the scenography – the visual aspects of a production (lighting, scenery, costumes etc.).

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Often shortened to 'TD' the exact

continued from page 9

discovery, which Terence has crafted purposefully. With Madeline's character, there is something so young and beautiful. She hasn't lost her imagination. Despite having suffered so much, she's still very creative. She creates stories and views the world with such a hopeful eye. When thinking of the design, I wanted to make sure her energy could also live in this space.

There is tension with who these characters are and how they relate to each other. As a designer, I think it is essential to use Terence's dramatic tensions. For example, creating a safe space for the characters, even though one of the descriptors in the stage directions is "dank." Although, it may not look like a safe space to some. For Attius, this is his workspace. It's a space that's full of tools. He builds coffins. So, contrary to how he feels about being at the hospital, he feels empowered in the workspace.

Do you strive to read the play straight through in one sitting?

CD: Yes. I forced myself to read it without taking notes. But I will immediately go back and reread it. Then I will take notes. I usually carve out an entire afternoon when I first read a script.

Did you know the play was being staged in theater-in-the-round?

CD: When I was reading the play, I kept imagining the production in-the-round. As a designer and an audience member, I find this to be one of the most exciting ways to experience theater. It's so intimate. And with Terence's piece, it is easy to see the action taking place.

Have you worked with Director Tamilla Woodard before?

CD: I had just done a show with her. So, it's great to have the opportunity to work together at CATF. We were scheduled to work together on another play that was cut short due to the pandemic. So, we actually spent a week on Zoom trying to figure out camera shots for a show that was supposed to be in-the-round but didn't happen. So, we had already been talking a lot. It helps just to get a sense of what the director really latches on to in the script. I feel like I have a good rapport with her. She is so smart. I've enjoyed our collaboration. And the conversations with she and Terence are really flowing.

Tamilla has referred to the style of this play as magical realism. How would you describe it?

CD: There is a little bit of magic in this play, seeped in with realism. Exploring this world has been a lot of fun for me. And I believe it's enjoyable for us as a creative team. As members of the creative team, we are all on a similar journey. It's like we're working a puzzle, trying to figure out how to fit all of the pieces. Terence writes specific stage directions. There's actually a lot of notes in his stage directions about props and furniture. He also includes words to express light and emotional obligations for the character. As an artist, I really do try to support the playwright's wishes as I support and contribute to the creative process. We are all working for the moment when the audience arrives and it genuinely becomes theater. Seeing something that they may assume will be one way and then they come out, hopefully having learned something,

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role of the technical director changes according to the size of the theatre company, and also according to your location in the world. In the US, the TD co-ordinates all technical aspects of the production, from organizing crew calls to ensuring equipment is ordered, to liaising with the designers and sometimes adapting a design to fit the venue. In the UK, this person is usually called the Production Manager.

STAGE RIGGING

A term generally describing how equipment on stage is suspended and/or moved. Rigging can be dead hung, manually operated or motorized, and serves many purposes. In a dead hung facility, the rigging is used to suspend equipment and does not move.

[-Stage Craft Industries](#)

RIGGING POINT

The rigging point or hanging point to which the lifting machine or suspension component is rigged.

[-Theatre Crafts](#)

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- [Set Designer Part 1](#)
- [Set Designer Part 2](#)

having grown and having felt their emotions a little more deeply.

Can you speak more about the dramatic tensions in the story. And do you think playing the story in the round heightens the dramatic tension for the audience?

CD: Yes, we really wanted to heighten the tension between the characters. And we've discussed a couple crucial moments. There are times when we wanted the space to feel like a safe space – an island. A place where Attius can take a moment to breathe. He can't do this when Henry is around; we want the audience to experience a heightened sense of dread. When Henry is away, then Attius feels he can breathe. But, when Henry returns, so does the feeling of dread. That's how the ideas of the island came about and then we decided it should be small. So, there's also this feeling that Attius is too large for this small space. When Henry comes, he will circle the whole room, which breaks the idea of "realism," but it heightens the tension when he arrives. Especially when Effie is in the place, and she hides under the bed. So, we're exploring a new way to raise the stakes and emphasize the discomfort. We're playing with how to awaken the story, but also the emotions in the audience. So, they're not passive viewers. They are actively engaged. We want the audience to be afraid with Attius. Because they know that Henry's coming back and the audience senses that there's more to this story. I feel that the set design can help. When the audience is sitting on all sides, it heightens the intimacy – quite simply, there's proximity there. The audience forms a community in-the-round and they experience being on edge together.

How do you approach the rendering process?

CD: When I do my first sketches, I don't actually think about it too in-depth. I work in an instinctual way. In this case, we latched onto the idea of a tree. There are references to trees in the play. So, bringing something organic that sort of could help break up the rectangular aspect – the flatness of the space. And the tree, as part of the set, takes us beyond the realism of the space.

You made a note that you wanted the tree to feel more magical than menacing, will you talk about that?

CD: We needed to find the right placement. If the tree is tilted towards the characters, there's something that's a little bit more menacing because it leans to the side. But if the tree is levitating above them, there's a little bit more air to breathe. I was playing with the differences and had to sketch them and talk to Tamilla and Terence to figure out what felt right. We didn't want the tree to be stifling. We wanted the possibility to create shadows for the lighting designer, but also for the audience. During light transitions, a person may look up and see that there is something that breaks the angularity of the space. I had approached it more in terms of shapes, than quality. As a team, we've talked about the color and the quality of the wood. The tree, which is, as of right now sort of a compilation of branches, we were looking at driftwoods, so it sort of has an ashen quality to it. There's something about it that is magical and mystical. Perhaps the energy at the top. Again, it kind of has a feeling

BACKGROUND

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Top of Scene One:

A dank, concrete-walled workshop.

Stacks of wood are piled near the side wall. A large flat work bench with a coffin under construction sits stage left. Some boards lie in the middle of the floor where they've been tossed.

Saws, hammers, screw drivers, mallets are scattered about the workshop on the bench and on the floor. A crowbar leans against the back wall.

Pails of paste and spools of thick cotton rope are stacked in the corner. Some of the buckets have been kicked over.

Somewhere in the room is an unfinished sign with the words TAFT HOSPITAL FOR THE NEGRO INSANE painted on it.

Morning light shines in through high windows 8 feet from the floor. A small table sits against the wall under the windows. Nearby sits a large lidded bucket full of water.

A small bed is in the corner stage right. A flask is on the floor near it.

COFFIN

The word "coffin" appears 102 times in *The House of the Negro Insane* dialogue and stage directions. Do you know, the appearance of a coffin in a dream might represent acceptance of change or loss? "It can also reflect ideas and habits that are no longer of use and can be buried or given up. In a positive context, a coffin reflects your willingness to move forward."

[-Dream Bible](#)

almost of a coffin sort of compression. This type of wood had gone through a lot, it's gone through the ocean, there's a color quality to it. It has a ghostly quality, and it's beautiful. This supports the idea of magical realism versus going very realistic, where I had initially started.

What is your favorite part of the process?

CD: One of my favorite moments is the first day of rehearsal, introducing the world to the actors, and hearing the play for the first time. I've read the play aloud, but I'm not an actor. So, it's always fascinating to listen to people who can say it - saying it. And sharing the work that we've done with people who are gonna live in it. That's always one of my favorites. It brings this idea of making something together real. Seeing the world being built is really exciting. I love working with the technical directors and the painters and throughout the process. There's always going to be little bumps in the road, but you have to adapt and be able to make quick decisions. I love those types of conversations because I think that there's always something I can learn from it.

What is your least favorite part of the process?

CD: I hate walking into the theater before lights are set. Because there's always a moment of, "Oh my God, what have I done?" That's very scary. In a way, I love it, and I hate it because it leads to one of my favorite moments, which is when the lighting designer starts playing with your set and you start seeing all the possibilities. Although they say, the set design comes first, it feels like the set's potential can be made or broken by the lighting design.

So, I try to be as communicative and collaborative with a lighting designer as possible. I want to have many conversations throughout the process, whether it be through team meetings or one-on-one. Or even just communicating through emails. We must be on the same page. Then it really, it just gels [pun not intended]. I also love creating spaces that give opportunities for the lighting designer to really play and the lighting designer John Alexander has been great. You know, I put a massive tree in the air. Some people might be anxious. Or say, "I can't do anything with that." But, he's been very receptive, and I think that's been really exciting to try and figure out how to make something really magical together.

Have you worked with John before?

CD: No. This is our first time, and it's been great so far. There's been a lot to talk about, and he's been really receptive. [Usually] lighting designers are not fond of theater-in-the-round [because] the lighting designer always has more work because there are no walls or doors. So, it has to be a color collaboration and we talked a lot about how to make certain moments happen so that lighting can have its moments and scenery can sort of help shape that. There are these beautiful moments at the beginning of the scenes where the "patients" are introduced. We're calling them "Examination Moments," we're trying to figure out how to really activate those moments with light.

Thank you for mentioning those examination moments. Can you talk about

FROM TAMILLA WOODARD

[DIRECTOR]:

The floor is lifted off of the ground. So there's a feeling of floating. It's a feeling of us as an audience peering in and down like flies on the wall. It creates a sense of intimacy and that some shapes and figures will be visually available to the audience from the floor.

Playwright August Wilson considered Jorge Luis Borges as one of his major influences. Borges employed the supernatural in his work.

"The experts call this Borgesian technique magical realism, a story of fantasy within a story of realism. Borges himself referred to it as "the contamination of reality by dream." Learn more at [The August Wilson Study Group](#) and [Vox](#).

In the artistic meetings the designers have been calling the island "the moat."

Check out Claire's website:

clairedeliso.com

other aspects of the play and the stage directions?

CD: Yes, very early on in our conversations, we decided that the coffin would want to be as rudimentary as possible. It's just a box, practical, no frills. It's very fundamental, like a cage and as small as they get. There is little space and no air. I think the examination moments when the characters are standing in front of the coffin symbolize the hope that light and air can pierce through the situation. How do you break out of this box, this job, this position that you're assigned? It goes back to this idea of navigating the tensions that these characters live in always.

For Attius, the idea of the coffin or the box is not only self-preservation but self-deprecation. Both he and society have put him in a box. There is this dichotomy of safety and entrapment. The tension of being in what he may consider a "safe space," but he's very much trapped in that "safe space." He's capable of so much more, which we see so much early on than he does. In those moments of examination, when the light is peering through the coffin, it is a symbol of possibility. That there may be a way to overcome or break free from what you're pegged in this particular world. Even with all the characters that have encountered, they still shine and have the hope of breaking free from this terrible situation. Tamilla has said multiple times she wants this story to be about heroism and hope.

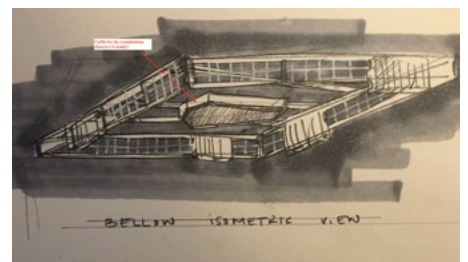
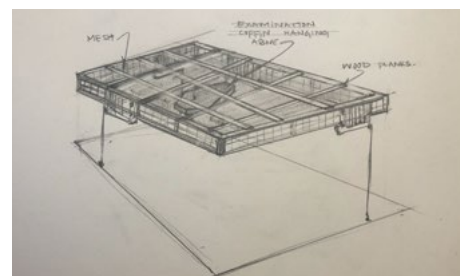
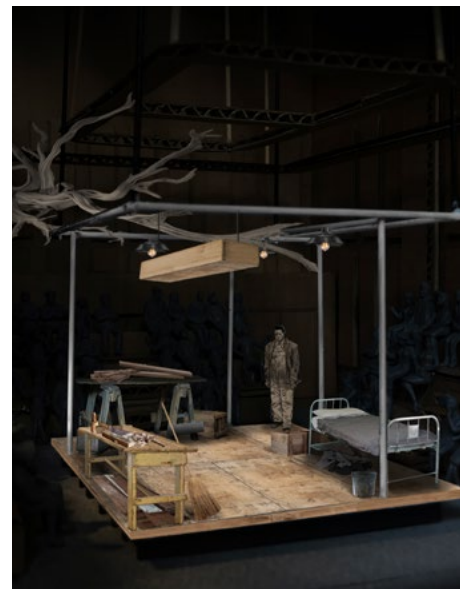
I think one of the things that felt so heartbreaking is that last—

Oops! We promised Terence - no spoilers! So, please see the production next year, and imagine what Claire might have said. Instead, let's talk about designing in a repertory environment.

CD: That isn't easy because it is a little bit of a negotiating game between the two teams. Because I have in my brain two shows at the same time. Thankfully I've done it before. So, as a designer, you have to consider the demands of both plays simultaneously, continually. That's why I love doing it. It's a challenge. It makes me think in a way that is technical and creative. It also feels like I'm trying to be sneaky about things. For instance, I can tell you about the coffin that will hang from the ceiling. Rigging is always complicated to do. So, finding new rigging points is something you don't want to do multiple times. Thus, the coffin in *House* will hang from the same two rigging points of the two police uniforms that the audience will see in *Sheepdog*. Those items will hang in precisely the same place. So, the technical directors will know, but the directors didn't know that I was doing that.

Do you have any favorite books about design?

CD: About design, well, this may sound silly, but I'm reading the libretto for the *Magic Flute*. It was one of the first operas I watched as a kid with my parents, and we thought it was just phenomenal! I wouldn't say I'm an opera buff by any means. But I do enjoy going to the opera sometimes. So, that's something I would recommend it because I love it. There's something about how creative the world is. It's not really about design at all, but it's, it is, it is about imagination. ■



CATALYST: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

What was your catalyst for writing *The House of the Negro Insane*?

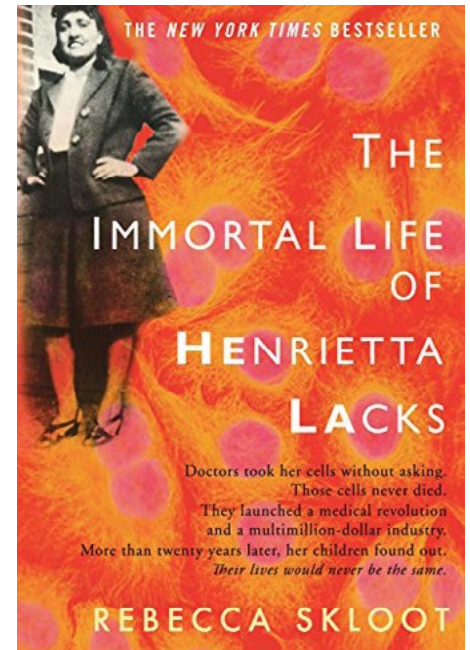
TA: The seed for the story was planted a few years ago when I read *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. The book is about the first “immortal” cell line and the African American woman who provided those cells without her knowledge or consent. There’s one chapter in the book where the author investigates what happened to Henrietta’s oldest daughter who was committed to the Crownsville State Hospital (founded as the Hospital for the Negro Insane of Maryland) and died there in 1955. It’s a small part of the book but I became really intrigued, especially after I discovered Crownsville was one of a number of psychiatric institutions built in the early 1900s specifically to house African Americans. We don’t hear much about post-slavery/pre-Civil Rights Black history, and as I researched these institutions I found many connections to how our communities are policed today and the prison-industrial complex. I knew this was the next play I wanted to write.

“Johns Hopkins University has announced plans to name a new research building after Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman who permanently changed modern medicine nearly 70 years ago when it was discovered that her cells could live forever. These “immortal cells” have helped scientists produce remedies for numerous diseases, including the first polio vaccine, that have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. But Lacks’ cells were taken without her consent when she was a patient at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in 1951. Some members of the Lacks Family have criticized Johns Hopkins’ use of the cells. They have raised questions about privacy and patients’ rights as well as whether the family should receive compensation for their use. For decades, the woman whose cells would transform modern medicine was unknown. Instead, her cells were simply known as “HeLa”—the first two letters of her first and last name.”

—From Democracy Now, “The War and Peace Report”

“It was when the book actually came out. That’s when I found out a lot of information about my grandmother, about her tremendous contributions to science. We knew when we were growing up, that she helped with the polio vaccine. We knew that she died from cancer, but we just didn’t know what type of cancer she died from. So, when the book came out, it gave us so much information that we didn’t know that our parents didn’t know. So, it was like a generational thing where one generation didn’t know, so they couldn’t tell the next generation. So now the grandchildren know here, we had his children know, so we’d make sure that our children know so we can carry on so they can carry the legacy and bring awareness to Henrietta is tremendous and huge contributions to science.”

—Jeri Lacks-Whye speaking about her grandmother’s legacy



“When I tell people the story of Henrietta Lacks and her cells, their first question is usually ‘Wasn’t it illegal for doctors to take Henrietta’s cells without her knowledge? Don’t doctors have to tell you when they use your cells in research?’ The answer is no – not in 1951, and not in 2009, when this book went to press.”

—Rebecca Skloot

[Watch this video](#) to see Amy Goodman interview Rebecca Skloot, author of the groundbreaking book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and Jeri Lacks Whye, the granddaughter of Henrietta Lacks.

“Vivid...Henrietta Lacks comes fully alive on the page...Immortal Life reads like a novel...A deftly crafted investigation of a social wrong committed by the medical establishment.”

—Eric Roston, *Washington Post*

CROWNSVILLE HOSPITAL FOR THE NEGRO INSANE

This unsettling institution was the site of many gruesome practices such as lobotomies, pneumoencephalography, and insulin shock therapy.

The Hospital for the Negro Insane of Maryland changed its name to Crownsville State Hospital in 1912, just two years after it was built on 566 acres of old tobacco farmland the state bought for \$19,000, part of a plan to reform the treatment of mental patients in the area.

The hospital was chronically crowded and understaffed. By 1949, there were 1,800 patients in a place intended for 1,100, with fewer than ten doctors on campus.

Many of the patients were sent to neighboring farms to work for free under the guise of an industrial therapy program. The hospital's own farming operation closed in the '60s and was immediately followed by a mass release of patients, suggesting many of them were only kept as laborers.

Lucille Elsie Pleasant, daughter of Henrietta Lacks, the source of the HeLa cell line, lived the final years of her short life in the hospital, where she died at just 15 years old. Her autopsy photo, like so many patients of Crownsville, showed evidence of abuse.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks From Chapter 33, *The Hospital for the Negro Insane*

"There were several things I'd promised Deborah we'd do together: seeing her mother's cells was first; figuring out what happened to Elsie was second."

"I can't believe this," Deborah whispered. "All them records is gone?" She ran her hand along the empty shelves, mumbling, "Nineteen fifty-five was the year where they killed her...I want them records...I know it wasn't good...Why else would they get rid of them?"

His name was Paul Lurz, and he was the hospital's director of performance and improvement, but he also happened to be a social worker who majored in history, which was his passion. He motioned for us to come sit in his office.

There wasn't much funding for treating Blacks in the forties and fifties," he said. "I'm afraid Crownsville wasn't a very nice place to be back then." He looked at Deborah. "Your sister was here?"

...reaching into her purse for a crumpled copy of Elsie's death certificate, which she began reading slowly out loud. "Elsie Lacks...cause of death (a) respiratory failure (b) epilepsy (c) cerebral palsy....Spent five years in Crownsville State Hospital." She handed Lurz the picture of her sister that Zakariyya had hanging on his wall. I don't believe my sister had all that.

Lurz shook his head "She doesn't look like she has palsy in this picture. What a lovely child.



"The United States' third asylum for African Americans is haunted by its horrible history."

—Atlas Obscura

"No one had to tell us something awful had happened at Crownsville—we could feel it in the walls."

—Rebecca Skloot

"From the start, racism has shaped the care of people with mental illness in the United States."

—Mical Raz

BACKGROUND

I was workshoping a play in Philadelphia when I decide to drive to Maryland to see the Crownsville campuses. I first learned of Crownsville while reading more on the life of Henrietta Lacks. From there, I started researching the other psychiatric hospitals and their histories. That's how it all began. I met with a man [Paul Lurz] who worked at Crownsville. He makes an appearance in the book (see left). I spent an afternoon talking to him about his experiences working there. He worked there for most of his life and must be in his eighties, probably late eighties. I learned a lot about the history. Paul told me there was tension surrounding what the staff did to the patients. —Terence Anthony

continued on page 16



continued from page 15

“When such hospitals began to close in the 1980s, penal institutions took their place. As welfare programs were starved, the US prison population spiked, with people of color and people with mental illness disproportionately incarcerated. Today, 90% of US psychiatric-care beds are in jails and prisons. Psychiatry will not be able to escape “the afterlife of slavery” until it confronts its culpability in mass incarceration.”

–Psychiatry under the shadow of white supremacy

MASS INCARCERATION AND ITS MYSTIFICATION

“In creating Attius’ character...I was considering the circumstances before the play begins—before Attius was incarcerated.” –Terence Anthony

“African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons across the country more than five times the rate of whites, and at least ten times the rate in five states.” –Ashley Nellis, Ph.D.

KEY FINDINGS

- African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is **5.1 times** the imprisonment of whites. In five states (Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, and Wisconsin), the disparity is more than 10 to 1.
- In twelve states, **more than half** of the prison population is Black: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Maryland, whose prison population is 72% African American, tops the nation.
- In eleven states, at least **1 in 20** adult black males is in prison.
- In Oklahoma, the state with the highest overall Black incarceration rate, **1 in 15** black males ages 18 and older is in prison.
- States exhibit substantial variation in the range of racial disparity, from a Black/white ratio of **12.2:1** in New Jersey to **2.4:1** in Hawaii.
- Latinos are imprisoned at a rate that is **1.4 times** the rate of whites. Hispanic/white ethnic disparities are particularly high in states such as Massachusetts (4.3:1), Connecticut (3.9:1), Pennsylvania (3.3:1), and New York (3.1:1).

***Hard Rock Returns To Prison From the Hospital For The Criminal Insane* by Etheridge Knight**

Hard Rock was "known not to take no shit
From nobody," and he had the scars to prove it:
Split purple lips, lumbed ears, welts above
His yellow eyes, and one long scar that cut
Across his temple and plowed through a thick
Canopy of kinky hair.

The WORD was that Hard Rock wasn't a mean nigger
Anymore, that the doctors had bored a hole in his head,
Cut out part of his brain, and shot electricity
Through the rest. When they brought Hard Rock back,
Handcuffed and chained, he was turned loose,
Like a freshly gelded stallion, to try his new status.
and we all waited and watched, like a herd of sheep,
To see if the WORD was true.

As we waited we wrapped ourselves in the cloak
Of his exploits: "Man, the last time, it took eight
Screws to put him in the Hole." "Yeah, remember when he
Smacked the captain with his dinner tray?" "he set
The record for time in the Hole-67 straight days!"
"OI Hard Rock! man, that's one crazy nigger."
And then the jewel of a myth that Hard Rock had once bit
A screw on the thumb and poisoned him with syphilitic spit.

The testing came to see if Hard Rock was really tame.
A hillbilly called him a black son of a bitch
And didn't lose his teeth, a screw who knew Hard Rock
From before shook him down and barked in his face
And Hard Rock did nothing. Just grinned and look silly.
His empty eyes like knot holes in a fence.

And even after we discovered that it took Hard Rock
Exactly 3 minutes to tell you his name,
we told ourselves that he had just wised up,
Was being cool; but we could not fool ourselves for long.
And we turned away, our eyes on the ground. Crushed.
He had been our Destroyer, the doer of things
We dreamed of doing but could not bring ourselves to do.
The fears of years like a biting whip,
Had cut deep bloody grooves
Across our backs.

ABOUT ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

Etheridge Knight was born on April 19, 1931 in Corinth, Mississippi. He was one of seven children in a poor family, and only completed a ninth-grade education. Spending many of his adolescent years working in pool halls, bars, and juke joints, he mastered the art of "telling toasts". Toasts are long narrative poems coming from an oral tradition which are performed from memory and with spirit. This environment honed his poetic experience, however, it also introduced him to drugs. He became addicted to drugs at an early age. He joined the U.S. Army, serving as a medical technician in the Korean War. Arrested in Indianapolis for stealing a purse in 1960, Knight was imprisoned for eight years. He recounts this experience in verse in poems from prison and in prose in the anthology *Black Voices from Prison* (1970; originally published two years earlier in Italian as *Voce negra dal carcere*).

He emerged as the voice of the black aesthetic movement with his first volume of verse *Poems from Prison* (1968). His poetry was a combination of "toasts" and a concern for freedom from oppression.

After his release from prison, Knight taught at various universities and contributed to several magazines, working for two years as an editor of *Motive* and as a contributing editor of *New Letters* (1974). He experimented with rhythmic forms of punctuation in *Belly Song and Other Poems* (1973), which addressed the themes of ancestry, racism, and love in *Born of a Woman* (1980) - a work that balances personal suffering with affirmation - he introduced the concept of the poet as a "meddler" who forms a trinity with the poem and the reader. Much of his verse was collected in *The Essential Etheridge Knight* (1986).

Knight's books and oral performances awarded him both popular and critical acclaim. He received honors from such institutions as the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Society of America. In 1990 he earned a bachelor's degree in American poetry and criminal justice from Martin Center University in Indianapolis.

Etheridge Knight died on March 10, 1991 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Poem taken from Etheridge Knight on [All Poetry](#)

RACISM AND POST-RECONSTRUCTION

The House of the Negro Insane takes place in 1935. Attius Grimes is 38 years old. This means Attius would have been born in 1897–Post-Reconstruction Era.

As Reconstruction drew to a close and the forces of white supremacy regained control from carpetbaggers (northerners who moved South) and freed Black people, southern state legislatures began enacting the first segregation laws, known as the “Jim Crow” laws. Taken from a much-copied minstrel routine written by a white actor who performed often in blackface, the name “Jim Crow” came to serve as a general derogatory term for African Americans in the post-Reconstruction South. By 1885, most southern states had laws requiring separate schools for Black and white students, and by 1900, “persons of color” were required to be separated from white people in railroad cars and depots, hotels, theaters, restaurants, barber shops, [psychiatric hospitals], and other establishments. On May 18, 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its verdict in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a case that represented the first major test of the meaning of the 14th Amendment’s provision of full and equal citizenship to African Americans. ([See *Plessy v. Ferguson*](#))

THE HISTORYMAKERS TALK ABOUT RACISM IN OKLAHOMA

THE HISTORYMAKERS is the Nation’s largest Video Oral History Collection. The mission is to preserve and make “widely accessible the untold personal stories of both well-known and unsung African Americans. The HistoryMakers enlightens, entertains and educates the public, helping to refashion a more inclusive record of American history.” ([Learn more](#))

Gayle Greer describes how her father and family friends navigated race in Tulsa, Oklahoma (interview by Larry Crowe).

“And one of the things that I grew up with was almost suffocating racism ... there was just a talk around the early days—the rough early days, about the racism. It was – we, we were taught to be very aware of where we were. And, and that was kind of the – of the offshoot I’m thinking from the riot because our parents were very protective of us, as it related to issues of race, you know, being – not being noticed, not being out there. Black men – young boys were always kind of protected; you always felt that sense. And, and I think that, you know, they downplayed it so that it would not, I guess, be so big in their minds. I don’t know. Because my father played a role in Tulsa, or was put in a role I should say, of being kind of a, a peacemaker. He was one of the few people of his generation who would – could operate on both the north and south side of town, and who became, like, one of the first Blacks to join the, the white Chamber of Commerce and the white YMCA, and stuff like that. But he paid a, a price by – and so many of his generation, of living law abiding lives, quiet lives, lives that did not seem to be too large because you would be – it would be dangerous.”

continued on page 19

BACKGROUND

“Ava DuVernay’s *The 13th*, is an exploration of racial criminalization from the end of slavery to the present. The documentary features interviews with several leading scholars, pundits, and activists working on the issue, as well as a host of other commentators, including journalists and politicians. It moves quickly through more than 150 years of history, with a clear goal of providing the backdrop to the present moment of racial violence and resistance.”

–Dan Berger, *Black Perspectives*

“Now that the Union is no longer in danger, now that the North and South are no longer enemies: now that they have ceased to scatter, tear, and slay each other, but sit together in halls of Congress, commerce, religion, and in brotherly love, it seems that the Negro is to lose by their sectional harmony and good will all the rights and privileges that he gained by their former bitter enmity. This, it is found, cannot be accomplished without confusing the moral sense of the nation and misleading the public mind; without creating doubt, inflaming passion, arousing prejudice, and attracting to the enemies of the Negro the popular sympathy by representing the Negro as an ignorant, base, and dangerous person, and by presenting to those enemies that his existence to them is a dreadful problem.”

–Frederick Douglass,
The Race Problem

continued from page 18

Amy Tate Billingsley describes her hopes and concerns for the African American Community, Pt. 2 (interview by Larry Crowe)

"Tulsa, Oklahoma [Tulsa race riot] for example. Reparations, that's a discussion—a when black people—whenever black people will have a level playing field, they can do all right, but whenever they have a level playing field and they begin to excel then the field is turned upside down. Tulsa, Oklahoma was a thriving community. They called it the Black Wall Street, people were doing extremely well, there was a lot of white resentment, they burned the town down to the ground, you know. I have a friend, a psychologist, who says that until America really comes to grips with slavery and racism, it will never heal. It's like a - it's like somebody who is a rape victim or incest victim, unless they actually cleanse themselves and acknowledge it and cleanse themselves the pathology comes out in other ways. And America is so sick around the race issue it's just outrageous to me. And people even to this day, if you get - if it looks like you're to achieve something which will help your people then they figure out a way to make sure that you don't. Now they're trying to tear down the whole thing of affirmative action, which I think is outrageous because we know that in the white world, blacks are greatly discriminated against. It's kind of like, I think somebody use the analogy, if you're a fish in water you don't know that you - what it's like not to have water. So, you're just used to being the privileged person and everything is fine and you can maybe get one or two people in, you know out, but you certainly don't want to compete on a level playing field with other people that you can discriminate against for some reason. So, therefore I think, I agree with reparations because there have been so many awful things done to black people over the years that I think that there ought to be some kind of reparations to try to equalize some of the wrong that's been done."

"The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do."

—James Baldwin

BACKGROUND

Media executive **Gayle Greer** (1941 -) , co-founder of the National Association of Minorities in Cable and Telecommunications, served as vice president of Time Warner Communications and group vice president of Time Warner Cable for over twenty years.

Civic leader **Amy Tate Billingsley** (1936 -) was heavily involved in events planning, marketing and organizing for several significant projects. She worked in the William J. Clinton Administration with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and with Labor Secretary Alexis Herman.

THE SANKOFA

SANKOFA: "GO BACK AND FETCH IT"

The concept of "Sankofa" is derived from King Adinkra of the Akan people of West Africa. "Sankofa" is expressed in the Akan language as "se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki." Literally translated, this means "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." [-Sankofa](#)

Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word and the symbol is "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." [-The Power of Sankofa: Know History](#)

The word is derived from the words:

SAN (return) • KO (go) • FA (look, seek and take)

"Sankofa" teaches us that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward. ... Visually and symbolically, "Sankofa" is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. [-Sankofa](#)

SCENE THREE, PAGE 22

Effie pulls AN EGG from inside her shirt.

She holds it up like a prize.

Attius stops, stares at it.



LEARN MORE!

- [Terence Anthony's Website](#)
- [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. Skloot, Rebecca. The Immortal life of Henrietta Lacks. Broadway Paperbacks, 2010.](#)
- [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks \(Book Review\)](#)
- [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks \(Film Review\)](#)
- [Psychiatry under the shadow of white supremacy](#)
- [Mental Illness in Black Community, 1700-2019: A Short History](#)
- [Human Rights: Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities in Health Care](#)
- [Crownsville Hospital: From Lunacy to Legacy](#)
- [The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons](#)
- [HistoryMakers](#)
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
- Alexander, Michelle. The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness. The New Press, 2020.
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- [Administrations of Lunacy: Racism and the Haunting of American Psychiatry at the Milledgeville Asylum. Segrest, Mab. London: The New Press, 2020. Print.](#)
- [13th \(Film\). Ava Duvernay, and Jason Moran. 13TH. USA, 2016.](#)
- The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration. Wilkerson, Isabel. New York: Random House, 2010. Print.

KEEP THE CONVO GOING

- Have you ever felt safer in a place that you knew was limiting your personal growth?
- Do you remember a situation from which you knew you must escape but also knew you must wait for the right time?
- Do you know anyone who should have been a patient instead of a prisoner?
- Do you know anyone who was diagnosed as mentally ill when they weren't?
- Is there anything you've done well and hoped that no one or someone in particular, would discover out of fear of arousing their jealousy or envy? If so, would it have put you in danger?

