

CREATED BY TÉA ARTISTRY

BEING

WRITTEN BY

TARA AMBER
CHUK OBASI
NALINI SHARMA

DIRECTED BY

VIEVE PRICE
CHUK OBASI

CHAKA

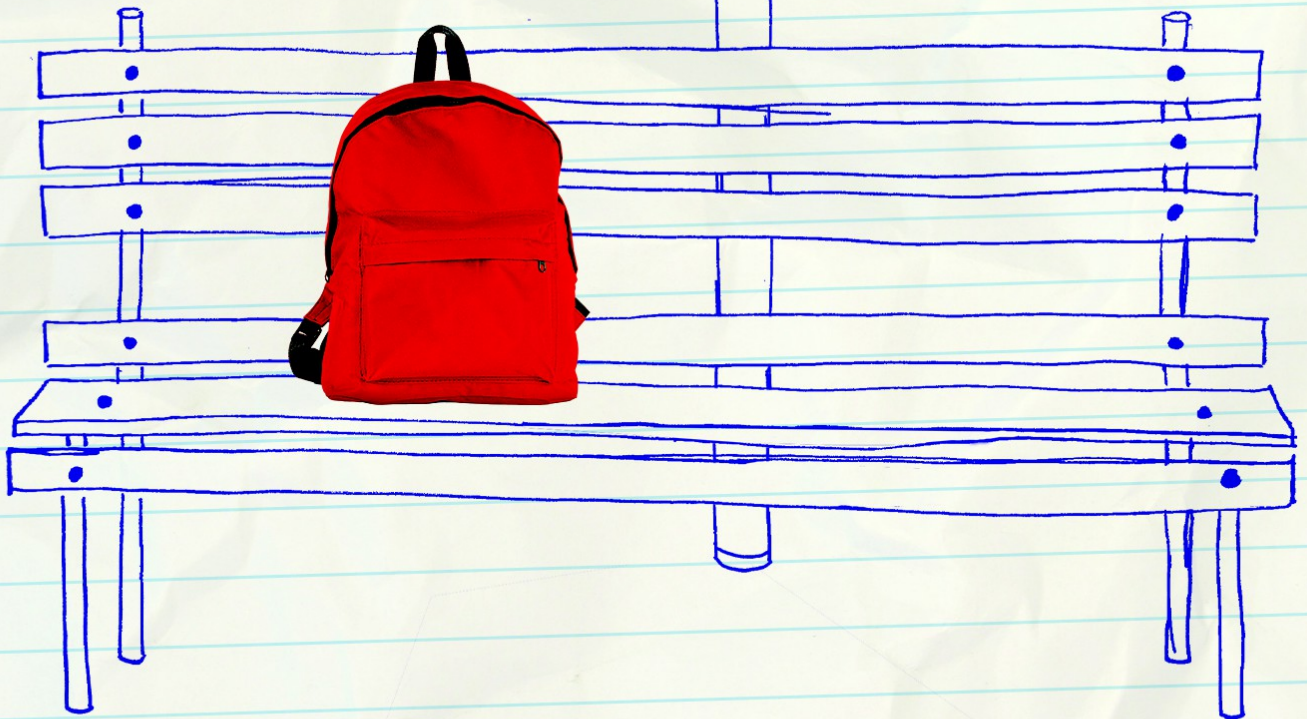
MARCH 13TH - 30TH, 2025

THURS. FRI. & SAT. @ 7:30PM
SUN. @ 2:00PM

PRESENTED BY

**BURNING
COAL
THEATRE
COMPANY**

& TÉA
ARTISTRY



SYNOPSIS

Chaka, a Black teenager from the Bronx, is grappling with the loss of his father, who passed away from complications of sickle cell disease. The doctors insisted there was nothing more they could do, but Chaka suspects it was more a matter of what they were willing to do.

Now a new transfer to East Prep High—an elite Manhattan private school that has recently embraced critical race theory—Chaka steps into what appears to be a progressive space. Yet beneath the surface, the school becomes a charged battlefield where privilege and oppression collide in real time as white privilege attempts to avoid its cognitive dissonance through the application of power.



Dress rehearsal of Being Chaka in 2023 at New Ohio Theatre. Photo Credit TÉA Artistry

As he struggles to find his footing in this unfamiliar world, haunted by the injustices of the past, Chaka's frustration deepens. His growing rage is not just for the system that failed his father—it's for the one that now demands his compliance.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

TÉA Artistry's *Being Chaka* was the third installment in *The Weaver*, a three-part performance initiative that dramatically explored the personal, social, and institutional experience of race in the United States. This project sought to acknowledge, unpack, challenge, and transform the nation's relationship with racism.

In 2018, TÉA Artistry initiated a process of inquiry into how the construct of race shaped individual and collective lives across multiple dimensions—personal, social, cultural, and structural. The company examined the pervasive manifestations of racism and colonization embedded in the stories people tell, the truths they hold, and the patterns of interaction they engage in. As part of this exploration, the artists conducted ongoing *Insight* conversations with one another and with more than fifty individuals willing to share their experiences.



The Weaver Rehearsals, Photo credit TÉA Artistry

The characters and themes woven throughout *The Weaver* emerged from these conversations and from artistic exploration conducted in *Insight* design labs. Across its three distinct performance pieces, *The Weaver* traced a journey through trauma, colonization, internalized racism, and rage, as well as joy, pride, love, self-transcendence, and triumph. Each piece was designed to illuminate the inner conscious experience of its characters, prompting audiences to reflect on their own internal landscapes. The interplay between stage and spectator invited questions such as: *Do I do that? Would I do that? What about this unsettles me? What could I do differently? Would I?*

The first installment, *The Weaver*, presented a sequence of interwoven narratives and recollections that personalized the impact of race as a social construct. Time and space collapsed as characters from different historical eras in the U.S. guided one another toward decolonization of self. By centering the interior lives of a diverse cast, the piece examined the threads connecting past, present, and future. Designed to foster reflection and discussion, *The Weaver* premiered on July 12, 2021, in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, where audiences engaged with the characters and with each other in an immersive townhouse setting.



Additional Rehearsals for The Weaver. Photo credit TÉA Artistry

The second installment, *Paradigm*, premiered at the New Ohio Ice Factory Festival in July 2022, drawing audiences into the rhythms, routines, and dramas of an American hospital disrupted by a racially charged incident. The piece followed the inner conscious responses of six central characters: Ms. K, the hospital's chief administrator; Chaka, a teenager suffering from sickle cell anemia; Beth, his attending nurse; Inaya, his mother; Kungzan, a contemporary of Chaka's whose father lay gravely ill; Annalisa, a patient with a loose and creative grasp on reality; and Presence, a ghostly protagonist emotionally tied to the hospital and its inhabitants.

Six TÉA artists devised and performed *Paradigm*, shaping the work through a series of *Insight Artistry* workshops. Supported by the Archive Residency with IRT/New Ohio Theatre, they critically explored the personal, social, and institutional forces at play in the drama's central event. Deeply engaged in their own inner experiences, they grappled with the complex reality that while racial attitudes and actions often follow familiar patterns, no individual is a stereotype. Each character in *Paradigm* navigated concerns, aspirations, and constraints shaped by the social and familial roles that expanded and contracted the ways they thought, felt, and acted.



2023 Being Chaka dress rehearsal. Photo Credit Kevin Condon.

Culminating TÉA Artistry's multi-year exploration of how Americans apprehend race and how it shapes their interactions and decisions, *Being Chaka* was the final work of *The Weaver Initiative*. As the New Ohio/IRT Archive Residency company, TÉA Artistry was given the opportunity to collaboratively develop *Paradigm* and *Being Chaka*—two works of *Insight Art* that interrogated the deeply personal and systemic dynamics of race in America.

THE LEGACY OF SYSTEMIC RACISM IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

There is perhaps no more uncomfortable truth than the fact that racism is integral to American culture and history and has been for a long time. It has extended into many parts of life, even basic needs like housing, jobs, healthcare, and education. Though until recently mainstream¹ (read: mostly white) understanding of racism was that it was a moral or personal failing on an individual level, our understanding has grown to take in the fact that it is a systemic problem² from which privileged individuals benefit and is built into the systems by which we live our lives. Most important to the story of *Being Chaka* is the way racism has contributed to the unfair way schools are run. Even though laws have changed over the years to make schools more equal, for example formal segregation by law is no longer permitted, many Black and Brown students still do not receive equal opportunity for success as their white counterparts.

Here we will look at how American racism has shaped our K-12 education system in the past and still impacts schools to this day. We will explore factors such as differences in school funding, how schools are still mostly separated by race, how disciplinary procedures increase unfairness, and how these problems stack up to hurt our students in the long run. Though we have come far, American education still has much to do before it can really claim to provide equal access to all.

From the arrival of the White Lion at the dock in Jamestown in 1619 until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, the majority of the Black population of the United States (or what would become the United States) was held in a form of bondage called "chattel slavery," where the slaves were considered the personal property of their masters or owners and could be bought and sold akin to livestock. This was upheld in the 1857 Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v. Sanford* where Chief Justice Roger Taney opined that slaves were not to be extended the rights of citizens and had, essentially, no rights "that a white man need respect."

This included a right to an education, though this would vary from place to place. In some states there was simply no obligation to provide one, while in others teaching a slave to read and/or write was punishable by whipping, branding, and death for the teacher. The slave could face similar penalties, or additionally the amputation of their dominant hand to keep them from writing. Though the Thirteenth Amendment extended citizenship to Black people and abolished slavery³, there was still significant white resistance to Black advancement, not only politically but also educationally. It was generally understood that an educated populace would be more difficult to control, more expensive to employ, and less likely to remain tied to small farms or communities.

With the way open for Black children to attend school, most parts of the United States enforced a form of legally segregated schooling which kept Black and white children separate from one another in terms of the education system, as well as bathrooms, drinking fountains, train cars, and several other areas of public life and infrastructure. The legality of segregation was tested in 1896



L: Chief Just Roger Taney, author of the Dred Scott decision. R: Dred Scott



A segregated water station in Oklahoma City

1 Meaning: Mostly white

2 Meaning one built into daily life & systems

3 With the exception of being punishment for a crime, which we will get to in a moment.

in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, when Homer Plessy boarded a whites-only train car in protest of this system. However, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation did not violate the United States Constitution, and that separate systems were perfectly acceptable so long as they were equal in quality. The Court went so far as to argue that if the separation put any sort of negative connotation upon Black accommodation, it was because Black people had done so themselves and were to blame. However, facts were that Black and Brown schools under segregation were, almost without exception, smaller, older, underfunded, underresourced, and in poorer condition. Separate but equal may have been acceptable, but the open secret was that these schools were in no way, shape, or form equal. White schools were simply better resourced, with more money, more and better-trained teachers, and nicer buildings.

Legally, this would change in 1954, with the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the Supreme ruled unanimously that segregation in education was explicitly a violation of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. Though the ruling was significant, the backlash was violent and widespread. The integration of the school system in Little Rock, Arkansas, required that the Black students arriving at the white school be escorted by paratroopers from the United States Army 101st Airborne. Violence was common, ranging from verbal abuse and assault on Black students to full-scale riots that needed to be quelled by military force. Many schools actively fought integration, including shutting down as opposed to teaching integrated classes. When Ruby Bridges⁴ began attending class at the formerly all-white William Frantz elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana, she had to be escorted to and from her classroom by United States Marshals. White parents pulled their children from the school en-masse, and only one teacher was found who was willing to teach Bridges. Due to concerns about her safety, she was only permitted to eat food she had brought from home and was barred from participating in recess activities. Though white parents began returning to the school after a few weeks, it would be over a year before she had any classmates. Bridges' family suffered greatly for their decision, with her grandparents being turned off their land in Mississippi, her father losing his job, and them being banned from the local grocery store. In order to retain a whites only environment, parents began moving their families to different neighborhoods, particularly in the suburbs where less-affluent Black families could not afford to live. Some further created networks of private schools with entrance exams designed to screen out Black and Brown students. Workers at schools that did integrate, even a bit, noted that the addition of white students to previously Black and Brown systems often brought a relatively large influx of resources. However, contemporary school funding systems still keep the education gap open in our society.

The system primarily used for school funding is that of property tax, where a percentage is assessed on



Above: Elizabeth Eckford is threatened during the desegregation of Little Rock. Below: Ruby Bridges is escorted by US Marshals in New Orleans.

⁴ At the time six years old

the property owners within a certain jurisdiction⁵ for the support of education for the youths living within that district. However, due to historical practices of housing segregation, such as denying mortgage loans to certain "high risk" neighborhoods⁶, or encouraging the purchase of suburban tracts by middle-class white families out of urban centers⁷, the property tax in Black and Brown neighborhoods is significantly lower than it is in white, particularly, suburban, neighborhoods. Given that "school quality" is often a driver of property values, this creates a cycle of underfunded schools in poorer neighborhoods, which have a tendency to contain the majority of Black and Brown families due to the housing issues mentioned previously.

One report outlining the difference between majority white school districts compared to majority Black found that, nationwide, such districts pull in about twenty-three billion dollars more per year⁸ than schools that serve a primarily Black and Brown population. Roughly the economy of an entire developing nation can be swallowed by that difference in funding, and this disparity is reflected in the student experience. Underfunded schools lack enrichment programs such as art, music, or sports. They further also have fewer teachers, significantly larger class sizes, and fewer counselors. Student who need help, either socially or academically, in underfunded schools are less likely to receive the help they need and demonstrate across the board lower-quality outcomes.

The recognition of these funding issues, and progressive social pressure to ameliorate it, have led to additional backlashes targeting the funding of our public schools. Many states have created "school voucher" programs, functionally privatizing education by allowing a parent to take public money⁹ from tax coffers and send their children to private schools. These private schools are overwhelmingly white, and are either so located or structured to discourage Black participation. Additionally, many states have created Charter School systems, where private entities can create poorly-regulated semi-public schools as an additional drain on education coffers. These measures have been shown to hurt students in poorer areas in particular, as poverty is usually coupled with lower geographic and social mobility.

Even in relatively integrated districts, studies have consistently shown that Black and Brown students are disproportionately disciplined compared to their white counterparts, even when controlling for the severity of the infractions. Statistically, Black students are roughly four times more likely to be suspended than white students, and this disparity in outcomes begins as early as preschool in many districts. The reasons for these disciplinary disparities are many, and at least some can be traced back to the roots of community disinvestment discussed above. In essence, disciplinary problems that may be met with counseling, mindfulness, or education in white districts have fewer recourses due to the dearth of resources.

Many schools, particularly in poorer areas, have adopted strong "zero tolerance," policies which carry heavy penalties for even mild offenses. Many of these policies have their roots in the "tough on crime" 1990's, and have led to substantial harm for students of color. Further, the "school resource officer" is now common in American schools, bringing the overpolicing of Black and Brown bodies into the schools. Infractions such as minor fights, or talking back have elevated what formerly would be a routine disciplinary matter handled by school administration to law enforcement handcuffing and arresting children. According to Stand for Children Tennessee, one Memphis school district recorded "resource officer" use of pepper spray against their students in the school on a nearly weekly basis.

This and other factors leads to an increased level of truancy among Black and Brown students, which impacts their academic performance. Lower academic outcomes in secondary education are a major predictor of college or university attendance, and also a major indicator of potential criminality. Because these students

A Redlined map of Philadelphia from the 1920's



Anti-Integration bussing riots in Boston. School desegregation issues were not purely Southern.

5 Usually a school district

6 A practice known as redlining

7 Thus providing financial support for "white flight"

8 This figure is roughly on par with the Gross Domestic Product of Bosnia and Hercegovina

9 Generally meaning the cost per instruction as established by the state

are more likely to be pushed out of the school system¹⁰ and wind up in the criminal justice system, experts have dubbed this cycle the "school-to-prison pipeline." This cycle continues the disproportionate oppression of Black and Brown families through generations, and keeps the spectre of the servile condition hanging over them. If you recall, the Thirteenth Amendment outlaws slavery *with the exception of punishment for a crime*. Prisoners, disproportionately Black and Brown, are still used for free or very low cost labor, sometimes even being leased to private corporations for profit. This means that, broadly, Black and Brown families have a harder time building generational wealth and breaking the cycle of poverty.

These structural issues are further exacerbated by negative impacts on students' mental health and interpersonal racism in the classroom. Studies show that teachers and administrators have lower expectations of students of color while reacting more harshly to mistakes. An unwelcoming and unfair environment exacerbated by stress can strongly damage confidence, willpower, and other forms of executive functioning. It is a cycle which continually breaks the heart of the American Dream, as education has long been believed to be the key to a better future. However, we remain a nation of academic haves and have-nots. This is despite the fact that it is well-established that all students who learn in diverse classrooms experience improved outcomes, not merely students of color.

¹⁰ Which treats tends to treat them like criminals anyhow

WHITELASH: PUSHING BACK FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO OBAMA

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

-- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Time is a flat circle."

--Rustin Cohle (True Detective)

Throughout American history, the various steps toward racial justice and progress has been met with resistance from white communities. This phenomena is common enough to have a name, and that is "Whitelash."¹¹ This phenomena happens when white people and institutions push back against policies and movement that promote racial equality. It has taken many forms throughout American history, from lynching and violence of the Ku Klux Klan¹² to the obstructionism of the Republican-led Senate in the last year of the Obama administration, to the currently sitting US president's rise to political relevance. These new laws, political shifts, and violence are intended to keep racial power imbalances in place, extending the arc of Dr. King's moral universe potentially into eternity.

The root of whitelash is fear. Fear on the part of white power structures of losing power, privilege, or control creates a fertile bed of reactionary conservatism, where changes to the status quo, even if they are aligned with national identity and ideals, are treated as alien forces being "crammed down the throats" or "pushed in the faces" of white Americans. The reactions have more than earned the name of rage.

One of the earliest and most potent examples of whitelash happened almost immediately upon the end of the Civil War. During the Reconstruction Era, when the Thirteenth Amendment had extended citizenship rights to the formerly enslaved¹³, Black Americans unleashed a hitherto unseen wellspring of economic, civic, political, and community activity. Numerous Black people held positions of trust throughout the country, from state legislatures and the House of Representatives to the Federal bureaucracy. This was particularly notable in majority Black areas. However, organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan quickly began organized terror campaigns to intimidate the Black vote and discourage them from exercising their basic rights. Meeting in secret, such "fraternities" not only provided organized terror to suppress the Black population, it also provided spaces for white minorities to organize violent resistance.



KKK Costumes Seized from a North Carolina Chapter

Where they could, white power structures enraged by Black progress created what were called "Black Codes," to limit Black freedoms. These laws strongly curtailed political and civic participation by nonwhites, but were not yet as all-encompassing as the "Jim Crow" laws that would be created when the Reconstruction period ended in 1877.

In 1898, the Wilmington coup and massacre took place in Wilmington, North Carolina. An armed white mob stormed the offices of *The Daily Record*¹⁴ with rifles and a Gatling gun, burning it to the ground. They then proceeded to attack Black residents of Wilmington, burn Black neighborhoods, and storm city hall to drive out the elected government of the state's largest city. The mayor and aldermen were forced to resign at gunpoint, with new aldermen and mayor



The white mob gathered in the wreckage of the Daily Record offices.

11 A portmanteau of "white" and "backlash." Sometimes also called "white rage" or "white tears."

12 As well as strong opposition to anti-lynching laws

13 Note, generally just the men depending on location

14 One of the few Black-owned papers in the country and the only Black-owned daily paper

installed by the mob and given a list of Blacks and "fusionist" whites¹⁵ to be banished from the city if not the state of North Carolina as a whole.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's fought for and secured Constitutional and legal assurances of racial equality in voting, education, and public spaces. Major steps forward were accomplished by the work of activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Bayard Rustin, and others along with cooperation from the political apparatus of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Democratic president of the United States. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 had finally given the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution some mechanisms for enforcement. However, white communities embraced backlash against this progress, varying from "white flight" as mentioned earlier to the "dog-whistle" politics of the likes of Nixon and Reagan.

"Dog-whistle" politics is the use of coded or suggestive language in order to convey a message behind a screen of plausible deniability. It is named after an ultra-sonic dog whistle, which can be heard by a dog but not by a human. In this case, the message appears benign or normal to the population as a whole while conveying support to those who are "in the know." Lee Atwater, a Republican political strategist, stated the following about Richard Nixon's use of dog-whistles:

You start out in 1954 by saying, "N, n*, n*." By 1968, you can't say "n*"— that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now, you're talking about cutting taxes. And all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me— because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this" is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "N*, n*."*

Atwater went on to advise Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, who used the stereotypical spectres of "Cadillac-driving Welfare queens" and ultraviolent Black men¹⁷ respectively to whip up support among white communities for their campaigns, particularly with an eye toward cutting taxes and government programs in ways that would inordinately harm Black communities. These appeals were often cloaked in the language of "law and order" while truly appealing to white voters opposed to civil rights and in favor of expanding the carceral state.

Another watershed moment in whitelash came with the 2008 election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. Though his election was a notably historic moment, and many took it as a sign that the United States was becoming more equal¹⁸, the whitelash in response not only catapulted Donald Trump to political prominence, and then the presidency¹⁹, it also cemented conservative obstructionism to a degree which threatens to undermine the American experiment itself.



Richard Milhouse Nixon campaigns across the South



Reagan at a press conference

15 White citizens who worked or cooperated with Black progress, primarily Republicans at the time

16 All cases of N* in this quote are uses of a specific racial slur regarding Black people

17 Example, Willie Horton

18 Indeed, some even suggesting that we had become "post-racial"

19 Twice

During Obama's time in office, many Americans felt uncomfortable with the idea of a Black man in a position of such power. This led not only to opposition to policies that helped communities of color, such as healthcare and criminal justice reform, but for many to actively question the President's legitimacy to hold office in the first place. This took the form of the "birther" conspiracy. This conspiracy, in which Donald Trump played a key role, claimed that Barack Obama was not born in the United States, and was thus ineligible to hold the office of the Presidency. This position was held, elaborated, and repeated by Trump and other white



A billboard demanding to see Obama's birth certificate

conservatives despite clear evidence from multiple sources that Barack Obama was born in Hawaii²⁰. Beginning in 2011, Trump's repeated demands to "see the birth certificate" and continued scrutiny of public disclosures in this regard helped bring him to mainstream political relevance. This conspiracy goes beyond simply a questioning of citizenship²¹, but worked to actively delegitimize the presidency of the first Black man in US history. By reinforcing the idea that a Black person could not rightfully hold such an office, Trump played into white fear and resentment, also emboldening white nationalists and paving the way for, as Dr. Carol Anderson put it, the Republicans to "unelect a Black president."

Though resistance from parties opposite a sitting president, especially when they control one or more house of Congress, is not unusual, the level of obstruction in the Republican-controlled Senate reached unprecedented levels during Obama's final years in office, with numerous nominees either being slow-walked or completely blocked. The most notable occurrence of this was

Senate Republicans refusal to even consider the nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court following the death of Antonin Scalia in February of 2016. Though nominations had been rejected in the past, never before had they simply been ignored due to the fact that the president came from an opposing political party. Then Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell notably bragged to a crowd "One of my proudest moments was when I looked at Barack Obama in the eye and I said, 'Mr. President, you will not fill the Supreme Court vacancy.'" Senator McConnell held that the outcome of the upcoming election²² would decide who had the say. The idea of blocking an appointment in the case of a divided government in the run up to an election would become known at the "McConnell Rule."²³ This denied a sitting president his customary and Constitutionally-appropriated power of judicial appointment and the ability to shape the American judiciary for a generation. This also served white conservative interests of keeping the judiciary more hostile to civil rights and other progressive policies. This Republican-appointed supermajority on the Supreme Court would then go on to hand Donald Trump wide immunity from prosecution, eroding the rule of law as well as Democratic and Liberal norms.²⁴



McConnell and a conservative activist pose with a t-shirt celebrating the blockage of Garland's nomination

20 Which is a part of the United States now and was at the time

21 Obama was not the first President to face this scrutiny. Andrew Johnson & Chester A. Arthur both faced similar accusations, but not while they were serving.

22 At that point several months out and well outside other past nomination windows

23 Despite being its namesake, McConnell would not hold to his rule, working quickly to confirm Trump's nomination of Amy Coney Barrett just days before the election in 2020.

24 Democratic and Liberal in this case used in their classic sense of government by majority and government constrained by laws for individual rights.

Recent examples of whitelash further include banning discussions of racism in schools, under the claim that it makes white students feel uncomfortable or marginalized. However, such freezing of speech and inquiry prevents development of a more than facile understanding of race in America. This impacts not only attitudes, but also policies and laws. When laws expanding voting rights were passed, states searched for ways, cloaked in dog whistles, to suppress this franchise. Voter ID laws, Mass Incarceration, Block Busting, and the "War on Drugs," have all exercised an outsized impact on Black communities. Though progress continues, so does the backlash, now often couched in a rejection of "woke" in the name of "safety" and "comfort."

BRAVE SPACES : NAVIGATING UNSAFE v. UNCOMFORTABLE

In our recent culture war moment, education and the content of our lessons, as well as the way those lessons are being presented, have become a major battleground over “controversial” materials and methodologies. One of the central points on these debates turn on the distinction between feeling uncomfortable versus that of feeling unsafe.

Students, Parents, and Educators²⁵ struggle with this distinction. Conservative and moderate white authorities tend to point out that frank discussions about American history, as well as gender or race relations, make students, especially white students and those from more privileged backgrounds, feel uncomfortable while those in favour of frank discussion point out that avoiding these topics can make marginalized students feel unsafe. Grasping the difference between these two things is vital to create an intellectual environment that is challenging while also being emotionally supportive, allowing us to develop a space for these brave conversations.

I want to look at the ways that being uncomfortable is a necessity for effective education while misplaced or bad faith arguments about safety have been used to stifle needed conversations around this nation's history and as a cudgel to censor education and arts professionals alike. Instead of justifying a clamp down on materials in the name of “protecting the children,” I suggest instead that fostering resilience is an essential step in student cognitive and affective development.

Let us begin with a couple of definitions, since words can mean slightly different things in different contexts. So in an educational setting, what is meant by “uncomfortable” and “unsafe:”

- Uncomfortable: Discomfort is the feeling of unease that comes from encountering new ideas, engaging in difficult conversations, or being challenged on deeply held beliefs. Discomfort can cause stress, frustration, or self-reflection, but it does not pose an actual threat to one's well-being.
- Unsafe: Feeling unsafe means being in physical or emotional danger. This includes experiences of harassment, discrimination, violence, or situations where one's mental or emotional health is seriously at risk. Unsafe environments prevent students from being able to learn effectively.

In the ideal situation, students should sometimes, if not somewhat regularly, feel uncomfortable but never feel unsafe. Sitting with the discomfort of cognitive dissonance, for example, can lead to a strong examination of the ideas and events that are causing the student to feel that way. Though unpleasant, it is an opportunity to expand thinking and challenge assumptions. They should never, however, feel unsafe. Lack of safety, or perception of the same, inhibits intellectual risk taking and strongly damages student performance.

Education for responsible citizenship is a matter of exposing students to new perspectives to encourage critical thinking, and hopefully prepare them for the complex world they are entering. This necessitates uncomfortable discussions about topics such as racism, sexism, and other historical injustices as well as their place within those very systems. Asking oneself how one might be contributing to the ill lot of one's fellow humans, even²⁶ unintentionally is unpleasant and uncomfortable to consider, but they are essential for helping to place oneself in the world holistically as well as for intellectual and moral development.

Educational psychologists have long recognized that mental discomfort is a normal part of learning. Just as one experiences discomfort when stretching a muscle, one experiences mental discomfort when they stretch beyond what it is they personally know or even question what they have already been taught. Cognitive dissonance, the mental discomfort of holding and wrestling with two conflicting thoughts, is a hallmark of wrestling with complex issues and developing deeper understanding. One Example might be discussions about slavery or segregation and the social complicity of the majority of white citizens, and how those structures may still unfairly benefit them to this day. Another might be an examination of discriminatory practices as outlined in a literature class, pointing toward biases in their own communities. It is certainly uncomfortable to think that you might have unearned advantages, especially if you are disadvantaged in other ways, that have helped to put you where you are. But this discomfort is not harmful, it is a sign of learning.

Engaging with discomfort plays a key role in the development of empathy as well as that of emotional resilience. When students explore with challenging topics from a variety of viewpoints, they develop a greater ability to understand and communicate with different perspectives. This is of vital importance in a diverse

25 Especially those coming from more privileged backgrounds

26 Perhaps especially

society, where they will inevitably encounter worldviews different from their own.

Avoidant behaviors do not prepare students for the real world of work and society. They are going to encounter difficult topics, controversial opinions, and strong ethical and moral challenges. This has been true for as long as humans have walked the Earth and will be long after our generation is gone the way of all flesh. We need to be preparing them to engage with respect, think critically, and manage their discomfort effectively and productively.

But to make this possible, safety is tantamount. However, increasingly, the concept of safety is being weaponized to silence dissent and shut down difficult conversations, including a growing push in recent years to remove certain “controversial” topics from the classroom because they make students uncomfortable, and those students²⁷ have mistaken that discomfort for a lack of safety.

The recent push, particularly from conservative and moderate politicians, parents, and community groups, has been to push topics related to race, gender, and social inequality out of the classroom on the grounds that it makes students feel unsafe. However, what students are feeling is uncomfortable. Some states have outright banned discussions of systemic racism, arguing that the comfort of white students is more important than learning about the nature of the social injustice underpinning our society. Another organization, Moms for Liberty, have fought to ban books about the experiences of marginalized communities, claiming that the very presence of these books in the library causes hostile environment, despite these materials providing validation to the lived experience of those who feel represented by them. Even discussions of immigration²⁸ have been set aside as too controversial despite the need to understand the diverse realities that contributing to a worldwide migrant crisis. Suppressing discussion doesn't protect anyone aside from the entrenched power structure, and it does this by preventing the development of the needed knowledge and empathy to engage with this material in a meaningful way.

Safety has become co-opted. Now it is less about protecting students from harm and more about protecting dominant narratives in a culture. This misuse prioritizes the comfort of some students over the inclusion and well-being of other. Suppressing “controversial” topics often harms the marginalized students the most. To have one's lived experience ignored, suppressed, or glossed-over may feel unsafe. As social animals who engage with one another as part of our identity formation, not having those identities acknowledged can damage the process and young people's ability to integrate with their peers. Having somebody use the word “everyone” but to understand yourself to be not included there is isolating. True safety in these cases is not about avoiding discomfort, but instead about ensuring that all students feel seen, valued, and are able to engage authentically with their peers in our shared reality.

Avoiding discomfort actually creates an unsafe environment. Trying not to tread on eggshells makes it more likely to slip and fall. True safety in the classroom means taking steps to ensure all students are respected, seen, heard, and able to learn in a way that acknowledges the situation in their reality. An educator's responsibility is to balance those needs with the emotional support required for them to develop resilience and the ability to bounce back. Difficult conversations will happen, but they will happen deliberately and with attention paid to respect and care for those involved.

This is going to require intentional strategies to foster both these elements. One key approach is the setting of clear expectations and ground rules for engagement, ensuring that the difficult discussion is structured and productive. This should be coupled with open dialogue, allowing students to express viewpoints respectfully without fear of retaliation. This should be coupled with counseling services and peer support groups to assist the student in processing. Teachers play a crucial role here in recognizing and guiding different perspectives while challenging misinformation and stereotypes. But by balancing these demands, we can prepare students for the challenges of America in the 21st century.

Learning to navigate discomfort is important. Instead of shutting down difficult conversations, we should be fostering conversations and engagement with new ideas as opposed to kneejerk reaction. This allows for deeper and more meaningful discussion, which allows for greater and more nuanced understanding of the problems that urgently face out society today. Further, the executive and emotional resilience developed to regulate one's emotions is useful to function more effectively without being overwhelmed. It is an investment that will pay a lifetime of dividends for the students, and generations for our society as a whole.

27 Or perhaps their parents

28 Aside from general surface-level of "the great melting pot" or the Emma Lazarus poem on Liberty Island

THE THORNS AND THISTLES OF THE GARDEN OF YOUR YOUTH: INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Trauma, damage, is often understood as a distressing or deeply disturbing experience that impacts someone's mental, physical, or emotional well-being. However, it does not always begin or end with the individual who had the experience directly, as traumatic experience, or perhaps more accurately the fallout from them, can be passed down to future generations, impacting and molding the lives of those who never directly experienced the original event. This phenomenon is called intergenerational trauma, and has been well documented in families and communities that have suffered significantly.

Intergenerational trauma has been observed in groups who have faced large-scale oppression, violence, and systemic harm. These groups range from Holocaust survivors and their children to colonized Indigenous communities, to Black American communities scarred by slavery and segregation. But breaking this cycle of pain, and fostering the healing that can come with it, requires understanding precisely how trauma can be passed down through successive generations, how it differs from personal trauma, and the biological, social, and cultural mechanisms by which it operates.

To begin, trauma is a deeply disturbing or distressing experience that overcomes an individual's ability to cope or, at times, comprehend, the emotional psychological, or even physical harm being done to them. Bessel van der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, relates the trauma response to the fight or flight response, particularly if the fight or flight instincts are foiled and the individual is unable to attempt either. However, though this is often understood as impacting a specific individual, this is not always the case. In the case of intergenerational trauma, an individual can inherit the patterns of emotional distress and behavioral responses from their ancestors, potentially even physiological changes from their ancestors who experienced the initial event.

Recent research in epigenetics²⁹ suggests that severe trauma is capable of causing chemical modification to certain genetic responses. Research on the children of Holocaust survivors, for example, found higher than normal incidence of heightened stress response and PTSD-like symptoms, while studies in the Black community show increased vulnerability to chronic stress-related illnesses such as hypertension and heart disease.³⁰ Though not decisive, there are consistent findings that point to a biological imprint of trauma which impacts how future generations respond to adversity.

Learned behaviors can also be passed from parents and grandparents to future generations, and children in traumatized communities often pick up these behaviors from their elders as part of their socialization and upbringing. Though the child may not experience the traumatic event directly, they may absorb hypervigilance, fear of authority, or distrust of outsiders, particularly in the case of children whose parents fled war or genocide. Victims of cultural or racial traumas may internalize a sense of grief for lost culture, which can lead to a sense of unworthiness. Further, familial and social structures can reinforce the sense that the world is unsafe and things are stacked against the group, this collective anxiety can impact young people's choice of living situation for themselves, helping to perpetuate patterns.

Further, if the trauma is not discussed, the silence and emotional repression created by the understanding that the family has endured immense suffering but this experience cannot be unpacked, must be hidden, or is an object of great shame. Such silence around formative events, particularly those of central cultural import to the community, leads to a fragmented development of sense of identity and struggle with integrating different parts of one's whole being.

These issues can be further exacerbated by the ways elders interact with their children. Parents who have endured traumatic experiences may communicate this through their parenting style, which can swing wildly from overprotective to emotionally sterile. The hypervigilance that often comes with surviving war or genocide can lead to a lack of overall attachment, making it difficult to provide warmth or affection, and strict discipline, as a way of attempting to protect them by making them "model citizens." These patterns and their impact on a child's emotional development can echo into adulthood, resulting in difficulties forming relationships as well as struggles with anxiety and a self-worth.

²⁹ The field of genetics that studies environmental interaction with the genetic code

³⁰ These studies have some limitations on demonstrating statistical significance when controlling for factors in the Black community such as overpolicing, food insecurity, and healthcare access

Recovering or Healing intergenerational trauma begins with understanding the nature of trauma itself, how beliefs and behavior patterns are transmitted from generation to generation, and then acknowledging the existence of the event and the damage that it has caused. Open conversation about events, no matter how unpleasant or distant, allows individuals to begin processing their emotions and develop a deeper understanding of their family's history and their place within it. Historical education that validates the lived experiences of marginalized communities further can help to provide light and air within a community to build understanding.

This should be coupled with a restorative process, providing access to therapy and trauma-informed care for the individuals working through their grief and pain while they and their descendants also reclaim cultural traditions, languages, and customs to rebuild their sense of belonging and identity. Strengthening these identifications can work along the same vectors as the spread of intergenerational trauma, but instead provide grounds for intergenerational connection, mentorship, and the building of resilience. However, this will require systemic change to how these communities are approached and significant resources developed to work toward true healing, ensuring that future generations inherit resilience instead of pain.

COMING OF AGE: CLOSING THE GAP

Morning comes. Light grows. A child wakes. A Promise begins.

Children of color walk roads paved by others. Carrying their weight. Bearing their wounds. Hearing their whispers. The past does not sleep so much as linger.

The world hands down labels. *Troublemaker. Thug. Other. Less.* Words are sharp weapons and cuts are deep. But beneath these names, a self burns, waiting to rise.

Stories of whips. Stories of chains and stolen land. Sundered families, erased tongues, forgotten gods. Sweetened history seeps in early, softening and hiding, blanketing classrooms in uncomfortable silence. But they listen between the lines and learn to read the missing words.

If they find themselves, it is in the spaces left blank by the official story.

Power sets limits. Know your place. Speak softly. Don't ask too much. Remain beneath notice. But children are not made for cages, and they grow. They stretch. They push. Out. Out past the walls. Then it dawns. Those walls were never real.

Survival is resistance, and the breath of the ancestors lingers in their lungs. The stories of scars tell not of pain alone, but of healing. Endurance.

Yes, the journey is long. Yes, the burden heavy. But they find beauty too in the songs passed down. In the jokes of those who understand, and in knowing they are not alone.

Coming of age is to tear down those labels and carve new names in stone. To close the gap between what they are and what they would be, what the world says and what they know to be true.

And in that moment, unshaken and utterly themselves, they step into the light.



Photo credit Kevin Condon

COMPANY BIOS

Jarred Pearce (Chaka) Jarred is returning to Burning Coal's stage for the 3rd time! His first ever show at Burning Coal was in 2023 when he played two characters in "ONA". He came back last year as "Bryce" in "Ex-Boyfriends" and now he makes his third return in his first leading role on stage as "Chaka". Jarred started acting again at the end of 2022 after taking 10 years off, but he always knew acting was his childhood dream. He debuted in his first show as Papa Bear in RLT's (Raleigh Little Theatre) "Three Little Pigs" and as ensemble in "Blood Wedding". He has recently also taken his acting even further and has debuted on national tv as a reenactment actor on a true crime television show called "Fatal Attraction". The show airs on "TV One". Jarred has been on Season 14 episode 46, Season 15 episode 32 and Season 16 episode 09. Not only that, but Jarred has also been in quite a few short films and is currently shooting his first feature length film that will be put on Tubi. Jarred enjoys making people laugh and always strives to be the best friend and the best person he can be. He's striving to be one of the greatest actors of his generation. Jarred is extremely grateful to have been given a chance to work with such wonderful directors (Vieve & Chuk), the honorable artistic director in Jerome Davis. Such a great stage manager in Julianna Frasca, all the crew members and all the lovely, gifted, talented and skilled actors and actresses that he gets to share the stage with.

Joseph Reese (Willy) Selected Performance Credits: Titus Andronicus (Prospect Theatre Project), Cadence: Home (T'EA), Hamlet (Arkansas Rep), Much Ado About Nothing (EBE Ensemble), Ragtime (Paramount Theatre), and Best Little Whorehouse in Texas (ECU/Loessin Playhouse). Joseph is also a poet and opera librettist. Opera/stage works include Orgullo (Maryland Opera Studio Commission, premier at the Public Theatre in NYC) Fatty Fatty No Friends (FringeNYC Excellence Award Winner, Innovative Theater Award Nomination, New York Musical Festival Best of Fest Concert, Time Out New York Critic's Pick), Whiskey Pants: The Mayor of Williamsburg (Audience Favorite at FRIGID New York, Showscore Critic's Pick, off-broadway premiere at HERE), Cadence: Home, and Red Sky the Musical. He is represented by UIA Talent Agency. For Lindsey, Jolie, and Everly. (www.savageally.com)

Nikki Giovanni Dublin-Turner (Purilla) is a Raleigh, NC native with a lifelong passion for the arts, dance, education, and advocacy. She holds a BS in Business Administration with a Marketing concentration from St. Augustine's University and a BA in Dance from Meredith College. As a dance educator, advocate, and activist, Nikki fosters creativity, inclusivity, empowerment, and cultural representation both in and outside the classroom. She brings this approach to her work as a multi-arts preschool teacher and teaching artist at Arts Together. In the spirit of Sankofa, she facilitates movement programs supporting individuals dealing with trauma, mental health awareness, senior citizens, and those with special needs. Rooted in her community, she also works with Wake County School Pre-K programs funded by The Kennedy Center. Her transformative methods have inspired fellow educators to embrace more inclusive teaching practices. Nikki has performed with Rainbow Dance Company, Black Box Dance Theater, and 2 Near The Edge. In 2020, she made her theater debut, portraying Lillian in ACCORD(ing), an immersive piece directed by Vieve Radha Price and Bronwen Carson. Above all, Nikki's most cherished role is that of Mama and Nana. She enjoys visiting quaint towns, spending time with family and friends, exploring nature, biking, and traveling.

Miriam Yisroyel Tabb (Inaya) had the honor and pleasure of acting in all 3 plays in T'ea Artistry's Weaver series. Her other off-Broadway performances include her one-woman show Matriarch at Theater Lab, the role of Venus of Willendorf in Alfred Preisser's Caligula Maximus and as a puppeteer/ensemble member of Theodora Skiptares' Medea (both at La MaMa E.T.C.). Miriam played the role of Kira Durand for My Father's Ashes, written & directed by Tom J. Slot for Original Bindings Production at Theater 54. Miriam was nominated for a Planet Connections award for Outstanding Actress in a Featured or Cameo Role of a Play or Musical. The role was Preacher in Miss Nowhere Diner written by Kathleen Potts, directed by Lydia Fort at Robert Moss Theatre. As a playwright and director, she created broken motherhood museum and Turning Points which premiered at 133rd St Arts Center and Aaron Davis Hall respectively. Miriam Tabb holds a B.A. in Theatre from The City College of New York.

Gabrielle Morell (Kunzang) is thrilled to make her debut with Burning Coal Theatre in Being Chaka. A native of Raleigh, North Carolina, she began her artistic journey in 2014 at the North Carolina Theater Conservatory, training under Kenny Gannon, Paul Paliyenko, and Michael Santangelo. Gabrielle further honed her craft while earning her degree at Hampshire College, where she portrayed a witch and the lead's love interest in Everybody Knows the Moon is Blue, written and directed by Sofia Anastasia. Gabrielle is an alum of Back to One Acting Studio and in-STUDIO, having studied advanced On-Camera and Scene Study with Bronwen Carson and Lee Spencer since 2021. She has performed in two Back to One showcases, playing Boochie in Stephen Adly Guirgis's Den of Thieves and Sam in Halley Feiffer's How to Make Friends and Then Kill Them. Gabrielle is currently represented by JTA Talent Agency. She would like to extend her thanks to the cast and crew of Being Chaka, Burning Coal, her family, friends, boyfriend, and mentors for their unwavering support and guidance.

Emma Katherine Stone (Maddy) is extremely excited to make her professional theater debut with Burning Coal Theater in Being Chaka. Emma grew up with a natural love of storytelling, performing and being on stage. Emma has spent the last few years predominantly working in film, acting in a plethora of projects, short films and pilot episodes, while also gathering a few crew credits as a Director's Assistant. Emma has studied mainly with Bronwen Carson and Estes Tarver, working through the years to craft real, complex and honest characters. Outside of acting, Emma enjoys physical activity, reading, crocheting, spending time with loved ones and playing Super Mario Bros Wii! Emma would like to thank all audience members for attending our show and she invites you to watch with an open mind and an open heart. "It is important we seek first to understand before we seek to be understood, for in humility there is peace."

Hunter Crone (Ethan) is honored to be making his debut with Burning Coal Theatre in Being Chaka. Hunter is an alum from Back-to-One Acting Studio and in-STUDIO where he has studied on-camera acting and scene study with Bronwen Carson, Lee Spencer, and Drew Matthews since 2021. Hunter made his theatre debut in Back-to-One's Performance Night where he performed as 'Flaco' from Den of Thieves and as 'Avery' from The Flick, both directed by Bronwen Carson. Hunter would like to thank his wonderful Mom and Dad for supporting him throughout his artistic journey, his crazy brother and sister, the best two dogs in the world, and his amazing group of friends.

Joey Brenneman (Caroline) is thrilled to be a part of Being Chaka at Burning Coal. She originated the role of Caroline in Téa Artistry's NYC Production in 2023. Joey is also a director and playwright. Her next project will be directing Mystic Conversations, by Julia Barry Bell, at Theater Row in NYC. In July she will be directing a new play that she also wrote called Escape the Noise, which explores smartphone and social media addiction among teenagers. Escape the Noise was accepted into the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it will have its international premiere in August. New York Directing Credits include A Burial Place, Vestments of the Gods, Timing of A Day (all by Owen Panettieri), Two GIRls (Gabrielle Maisels), and Truth Values (Gioia DiCari). Playwright credits include Of Loss and Grace, Uncorked, Better Left Unsaid, and Off. In addition to theater work, Joey has filmed brain surgery, co-developed a tree-themed event for Hermès New York, and is the co-host of Before We Die, a podcast about biomedical technology. She is a proud mama and is married to actor, Craig Waletzko. joeybrenneman.com

Amanda Marikar (Ms. K) has been a proud member of TE'A since 2010 (Under the Veil), and is thrilled to return to Being Chaka, after being a part of the original NYC company. Selected credits: Cadence: Home (TE'A, co-writer and performer), Mein Uncle (440 Lafayette), At War (Bleecker St.), Quake (Finborough Theatre, London), readings for MCC Theater, Rattlestick, terraNOVA, & ESPA. Co-founding member of FRESH PRODUCE'd, Play By Play NYC, and member of Our Bar NYC. Maggie Flanigan Studio, Moscow Art Theatre, BADA, Oxford University, B.A. Barnard College. Amanda is an adventurous home cook and freelance food writer. For Mom. (www.amanda-marikar.com)

Christa Irby (Annalisa) is honored to make her debut with Burning Coal Theatre in Being Chaka. Her stage credits include the ensemble in Porgy and Bess and Dionne in Hair at Cape Fear Regional Theatre, and Bob Marley's Three Little Birds and The Sound of Motown Christmas with Pure Life Theatre. An English major with a deep love for African American history and literature, Christa's artistic journey is shaped by a passion for storytelling that reflects culture, history, and identity. When not on stage, she works as an elementary school teacher and freelance writer, weaving creativity into the classroom and beyond. Christa is grateful to her family for their unwavering love and support, to Burning Coal and Being Chaka's directors for the creative vision, and to God for grace, mercy and blessings.

Andrew Price Carlile (Gunnar) is delighted to return to the Burning Coal stage after Haughey/Gregory and The Rainmaker. Recent area credits include Dancing at Lughnasa with FireBox Theatre; favorite roles include Dr. Treves in The Elephant Man and Judas in The Last Days of Judas Iscariot. When not onstage, Andrew can be found playing capoeira, guitar, and board games. His love and gratitude go out to Sally, Yana, and Korra for breathing life into the process. See more at www.andrew-price-carlile.com

Jennifer Ijeoma (Costume Designer) is excited to be working with Burning Coal Theatre. Jennifer works alongside the leadership of Pure Life Theatre Company as the managing director of Revolutionary Voices Theatre Company. Her love for the arts has propelled her to dive more into costuming the theatre world. Jennifer has costumed The Motown Sounds of Christmas, Fences, MaRainey's Black Bottom, She Persisted, Hymn, Home and Jitney. She has created costumes for Burning Coal Theatre, Pure Life Theater and Revolutionary Voices summer camps production of Newsies, Beauty and the Beast Jr, and Willie Wonka Jr. Jennifer has worked in education for 27 years and strongly advocates for the NAACP's ACT-SO program.

Julianna Frasca (Production Stage Manager) is excited to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre for Being Chaka after stage managing for Hymn early last year. Before Burning Coal, she stage managed for Eastline Theatre on Long Island in their productions of Angels in America (both parts), In the Next Room, and Being Earnest, a queer adaptation of The Importance of Being Earnest. Other credits include stage manager for Canned Laughter at the Downtown Urban Arts Festival, and assistant stage manager for Malefactions at Cradle Theatre Company. Julianna would like to thank her wonderful husband, William, and loving dog, Nacho, for supporting her while she leaves every night for rehearsals.

Brenda Bailey (Assistant Stage Manager) is honored to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre for Being Chaka after assistant stage managing for Rainmaker earlier in this season. When not behind the scenes, Brenda can also be seen on stage in productions such as Bob Marley's: Three Little Birds and Bright Star with Pure Life Theater, Doubt with Magnolia Arts Center and Crisis of Moments in partnership with North Carolina Central and Duke University. Outside of theater, Brenda can be seen performing live music and hosting poetry events throughout the Triangle.

Astrid Paola Maldonado (Assistant Stage Manager) is so excited to be working on her 2nd show at the Burning Coal Theatre. Her first show with Burning Coal was Paint Me This House of Love in the position of ASM. Before that she worked on shows at Stephen F. Austin State University which includes tech credits from: The 39 Steps, Once Upon a Mattress, Real Women Have Curves, and many others as a carpenter. The Piano Lesson and Nice and Slow as wardrobe crew. She has also ran lights for SFA's production of Talking With. She is very much looking forward to working with the amazing people involved in this production of Being Chaka.

Veniza Catlett (Assistant Stage Manager) is thrilled to be working with Burning Coal Theatre Company for the first time! Since relocating to the U.S. in 2022, she has become a dedicated member and choreographer for FAPA-NC. Last year, Veniza portrayed Cousin Chinese Bird in Pure Life Theatre's production of Three Little Birds. Prior to this, she spent nearly a decade honing her craft as a resident artist and apprentice director with the Integrated Performing Arts Guild (IPAG) in the Philippines, performing across the country, in various parts of Asia, and in multiple states across the U.S. (2018). Veniza extends her heartfelt gratitude to her son, Thaddeus, and her husband, Timothy, for being her daily inspiration!

Meredith Riggan (Scenic Charge Artist) is a North Carolina based artist and is excited to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre Company for the production of Being Chaka. This will be Meredith's 9th season painting for Burning Coal Theatre. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Scenic Art from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Meredith has worked as the Scenic Charge Artist at several theatres around North Carolina including William Peace University, Half Pint Theatre, Sweet Tea Shakespeare, Triad Stage, City Arts-Greensboro Children's Theatre, The Winston Salem Theatre Alliance, ECU Loessin Playhouse, along with several freelance jobs such as painting for The International Festival and painting custom pet portraits through her business, Riggan Originals.

ColeTrain (Shop Dog "Paint Assistant") is excited to be a part of another production at Burning Coal Theatre. He has been "assisting" his Scenic Artist Mom in several theatres since he was 7 weeks old. He has no formal training in Scenic Art, but will retrieve a paint brush occasionally. He is great at supervising projects, looking cute, and leaves a paw print on every set. ColeTrain is a 10/10 good boy.

Bri Flynn (Props Wrangler) For Burning Coal Theatre: Moonlight, Haughey/Gregory, and The Rainmaker. For Raleigh Little Theatre: Curtains, Hands on a Hardbody, and Trouble In Mind. In addition to her 10 years of Film and Technical Theater experience, Bri is a graduate of The Savannah College of Art and Design where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Production Design with a Set/Lighting Concentration. She is grateful to Burning Coal for giving her the opportunity to join the wonderful cast and crew of Being Chaka.

Eric S. Kildow (Study Guide) For Burning Coal: Man of La Mancha, Brigadoon, As You Like It, Shining City, Good, Ruined, The Heretic, (3 Man) Tempest, Jesus Fund, Diary of Anne Frank, Fayetteville Street, Outrunning Bullets, The Wiz, Blue Sky, Spoonface Steinberg, Oakwood, Skylight, Written on the Heart, Heisenberg, The Royale, Darkside, Peter Pan & Wendy, Normal Heart, King Charles III, Stuff Happens, Ashe in Johannesburg, The Container, Camelot, Animal Farm, A Hundred Words for Snow, Conversations I Always Wanted to Have, Evita, I & You, and The Road to Mecca, Arcadia, Moonlight, Hymn, A Little Night Music, Being Chaka. Eric is Associate Professor of Theatre at Kent State University and works as a freelance dramaturg & director. As an artistic associate of the London-based Loitering With Intent, he presented the devised work Turn Right/Turn Left: A Manual for the End of the World at Fleet Street Theatre in Hamburg, Germany. He is a member of Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas, Lincoln Center Director's Lab and Burning Coal Company of Artists.

Carry Vaughan-Sprouse (House Manager) has been with Burning Coal Theatre since 2013 as their lead House Manager/Front of House Coordinator. She has also stage managed, assistant stage managed and assistant directed numerous productions in her time at Burning Coal. Her favorites are The Heretic (2013), Iron Curtain Trilogy - Raleigh and London Tours (2014), Romeo and Juliet (2015), Dark Vanilla Jungle - London Tour (2016), The Normal Heart (2018), A Hundred Words for Snow (2020), I and You (2021), A Great Big Woolly Mammoth Thawing from the Ice (2022), and Radio (2024).

Julianna Babcock (Lighting Designer) Is thrilled to be returning to Burning Coal as lighting designer for this production. This is Julianna's second show as a designer, having previously designed Matilda Jr. for the summer theatre conservatory. However, she has also worked as the assistant lighting designer for four shows with Burning Coal. While she has a passion for lighting design, she is a business administration major at William Peace University here in Raleigh. She is hoping for many more opportunities in the theatre and has enjoyed working with all the talented people involved with this production. Special thanks goes out to her dog, Walter, for all his moral support through this project.

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NC EDUCATION STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina values the skills and competencies of Arts education due to their applicability to other disciplines. These productions are designed to give your students exposure to the competencies and specific standards listed below.

This production and the related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Standard Course of Study Competencies and Objectives in the Theatre Arts.

- **COMPETENCY GOAL 1:** The learner will write based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 1.02: Recognize the beginning, middle, and end of a story
 - 1.03: Infer lessons from multicultural stories, fairy tales, tall tales, legends, and myths.
 - 1.06: Refine reading comprehension by using verbal and non-verbal communication.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 1.01: Recognize and explain unique characteristics of the dramatic script such as dramatic structure and dialogue.
 - 1.04: Produce written, verbal, and visual responses to written and/or performed dramatic material.
 - 1.05: Identify themes and plots from multicultural literature.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 1.03: Compare and contrast play structure in relation to other forms of literature.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 7:** The learner will analyze, critique, and construct meaning from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 7.01: Build skills to critique self and others in a respectful and constructive manner.
 - 7.03: Convey personal reactions to various texts.
 - 7.05: Communicate emotions and thoughts evoked by performance.
 - 7.07: Suggest alternative characters, settings, or events after viewing or participating in a performance.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 7.01: Recognize and practice audience etiquette.
 - 7.03: Develop verbal, visual and written responses to works of informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions from various cultures.
 - 7.04: Express meaning perceived from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 7.02: Develop and relate a world view of theatre in society.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 8:** The learner will understand context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 8.04: Experience live or recorded performance
 - 8.05: Discuss the similarities and differences between live and recorded theatrical events.

This production is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Anchor Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies.

- Reading Anchor 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Reading Anchor 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Writing Anchor 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Writing Anchor 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.