

"Remaking the Wheel"  
An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)  
by  
Laura C. Jansen

  
(Advisor's Signature)

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### Dedication

"Remaking the Wheel" is dedicated to my generation in the hopes that we will have the courage to create a world in which the ugliness of prejudice is but a fading memory, and humanity celebrates rather than scorns difference.

"Citizens who refuse to obey anything but their own conscience can transform their countries. A role in history" (Steinem 10).

### Special Thanks To...

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## The Creation of "Remaking the Wheel"

### I. In the Beginning...

The genesis of "Remaking the Wheel" came in January of 1992. Dr. Judy E. Yordon, professor of theatre, was making plans to take her interpretation students to the annual Ozarks/Flint Hills Performance Festival, to be held in Springfield, Missouri. This festival brings together interpretation students and scholars from across the country, and gives Ball State students the opportunity to present a production and to observe what others in the field are accomplishing. As an interpretation minor in the Department of Theatre and Dance Performance, I was extremely interested in attending the Performance Festival. Meanwhile, I was mentally searching for an intriguing and challenging thesis project to complete the following year. My search ended when I approached Dr. Yordon about the possibility of directing a script for the 1993 Festival. She agreed that the project would be appropriate for my talents and also agreed to be my advisor.

After attending the 1992 Performance Festival, both as a solo performer and as the assistant director for Ball State's production, "Stories in a Circle," I became very excited about my script the following year. Ball State's work was highly respected, and I was eager to continue that tradition. Thus I started a year-long process that began with reviewing what I knew about presentational theatre.

## II. A Word About Presentational Theatre and Readers Theatre...

Presentational theatre dates back to Greek playwrights, according to Dr. Yordon in her text, Roles in Interpretation (406). Presentational theatre productions are "nonrealistic performances which depend on the audience's ability to imagine suggested elements. Presentational productions rarely attempt to depict reality or a realistic impression of life" (Yordon 406). To this end, characters may talk directly to the audience, props are often imagined, and characters may be bifurcated (two actors playing the same role). Another element unique to presentational theatre is the use of offstage focus (representational theatre, by contrast, uses onstage focus, in which the actors converse face to face). With offstage focus, the scene exists "not onstage...but in the audience's imagination" (Yordon 37). Two characters who were having a conversation, for example, would imagine seeing each other offstage above the heads of the audience, and their faces would be full front to the audience (for more information on the use of focus in interpretation, see pages 37 and 139-42 of the Yordon text).

One type of presentational theatre production, and the one I chose for my script, is readers theatre. Readers theatre is "a flexible, creative medium for presenting all kinds of literary texts" (Yordon 408). Texts not originally intended for the stage, such as prose, poetry, and nonfiction may be employed. There are two basic kinds of compiled scripts. The first is the expanded program, where the selected literature maintains its

original identity and meaning; the second is the compiled script, in which pieces of literature becomes part of a whole that suggests something that may not have been originally intended by the original literature (Yordon 410). I was interested in employing the second type of script for my production; I felt it presented a greater creative challenge. As Yordon notes:

The collage compiled script is the newest and perhaps the most challenging type of traditional readers theatre form - both for the performers and for the compiler/director...In a collage compiled script, often only fragments of literary selections are used: a stanza from a poem, a few paragraphs from a short story or novel, a newspaper headline, a diary entry, a few lines of dialogue from a play, and so forth...each is recognized only as a part of the greater whole...the selections or fragments of selections work together as though there were only one source, and the script reveals only one seamless message - that of the editor/compiler (414).

### **III. Choosing a Theme...**

With my decision to create a readers theatre compiled script, I had soothed my initial "thesis angst," and, I thought (since the 1993 Performance Festival was a year away), well ahead of time. But a greater challenge lay ahead - on **what** subject was I going to compile said script?? For the next nine months, I casually, then seriously, turned a seemingly endless amount of

ideas over in my mind. One of those ideas was to explore racism. It's always been a topic that I've considered to be of terrible importance to our country. The L.A. riots certainly proved that the issue didn't die with the civil rights movement. While I was considering this topic, I hadn't definitely settled on it; I was still considering others, and as the first semester was nearing a close, it seemed as though I would never make a decision. My decision was, in a sense, made for me when Dr. Yordon received a letter from the organizing committee of the 1993 Performance Festival. The theme of the festival was "Cultural Diversity: Celebrating Difference in Performance." While it wasn't a requirement to present a script on that theme, the letter nevertheless seemed to point me in the direction of what eventually became "Remaking the Wheel."

#### **IV. The Compilation Process...**

My next step was to read. And read. And read. And read. I originally selected much more literature than I would eventually need (my biggest stumbling block later on would be in deciding what to keep and what to discard). While my theme was in place, I hadn't yet decided on another key point - the assertion. An assertion is a definite stand on the theme ("Education is the key to ending racism," "Violence should be advocated - By any means necessary," etc). Since, I was unable to nail down an assertion, I kept reading. I purposely sought out sources that were not directly associated with the race

issue. These pieces ranged from Revolution from Within by Gloria Steinem to Into the Woods, the Stephen Sondheim musical. I felt these choices provided variety while presenting important ideas.

I was aiming for a completion date of early February. Near the first of January, I encountered a book that overwhelmed me with its simplicity and power. The book was Race by Studs Terkel, and it became the heart of "Remaking the Wheel." Terkel is an oral historian who interviewed approximately one hundred people for his book. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Orientals gave their accounts and opinions of the racial issue in the United States. The emotions in the book range from pain to anger to peace to hope to pessimism. I was struck by these people's experiences, and what had previously been an academic exercise for me suddenly became much more personal. These people were **real**, and many of them were living in an America about which I knew nothing. Through their stories, I found my assertion. I did not want to attempt to profess knowledge of a definitive solution to the problem of racism. Rather, I presented an assertion of awareness: If the United States continues to ignore this problem, the country stands a good chance of destroying itself.

I decided to present this assertion in microcosm, and explore a group of people who find out for themselves how easily they can give into hatred and prejudice. As I reviewed the literature I had collected, five distinct characters began to emerge (for a full description of these characters, see the page

prior to the text of "Remaking the Wheel").

My next challenge was to give these characters and this script a structure. There are three main types of compiled script structure: composition structure, speech structure, and music structure (Yordon 415). I decided upon the rondo form, which is a musical structure. The rondo form follows the following pattern: ABACADAE (etc). A represents the main theme; BCDE (etc) provide variations and contrasting themes. My "A" (eventually) became a talk show, on which these five characters were discussing racism, multiculturalism, etc. "BCDE" became "case studies," wherein the panelists on the talk show portrayed other characters and enacted their stories. This form proved to be the most effective in presenting my theme; it provided an easily recognizable structure, and gave the actors and audience the opportunity to explore a multitude of ideas.

#### **V. Ethical Concerns...**

As a white middle-class female, I encountered a few ethical dilemmas during the creation of "Remaking the Wheel." How could I make statements about what it was like to be black (or Hispanic, or Asian, or whatever) in America, when I had no idea what it was like? Did I have the right to create this script at all? And, having never experienced racism to the degree that most minorities have, could I pretend to have a solution to the problem? Finally, my main concern lay in casting. I knew, because of those who had expressed interest in my production,

that my cast was going to be comprised primarily of white actors (I anticipated one black and four whites). Yet, it was essential to me that there be African-American, Asian, and Hispanic characters in my script. I could not, I felt, have a white person play a black person and still be an ethically responsible director.

I solved these ethical dilemmas in a variety of ways. My "right" to create a script on racism, which I thought was a major issue, was the easiest justification to make, as it turned out. As a white, I realize that certain aspects of my heritage created the racist conditions that exist in America today; the script provided an outlet for me not only to deal with knowledge, but to do what I could to correct that situation (in my little corner of the world, anyway). My roommate is black, and we both share the hope that our children will live in a society where they can enjoy a friendship without the pressures of race.

As to the problem of presenting a solution to racism, I solved that with my decision not to present a definitive one at all; each character has his/her own solution to the problem. In that direction, I hoped that audience members would decide for themselves what they could do in their own lives to combat prejudice.

Solving the casting problem was my biggest challenge. Finally, I took my cue from a Ball State production that was presented in the fall of 1992 - Cloud 9. Cross-racial and cross-gender casting have gained popularity lately in the theatre

world, and Cloud 9 makes full use of that trend. In the play, whites portray blacks, adults portray children, men portray women, and women portray men. I decided to employ the same idea in "Remaking the Wheel." During the BCDE sections of the script, the characters would take on a character that would often be not only of a different race but also of the opposite sex as well. I felt this device would uphold the connection between all humanity.

Finally, after further editing and rearranging, my script was ready for actors to breathe life into it.

#### **VI. Auditions, Rehearsals, and the Final Product...**

Auditions for Remaking the Wheel were held on March 3, 1993. I did not expect **anything** that would happen in the next two days. First of all, I ran into a momentary snag when casting. The one black I had expected to be in the show could not, for numerous reasons, commit herself to the production, and only one male showed up to audition. My original plans obviously wouldn't work in this situation, as the initial drafts of the script called for two white males, two white females, and one black female. So I cast "Remaking the Wheel" with five white females (and made changes in the script to facilitate this choice - changing gender pronouns, etc). It certainly made a statement of sorts. I made this decision based on two points. First, as a white female, I can only perceive the world from that perspective. And second, the history of the oppression of women and minorities is quite

similar.

No sooner had I solved that dilemma then another wrench was thrown in my plans. On March 4, I was informed that the 1993 Performance Festival, to be held in Emporia, Kansas, from April 22-24, had been **cancelled!!!!** After the initial shock wore off, I forced myself to face a few realities. First, the show must go on; my thesis project was too far along to change now! And second, my cast members (who were looking forward to the trip to Emporia as much as I was) might not be interested in staying with the show at this point. I talked to my actors and gave them the option of declining their roles. They all expressed the desire to stick with me; they felt the script was too strong to abandon. It was then decided to present "Remaking the Wheel" on the Ball State campus on April 24.

The script that I prepared went through a number of changes through rehearsals. It was during the rehearsal process that the "talk show" format was decided on, for example (previously, the rondo form had been intact, but without a specific context). I decided to use offstage focus during the talk show segments, to represent the inability of these characters to communicate on a personal level; they are merely speaking in generalities and are missing the importance of relating to individuals. Only in the "cast study" segments was onstage focus used. My cast was an incredibly hard-working group of women; the language of "Remaking the Wheel" is often difficult and verbose, and they rose to the challenge. They constantly came up with ideas to strengthen the

script and to define their characters. Through the rehearsal process, many lines were cut, changed, or given to another character when I or the cast deemed it necessary. This collaboration made for a tight, exciting, dramatic show. Changes were made in the script up until the day before the performance; I admire my cast's adaptability!

"Remaking the Wheel" was presented on Saturday, April 24, 1993 in Edward S. Strother Theatre. I was astounded. My cast was, in a word, phenomenal. They didn't miss a beat. The show was very well received by my peers, family, and teachers. Once audience member felt "awakened." I received many comments such as that one, and those were reward enough. "Remaking the Wheel" was a journey for me, not only a creative and academic one, but a personal one as well. It proved to be an exciting, challenging, and often arduous journey that was well worth the effort.

**Works Cited**

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Wisconsin: Brown and Benchmark, 1993.

**"Remaking the Wheel"**

Compiled by Laura C. Jansen

### Cast of Characters

(DIRECTOR'S NOTE: In the original production, all five characters were played by women. This is by no means a necessity, although it was quite effective.)

- A (Tina) - Tina, as the talk show host, has a certain objectivity that the others lack, although that frame of objectivity is broken often. She has never given the subject of racism much thought before. She lives in a world where racism does not exist because she fails to acknowledge it. This day's show will become more than just another day on the job for her.
- B (Rebecca) - Although she is a very intelligent woman, Rebecca is the product of ignorance. Her beliefs are inherited; they are not hers alone. If she were ever to think for herself, instead of repeating what she's heard while growing up, she would realize the narrowness of her arguments.
- C (Sarah) - Sarah is a woman who led the marches during the height of the civil rights movement. However, the lack of progress made in that direction during the last two decades has caused her to retire from public life. She is torn between hope and cynicism, and is looking for a reason to start fighting again.
- D (Hope) - Hope is a modern "liberal." She wishes she had been there in the sixties, marching for her inalienable rights. Instead, she studies racism through books, interviews, and research. She gets excited about the topic and believes that "if we talk about the problem, everything will be okay." She has never experienced racism from either end, and is, in her own way, quite isolated from the real world.
- E (Anna) - Having lost her fiance in a race riot, Anna is the most pessimistic of the group. She doesn't feel hatred toward the black race, but she is not enthusiastic about America's chances in the future.

"Remaking the Wheel"

(The stage is simple - four chairs set up horizontally. "A" [Tina] enters. She is the talk show host. She is carrying a microphone, and is ad-libbing with a voice from the booth)

Voice: So, what's today's topic, Tina? Racism? Tom Cruise couldn't make it today, huh? (etc)

(Ad-libbing among all the characters continues through the following. "D" [Hope] enters down SL, bringing with her a box of folders, notebooks, index cards, resource materials, etc. She is very excited to be here. "B" [Rebecca] enters up SL. B and D notice each other; it is obvious they are acquainted, and are not pleased that the other is present. "C" [Sarah] enter up SL; D rushes to greet her, thrilled to meet her idol. C does not respond in kind. "E" [Anna] enters last. The panelists are seated (left to right) C, B, D, E. As soon as E is seated, the talk show begins.)

Voice: Okay, Tina, we're going in five, four, three, two, and...

A: (To audience) Welcome to today's show. This afternoon we're discussing racism, multi-culturalism, and integration in America twenty-five years after the civil rights movement. On our panel we have Sarah, who led the marches in the sixties, but has since retired from public life; Rebecca, a college senior and president of a campus group advocating separation of the races; Hope, a writer working on her second book on racism; and Anna, who lost her fiance in a race riot. Let's begin with Sarah. What caused you to retire from public activism?

C: At one time I thought things were getting better; I really did. But it seems like we're backsliding, all the way backwards. It seems like everybody hates everybody. We're just a time bomb right now. You can't help feel the tension.

A: What kind of changes have you seen in our young people?

C: I saw good signs when things opened up a bit after the sixties. We had a smart group of students. They had high-IQs, good study habits, and marched for their inalienable rights. Then a more docile group of students came along. It was right after the rash of assassinations and the Vietnam War. Then we ran into the Reagan years; they stopped asking questions. We should have a beautiful country by now. We have no business having to go back and remake this wheel.

B: But-

A: Rebecca, you seem like you want to say something. Any thoughts?

B: You want to see multi-culturalism in action? Look at Yugoslavia, at Lebanon, at Northern Ireland, or wherever else group "identity" has been hyped.

A: Hope you've brought with you today some notes for a project you're working on, correct? Interviews with real people just like you and me, off all races, who live in the global village of the 1990's?

D: Yes, that's right. I thought I'd pass out some of my notes, so the rest of the panel could see the kind of work I'm doing. (She does so, handing a folder or notebook to each panelist. Very nervous, she also drops index cards all over the floor) What I've discovered is this - the United States really needs to find its soul. It has to recognize that its strength is in diversity. What makes a world power really great is being able to say "we're rich because we have different kinds of people."

E: Oh, please.

A: Anna, you disagree. Are you bitter about the loss of your fiance.

E: I certainly don't blame the blacks as a race for his death. But it just serves to reaffirm my opinion that the world is going, and it's just a matter of time before we all just self-destruct. Maybe that's why so many people are not afraid to stand up - because I truly don't think there's anything to fear in the end.

A: Can't we all get along?

B: We've tried.

C: Now we're all just looking out for number one.

B: I don't have the time or energy to worry about somebody else.

B,E: It's either/or.

A: It's either/or.

D: That is simply not true. Nationalism is dangerous on this fragile and shrinking planet. And in this fragile and shrinking country.

B: But even those of us most skeptical about nationalism...

C: ...have drifted into considering it a necessary evil.

E: Nationalism breeds nationalism.

D: We can't afford either/or prisons. That way of thinking divides

almost everything in two. Liberal and conservative. Intellect and emotion. Subject and object.

D,E: Masculine

B,C: Feminine

B: Light skin and dark skin

C: Dominant and passive

E: Black and white

A: Right and wrong

D: Winner and loser

ALL: Good and evil

B: My race, your race.

C: My culture, your culture.

A: Is binary thinking always wrong? Some things really do have two parts.

D: But as a universal pattern with almost no alternatives...

E: It limits us at best, and destroys us at worst.

A: Is it always "or"? Is it never "and"?

D: Each of us is a hologram.

A: A hologram?

D: We can only perceive, understand, and value ourselves by looking from all sides.

A: From a continuum.

C: Of past

B: Present

E: And future?

D: People have choices - (to B) my race, your race - but being all one or all the other is not the future. Running away is not the answer.

B: What's there to run away from? Racial tension has existed from

day one in this country. We've survived this long, haven't we?

C: You can't talk about American music, art, dance, and literature without understanding the love of the different races that founded this country.

E: Love? Try animosity.

C: A lot of animosity, of course. Like a married couple, we have to live together.

A: Sometimes we don't want to.

B: Sometimes we want to beat each other up.

C: Maybe one of us wants to get out of the marriage, but we can't. If somehow, somewhere, the world could get objectivity. If there were some big universal mirror...

D: We can't live in this world alone. We need each other. If we could only take a leap of the imagination. **(Stands and begins flipping through note cards and finds the one she is looking for)** Okay, I've brought these interviews, right? Well, this is Tasha. She's twenty-six years old, she's a black female, and this is her story. **(Reading from the card)** Most people I work with are about my age. They've never had any reason to associate -

B: **(Interrupting)** You have to be careful not to think you're somebody else. Look, get as close to people as you can, but don't get things messed up: you're white. You've got to recognize that you can never fully walk in other people's shoes.

D: But to not even try on that shoe? You're just limiting yourself. All right, you think you know everything, you read it.

B: **(Takes card and crosses downstage. Her "enactment" of the scene is very insincere. The others cross SL and form a cluster; they look as if they're gossiping.)** Most people I work with are about my age. They've never had any reason to associate with black people and they really don't know them. Sometimes they'll say

C: We were at this party last night and we got lost.

E: We ended up in Cabrini-Green and I thought we were going to die.

B: It infuriates me when I hear stuff like that, because they seem to think that all black people have to do is sit around waiting for white people to jump on. I'll get sarcastic and say, "Black people are just waiting for white blood. We crave that stuff."

C,E: Excuse me.

B: I get mad because they don't see me. All they see is that I'm black and all that goes with it

A: She must be good in the kitchen.

B: Not true.

C: She must be a good dancer. She must be good at basketball.

B: Definitely not true.

D: She must like watermelon

B: I've actually had people say to me

E: We're going to have watermelon; you'll like that.

B: I don't like watermelon. I don't like **any** melon. A white can't feel what a black person feels because he hasn't gone through the experience we had. **(C crosses back to chair and sits)** What I don't understand as a black woman is the white race not wanting to look at the issue. **(A goes back to her position in front of the audience)** We wouldn't be here if we weren't brought here. **(D sits)** It takes ten generations to get rid of a slavery mentality. **(E sits)** We're not that far from slavery. **(B crosses to chair and sits)**

**(Talk show)**

E: It's difficult for white society to stop denying its racism. Our country

A: Founded on the principles of enlightenment

E: Was practicing slavery. It required an enormous amount of denial to have these two things going on simultaneously.

D: It is the most obsessive feature of American life.

C: Every American, whether white or black or Hispanic or Oriental or Jewish or whatever, carries with him the consciousness of race, always.

A: Everywhere you go, even where there are no blacks?

B: It obsesses everybody, **(to D)** even those who think they are not obsessed.

D: **(Reluctantly telling story)** I was driving in a black neighborhood.

B: The people at the corners are all gesticulating at her.

D: I was very frightened. I rolled up my windows and locked my doors. I discovered, after several blocks, that I was going the wrong way on a one-way street and they were trying to help me. My assumption was that they were blacks and they were out to get me.

B: Mind you, she's a very enlightened woman. You'd never associate her with racism, yet her first reaction was that they're dangerous.

D: I think racism has deeply stained the character of every single individual in our society.

C: It has stained every black.

A: It has stained every white.

D: And it's lead to an anti-white feeling among blacks. To me, that's understandable. It's unspeakable what black people have gone through since they were first brought to this country.

C: Black anger? I don't know if I'd call it anger. Today people realize:

B,D,E: I don't have to take that.

C: It's not like it used to be. You have blacks who say

D: I wouldn't let a black person slap me upside my head, so why should I let a white person?

B: (Picks up note card and hands it to D) Charles. Age 35. Black male.

D: With rare exceptions, white people are reared to be racist from early on. It's in their gut. Blacks have a condition, not a problem. Whites have the problem, racism, that creates our condition. What did black people ever do to white people, as a race? No reply. What did white people ever do to black people, as a race? You could fill a blackboard. Every white man knows that if he were black,

C: His life would have been different.

D: America has never repented for what it's done to our people. Or shall we talk of the Indians and broken treaties?

(Talk Show)

B: When the Constitution was written those writers were all white males.

E: Only male land owners had the right to vote.

C: Even whites who didn't own land,

C,D,E: As well as women,

C: Were denied the right to vote.

D: African Americans were considered three-fifths of a human being.

E: In many ways we are still struggling from the impact of that original sin.

A: I think every black male will tell you how it feels to go into a parking garage at night.

C: Just by his presence,

B: He evokes fear.

A: Imagine how it feels to walk down the street and by your very presence, you evoke fear.

C: (Selecting card and giving it to A) Jack. Age 56. White male.

A: (Crosses downstage. D and E cross SL) I'm a restaurant owner. This one time I happened to be walking toward the front and a young black man was arguing with the cashier.

E: (as cashier) He'd come in from the outside.

D: (as the young black man) And asked where the bathroom was.

E: Ours is for the customers. Try next door.

A: Yes, that's our policy. He brushed by me and almost knocked me over. (D does this. A follows.) I thought I told you this was for our customers.

D: I am your customer. I'm sitting over there with my wife.

A: But you came from outside.

D: I was in your vestibule using the phone.

A: Why didn't you say that?

D: Why should I? If I were white would you have said anything?

A: You're right and I owe you an apology.

D: I don't want your apology. Just leave me alone.

A: Here was clearly a case of prejudgment, prejudice. I was

guilty. Case closed. I respected that man for not accepting my apology.

D: Why should he?

A: That was maybe eight years ago. I'll never forget it because I never felt so wrong.

**(Talk Show)**

D: I think it's going to take another hundred years, maybe two hundred, before the feeling of whites superiority goes - this feeling

A: Against blacks,

C: Against Mexicans,

B: Against Orientals.

D: Because they're different from us.

E: Isn't that the whole thing? You look down on those people whose culture is different from yours. Naturally, you can't be as good as me. That is human nature.

A: How do we change human nature?

E: I don't think we can. Maybe one day it will disappear, this racism. It's not going to happen in my lifetime.

D: **(Giving card to E)** Yuriko. Age 41. Japanese-American female.

E: **(Crosses downstage)** For me, race is something between whites and Asians. That's what I grew up with. Just last week, at the supermarket, there were very loud remarks for my benefit.

D: I'm glad I'm not **that** color.

E: It doesn't happen every day, but it happens. I think I know why we're considered

B: **(to D)** The model community.

E: When we were put in camps during the war, a substantial number of us said

**(During next two lines, B walks C and A SL, holding their arms behind their backs as if they're prisoners)**

C: We're opposed to discrimination, but if the government orders us to be put away,

A: We're going to support it and cooperate.

B: (to D) This is an attitude the white majority loves.

E: What could be a better, more American, attitude to say

C,A,E: Please don't discriminate against us, but if you do, it's okay.

E: That makes you the model minority. If the white man thinks I'm worse than he is, that's his problem, not mine.

(Talk Show)

A: I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on this planet. The president of the United States. A gondolier in Venice. Fill in the names. I find that A) tremendously comforting that we're so close and B) like Chinese water torture that we're so close. Because you have to find the right six people to make the connection. It's not just big names. It's **anyone**. A native in a rain forest. A tierra del fuegan. An Eskimo. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people. It's a profound thought. How every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds. Six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet.

D: The people of the world are so interdependent that no group, not even white Americans, can separate itself and survive.

B: Six degrees? We tried integration and it failed.

E: That isn't so. Integration has never been tried in this country. It has not even been defined. What is integration?

A: If you put two, three blacks in an all-white institution,

D: It's not integrated. It requires a complete change in the way you think. Real integration involves a change in values. Before integration can work, there has to be a mutual respect.

E: When people understand who they are and understand their history, they have more respect for themselves and for others.

D: Education is the route by which everyone can liberate themselves.

B: There's been a campaign for multi-cultural courses as requirements in the curriculum on campus. I'm split-minded on it.

D: We should know about more than the westward movement of whites. America has been multi-cultural for a long time, and we need a more

balanced account.

B: The majority of white students, who aren't embittered racists. may be forced to sit in a class which they may not be interested in.

D: If our curriculum opened up, it wouldn't mean losing anything. It would merely add to our knowledge.

B: They will say "I have to sit here because these black students shouted loud enough to make the university institute this."

D: Those courses hint at the dimension of what we've all been missing.

B: You can't force someone not to be a racist.

D: Deep ignorance about other human beings. Ignorance leads to fear and we have a habit of living out our fears.

B: Fear turns to hatred,

A: Hatred to violence,

C: And violence to war.

E: Hatred is more of a burden than a luxury. Character is our weapon. Character has a way to make us humble and strong at the same time. Character takes us

D: Beyond culture,

A: Beyond religion,

C: Beyond color.

D: In a world as small as ours we will either choose co-existence or co-annihilation. The strength of small people isn't in guns. It is in intellect, it is in culture and traditions and in self-belief.

C: We have to keep on working together, and when we hear the word nigger or spic - or cracker - stand up and say,

ALL: (All stand except B) I don't appreciate that. Enough of this bullshit!

A: Before we have an understanding of the other person, we have to understand ourselves more. (Searches for a card to illustrate the point and gives it to D) Sheila. Age 45. Black female.

D: (Cross downstage) I went through some stages. I didn't like to

be called black because black was dirty. Kinky hair wasn't cool. I straightened my hair but I did it reluctantly. At times I felt slightly degraded that I could not wear my hair the way it naturally is. It's saying if you're truly yourself, you're ugly. Then, I went all the way from not wanting to be black to being superblack. All the way militant.

C: (Crosses to D) What have you done to your hair?

D: Nothing - except cut it off.

E: Now that's the truth - it's what ain't been done to it? you expect this boy (gestures to C) to go out with you with your head all nappy like that?

D: That's up to George. If he's ashamed of his heritage-

C: Oh, don't be so proud of yourself, just because you look eccentric.

D: How can something that's natural be eccentric?

E: Why must you make an argument out of everything people say?

D: Because I hate assimilationist Negroes!

E: Will somebody please tell me what assimila-whoever means!

C: Oh, it's just a college girl's way of calling people Uncle Toms- but that isn't what it means at all.

E: Well, what does it mean?

D: It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominate, and in this case, oppressive culture!

C: Oh dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Benin - and then some poetry in the Bantu - and the whole monologue will end with the word heritage! Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!

D: Lose your history, lose everything.

(During all of this, A and B have been watching with interest. Now they jump in. The scene takes on a "rally" feel. D and E join in enthusiastically, ad-libbing "Yeah!" "That's right" etc. when appropriate. C remains on the sidelines, watching with skepticism.)

A: When this campaign to call ourselves African-American began, I was astonished by the hostility of so many white people to the idea.

B: Why should they be? Africa is our homeland and we're American. If we openly accept our African-ness, is that subversive of American values?

A: When we first came here, it was against the law to practice our rituals. Even the drum was forbidden. We've never been able to embrace our African heritage.

B: Black people are just now beginning to realize how much they've been deprived of knowledge of their own selves.

A,B,E,D: We are Americans of African descent!!

**(Talk Show)**

C: I was thinking about how we celebrate George Washington. If we do anything to knock him off his pedestal,

B: We're really going to run into opposition.

C: But we got to start telling the truth. He owned other people. It's kind of like the Jews being made to celebrate Hitler.

A: Is race always on a black person's mind from the time he wakes up to the time he goes asleep? Wouldn't that drive a person crazy?

C: **(Annoyed at A's question)** The world is already crazy. Being black in America is like being forced to wear ill-fitting shoes. It's always uncomfortable.

B: But you've got to wear it because it's the only shoes you've got.

C: Some people can bear the uncomfot more than others. When you see

D: Some acting docile

B: And some acting militant,

C: They have one thing in common:

B,D: The shoe is uncomfortable.

B: It always has been

D: And always will be.

C: **(To A, accusatory)** Unless you go back to the roots and begin to

tell the truth: everybody who participated in slavery was dead wrong.

A: **(Defensive)** I went through a very bad time, too. I felt like being white middle-class had a real stigma to it. Everything was our fault. It was my fault there were homeless people. It was my fault there was crime.

B: Another thing. If a black person gets on TV and talks about white people and makes fun of them, he's a comedian. If a white person gets on TV and does the same thing about black people, he's a racist.

A: I don't think that's right.

B: A lot of people feel the same way I do.

A: I was really getting angry. Maybe I overreacted, but it just seemed to me that every time I turned around, people would be constantly trying to send me on a guilt trip because I had a decent life.

B: I'm not prowhite or antiblack, but...I know they went through slavery and all that, but I don't think we should have to pay.

A: I had a good husband and we weren't having marital problems and we had nice home and a car. How dare I have that when there are homeless people? **(Realizes she has broken her decorum and objectivity on national television. Composes herself and then changes the subject)** Since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, racial slurs have been more openly, more unashamedly expressed.

C: He came along with anecdotes of welfare queens and Cadillacs. In winning the presidency, the Gipper made the eighties

B: The decade unashamed.

A: Absolved us of our sin.

D: What I'll never understand was how we could take a man, born in almost the first decade of the century, and get him to preside over the next to last decade, to do everything in his power to throw us back into the first decade of the century. What a rip-off. And George Bush, in effect, employed Willie Horton as his campaign manager and was rewarded with the presidency.

C: Their hostility toward civil-rights legislation was seen as a friendly wink toward those whose language may be more gamey than civil.

B: **(Giving note card to C)** George. Age 30. White male.

C: A woman says to me

E: What kind of work do you do?

C: I'm in the coal business. I deliver a load of coal to school every morning. So she says to me later

E: I never could figure it out, and one day, I started to laugh so hysterically that the load of coal you were delivering was a load of black kids that you were taking to school.

C: She still talks about it every time I see her.

E: I can never get over it.

B: But you're not a racist?

E: Hell, no! Did you ever hear me say the word "nigger"? The blacks have the future. They may not have got to the top of that mountain yet, but they're gonna get to it. We're dead, the white guy. We're just about extinct.

B: (Before C sits, she gives her another card to enact) Jose. Age 27. Hispanic male. (Giving another card to D) And Sally. Age 25. White female.

C: Hispanics are used as a buffer between black and white communities. (D crosses SL to represent the white community; A crosses SR to represent the black community) We're kind of a geographic Ping-Pong ball. Whites may let us move into their neighborhood...

(E crosses to D and looks expectantly at her)

D: We'll take the lesser of two evils.

C: I call him a dumb Hispanic, the one who moves into a white community and thinks

E: Oh, wonderful! I've been accepted.

C: Look dummy, the only reason you're there is because right behind you are the blacks about to move in (gestures toward A). It's a real paradox they find themselves in, the Hispanics and the blacks. On the one hand, we say

(B crosses to join C in the Hispanic neighborhood)

B,C: Get an education, get that degree, make a better life.

C: But when they leave the old neighborhood, they're

C,B: Sell outs.

C: Should we say "Don't make any progress and stay put?"

(B, E, and C cross back to chairs. A assumes the role of a secretary to whom D is talking.)

D: I've just registered for my last year in nursing school. I won't be able to go back because the scholarship I got last year was just denied me. They said it was a Hispanic scholarship and

A: Enough Hispanics applied.

D: So I lost out. I can't afford the tuition, so I don't know if I'm ever going back. There goes my dream of becoming a registered nurse. It's something I've always wanted. I got so close.

A: I'm sorry, but this time we have enough Hispanics.

D: I've never been prejudiced, but why the hell are you doing this to me? I deserved that scholarship. Just because their skin's darker than mine, why should they get it and I don't? It's the first time I've had feelings like this and it makes me very uncomfortable.

(Talk Show)

B: (to C) You know, I've been listening and reading about Farrakhan, you didn't know that did you?

C: I didn't know you could read.

B: Fuck you. (All react to this being said on the air - especially A) Anyway, Minister Farrakhan always talks about the so-called "day" when the Black man will rise. "We will one day rule the earth as we did in our glorious past." You really believe that?

C: It's inevitable.

B: Keep dreaming.

D: Rudyard Kipling teaches us that the things we do, two by two, we shall answer for them, one by one. The whites will answer one by one for all the things they did two by two, by screwing the blacks for centuries. They're telling us: move over, dude. It's our turn now. I love it.

E: (Handing card to D) Geoffrey. Age 40. South African male.

(D assumes role of Geoffrey. A and C portray friends of his. B and E cross SL and huddle together on the floor. They are the "poorest of the poor.")

A: Geoffrey, you have to move out of South Africa. You'll be killed. Why do you stay in South Africa?

D: One has to stay there to educate the black workers and we'll know we've been successful when they kill us.

C: Planning the revolution that will destroy you.

A: Putting your life on the line.

D: You don't think of it like that. I wish you'd come visit.

C: But we'd visit you and sit in your gorgeous house planning trips into the townships demanding to see (Gesturing to E and B)

E,B: The poorest of the poor.

C: "Are you sure they're the worst off? I mean we've come all this way."

A: "We don't want to see people just mildly victimized by apartheid."

C,A: "We demand shock."

A: It doesn't seem right sitting on the East Side talking about revolution.

D: (Crossing downstage. To aud) When white Americans run into me, they seem enormously relieved to find themselves in the company of someone they assume is

(B breaks from previous position and joins A and C.)

A,B,C: A fellow racist.

D: When I came to the United States, I thought people would ask me about apartheid and my part in it. (Looks toward A, B and C. They smile and shrug, having no questions for him.) No. In all my years in the U.S., I got only

E: One hostile reaction. (Crosses away from group)

D: Most often, I've been slapped on the back.

(B, C, and A cross to D, in turn, as they say their lines.)

B: Good job.

C: You know how to deal with them.

A: At last you are somebody to whom we can unburden ourselves.

D: You hear it all.

C: They do crime.

A: They're taking over.

D: **(Crossing to E)** There is a countervailing reaction from black Americans. Since I had to be

E: A dyed-in-the-wool racist

D: There would be no ambiguity here. They felt I would not

E: Patronize them or speak to them with a forked tongue.

D: They've known whites who say

A,B,C: Politically correct things

E: To their faces and then go home and complain about

C: Welfare mothers

B: And black crime.

**(Talk Show)**

C: Pretty soon I'll have grandkids and they will want to sing

D: "We Shall Overcome."

C: No, we have sang that long enough. We should not make a lifetime of singing that song. I refuse to sing it anymore. I would hope we could learn something from history, but apparently we don't.

D: **(Giving note card to B. The others assume roles as family members)** Steve. Age 35. White male. And a black family, the Johnsons.

**(B knocks on door and C opens it.)**

B: I'm from the Clyborne Park Improvement Association.

C: How do you do. Have a seat. What can we do for you?

**(B does not sit)**

B: We have had it brought to our attention at the last meeting that you people have bought a piece of residential property at four o six Clybourne Street.

A: That's right. Care for something to drink?

B: No. I was elected to come here this afternoon and talk to you people. Our community is made up of people who've worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community. You've got to admit that a man has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities.

D: This, friends, is the welcoming committee.

C: Is this what you came marching all the way over here to tell us?

E: Lord have mercy, ain't this the living gall!

B: I don't understand why you people are reacting this way. What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted?

A: Get out of my house.

(B goes out door. Pauses, looks back at family.)

B: (to aud) No one can tell me that the stereotypes they have about blacks ain't true. A lot of them are good people, but there's more bad than good. They don't take care of their homes. Don't like to work. They get married ten times. They look like shit. They live like low-lives.

(A,D,E, and C are still in their roles as the black family.)

C: (to B) When you had your hundred years of that Statue of Liberty, I got damned mad because it was sickening to me. That was not made for me. We didn't come through Ellis Island. (to family) What are you celebrating? You came here in chains in the bottom of ships and half-dead and beaten. Do you understand what I'm saying?

B: (to aud) I work with black guys that are okay and all that. They don't think anybody owes them anything. That's another thing. They have attitudes. Just because what happened fifty years ago, everybody owes them something.

C: (to family) Why are you going to help them celebrate? A hundred years of what? You was not free. When you think of what you done give up for this country and you got so little. That's when I get upset when these white people tell me how good it is here. (to B) Don't tell me how good it is here. I live here. It's good to you, it ain't good to me. Do you understand what I'm saying?

B: (to aud) The first thing they should do is maybe try to speak the language halfway decently. (to C) How do you expect to go anywhere when you can't even barely speak English? (to aud) When you see five of them hanging around the corner, yapping, with the music going real loud, it bugs me.

C: (to aud) They don't have us in their history books. (to family) They never let you forget their history, but they want you to forget yours. (to B) Is it so painful for you to think what you done to us? (to family) They don't tell you what you contributed to this country. (to aud) When our kids read a book, you would think that nobody did nothing in this country except the white man.

B: (to aud) I think this city would be a much better place if there wasn't a majority of black people living here. Things were cleaner in the old days. (Family moves toward her angrily) Hey wait a minute. I never said that if they weren't around, things would be better.

C: (to family) I think we'd best be getting on, separating from these people. When Moses led the people out of Egypt, they didn't say, "Let's integrate." They got the heck out of there. When World War II was over, the Jews didn't break bread with the Germans and be brothers and all integrate. They said, "These people was trying to wipe us off the face of the map. Let's get the heck out of here." (all cross to chairs and sit)

B: (to aud) If it wasn't for ni- them, we wouldn't have half the good music we have. We wouldn't have jazz, would we? If there weren't so many of them, if they didn't take up so much space. (crosses to chair and sits)

(Talk Show)

A: We're supposed to have gotten over all this.

E: I had always believed that whites needed some way to get out of the prison of racism. Whether they were conscious of it or not, they were restricted by it, too. Obviously I was wrong. I thought that the Brown decision and the civil-rights movement would liberate the whites as well.

A: But if they were liberated,

B: You'd have to liberate blacks, too.

E: They didn't want that sort of liberation.

D: (to E) With your cynicism, your pessimism, why haven't you committed suicide?

E: I'm curious. I really want to see this process, this joke, up until I die.

D: I think whites, deep down inside, feel uncomfortable. He feels that if he was treated the way he treated the black, he'd want to get even.

A: On the edge all the time.

C: It's dangerous to have a bunch of people in a society who've got nothing to lose.

**(All begin to talk over one another, repeating their line over and over again)**

B: Didn't want that sort of liberation.

A: On the edge all the time.

C: Nothing to lose.

E: This process, this joke.

D: He'd want to get even.

**(A, attempting to regain control of her show, stands in front of them and motions for them to quiet down. Once they have ceased shouting at one another, she speaks.)**

A: What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?

C: Or fester like a sore-  
And then run?

B: Does it stink like rotten meat?

D: Or crust and sugar over-  
like a syrupy sweet?

E: Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

ALL: Or does it explode?

**(They all look at each other using onstage focus for the first time during the talk show. During the following lines - ending with "It makes no difference," they characters get increasingly angry at each other and push one another with growing intensity.)**

C: Among black people, there is frustration, anger, hatred.

B: Among whites, there is fear, hatred, denial.

E: When you create two societies, so separate, so unequal, people at the

C,A: Bottom half

E: Are ultimately going to lash out at the people at the

B,D: Top half.

E: There will be violence.

B: It doesn't matter what we do, it gets taken away from us.

D: There's no use.

C: Let's withdraw.

E: Let's do whatever we feel like doing.

A: If we feel like being disorderly, let's be disorderly.

ALL: It makes no difference.

(During the racial slur montage, the four others gang up on the one being "slurred"; the "slurred," in turn, out of fear and anger, turns on another in the group)

B: (to E) Dago, wop, garlic-breath, guinea, pizza-slinging, spaghetti-bending, Vic Damone, Perry Como, Luciano Pavarotti, Sole Mio, nonsinging motherfucker.

E: (to C) You slant-eyed, me-no-speak-American, own every fruit and vegetable stand in New York, Reverent Moon, Summer Olympics '88, Korean kick-boxing bastard.

C: (to A) Goya bean-eating, fifteen in a car, thirty in an apartment, pointed shoes, red-wearing, Menudo, meda-meda Puerto Rican cocksucker.

A: (to D) It's cheap, I got a good price for you, Mayor Koch, "How I'm doing," chocolate-egg-cream-drinking, bagel and lox, B'nai B'rith Jew asshole.

D: (to B) You gold-teeth, gold-chain-wearing, fried-chicken-and-biscuit-eatin'-monkey, ape, baboon, big thigh, fast-running, three-hundred-sixty-degree-basketball-dunking spade Moulan Yan. Go back to Africa.

(D and B circle each other, with D about to hit B. E and A gang up on C and push her to the ground. All are repeating slurs to

each other, building to an "explosion.")

ALL: Or does it explode?

(All stop, suddenly realizing what they're doing, how easily they gave in to anger. C crosses back to her chair and sits. E remains seated down SL. A sits in front of E's chair. D kneels in front of her chair and begins collecting the scattered note cards, folders, etc. B is helping her. There is a long silence.)

B: (Reading from a note card) The things that separate us make up one percent of who we are. Ninety-nine percent of our lives are similar.

A: The same planet supports us.

C: We have the same environment.

D: You have two arms and legs and I have the same.

B: We... (stops reading, looks at group, crosses down SR, and kneels there) I... have given so much over the years to that one percent, complexion, it's a travesty.

D: (As she is putting her things away, her attention is drawn to a certain book - The Autobiography of Malcolm X in this case, but it doesn't really matter) Books about revolutions begin with a chapter that describes

E: The decay of authority or the sufferings of the people.

D: They should begin with a psychological chapter - one that shows how

C: A harassed, terrified man suddenly breaks his terror

C,B: Stops being afraid.

C,B,D: Man gets rid of fear and feels

C,B,D,E: Free. Without that, there would be no revolution.

(During the above "pyramid," the women are amazed that they are all saying this at the same time. Where did it come from??)

D: Citizens who refuse to obey anything but their own conscience can transform their countries. A role in history.

E: The real tragedy between blacks and whites in America is not that

ALL: We hate each other.

E: Hatred by itself is a pretty shallow force and can only cut so deep. The real tragedy is that

ALL: We love and admire each other.

E: American culture as we know it would not exist if it weren't so. Like a Greek play, there would be no tragedy if it weren't for the love.

ALL: (quietly) Or does it explode?

D: Tomorrow looks a bit sad because of the nature of the current generation. In the past, the visionary force was in the young. But if the young are more conservative than their elders, we're in for it.

C: (gets out of her chair and sits in front of B's chair) Perhaps there will be a change in the nineties.

A,B,C,E: Something seems to be in the wind.

D: I hope. There's a chance. That someday, our children will meet. And they'll never say it's either/or. And maybe,

C: Just maybe, things will be a little better.

D: So I was right all along. You were a true believer.

C: I don't see how it could be any other way. I have faith we can mature.

E: Stranger things have happened.

A: Maybe America is in its adolescence.

D: Maybe we're driving home from the prom, drunk, and nobody knows whether we're going to survive or not.

B: Maybe we'll survive and maybe we'll be a pretty smart old person, well-adjusted and mellow.

C: I am guardedly optimistic. If everything is going to hell, it would be hard for me to get up in the morning. But I can't honestly say, "Sure things will get better." We might not make it home from the prom.

Voice: Uh, Tina? We need a wrap-up here.

(All become aware once again of camera; they had forgotten it was there. A crosses down center. With her cross, and the position

of the others, a circle has been formed - the wheel remade.)

A: If we do not devote the resources necessary to avert the tragedy - will there have to be some sort of...explosion...before we realize the gravity of the situation? Think of the money we instantly manufactured for Desert Storm. The crisis in this country is much more grave than that. But we don't have the same kind of will to tackle it. We have to. We simply have no choice.

The End

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