

PLAN-B
THEATRE

A WEEK WITH A PLAY



The Clean-Up Project
by Carleton Bluford

STUDY GUIDE



WELCOME TO A WEEK WITH A PLAY

This study guide will accompany you
as you read, watch, and discuss

The Clean-Up Project

by Carleton Bluford

**JORDAN & MELVIN (A BLACK COUPLE) AND THEIR FRIENDS RYAN & TAYLOR (A WHITE COUPLE)
ARE FORCED TO NAVIGATE A NEAR-FUTURE AMERICA WHERE WHITE PEOPLE ARE AT RISK.**

BLACK HISTORY MONTH LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Your students will have the opportunity to meet Carleton Bluford and ask him about his experience writing THE CLEAN-UP PROJECT. Read his bio and articles he wrote for Catalyst Magazine and QSaltLake Magazine at planbtheatre.org/carletonbluford/.



"My process of writing this play directly mirrors what I was going through in my life, in real time. I had a lot of feelings but didn't quite know how to express them or what people would think of me if I did. This struggle is central to the play."

*Carleton Bluford
Catalyst Magazine
February 2022 issue*

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Throughout THE CLEAN-UP PROJECT, characters refer to people and events in the American Civil Rights Movement. The resources below may help you further explore the context of the play with your students.

- [PBS Utah](#)
- [Utah Education Network's Themepark](#)
- [The Southern Poverty Law Center's Learning for Justice](#)

Be prepared for discussions about race and discrimination. We hope for each student to have the opportunity to respond honestly to the play and to be able to explore its themes in a safe environment. The Southern Poverty Law Center suggests the following points for talking about race in the classroom:

- Acknowledge the importance of race in your students' lives.
- Dispel ideas about a biological basis for race.
- Learn about the history of race as a social construct and means of control.
- Create a safe environment with clear communication guidelines.
- Identify common roadblocks to productive discussion.
- Recognize that disparities exist but need not persist.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Create opportunities for students to speak from their own experience.



Photo source: Library of Congress

*"Justice is indivisible;
injustice anywhere
is a threat to
justice everywhere."*

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
National Conference on New Politics
August 31, 1967*

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

In addition to **Martin Luther King, Jr.** and **Rosa Parks**, two of the most famous civil rights activist in American history, the people below are mentioned by name in THE CLEAN-UP PROJECT. After learning a little about each, ask your students: why do you think Bluford chose to include a reference to this person?

Colin Kaepernick: [Athletes vs. Injustice: Protests in Sports](#)
(video) Retro Report on PBS (11:13)

Bayard Rustin: [The Gay Civil Rights Activist Nearly Erased From History](#)
(video) Great Big Story (3:15)

Ralph Abernathy: [Abernathy's Epitaph Reads: 'I Tried'](#)
(article) AP News April 18, 1990

Jo Ann Robinson: [Hidden Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott](#)
(video) AL.com (5:25)

Stacey Abrams: [3 Questions to Ask Yourself About Everything You Do](#)
(video) TED (12:38)



WHAT DO ACTIVISTS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Challenge your students to find and share an example of someone who is currently involved in campaigning for social change. Remind them that it's not just politicians, lawyers, and community organizers, but also artists! Consider, for example, poet [Amanda Gorman](#) or hip-hop artist [Lil Nas X](#).

BEING AN ALLY

- What does it mean to be an ally?
- Are Taylor & Ryan allies?
- Are Jordan & Melvin allies?

*"In the end we will remember
not the words of our enemies,
but the silence of our
friends."*

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Allyship, according to the [Anti-Oppression Network](#), is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people." Just as you don't get to decide when others trust you, you don't get to label yourself as an ally.

In other words, allyship is not a self-defined identity. [Mia McKenzie](#) offers the frustrating example of a white student who responded poorly to being called out on racist behavior: "whenever she was approached about some oppressive thing she did or said, [she] got in her white girl feels and cried about how the PoC student was erasing her identity as an ally." Ally is a term that describes your relationship with others, not a core aspect of who you are. Someone thinks of you as an ally when they feel they can trust you to listen to and support them.

Mckenzie writes, "Solidarity is action. That's it. What we DO in solidarity is all that counts. How people with privilege listen to what marginalized groups ask of them and do that is all that counts. Claiming "ally" as an identity and then using it to shield oneself from the criticism of those one says they're an "ally" to is the opposite of solidarity."

An important part of being an ally is working to educate others, especially those with whom you share an identity. [Jamie Utt](#) writes, "As a person who benefits every single day from White privilege, it is not my place to engage People of Color in a discussion about what is or is not racist. That's not solidarity. However, I have a very specific responsibility in engaging conversations about racism: talking to other White people. Beyond listening, arguably the most important thing that I can do to act in solidarity is to engage those who share my identity. As a man, I have a specific responsibility to engage men in building a more positive masculinity and standing up to misogyny and sexism. As a White person, I have a responsibility to stand up to racism and work to bring White people into the anti-racist conversation in a way that they can hear and access. As an able-bodied person, I have a responsibility to call out examples of everyday ableism."

"If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."

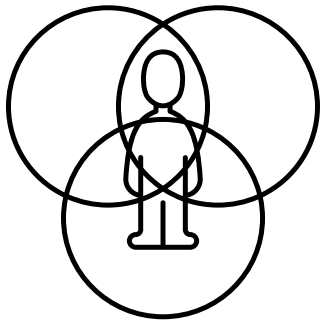
-Toni Morrison

INTERSECTIONALITY

Aspects of Identity

Have your students pair up. Ask them to identify something they have in common with their partner and a way in which they differ. Have them repeat the activity with several different partners.

Write the word *identity* on the board and ask your students to define it. Then brainstorm different aspects of identities such as their gender, race, age, disabilities, religion, and sexual orientation.



Essential Meaning of identity

1: who someone is: the name of a person

The identity of the criminal/victim is not known.

2: the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others

As children grow, they establish their own identities.

What is intersectionality?

The term *intersectionality* was coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe a framework for discussion about how people often face discrimination in over-lapping ways. To help your students understand the need for this framework, watch Crenshaw's TED talk [The Urgency of Intersectionality \(18:49\)](#). While the entire video is quite moving, if time is short—as it so often is in the classroom—watch from 4:53 to 11:35 for the essential points.

Rosa Parks

Black women wishing to join the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's often faced discrimination from Black men who did not view them as equals. Read and discuss the passage on the next page with your students.

Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde was a Black lesbian poet and civil rights activist. In a [1982 address at Harvard University](#), she said, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives."

With your students, read and discuss Lorde's poem *Who Said it was Simple* about her experiences encountering racism within the Feminist Movement.

INTERSECTIONALITY: ROSA PARKS



Read the passage below and then discuss the following questions:

- What is the NAACP? Why would it have been dangerous to join?
- What does it mean to take the minutes? Why was this considered women's work?
- Why do you think Nixon didn't think women should be activists?

Extract from *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* by Lynne Olson:

[Her husband] had long discouraged her from joining the NAACP—too dangerous for a woman, he said. But in 1943, Rosa found that the local chapter had at least one female member—her old friend from Miss White's school, Johnnie Carr. Rosa decided to go to the December meeting to see Carr and take a look at the organization for herself. The meeting, which Carr didn't attend, turned out to be the annual election of officers. The men said they needed a woman to take the minutes, and Parks, the only woman present, agreed. "I was too timid to say no," she explained. She paid her membership dues, was elected secretary on the spot, and, from that moment on, threw herself into civil rights work with singular passion.

Despite her modern image as a simple seamstress who just happened to get on a bus one day and ignite a movement, Rosa Parks, together with E. D. Nixon, was the mainstay of the Montgomery NAACP through the 1940s and 1950s. On her lunch hours, in the evenings after work, and on weekends, Parks would be in Nixon's office, answering phones, handling correspondence, sending out press releases to newspapers, keeping track of the complaints that flooded in concerning racial violence and discrimination. As much as he depended on her, Nixon had little use for women as activists. One time he told Parks that "women don't need to be nowhere but in the kitchen." She shot back: "Well, what about me?" Realizing he had painted himself into a corner, Nixon came back with a lame reply: "... I need a secretary and you are a good one." She was much more than that.

Who Said It Was Simple

by Audre Lorde

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.
An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.
But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

Audre Lorde, "Who Said It Was Simple" from *From a Land Where Other People Live*.
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