IMMERSIVE THEATRE

You are about to enter an immersive theatre experience.

This is a way of storytelling that puts the audience into the time, place and environment and removes the barriers of traditional performance. Upon entering, the audience will be transported to a university in the south in the late 1950s. The aim for historical accuracy may put the audience in uncomfortable situations that explores a time of many issues that may cause members discomfort. If you ever wish to leave this immersive experience find a “guard” who will show you to the nearest exit. Upon entering the theatre you may take a seat wherever you wish.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Actors may talk to you but please do not talk to the actors.

Actors may invite you to follow them but please do not touch them.

Actors may voice character points of view that you find distasteful or disagree with; please remember this is an experience that explores issues of racism, bullying, homophobia, segregation, intolerance and prejudice.

The views expressed by the characters are merely that: a character’s point of view and not that of the actor or the team creating the show.

Historical Background

By Glenn Chambers

Though customary throughout much of the history of the United States, legal racial segregation became the law of the land following the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision in which a 7-1 decision ruled that racial segregation did not violate the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment to the constitution. As a result, the concept of “separate, but equal” became national policy until it was successfully challenged in the Brown v Board of Education case in 1954. Jim Crow laws touched on every aspect of daily life. Though things remained separate, they were never equal. African Americans were relegated to certain neighborhoods, cities passed curfews relegating the movement of black Citizens and public facilities and other accommodations were separated based on race. Institutions such as prisons, hospitals, schools, colleges, and orphanages were also separate.

The nation perfected the notion of “separate,” but never embraced the idea of “equal” in terms of resources provided for African-Americans. African-American institutions were almost always underresourced and underfunded by federal and state institutions even though African-Americans paid taxes. Also, the seemingly rigid public enforcement of Jim Crow laws often hid the mental trauma associated with the practice. If African Americans went against the societal norm, they were subjected to vigilante justice, terrorism, and a legal system partial to whites. The goal of segregation was to reinforce a political, racial, economic, and cultural hierarchy based on white supremacy in which African
Americans were subordinate and inferior to Whites.

The *De jure*, or legal segregation was much more prevalent in the South in which the legacy of slavery and the Civil War was ever-present in the economic and cultural institutions of the region. However, in Northern environments, *de facto* or customary segregation was just as damaging. Restrictive housing covenants and red-lining kept African Americans out of certain neighborhoods and denied them access to educational opportunities. Many industries would not hire African Americans and unions passed extensive laws to exclude them. Efforts to desegregate Northern institutions were met with the same hate and vitriol as they were in the South. The legacy of segregation still permeates many aspects of our society.

Glenn Chambers is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at MSU.

**“Thus with a kiss I die”**

*Romeo and Juliet*

Act V Scene iii

**Shakespeare in Black and White: A brief history of casting**

The above photo shows a rare university production featuring both black and white actors. What makes it unique is that the photo is from 1906. This production of *Twelfth Night* from Atlanta University is a rarity indeed as most universities or professional organizations (both southern or northern) did not practice colorblind casting until well after the 1950s.

According to Ayanna Thomas in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Casting*, “The systematic practice of non-traditional or ‘colorblind’ casting began with Joseph Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival in the 1950s. Although colorblind casting has been practiced for half a century now, it still inspires vehement controversy and debate.”

One must look at “colorblind casting in cultural terms and the theoretical implications of this practice for reading Shakespeare in a contemporary context.”

Colorblind and color conscious casting still cause debate in today’s theatrical world.

ACCESSIBILITY/MOBILITY QUESTIONS?

In this immersive theatre piece, you may choose infinite experiences.

Follow one actor for the evening.

Stay in limited locations and let the action come to you.

Or follow whichever storyline intrigues you most.

Should you choose the highly active path please be aware that this performance is not recommended for audience members who are not comfortable standing, walking, climbing stairs or being alone. Because of the immersive nature of this piece, audiences may be standing for several minutes at a time over the course of the performance and will also be required to navigate several flights of stairs.

Audiences are encouraged to wear comfortable shoes.

Should you choose a less active path for your experience, there are four separate rooms across the Auditorium Building you must travel to. All are accessible.

Enter the Auditorium at the Fairchild Theatre entrance in the back of the building.