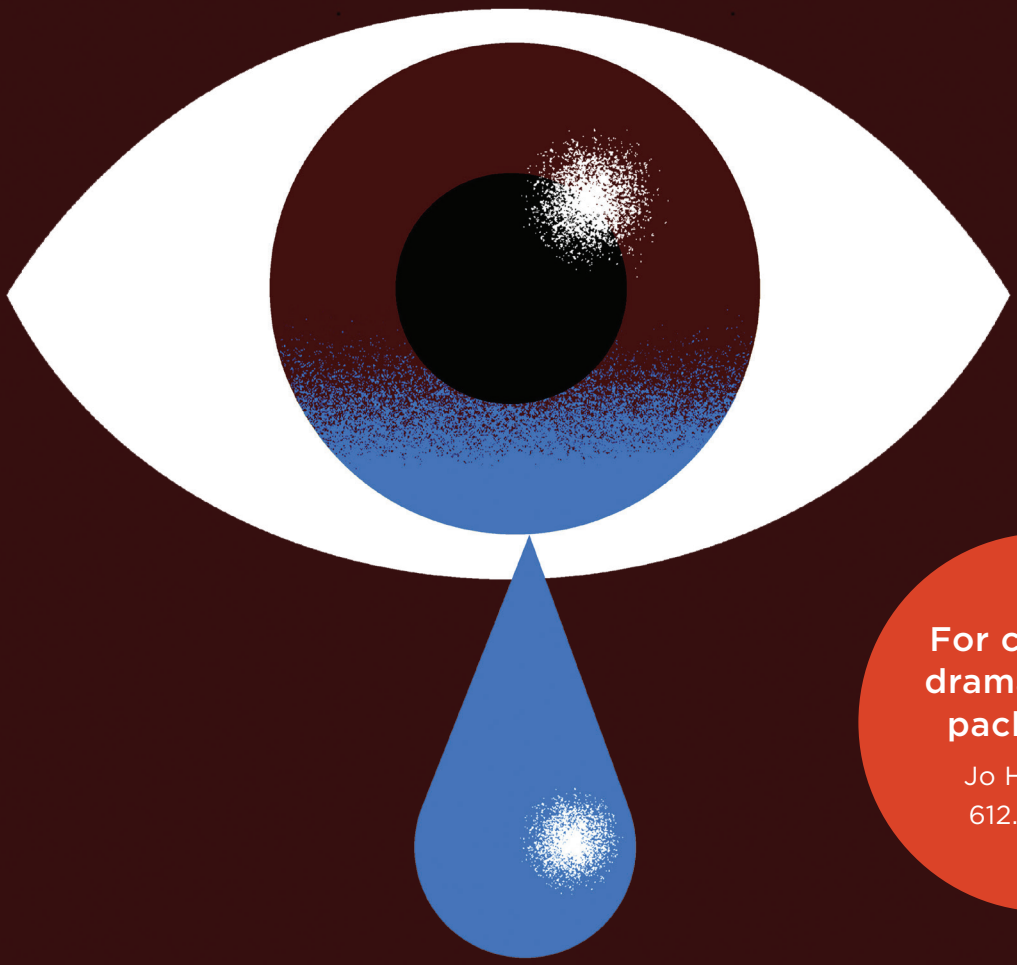
GUTHRIE THEATER

Wurtele Thrust Stage / April 15 – May 21, 2017



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Toni Morrison's

The Bluest Eye

adapted by LYDIA R. DIAMOND
directed by LILEANA BLAIN-CRUZ

STUDY GUIDE

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GUTHRIE THEATER

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The Guthrie Theater, founded in 1963, is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training. By presenting both classical literature and new work from diverse cultures, the Guthrie illuminates the common humanity connecting Minnesota to the peoples of the world.

Guthrie Theater Study Guide

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Brittany Bellizeare as Pecola

PHOTO: LAUREN MUELLER

Synopsis

The Bluest Eye tells the story of one year in the life of a young black girl in 1940s Lorain, Ohio. Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove wants nothing more than to be loved by her family and schoolmates. Left to fend for herself, she blames her dark skin and prays for blue eyes, sure that love will follow. The events of *The Bluest Eye* take place primarily from the Autumn of 1940 to the same time in 1941, but in order to explain the full stories behind those events, the narrative frequently moves back in time.

The Characters

Claudia MacTeer is the younger of two sisters in the MacTeer family. She contributes two "voices" to the story — one as a child, one as an adult — with curiosity, compassion and perspective, which she uses to reflect on the fate of her childhood friend, Pecola.

Frieda MacTeer is the older of the sisters, less adventuresome and witty than Claudia and, in some ways, dependent on her sister for judgment, despite her reserves of general, practical information.

Pecola Breedlove is the "little-girl-gone-to-woman" in the story. She shares her family's conviction that she is ugly and unworthy but somehow has sufficient resolve to attempt a few self-help strategies. Of all the characters, Pecola has been most damaged by her circumstances in life, beginning with having a family incapable of normal expressions of love and protection. Nearly every event in her life leaves her a victim, and the story examines what influences led to her fate and what influences kept her from being helped.

Mrs. MacTeer/Mama is too busy maintaining a household on meager resources to hover affectionately over her children, but her love for Claudia and Frieda is evident in the work she does to keep the family nourished, healthy and together.

Mr. MacTeer has little verbal presence in his household, but he works hard to keep the family going and is fiercely protective of his children when it is necessary.

Mr. Yacobowski, as a member of the immigrant working class, has also been marginalized by mainstream society, but as a white male, he is "allowed" to feel superior to a little black girl. His interaction with Pecola supplies the narrative with a vignette portraying the dynamics of class division in American society.

Mrs. Breedlove/Pauline, originally from the South, fails to find community, intimacy or sustaining work in Ohio. She falls under the spell of lifestyle and beauty standards that she cannot achieve and consequently drifts into resentment, self-righteousness and greater isolation. Cut off from any source of emotional self-nourishment, she is unable to nurture her children. Her daughter, Pecola, calls her Mrs. Breedlove.

Mr. Breedlove/Cholly, Pauline's husband and Pecola's father, knew nothing about his father and was abandoned by his mother at four days of age. He is, nonetheless, vigorous, sensual and spirited — perhaps because he was rescued and raised by Aunt Jimmy and her warmhearted female friends — and has no trouble calling attention to himself once he leaves home after his aunt's death and enters the world.

Aunt Jimmy is Cholly's aunt, who rescues him at the age of four days from the train tracks. She is a woman of great energy and warmth and, as a result, is surrounded by a bevy of older female friends who heap affection and concern onto Cholly. When she becomes ill and dies, Cholly is overwhelmed with feelings of loss but has no means of expressing them. Although Aunt Jimmy's friends would have stepped in to take charge of him, Cholly, with no immediate family members left, flees.

Soaphead Church/Elihue Micah Whitcomb His name Soaphead refers to the particular appearance of his hair—tight and curly that held "a sheen and wave when pomaded with soap lather." Soaphead's chief attribute is his fastidiousness, which creates the necessity for a pristine and lifeless "life." He uses his "special powers" to grant Pecola her wish for blue eyes.

About the Adaptor

Lydia Diamond was born Lydia Gartin in Detroit, Michigan in April 1969. She began seeing Broadway shows at around age eight — touring productions presented in the University of Massachusetts Fine Arts Center that her mother managed. "I grew up with no money, lots and lots of books and a single mother with a Ph.D." The first "grown-up play" she saw at her mother's theater was *The Elephant Man*. "The audience was disturbed that I was there, because I was so young." (American Theatre Magazine, December, 2011)

As a child, Diamond studied violin and piano, met famous artists through her mother, and never lived anywhere longer than a few years, as her mother pursued her academic career in Detroit, Carbondale, Ill.; Itta Bena, Miss.; Amherst, Mass.; and Waco, Tex. The only geographical constant came during summers, which she spent with her grandparents, both educators, in the little town of Sparta, Ill.

Diamond's high school in Waco had "a pretty decent theatre program," and among the parts she played was Vera in Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians.* Although the character is involved in a romance, she recalls, "They wouldn't let us kiss at the end because I was black. I was the only black kid doing theatre." Diamond graduated to being virtually the only African American college student doing theater at Northwestern. Her aim was to be an actor — she spent 10 years identifying herself as one, while waiting tables, teaching and writing: "I was writing plays long before I thought of myself as a playwright."

She wrote her first adult play for an undergraduate course, and decided in 1992 to produce it herself in the basement of a vegetarian restaurant in Chicago called Cafe Voltaire, where she also worked as a cook. Diamond created her own theater company to do so, and called it Another Small Black Theatre Company With Good Things to Say and a Lot of Nerve Productions.

Her husband, sociologist John Diamond, saw one of her early plays and was, in his words, "Blown away. She grappled with the issues of race, class, sexuality and marginality that are infused in all of her work but, because it was essentially a one-woman show and somewhat autobiographical, it was very personal. I felt like I knew her a lot better."

Diamond's subjects have varied, but her work generally alternates between black history plays and contemporary dramas with autobiographical elements that use humor to sweeten a sometimes dark exploration of family relationships, race, gender and class.

Why I Had to Adapt *The Bluest Eye*

by Lydia R. Diamond
Adaptor

In high school I was given Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a gift from my English teacher, who had picked me out as someone she wanted to mentor. I read it, but it went over my head. I think I was so young that I just shut down in places where it was hurtful or too close to the truth.

When I got to college, I realized that I wasn't being given the canon of African American writers in my literature classes or in the theater department, so I went looking for them myself. I made it my mission to go out and get every one of Toni Morrison's books and read them. I knew that she was a genius and that she spoke to my soul, even if I didn't understand it all. When I read *The Bluest Eye*, I still had a strange response. The themes were too close to me or too painful. I deluded myself into thinking it was because it was beyond me. The writing was piercing, and it was easier to tell myself, "I don't understand."

But it's very simple. *The Bluest Eye* is the story of a young African American girl and her family who are affected by a dominant American culture that says to them: "You're not beautiful; you're not relevant; you're invisible; you don't even count." There is pain in the novel – the way in which our country has dealt with race, the way in which the power structure has hurt us, *and* the way in which it has made us hurt ourselves. Often enough we African Americans don't get the opportunity to say, "This is the source of my dysfunction, and it's not all my fault." To be shown that when you are young is painful, horrible. On the other hand, it's affirming to have all these things made clear; things that I knew were sick and wrong, things that touched me in intangible ways, were all made clear just by having the lives of people like me represented in literature.

Morrison's writing is elegant and purposeful, never didactic or thematic. It's from the soul. When I'm teaching, I tell my students that when you're writing from your soul about what you know, it's always going to be political and relevant. So *The Bluest Eye* is not about race, but it's about the world of the characters, and unfortunately and fortunately they live in a place that's all about race.

The call to write this adaptation for Steppenwolf Theatre came in 2005, days after I'd had my first baby. Actually, that coincidence made it feel so very relevant to my life. I thought, "All right! I'm a mother, and this book is more relevant to my life than ever; but I'm also a playwright, and people still know that I'm a playwright." I needed that affirmation at exactly that time.

So I said "yes" without thinking, and then I thought, "Oh my God, did I just say yes to this enormous project?" I started reading the book again while I was holding my baby.

Entire sections I had read many times before suddenly made more sense, were more personal. There were moments that resonated, like when Frieda and Claudia, towards the end of the novel, talk about a newborn boy; they talk about the little circles of "O" in his hair. I was reading about this little brown baby that these characters were praying would survive, and I was holding my own little boy, and the text was just heartbreaking. My little baby had circles of "O" in his hair, too. And right then I realized that I was adapting *The Bluest Eye* for Baylor, my son, and it was the most empowering and frightening and wonderful thing.

This essay first appeared in Steppenwolf Theatre's Study Guide for *The Bluest Eye*. It is reprinted here with their and Ms. Diamond's permission and generosity.

About the Author

Raised in the North, Toni Morrison's southern roots were deliberately severed by both her maternal and paternal grandparents. Her maternal grandfather, John Solomon Willis, had his inherited Alabama farm swindled from him by a predatory white man; as a consequence of this injustice, he moved his family first to Kentucky, where a less overt racism continued to make life intolerable, and then to Lorain, Ohio, a mid-western industrial center with employment possibilities that drew large numbers of migrating southern blacks. Morrison's paternal grandparents also left their Georgia home in reaction to the hostile, racist culture that included lynchings and other oppressive acts. As a result, the South as a region did not exist as a benevolent inherited resource for Morrison while she was growing up; it became more of an estranged section of the country from which she had been helped to flee. As is evident in her novels, Morrison returned by a spiritually circuitous route to the strong southern traditions that would again be reinvigorated and re-experienced as life sustaining.

The future Nobel literature laureate was born Chloe Ardelia Wofford at home in Lorain, Ohio, on February 18, 1931, the second child and daughter to George and Ella Ramah Willis Wofford. Two distinguishing experiences in her early years were, first, living with the sharply divided views of her parents about race (her father was actively disdainful of white people, her mother more focused on individual attitudes and behavior) and, second, beginning elementary school as the only child already able to read. This latter distinction was a result of her family's emphasis on acquiring cultural literacy, especially in literature and music. Her maternal grandfather was an accomplished violinist, and her mother was a talented singer who performed in the church choir and sang frequently around the house. Folk music was especially prominent for Morrison. Reading and storytelling were also promoted, and both parents liked to tell stories from their respective family histories and also invented ghost stories that their children recalled as fun but genuinely scary.

Morrison was such an advanced reader that she was asked to tutor others in her class and she spent much of her free time in the Lorain Public Library (so happily and productively, in fact, that years later, on January 22, 1995, the Lorain Public Library dedicated the new Toni Morrison Reading Room at a public ceremony that she attended). With such ability and support, Morrison was able to excel at school. Years later, she recalled having been profoundly drawn to the classical writers — Austen, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and others. She said she knew these books "were not written for a little black girl in Lorain, Ohio, but they were so magnificently done that I got

them anyway — they spoke directly to me out of their own specificity" (Jean Strouse, "Toni Morrison's Black Magic," Newsweek, March 30, 1981).

Although racial issues did not dominate family discussions, Morrison did observe her mother resisting the northern (more subtle) brand of discrimination practiced in Lorain, Ohio (and the North, in general), when she carried out a small act of rebellion by refusing to sit in the section of the local movie theater set aside for blacks. Racial issues were being confronted across the United States at the time, and this fact, coupled with her father's active disdain for white people, ensured that Toni Morrison grew up with a "politicizing" awareness.

Morrison became the first person from either side of her family to attend college. She entered Howard University in 1949 and graduated with honors in 1953 after studying literature, the classics, and art. It was while she was at Howard that she changed her original name to Toni, for reasons never fully disclosed.

After Howard, Morrison studied at Cornell, earning her master's degree with a thesis comparing alienation and suicide in the writings of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf; after her graduate studies, she took a job teaching literature at Texas Southern University. By then, it was evident that Morrison was headed for a career teaching literature at the college level. She returned to Howard after two years and remained there as an instructor between 1957 and 1965. Among the students she taught there were three who would go on to take prominent roles in the civil rights and Black Power movements — Andrew Young, Claude Brown and Stokely Carmichael.

Morrison was married during this period to a Jamaican born architect, Harold Morrison. The couple had two sons, divorcing in 1964 while Morrison was pregnant with their second child. She went back briefly to Lorain to live with her family before relocating to Syracuse, New York, where she took a job as a textbook editor for a division of Random House. It was an important role that she assumed in this job: Morrison was responsible for helping to change the way black people were represented in school curricula. In 1967, Morrison was promoted to senior editor, and she moved to New York to take the position. It was during this difficult time of overwork and isolation that Morrison joined a fiction and poetry writing group and began writing during the infrequent parts of the day when she was not working and when her children were sleeping. The story she was working on became her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, but it took years to get the attention required to become a publishable work. Of this early effort at writing —which no one, certainly not Morrison herself, knew would initiate a new and significant career for her — she recalled how little time she had for this new effort: "I wrote like someone with a dirty habit. Secretly, compulsively, and slyly" (quoted in Karen Carmean, Toni Morrison's World of Fiction, 1993, 4). The manuscript was turned down by several publishers before Holt, Rinehart, and Winston published it in 1970 with the title *The Bluest Eye*. Although the novel was not a commercial success, its appearance marked the beginning of the career Toni Morrison had never imagined.

Accolades and opportunities began to arrive for Toni Morrison after the publication of her book *Sula* in 1973: The novel was nominated for a National Book Award (1975); she took a position as a faculty member at the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference in Vermont; she was offered and accepted a visiting lectureship at Yale; *Song of Solomon* came out in 1977 for which Morrison won the National Book Critics' Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

In 1987, Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*, was published; it became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection but was not named a finalist for the National Book Award, an omission felt so keenly that, a year later, a group of almost 50 African American writers published a statement of protest in the *New York Times Book Review*. Later that year, Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and one year later, in 1989, she became the first African American woman to hold an endowed university chair when she was appointed the Robert E. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University. While at Princeton, she established the Atelier program, which brought to the university artists of all kinds to work directly with students on their projects and productions. It was also during this time that her sixth novel, *Jazz*, was released and, most notably, she became the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature.

In the Authors' Words

The cast of *The Bluest Eye* in rehearsal

"I've always very organically been drawn to conversations around race and class. They fascinate me because we're so ill-equipped to talk about them. But I would never until [my play *Smart People*], call it a political imperative. It's just, that's where I live. When I first started writing, I came at it through a sense of urgency and sometimes presumption – I knew what was wrong with our society, and I knew the answers, and I had a commitment to putting these things on stage so I could change the world. Then I got older and life happened to me in very specific and sometimes not good ways, and then I had a child and a husband who was not well sometimes. I was humbled by life in a way that made me have a lot less of that sense of knowing everything. For a while, I was shaken by that—and that happened actually through the writing of [Smart People]—but I figured out [how] to embrace it, and there was something compelling and deeper about saying, 'I don't' know,' and writing either towards the answer or writing more towards embracing the question. I think that's fruitful."

Lydia Diamond, "An Interview with Lydia Diamond", Victoria Myers, *The Interval*, February 16th 2016

"Anyway, after I finished *The Bluest Eye,* I had sent it out to a number of people, and I got mostly postcards saying, "We pass." But I got one letter—somebody took it seriously and wrote a rejection letter. The editor was a woman. She said something nice about the language. And then she said, "But it has no beginning, it has no middle, and it has no end." And I just thought, She's wrong. But the thrill was having done it... But this was back in the day of the "screw whitey" books. One of the aggressive themes of the "screw whitey" movement was "black is beautiful." I just thought, "What is that about? Who are they talking to? Me? You're going to tell me I'm beautiful?" And I thought, "Wait a minute. Before the guys get on the my-beautiful-black-queen wagon, let me tell you what it used to be like before you started that!" You know, what racism does is create self-loathing, and it hurts. It can ruin you."

Toni Morrison, "Toni Morrison" by Christopher Bollen, *Interview Magazine*, May 7, 2012

Setting: Lorain, Ohio (1940–1941)

The Bluest Eye takes place in Lorain, Ohio, a small town on the shore of Lake Erie. The play begins in 1940, at a time when Lorain's economy is based on industry. Many of the citizens work in the town's steel mill or at the port, loading and unloading ships from other port towns on the Great Lakes, including Detroit, Toledo and Chicago. The town has a beach, a park along the lake, a famous lighthouse and a movie palace. It is large enough to have a varied population, but not so big that Claudia and Frieda cannot walk from their house to the wealthy lakefront neighborhood where Mrs. Breedlove works as a maid.

Morrison acknowledges that the information from which she drew for *The Bluest Eye* was autobiographical: "I didn't create that town. It's clearer to me now in my memory of it than when I lived there—and I haven't really lived there since I was seventeen years old." Morrison's Lorain is drawn from memory and imagination. In the beauty of the landscape and the history of liberation on both sides of Lake Erie, Lorain embodies the American dream. It is a place so promising that on her arrival, Pauline Breedlove asks herself, "What could go wrong?"

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Bluest Eye is set at the end of the Depression, and its effects are still felt by the characters. It is, in part, because of the Depression that Cholly does not have a job and that waste is so abhorrent to Mama. The Great Depression (1929-39) was the deepest and longest-lasting economic downturn in the history of the Western industrialized world. In the United States, the Great Depression began soon after the stock market crash of October 1929, which sent Wall Street into a panic and wiped out millions of investors. Over the next several years, consumer spending and investment dropped, causing steep declines in industrial output and rising levels of unemployment as failing companies laid off workers. By 1933, when the Great Depression reached its nadir, some 13 to 15 million Americans were unemployed and nearly half of the country's banks had failed.

Toni Morrison's Childhood Residence: 2245 Elyria Avenue, Lorain, Ohio. Morrison locates the McTeer home on Twenty-First Street, just around the corner.

By 1933, unemployment nationwide had risen to 26.6%, and those who were fortunate enough to find work were severely underpaid. Frugality could mean the difference between having enough food to feed your family and going hungry. In hopes of giving relief to the struggling nation, President Roosevelt established the "New Deal" programs to create jobs and stimulate economic recovery for the United States. The Civilian Conservation Corps, Civils Works Administration, Works Progress Administration and other government offices instituted by Roosevelt employed millions in many different capacities. Though the relief and reform measures put into place by President Roosevelt helped lessen the worst effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the economy would not fully turn around until after 1939, when World War II kicked American industry into high gear.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

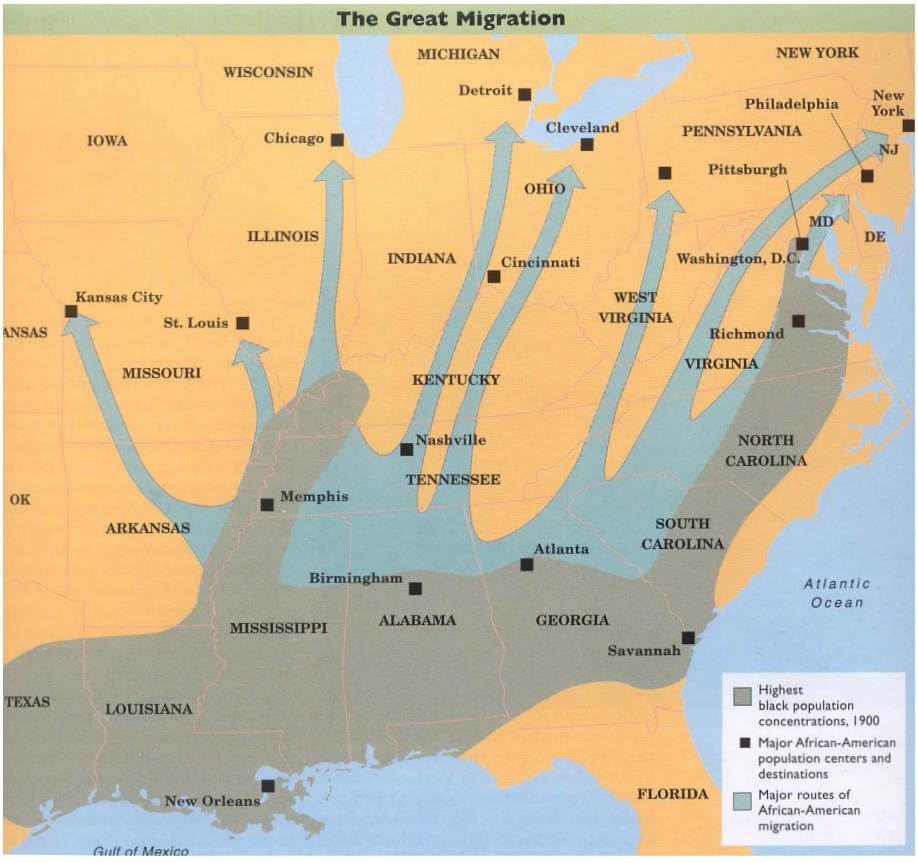
In the period between 1916 and the 1960s, more than six million Southern black people moved to the North. Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove left the rural South as a part of this trend, as did many African Americans who came to populate Lorain and other Midwest towns. Like many northern towns with industrial economies, Lorain was a destination of this "Great Migration".

After the post-Civil War Reconstruction period ended in 1876, white supremacy was largely restored across the South, and the segregationist policies known as Jim Crow soon became the law of the land. Southern blacks were forced to make their living working the land as part of the sharecropping system, which offered little in the way of economic opportunity, especially after a boll weevil epidemic in 1898 caused massive crop damage across the South. And while the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had been officially dissolved in 1869, it continued underground after that, and intimidation, violence and even lynching of black southerners were not uncommon practices in the Jim Crow South.

After World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, industrialized urban areas in the North, Midwest and West faced a shortage of industrial laborers, as the war put an end to the steady tide of European immigration to the United States. With war production kicking into high gear, recruiters enticed African Americans to come north, to the dismay of white Southerners. Black newspapers — particularly the widely read Chicago Defender — published advertisements touting the opportunities available in the cities of the North and West, along with first-person accounts of success.

By the end of 1919, some 1 million blacks had left the South, usually traveling by train, boat or bus; a smaller number had automobiles or even horse-drawn carts. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, the black population of major Northern cities grew by large percentages, including New York (66 percent) Chicago (148 percent), Philadelphia (500 percent) and Detroit (611 percent). Many new arrivals found jobs in factories, slaughterhouses and foundries, where working conditions were arduous and sometimes dangerous. Female migrants had a harder time finding work, spurring heated competition for domestic labor positions.

Aside from competition for employment, there was also competition for living space in the increasingly crowded cities. While segregation was not legalized in the North (as it was in the South), racism and prejudice were widespread. After



the U.S. Supreme Court declared racially based housing ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, some residential neighborhoods enacted covenants requiring white property owners to agree not to sell to blacks; these would remain legal until the Court struck them down in 1948.

Rising rents in segregated areas, plus a resurgence of KKK activity after 1915, worsened black and white relations across the country. The summer of 1919 began the greatest period of interracial strife in U.S. history, including a disturbing wave of race riots. The most serious took place in Chicago in July 1919; it lasted 13 days and left 38 people dead, 537 injured and 1,000 black families without homes.

As a result of housing tensions, many blacks ended up creating their own cities within big cities, fostering the growth of a new urban African-American culture. The most prominent example was Harlem in New York City, a formerly all-white neighborhood that by the 1920s housed some 200,000 African Americans. The black experience during the Great Migration became an important theme in the artistic movement known first as the New Negro Movement and later as the Harlem renaissance, which would have an enormous impact on the culture of the era. The Great Migration also began a new era of increasing political activism among African Americans, who after being disenfranchised in the South found a new place for themselves in public life in the cities of the North and West.

Black migration slowed considerably in the 1930s, when the country sank into the Great Depression, but picked up again with the coming of World War II. By 1970, when the Great Migration ended, its demographic impact was unmistakable: Whereas in 1900, nine out of every 10 black Americans lived in the South, and three out of every four lived on farms, by 1970 the South was home to less than half of the country's African Americans, with only 25 percent living in the region's rural areas.

RACE AND BEAUTY

"I had only one desire: to dismember it."

Claudia and Frieda are given baby dolls for Christmas. Frieda and Pecola adore these white dolls and Shirley Temple, thinking of the dolls and the little girl with the golden ringlets and rosy cheeks as examples of ideal children. When asked why she loves Shirley Temple so much, Pecola says, "She's pretty and talented and people love her." Shirley Temple seems to be all that Pecola is not, and Pecola loves her for it. Claudia, on the other hand, hates Shirley Temple in the same way that she hates the blonde, blue-eyed dolls she is given for Christmas. Claudia doesn't know why she should love such a doll, so instead of caring for it, she dissects it, thinking maybe she'll find "what the world thought was so wonderful about pink skin and yellow hair." Claudia is angry that Shirley Temple gets to dance with Mr. Bojangles, a black man, "my friend, my uncle, my daddy, who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me." It seems to Claudia that the world likes little white girls best, and so the dolls become a symbol of that preference and a symbol of how she, as a little black girl, can never be loved.

Claudia distrusts the "magic" through which little white girls are able to win the hearts of adults, but Pecola believes that if she looked even a little bit like them, people might think she's pretty and would love and take care of her. Claudia does not believe that whiteness equals goodness and senses the racism inherent in that assumption. A pervasive element of Pecola's tragedy is her internalization of the disregard with which her community treats her.

DOCTORS KENNETH AND MAMIE CLARK AND "THE DOLL TEST"

In the 1940s, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark designed and conducted a series of experiments known colloquially as "the doll tests" to study the psychological effects of segregation on African-American children.

Drs. Clark used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, children between the ages of three to seven, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they prefer. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem.

The doll test was only one part of Dr. Clark's testimony in Brown v. Board of Education — it did not constitute the largest portion of his analysis and expert report. His conclusions during his testimony were based on a comprehensive analysis of the most cutting-edge psychology scholarship of the period.

In an interview for the PBS documentary on the Civil Rights movement, "Eyes on the Prize," Dr. Kenneth Clark recalled: "The Dolls Test was an attempt on the part of my wife and me to study the development of the sense of self-esteem in children. We worked with Negro children — I'll

call black children — to see the extent to which their color, their sense of their own race and status, influenced their judgment about themselves, self-esteem. This research, by the way, was done long before we had any notion that the NAACP or that the public officials would be concerned with our results. In fact, we did the study fourteen years before Brown, and the lawyers of the NAACP learned about it and came and asked us if we thought it was relevant to what they were planning to do in terms of the Brown decision cases. And we told them it was up to them to make that decision and we did not do it for litigation. We did it to communicate to our colleagues in psychology the influence of race and color and status on the self-esteem of children."

In a particularly memorable episode while Dr. Clark was conducting experiments in rural Arkansas, he asked a black child which doll was most like him. The child responded by smiling and pointing to the brown doll: "That's a nigger. I'm a nigger." Dr. Clark described this experience "as disturbing, or more disturbing, than the children in Massachusetts who would refuse to answer the question or who would cry and run out of the room."

THE DOLL TEST IN BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Brown team relied on the testimonies and research of social scientists throughout their legal strategy. Robert Carter, in particular, spearheaded this effort and worked to enlist the support of sociologists and psychologists who would be willing to provide expert social science testimony that dovetailed with the conclusions of "the doll tests." Dr. Kenneth Clark provided testimony in the Briggs, Davis and Delaware cases and co-authored a summary of the social science testimony delivered during the trials that was endorsed by 35 leading social scientists.

The Supreme Court cited Clark's 1950 paper in its Brown decision and acknowledged it implicitly in the following passage: "To separate [African-American children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." Dr. Kenneth Clark was dismayed that the court failed to cite two other conclusions he had reached: that racism was an inherently American institution, and that school segregation inhibited the development of white children, too.

PHOTO BY LAUREN MUELLER

From the Director: Lileana Blain-Cruz

We are living in a really complicated time right now. When we think about what it means to make art at a time like this, doing a piece like *The Bluest Eye* really means a lot. I remember reading *The Bluest Eye* in college; Toni Morrison was one of those writers that shakes your life as a student, as an English major, as just a writer of the human experience. And this was her first novel, which is also very moving to me; this is the first thing that she decided to write about in novel form. One of the things that she says in an interview — she was writing *The Bluest Eye* in the 1960's — was that there was a movement of "black is beautiful, black is amazing, celebrate that." And that was super powerful, but she also wanted to talk about the people who would be forgotten; the people who wouldn't necessarily have that strong, powerful voice – basically, a young black girl, who would be anonymous in a society that didn't see her. She wanted us to not take that for granted, to remember that. Thinking about telling the stories of those who are most vulnerable, of those who don't necessarily get a chance to be center stage is really powerful for me.

Lydia Diamond has written a really beautiful adaptation of that text; she takes the fragmentation that's part of the novel and she places it in a highly theatrical landscape. She creates the community that Pecola lives in, and yet she allows for that fragmentation it talks about, which is essentially the cripplingly, devastating effects of racism and how that can live inside of a child. So yes, it's complicated.

It embraces the whole entirety of that experience and all of its complication, and that is really thrilling.

All of this is placed within a very specific landscape: Very urban, concrete surroundings. We were very much inspired by the image of Pecola walking down the street and seeing a dandelion weed poking through a crack in the sidewalk. Her thoughts are: "Why does everybody hate this weed? This weed is beautiful, it's one of my favorite flowers that exist." But over the course of the play and over the course of the novel we see her relationship to that flower change. The story moves from Pecola's awareness of something beautiful and often unseen to the point where she hates the dandelion.

Our space blows up that segment of the sidewalk and we see a kind of cracked surface where weeds are growing throughout. And at the back wall there's one particular patch of dandelions that kind of serve as a metaphor for Pecola in her landscape. And over the course of the play or at the end of the play — spoiler alert — something happens to that flower. That essentially serves as the landscape.

As an artist I'm also inspired by movement. We're working with movement to get at the more abstract moments. That allows for a focus on the people, real emphasis on character. Even though the playing space is massive, there is a real possibility of intimacy that is really exciting and thrilling, and that's something we want to embrace — to really narrow in on these humans who are sharing the space with us, to feel mostly connected to them, so that we weren't looking at this community that we had no connection with, but rather these seven or eight human beings that could talk directly to us.

Edited from comments made to the cast and staff on the first day of rehearsal

For Further Understanding

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