Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Signature:

Emily Camille Bullock April 22, 2010

Identity, Culture and Family: A Theatrical Exploration

by

E. Camille Bullock

Adviser

Janice E. Akers

Department of Theater Studies

Janice E. Akers
Adviser

Donald Cameron McManus
Committee Member

Joseph Skibell
Committee Member

April 22, 2010
Date

Identity, Culture and Family: A Theatrical Exploration

By

E. Camille Bullock

Adviser

Janice E. Akers

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Theater Studies

2010

Abstract

Identity, Culture and Family: A Theatrical Exploration
By E. Camille Bullock

Through the playwriting process, this paper seeks to understand if an exploration of self through theater can be as satisfying and meaningful for a playwright as it is for an audience. First this paper examines the theater of cultural identity, Cajun culture and the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans through research, building on that through personal experience and narrative. The play takes a very honest approach toward the shame of family, culture, self and the human condition. It concludes with a personal reflection on how the composition and performance of a piece of this nature can affect a playwright and an audience.

Identity, Culture and Family: A Theatrical Exploration

by

E. Camille Bullock

Adviser

Janice E. Akers

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Theater Studies

2010

Table of Contents

Introduction

There are countless reasons why people write plays. Some playwrights, like Bertolt Brecht or Augusto Boal, write to make the theater a forum for political discourse. Others, like Antonin Artaud, write to awaken, stir and shock the public into action and to reaffirm the importance of the theater. And still there are others who write for reasons far more personal than the development of theater, the rousing of the masses or political dialogue. They write as a form of expression and desire to be heard and to tell others. Indeed, through the playwright's journey of searching and longing for self and identity within a larger group, a play can provide anything from cultural and social commentary to education and fulfillment—for the author and the reader.

In this thesis, I hope to explore the effects of using theater as a means of expressing my attempts to reconnect with my own culture, the Cajun people of Southwest Louisiana. Framed around personal experiences during my post-Katrina relocation from urban New Orleans to the highly-Cajun-populated city of Lafayette, Louisiana, the play, written for one person, seeks to explore family, identity and self through the scope of my own experiences as a first-generation Cajun export from the bayou to the big city and back again. As a preface to the play, this introduction tackles three separate components: theater of cultural identity, the Cajun place within America, and history of Hurricane Katrina as told through a personal narrative.

I

Throughout the years, art has been used as a source of forming and bolstering cultural and national identity. Even in the pre-revolutionary times of Puritanism, when the distrust of most kinds of artistic expression was at its peak, the prevalence of artistic activity show that colonists drew upon arts and theater to codify their identity. Through performance, we are able to see the relationship between the individual and society and can determine the collective unities and disunities of the group as a whole.

In the introduction to *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in the American Theater*, J. Ellen Gainor speaks to the power of theater to develop American culture and identity. "The developments in American theater over the centuries have paralleled events in American history [and this book examines] political debates brought to life, technological advancements used to enhance theatrical spectacle, social issues shared across the land in the eras before electronic media could generate mass culture" (Gainor 9). But this power of unification has been utilized by many more than those bolstering large national cultures. The universality of theater has created a common bond for mainstream societies, but it has also sparked a counter-movement among subgroups trying to find an identity within that larger identity. Oftentimes, if a playwright belongs to a group that has been the victim of oppression (historically this has included, but is not limited to, blacks, women, Jews, and homosexuals), he will use his art as a means of drawing attention to his, and potentially the whole group's, desire for expression, identity and understanding. For instance, the African-American subculture has used art for many years as a source of exploration and celebration of culture and identity.

To take a deeper look at theater of cultural identity, this thesis will explore a case study in black theater. Within African-American culture, there comes the existential crisis of being American and relating directly to American history, and being African American, isolated from the history and the fabric of the country as a whole. Since African Americans were enslaved for nearly the first one hundred years of the country's existence, treated like animals and considered three-fifths of a person in the census, they are hardly historically represented in records. How, then, can someone today relate to the myths of African-American history as told by the oppressors and eventual "liberators." African-American author Suzan-Lori Parks grapples with this very issue in *The America Play,* which directly addresses these exclusions and losses in historical content, and how they affect African Americans. Parks's character of the Foundling Father, a black man who dresses as Abraham Lincoln and allows people to pay money to shoot him in the head, represents African-American underrepresentation, which she considers the great hole within American history. Parks represents the general African-American search for identity through the narrative of the Foundling Father's individual journey as a man traveling the country digging holes to construct his own personal history. He is searching for "an identity, a meaning, and an understanding of his significance within the (w)hole of American history" (Elam and Rayner 180).

Blacks have sought cultural identity through theater outside of the Americas also. Black theater arose in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century during a time marked by police brutality, outgoing racist immigration laws and marginalization of the of the labor market. In Britain, where there is a clear white majority, blacks asserted themselves as artistic contributors by forming all-black theater companies and creating

works that explored black places within society. Plays like American playwright Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* and groups like the Theatre of Black Women created a new aesthetic fusing poetry, dance and music, all while touching on themes related to what it means to be a black woman, impacted by everything from living as a minority to immigration and colonialism (McMillian and Suandi 118).

> As Geneva Smitherman put it, 'Black theatre is moving to the point where we've taken the ritual, passion, drama and intensity of the church and put it into secular music so it can be a functional kind of thing; so you can use your catharsis, your collective energy and collective prayer in your everyday life.' The construction of identity is a performative process, continually being negotiated through a 'complex historical process of appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention, and revival.' Cultural identity is an 'articulation fostered in a complex structure of diverse and contradictory, yet connected relations.' (McMillan and Suandi 119-120)

The delicate balance of cultural identity is applicable to more than just black British theater. With both of the aforementioned black theaters, there has been some kind of disconnect between the culture with which the playwrights associate that creates an internal competition of the opposing forces of belonging to one group and yet seeking oneself within another. These feelings, which create uncertainty and discomfort, can be purged through the theater.

II

A great paradox exists within the Cajun culture in the United States, according to Maria Hebert-Leiter. Though Cajuns are American people living presently in South Louisiana, many believe that they are intrinsically bound entirely to their past. Everything about the Cajun people, from where they live geographically within the United States to the special version of the French language that they speak, is rooted firmly in an

adherence to history, and as a result, contemporary Cajuns find themselves navigating the disconnect between their current Americanism and their Acadian ancestry. To fully understand this contradiction in the present, it is first important to study the Cajun past.

To put it simply, the Cajun people are descended from the Acadians, French-speaking settlers living in the present-day Maritime Provinces of Canada. Still, there are people of non-Acadian descent who identify as Cajun today, including some English, Scottish, Irish, Spanish Basques and Native Americans. After *Le Grand Derangement*, the British expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755, some of the Acadian people migrated south and regrouped in Louisiana. In the diaspora, these Acadians became the Cajuns, and banded together and *became*, according to author James Dormon, an ethnic group. Within their tight communities in Louisiana, Cajuns practiced Roman Catholicism, continued their use of the French language, and developed new food and music traditions. With the United States' purchase of the Louisiana territory, the Cajuns became American and chose to assimilate with the laws and languages of their new country, but still continued to associate closely with one another and to develop their own cultural norms (Hebert-Leiter 6-7).

This pull between new country and the lingering of old tradition formed the interstitial position that the Cajun holds in American society today. As some cultural historians say, the Cajuns are in an "in-between" position, both economically and racially, and they are simultaneously trying to assimilate and differentiate themselves. An example of this in-between place can be found looking no farther than the term *Cajun*. The term, woi which Cajuns proudly refer to themselves, "suggests that it was employed by ith*outsiders*, not insiders, for it is fundamentally an anglicized version of the

contraction '*Cadien* (or phonetically, 'Ca'jin'), long in use among the French Acadians to refer to themselves. 'Cajun' is an Americanized form of the term" (Hebert-Leiter 5). The term, which has been Americanized just as the Cajun people were, has its roots in an archaic word, analogous to the impact of the traditions of the Acadians on the contemporary Cajun.

The uniqueness of the Cajun as a member of American society has led to two main stereotypes that govern their depiction. In film, television, literature and other media, the Cajun is either shown as an ignorant swamp-dweller living with alligators and crawfish in the backwoods of rural Louisiana, or a quaint, vaguely religious, 'creature of simple virtue' who, when he isn't downing beer, is a spitting out unexpected words of wisdom—in French of course. (Hebert-Leiter 9).

In the 21st century, as young Cajuns are getting better educations, there has been a pull to create an insider's view of Cajun culture, as opposed to the stereotypes that have previously informed the world. This newfound Cajun literary record facilitates tracing the Cajun double-bind with American society, but even as the Cajuns become more American, they still remain aware of cultural differences.

> Cajuns continue to play the diatonic accordion, sing in Cajun French, and whip up a large pot of gumbo or jambalaya even as they speak in English, attend American public schools, and vote in national elections. Even if Cajun identity has become more self-conscious, and includes staged cultural festivals and prepackaged food, it is also a source of cultural pride that stems from the ability to survive the settlement in and development of a strange continent and new nation. (Hebert-Leiter 147)

III

On August 29, 2005, I sat for hours in the dark on the kitchen floor of my brother's squatty brick house in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, my family's evacuation

destination of choice, listening to a radio announcer gravely announce which levees had broken. Seventeen years old at the time, I was mostly concerned about getting back to school so I could play the clarinet at the first football game of the season. I didn't know that I wasn't going immediately home, that every chink in the armor of the American crisis response system would be revealed, or that the deeply drawn lines of poverty and racial stratification in New Orleans would be displayed on the evening news. That day, as I a lay on my side listening, my cheek pressed to the cool linoleum in the otherwise insufferably thick summer air, it never occurred to me that I was witnessing the death of all things comfortable and simple and easy in my life.

I have wanted to write about my post-Katrina experiences for a very long time. Indeed, my evacuation from the city I love and the liberal-minded, urban culture that I had completely taken for granted, are a story I want to tell. However, it was not until I factored in this research that it seemed to me that this is more than just a story I want to tell to others. It could be morphed into a study in culture, assimilation, and identity.

There are two main effects that my study on cultural identity's reflection within the theater and general Cajun culture had on my plans for writing. The first is that it made me realize how many of my ideas and experiences directly relate to the research. The theater of cultural identity finds itself within a particular subculture's search for a sense of self and a desire for significance within the greater scheme of the world. Just as Suzan-Lori Parks asserts in her writing of *The America Play* that African Americans are searching for their place within the history of the United States, I feel that the Cajun people are in search of finding the balance between their ancestry and their place as contemporary Americans.

The second contribution that this research has had on my writing is that it has given me new ideas and connections that I had not previously made. One of my original plans for my work involved drawing parallel between my evacuation to Lafayette and the expulsion of the Acadians to Louisiana. While this is a sufficient parallel to draw, my discovery of the "in-between" nature of Cajun identity based on the old world and the new world is a reflection of my personal journey toward coming to terms with my own "Cajunness," and trying to accept my new home, while wanting more than anything to hold on to what I held so dear about my real home.

Ragin'

A play written for one person

By Camille Bullock

SOPHIE

I knew it had the potential to be a little incendiary, so I decided to sit them down one by one for a nice, no-pressure leisurely chat about my foreign language education. Not an exciting topic, I told mom. No, no, no, nothing interesting here, just some random paperwork we have to fill out so that I can continue learning a language in middle school. Oh, well, I haven't put much thought into it, but I was thinking….Spanish, you know with the immigrant population growing at the rate it is, it would be just foolish to not have at least one member of the family who can converse with someone from a Latin American country. I mean, I don't *want* to do it, no, not at all, but I feel like our family would just be at such a disadvantage if one of us didn't speak Spanish. Well, I can, umm, well, I can tell the gardener exactly where you want him to water. You know how you hate it when the hydrangeas die. I mean, if I just told him that then he would know, right? And none of us can tell him, so if I spoke Spanish… Well, I didn't think that was that offensive, it was just an example of someone in this world who speaks a language other than English or French and…well. Well, I'm just saying that just because "our people" as you call them, historically speak French, it doesn't mean that I have to speak French, right? That doesn't make sense. They don't even speak real French! They speak some kind of fake stupid French that doesn't even translate right. That's the reason I'm so bad at French anyway! It's *because* of "our people." They're the reason I'm not taking French! BECAUSE THEY SUCK!

So, that conversation didn't go as well as I hoped. Maybe you're thinking, you know, what's the big deal, the kid wants to take Spanish, and there *is* a surge in the immigrant population… You know, that kid's really logical! Hey give that kid a medal for having so much foresight and forethought and fore-everything at the age of nine!

Maybe that's what you're thinking…that's what I was thinking. But it doesn't really work like that in my family. I guess I should give you some background. My name is Gabrielle Sophia Drake, I go by Sophie, my middle name. I'm from New Orleans, Louisiana, but I'm really just a first-generation immigrant from Cajun country to the United States of America. I'm 75 percent Cajun by blood, my mother is the product of an Hebert and a Mayard and my father is half Soulier and then half Drake. We don't really like to talk about the Drake side—the English side—which is a kind of a shame since we all carry it with us every day. So my grandmother Lucille Soulier married Al Drake despite his roots in Texas and a surname that screamed oppressor. And even though he wasn't Catholic, he was forced to go to mass every week and raised his two sons to carry

rosaries with them everywhere they went. It was what my grandmother viewed as his penance for being born into a Southern Baptist family.

So yeah, I would say I'm ¾ Cajun by blood, but 100 percent Cajun by lifestyle. Okay, wait backtrack, I forget sometimes that I need to explain what "Cajun" is. The French colonized the maritime provinces of Canada, I think maritime means "by the sea" or something. Either way, it's like Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and whatever and they formed a settlement there called Acadie. In the mid-eighteenth century, as a result of the French and Indian War, the English kicked the French settlers out of Canada and they migrated down to the United States, many ending up in South Louisiana. Cajun is actually just a corruption of the word Acadian: Acadian…Aca-gee-en…Aca-gen…Cajun. See? So yeah okay, now that that's out of the way, we like most Cajuns are Catholic. Hyper-Catholic. No abortion, no fertility drugs, no death penalty …and I haven't *asked* my parents about contraception because the idea of having that conversation makes me feel really uncomfortable, but I'm almost positive we're against that too. I have two older brothers, Stephen and Aubrey. They both went to Catholic military high school and they both took French the whole time. Aubrey's actually really into all this heritage stuff and for a long time debated about which tattoo would be the best one for him to get: the French flag or an alligator in one of those sprawled crawling kind of poses, um, kind of like this, *(SOPHIE, pauses for a minute and orientates her body to the pose of an alligator, with its mouth open ready to attack)* with "Bayou Boy" written in cursive underneath it. Two epic choices, right? Luckily, he opted not to get a tattoo at all…that we know of.

But anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's go back to fourth grade and go back to the decision. The day I turned my back on my culture…which was already oppressed enough by the British and the Americans and the people who made that Adam Sandler movie The Waterboy. At my elementary school, all students take French from first to fourth grades. In the fourth grade, a student is allowed to choose whether he or she wants to continue their education in French or whether they want to spend middle school learning Spanish. There were two reasons that Spanish seemed like the right choice for me. Number one: Madame Pastorek had given me what I deemed a completely undeserved B minus in French for the first semester of fourth grade. A B MINUS. Looking a little closer at the grade breakdown, it still remained unclear why I had a grade so freakishly close to a C plus. Pronunciation, exemplary. Effort, exemplary. Conduct, exemplary. Fluency, satisfactory. Comprehension, exemplary. Written Expression, needs improvement. I mean, obviously, my written expression is pulling my grade down…which I'd be fine with if I knew what written expression even was. I don't even remember writing anything in French class, I remember looking at pictures of pizza and repeating "crevette" and "fromage" over and over and over again. How and when was I supposed to express, through writing, that I wanted a cheese pizza with shrimp. It's obscene. A B minus? I was not a B minus student. And it was French's fault. Okay, now problem number two: I'm sorry if this is offensive, but only lame kids took French. Lauren Britt was going to take French with her whiny voice and mayonnaise ring that formed around her mouth after she ate her turkey sandwich at lunch time. And who could forget her show-and-tell in third grade that was I got my ears pierced during my trip to

the Bahamas and now I have to turn them every hour so my lobes don't crust over. Ewww. She even had those glasses that tinted when you went out into the sun. Transitions lenses at age 10. And *she* was taking French. What was I supposed to do? I was actually a little surprised that my family took it as poorly as they did. I mean, had they seen Lauren Britt's mayonnaise ring? Still, since my mother reacted so negatively, I immediately regretted my decision to do this one-by-one. I should've just ripped it off like a band-aid.

Next on the list was my father, who probably should've been the first, since it was him who was paying ten thousand dollars a year for this ritzy elementary school that gave me this option in the first place. After all, it was the money he was earning on all those far flung business trips to Shreveport and Baton Rouge that was paying for me to abandon my culture. The cypress floorboards creaked under my feet as I made my way into the family dining room. We don't really dine much there. The table is covered with affidavits and law books and legal pads and other important lawyer things. The dining room is basically a giant glorified second-office.

Dad? Are you busy? I want to talk to you about something…

He took it well. It's probably the Drake in him. The level-headed Englishman, lightly tapping his receding hairline while he's trying to rationalize my argument. We had a long intellectual discussion about the how *much* of architecture in the French Quarter is actually Spanish in heritage, and he didn't think he needed to remind me of the Spanish influence within the Creole culture, I surely knew all about that from the Louisiana History course I took last year. Not to mention the increasing Mexican influx into Louisiana and how maybe, there would be some new kind of cultural renaissance, perhaps mirroring the expulsion of Cajuns from Canada all those years ago.

Maybe, Dad. Maybe that will happen. So you're not mad at me? …Good.

Why wasn't he mad at me? I was turning my back on his people too. I think part of it might be that he's so much farther removed from the culture and the Cajun subjugation than my mom ever was. I wouldn't say my dad grew up with a silver spoon in his mouth or anything, but he definitely lived a normal, happy middle class life as Lucy and Al's golden child. He grew up in New Iberia, Louisiana, which although is by no means a big city, is fairly urban. He has one brother, Elton, who is fourteen years older than him. My grandmother had miscarriage after miscarriage until finally little Glenn was born a boy wonder, cherubic and funny and brilliant and perfect. An altar boy, high school, college and law school salutatorian, and a member of a variety of local choirs.

My mother grew up very differently. She spent her whole life in Abbeville, Louisiana, known for Black's Family Cajun Restaurant, the gorgeous St. Mary Magdalene Catholic church, and devastating poverty. To make ends meet, my grandfather was in the Air Force and my grandmother worked days at Anthony's clothing store. So that left my great-grandmother, who we know as "Gra-maw," emphasis on the no 'N' or 'D,' the single most Cajun person I've ever met, to take care of the five dirty hungry little

Heberts. Gra-maw was big and round with knee-high stockings rolled down to her ankles and big medical walking shoes. She didn't believe in pot holders but she was a pretty big fan of corporal punishment. If they were misbehaving, she would make them kneel on uncooked grains of rice or cut their own switch from the backyard. Once when they were being particularly bad, she picked up the phone receiver and said, as if they were automatically on the other end "That's it, Po-lice? This is Eunice. There are some bad children that you need to put straight in jail." They cried and begged her to call back and say that they were sorry and that they didn't need to go to prison. She gleefully kept it up until my grandmother returned home from work to five kids having emotional breakdowns. My mom tells stories of leftover stew, the dreaded worst meal of week, when all of the food that was about to rot was thrown into a big pot with some chicken broth. Corn, milk, beef, chicken, cheese, let simmer fifteen minutes. Heartily serves a family a four… your family has seven members? Oops, well, we'll figure something out. Even now, my mom still hoards food, I think she worries that maybe she won't get her share unless she gets a little bit extra. If you go through our pantry, you'll see that she buys three of everything, loaves of bread, cans of asparagus, cranberry chutney, everything, just because she's always a little worried there won't be enough.

So maybe that's why my dad just let it go. Just punished me in his own way, with a lecture about history instead of a lecture about my own personal rejection of it. He lived the promised Cajun childhood, the better life his ancestors had hoped for, with enough food and clothes to survive and the money and smarts for a proper education. Not to mention, he was handsome enough to reel in the Queen of the Dairy Day Parade. Maybe all those years of living the life he was destined to have had hardened him to their plight. Meanwhile, just half an hour away, my mother was living a very different life, the one that *her* ancestors had lived all those years ago when they were forced to leave their homes and start anew in Bayou. All of their hardships were reflected in hers. When we would go on trips to see my grandparents, the differences between their upbringings were clear. Everything in New Iberia is spotless and smelled like mothballs. Abbeville stinks of decay, and there's a thin layer of dust over everything.

Done. It was done. I had told my mother and my father. And as far as I was concerned they were the only people who ever really needed to know. A few weeks passed and the whole thing had sort of blown over. I think my mom had realized that maybe she had overreacted, or maybe she was even looking forward to the gardener paying special attention to her hydrangeas. Aubrey had also helped, distracting everyone by flunking a math test and it seemed like maybe my little faux pas, pardon my French, had been forgotten.

That was until one of those monthly weekend trips to New Iberia and Abbeville. I was watching Golden Girls with my dad's mom when she started speaking to me in French. Now, even though I hadn't even started my Spanish lessons yet, we've established that my French definitely leaves something to be desired. I mean, if she had asked me something about pizza, I would've been set, but unfortunately, she was using words I had never heard before.

I'm sorry, Maw Maw, I can't understand you. No, I'm taking French at school, you're just speaking it fast, that's all, I can't follow what you're saying.

Stephen looked up from his comic book with a little bit of a cruel smile on his face. "Sophie's not taking French next year, Maw Maw. Sophie's taking Spanish."

There was a silence. A horrible, impenetrable instant of silence, punctuated by the riotous laughter of the Golden Girls live studio audience. Then two disapproving French words that I did know the meaning of.

"Mon Dieu."

There was another painful, awkward moment before Maw Maw exhaled and we all just started watching Golden Girls again, pretending we were living in a world where Bea Arthur rich baritone voice was the still most unsettling thing in the room. We never spoke about it again, she had either forgiven or forgotten or both. Maw Maw died in November of that year, only about three months into my Spanish language education. I like to think that she probably would have been happy to know that I never knew more Spanish than French in her lifetime.

On the same trip, as we pulled into the parking lot of Twin Oaks Retirement Community, I braced myself for who I knew would be the hardest person to tell. Gra-maw was old, really old, probably in her early nineties at that point, but her mind and her tongue were just as sharp as ever. She was the queen of the old folks' home, stirring up trouble and gossiping and watching professional wrestling and trapping men in her room with her wheelchair so she could have her way with them. She seemed like she was going to live forever, and we always said it was because she was so mean. The girthy figure she had always prided herself on had wasted away, but she could still look at you with those judging eyes and insult you to your face. She had this flesh-colored mole by her lower lip with a single long pointy hair growing out of it. I took a deep breath. I could only stare at the mole. That hair.

Hi Gra-maw.

People always talk about how their lives flash before their eyes in near death experiences. When my mother forced me to tell Gra-maw that I hated my culture and my people and by virtue of that, I hated her, a life flashed before my eyes. It wasn't my life, it was Clotile Sophie Doucet's. She's my oldest traceable ancestor, she came down to Louisiana from the old country.

That mole.

Clotile Sophie lived a long, good life, marked by a lot of tragedy and but also by prosperity and hope. She and her family were forced to leave their homes in Acadie in 1755. Her mother and youngest sister died on the journey down to Louisiana. She and her father grew closer and depended on each other during those first hard transitional years.

A hardworking young man named Jean saw her tending the rice fields and asked her father for her hand in marriage about ten minutes later. She was afraid but she said yes anyway because she could tell that this man was going to take good care of her. Together they had eight children, only one of whom was stillborn, and farmed sugar cane side-by-side until their deaths in the early 19th century, earning just enough money to leave a small inheritance for each son.

Gra-maw I'm taking Spanish. I don't want to take French anymore.

She looked at me and my heart stopped. Clotile Sophie and her husband and their seven living kids flew immediately from my mind. Gra-maw smiled at me, told me I looked fat, and then gave me a pointy hair mole kiss on the mouth.

And it was over. The burden had been lifted. I was free.

Blackout.

Lights go up on SOPHIE seated rigidly in a chair, holding two drinking straws to her eyes. She's looking through them. She sits in silence for a few seconds.

SOPHIE

Acadian Usher Syndrome or Usher syndrome type 1C is a genetic degenerative disorder found in the Cajun population of southwest Louisiana causing deafblindness. Eight-hundred Louisiana Acadians have Usher Syndrome. Patients typically lose all hearing before they're even old enough to talk, and have difficulty balancing on their own. As they age, their vision begins to deteriorate, beginning with nightblindedness, and followed by the narrowing of the vision's range. *(Pause)* Eventually, the scope of vision narrows to the diameter of a drinking straw. Can you imagine? That's all you can see -- Straight ahead of you. Nothing from either side, just straight ahead. And one day, your vision just completely goes away. The scope becomes so small that there's nowhere left to go.

They only have the tiniest little range of vision. They see what they want, they hear what they want. They're a stubborn people. Narrow-minded. The food is spicy, the women are curvy, and the people are insufferably immobile. They've done enough moving around in their lives, and they're sure as hell not about to do it for you.

Blackout.

(SOPHIE sits holding a marble composition book.)

SOPHIE

So, I keep a journal. It's just a thing I do because, obviously, you know, for posterity, but also I'm one of those people who secretly believes that my life is important enough to be written down. I read the old stuff sometimes now. And most of it is god awful. I write all about like Clay Aiken's latest CD, like I write an inordinate amount about Clay Aiken, and how it makes me mad that Aubrey called him gay, which, hindsight is 20/20 right? And I write about this boy named Shane Shaddix who I had this massively creepy crush on in high school and it's all this stuff about how I am going to trick him into asking me to Homecoming. TRICK HIM, into asking me to go to a dance. And most of it is just that, talking about boys and love and things I still don't really understand but I definitely didn't understand when I was fifteen years old. Anyway, um, I kept this journal during what happened after Katrina, too, so I've been reading it a lot lately, and…

Well, okay.

[27 Aug 2005|**09:39am**] I seriously hate hurricanes. I hate missing school, I hate evacuating, and I hate the idea that my stuff might be getting messed up at home.

I think it also secretly stems back to when I was so anxious when I was little. And the ways I learned not to be afraid, not to be so freaked out that I was paralyzed with a terrible immense fear, was to tell myself that there's nothing to be afraid of. But hurricanes are something to be a worried about, they can't be controlled or reasoned with. And you can't even tell yourself it's not coming, because no matter how bad your denial, it's on its way.

Yeah, so I'm going to Hattiesburg. We'll probably take two cars, so at least there will only be one dog per car.

(To audience)

Yeah, I guess that was something I was really worried about…

(Goes back to reading.)

But the thing is, I'm not even really all that worried. I'm just randomly talking about it.

(She puts the book away and begins to address the audience, continuing the narrative of the story.)

SOPHIE

So that's what we did. We packed up about a weekend's worth of clothes and we put all of our photographs and portraits and artwork on the second floor in case, God forbid,

something happened, we took the dogs for a walk and then piled them in the car. We left New Orleans to stay with my brother Stephen to wait out the storm. We didn't expect to be gone long, this evacuating thing is just something you do every once in a while. Still, even though Hattiesburg was pretty far inland, we knew it was going to get hit hard.

Like, we knew we were going to lose power. There was no doubt about that. Camped out in my brother's little brick duplex in rural Mississippi just off of Highway 11, with the wind blowing like that…there was just no way. All those pine trees just fell, like, uh, I don't know, like when you try to balance a broom on your finger and it just falls. Like straight over. And they were falling all over houses and powerlines and everything so we knew it was going to go off sooner or later. So when it finally happened, we just hunkered down and tried to ignore that everything was so dark and depressing. I learned about this disease in Mr. Stricklin's psychology class, I had only been in that class for a week, but we learned about it like the third day, the disease, which is like these people in winter who when the days get shorter and things get kind of dreary get like depressed. But it's called Seasonal Affective Disorder or S-A-D, SAD, which that's just funny, but anyway, it was like that. When the power went off we were trying to pretend like we were happy and that the sound of the rain on the windows was soothing but the minute it got dark it was like the season had changed. And we were all just S-A-D. But still, you know, keep up the morale. We lit these warm vanilla sugar scented candles that I made us buy on our supply shopping trip, and I pretended that they were cookies baking and we started eating all the ice cream out the freezer as it thawed and we pretended like our damp thighs and forearms weren't sticking to the leather couch or the linoleum floor or our shorts or the walls or whatever we were currently touching. And it was fun for a little while because we were ready. I mean, yeah, of course the power's going to go out. There's a hurricane coming.

What we didn't realize is that we were going to lose water. That was what we hadn't counted on. We were all outside, standing actually in the rain and wind and for a minute it was kind of nice. Like, the little droplets of rain kept being blown into my face and the wind was cooling me down and it was so hot inside and it was just…really awesome is the only word I can use to describe it, like…the awesome power of nature or whatever. We were right in the thick of it. My brothers and I used to watch Storm Chasers on the Weather Channel when we were younger. And we kind of felt like storm chasers, I think one of them even kind of made a joke about it. We were getting pretty old then, Stephen was in his mid-twenties and Aubrey was in the third of his six-and-a-half years in college, and I was a senior in high school, but there was something absolutely necessary about standing out here together and secretly playing make believe like we used to. Pretending silently that it was our job to be here and that maybe there was a camera crew that would want to follow us around. We, the storm chasers, had chosen to be in this situation. And for a minute we forgot about what was really happening. For a minute, it wasn't so scary.

Then Stephen, with what I can only imagine was the unknowing bravery of someone who flies helicopters into tornados, stepped off the porch for just a second to see what the sky looked like. He's such a nerd. He loves clouds and all their different formations, cumulous, cirrus, stratus, whatever. Then out of nowhere I saw it falling. The pinecone. It

wasn't one of the ones you put in Christmas displays or that you cover in peanut butter for birds to eat, it was weird and heavy and hard and spiny. It had these razor sharp point things on the outside and as I watched it fall in slow motion towards his foot…Steve, completely unaware, head turned toward the clouds like always…. I knew somehow that everything was about to change. One Fourth of July when we set off fireworks at MawMaw's house, something went terribly wrong and he had to jump over a rogue Dizzy Lizzy or Jumping Jack or whatever you call the ones that just buzz and spin around on the ground. He jumped over it or he flailed over it as Stephen is less than graceful, and he landed funny and split open his toe. Then he ran all lopsided for safety toward the grass, tripping and accidentally shoving the raw meat of his wound into an ant pile. Anyway, I saw it coming, I saw each pinecone razor sink into the flesh of the top of his foot. The way he was jumping now reminded me of his hobbling toward the grass that summer. Only for reasons I can't explain, there was far more panic on his face. Though his ant pile foot injury goes down in history as one of the family's most gruesome childhood accidents, there was something much more terrifying for him about this instant. Maybe it was just the nerves and the tension of our situation or maybe it was because he was thinking about the clouds, but he was frozen, looking at the blood, the significant amount of blood, mixing with the rain and watering down, seeming to triple in quantity.

It wasn't even that bad a cut, more bark than bite, but it was Stephen's bloody foot that ended any fun that there had been about roughing it in the Hattiesburg wilderness during a hurricane. The Storm Chasers had retreated into the house and were washing the blood off when the faucet started to sputter and lose pressure. Mississippi was out of water.

There are certain things you don't consider when you're thinking about losing the ability to have water in your life. Like, at first you think "Oh man, like, I'm going to be so thirsty, like, how am I going make it." And then you remember all the bottled water you have and you realize that you'll have enough stuff to last you for at least a little while and you start to feel better about it. Then all of a sudden you have to go to the bathroom. I don't want to be gross or anything, but you can't flush toilets if there's no water. Toilets don't work like that. So we were our family of five, plus Stephen's wife, all using this one bathroom and the bathroom had no windows no ventilation at all, and we can't flush the toilet. And we had some rules that I don't really feel like I need to go into about what you could and couldn't do in the bathroom. But anyway, our toilet is basically working as a port-o-potty and the room is so dark, pitch black so we lit some of the scented candles in there. Let me tell you something, there's really nothing I have ever experienced in my life that is quite like the smell of warm vanilla sugar and urine mixed together.

We needed water and we needed electricity…and we needed information, but all we had was a radio that we had propped up against a metal mixing bowl because the antenna was broken. We knew things weren't good at home. We knew the levee was broken and we knew we wouldn't be able to go back for at least a little while. But while all of you were sitting in your houses watching video of bloated dead bodies drifting past rooftops, we were reading books and searching for a better radio signal. While you were being bombarded with images of Anderson Cooper's somber face, we were consumed with our

own thoughts, trapped in a silent world where there was no news coverage. Where we had no idea exactly what Katrina meant for the nation. We lived like that for two full days. We probably would've tried to stay longer, but one of the dogs vomited from dehydration and we knew he would die if we didn't go.

There wasn't much discussion about where. From Dallas to Atlanta, hotels and motels were booked with New Orleans evacuees. We needed somewhere we could go for a while just to figure out things out. So we had to stay with family, and our entire family was in southwest Louisiana, just far enough away from the hurricane's path to still have all of the utilities and conveniences that we, the savage Drakes, had lived without for the past four days. For my mom, I think it was less than ideal. Don't get me wrong, she loves her family, I know deep down she does. But she didn't move away from Abbeville just for the employment opportunities or the art or the culture. She moved away because she needed to distance herself from everything and everyone.

There's a whole part of my mom that I haven't really talked about yet, this side that we as a family don't like to talk about because it's frustrating and upsetting and I personally don't like talk about because it's so cliché. Because everyone's family is screwed up and everyone has that baggage and that black sheep. That's what basically the majority of my mother's family is. A flock of black sheep, like she's just the one white sheep. What I didn't tell you about my mom's family is the end of it. I said that her father was in the Air Force. He was a plane mechanic during the Vietnam War. He never saw combat, but he breathed in a lot Agent Orange which eventually killed him. He died of some kind of cancer, I don't even know, I don't think I've really wanted to just come out and ask about it, shortly after he came home, when my mom was maybe 19, and her youngest brother Jason wasn't even ten yet. My grandmother didn't really know how to function. I mean, there she was all alone with five kids. So instead of dealing with her grief and trying to help them cope, things got weird. Mimi dealt with each of them in a different way. She just ignored my Aunt Lisa completely as pretending that she didn't exist was easier than having to actually have a conversation with her. I don't know if Mimi ignored her because of this, I guess it's a kind of chicken or the egg thing, but all I know is that now Lisa has grown up to be the most unbearable of my mom's siblings. She calls you on the telephone and bitches you out for hours about how you're the worst relative ever. If you're a woman, it's because you're jealous of her and if you're a man it's because you're in love with her. My mom had our phone disconnected for 24 hours when I was in the tenth grade, just because she couldn't stand another chat with Osama bin Lisa, telephone terrorist. And then there was Jason. He was the youngest. Nine years old when my grandfather died, and kind of a trouble maker to begin with. He had gotten drunk for the first time at age six when he stole extra wine at his own first communion. His father's death didn't help, and he ended up dropping out of the seventh grade. And instead of being his mother, instead of being his disciplinarian, Mimi coddled him. He was her baby. He doesn't have to go to school if he doesn't want to.

After my Uncle Robert moved out, Mimi's twelve-year-old son was the only man left in her life, and if she stopped him from getting drunk, or smoking weed or staying out until all hours of the morning, maybe he would stop loving her. Maybe he would leave too.

And it's been that way ever since. And it's messed him up bad. I mean, one time, like, fairly recently, Jason was like jonsing for crack or meth or whatever he even does but he didn't have a car so he stole the bike from a child with Downs Syndrome and rode it away to go meet his dealer. Then he didn't have any money, so he traded the bike for drugs. Or like, one time he was high on PCP and he got a big knife and was practically stalking my Aunt Lisa and she hid in the bathroom and she was crying and scared and he started cutting through the screen door with the knife and she called the police and when they got there my grandmother sent them away and said Lisa was crazy. And when I was, I don't know, maybe in eighth grade, Jason asked my Aunt Kathy's husband Patrick, who is paralyzed, there was a motorcycle accident and he only has one working arm, he asked him for some money and Patrick called him a "punk" or an "asshole" or something. And then Jason went into this rage and just beat the shit out of him, breaking his nose and Patrick you know, couldn't really fight back with one arm. And again, my grandmother took Jason's side…because you know Patrick shouldn't have done any name-calling in the first place she said.

I tell these stories because I think they're funny and I think they're ridiculous. But then all of a sudden…I think about it. And I realize that these are real people. Real people that I've met. People whose DNA is not that different from my own. I mean, think about that…just think about it.

I don't think Mimi realizes how she feels exactly. I don't think she knew then, or knows now, when she gives him money, or lets him drunk drive the car my parents bought her, or checks him out of rehab early because he's "bored" that that's why she's doing it, that she's afraid he'll leave. But my mom knows. And it kills her. And that's why she wasn't ready to go back there. To be behind enemy lines. Or I don't even think that's the right war metaphor. I guess it's like being shot at by friendly fire. I don't know which one is worse.

SOPHIE

So we drive and drive and drive and we have to drive through like all these random places because we can't just drive through New Orleans which would be the fastest way. But anyway, we get there. We finally get to Lafayette, well actually it's Kaplan, technically, I mean it's just a suburb of Lafayette and we decide that we're going to go to my Aunt Kathy's house first. Like, we're just going to ease into the crazy and she is by far the nicest and most normal member of my mom's family. And like I said, we didn't really know what was going on because all we've had is our antennaless radio. And we get there and the news is on. Fox News. They love Fox News. And we just start watching it and that's kind of when we realized that this was an entirely different animal than we had even known in Hattiesburg. That there was something unraveling that was way bigger than us.

(Blackout.)

(In the darkness, the ominous FOX News music riff plays. As lights go

up, SOPHIE takes on the characters of SEAN HANNITY, GERALDO RIVERA, and SHEPARD SMITH, The following is a transcript from an actual FOX News Report).

SEAN HANNITY

Hi, I'm Sean Hannity and joining us now from outside the Convention Center in New Orleans is our very own Geraldo Rivera who's on the ground from earlier today. Gerlado.

GERALDO RIVERA

Hi, Sean. There's no earthly answer that anyone can understand, why these people after six days are still in this filthy, filthy miserable convention center. Why are they still here, there's the freeway here, I'll tell you what I would've done, what I would still do I would say let them walk out here, I would say, let them walk away from the filth, let them walk away from the devastation, let them walk away from the dead bodies here. Where are the buses? There are so many little babies. There are so many babies here, it's just not, you know, I mean it's, you know, it's just, its not a question of about your, it's a question of reality, how do you…how do you…I DON'T KNOW MAN. I don't know! Let them walk out of here, let them walk the hell out of here, let them get on the interstate and walk out, Walk some place walk to the Walmart on the other side of the river, These babies? What the hell? It's it's it's I…

HANNITY

Geraldo…hang on right there. Let's go back to Shep, Shepard Smith is also in New Orleans.

SHEPARD SMITH

They won't let them walk out of there because I'm standing right above that Convention Center and what they've done is they've locked them in there. The government said 'you go here and you'll get help,' and they didn't get help they got locked in there and they watched people get killed around them and they watched people starving and they watched elderly people not get any medicine. This is the bridge that takes you from New Orleans to Gretna, Orleans Parish to Jefferson Parish. It's the only way out, it's the connection to the rest of the world and they've set up a checkpoint, and anyone who walked out of that city now is turned around. Over there, there's hope, over there, there's electricity, over there there's food and water, but you cannot go from there to there, the government will not allow you to do it—

HANNITY

(interrupting)

Shep—I think, I want to get some perspective here because earlier today the images…

SMITH

That is all the perspective you need!

HANNITY

Hang on a second. I want to get perspective in this sense. That earlier today FOX was showing the images of the convoys, of the people getting in there with the convoys there was food there was medicine there was water there were supplies, so obviously we're getting a lot closer than we were. So what is going to take, what is the time frame, is anybody saying that that was going in there today to the people that you're talking about.

SMITH

No idea.

HANNITY

Alright, let's go back to Geraldo. Geraldo, you there?

RIVERA

Sean, look. Sean, just take a look, take a look. I want everyone in the world to see, six days after Katrina swept through this city, five days after the levee collapsed. This baby, this baby. Look in the face of the baby. This is it, no sugar coating, no political spin, no republicans or democrats, people suffering. Let them go, let them out of here. Let them out of here. Let them go. Let them across the interstate. Let them go.

HANNITY

Alright, thanks Geraldo. We appreciate it. From New Orleans tonight.

(FOX News music swells again.)

(A different news rift plays, perhaps one introducing WWL News Radio, so it is clear that this is a different broadcast. Next SOPHIE takes on the characters of New Orleans Mayor RAY NAGIN and radio interviewer GARLAND ROBINETTE.)

GARLAND ROBINETTE

This is Garland Robinette with WWL 870AM. We have New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin on the phone. Mayor Nagin, what did you say to the President of the United States and what did he say to you?

RAY NAGIN

I… I basically told him we had an incredible, ah, crisis here and that his flyin over in Airforce One does not do it justice. We're outmanned in just about every respect. You

know the reason why the looters got out of control? Because we had most of our resources savin people. Thousands of people. That were stuck in attics man. Old ladies. When you pull off the doggone ventilator vent and they're standin in there in water up to their frickin necks. And they don't have a clue what's goin on down here. They flew down here. One time, two days after the doggone event was over with TV cameras, A.P. reporters, all kind of goddamn, excuse my French, everybody in America, but I am pissed!

ROBINETTE

What do you need, right now, to get control of this situation?

NAGIN

I need reinforcements. I need troops, man. I need 500 buses, man. I'm like, YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN ME. THIS IS A NATIONAL DISASTER! GET EVERY GODDAMN GREYHOUND BUS COMPANY IN THE COUNTRY AND GET THEIR ASSES MOVIN TO NEW ORLEANS! That's, they thinking small, man, and this is a major, major MAJOR deal! We…. It's…. it's, it's, it's AWFUL down here, man! You know, God is lookin down on all this, and if they are not doin everything in their power to save people they are gonna pay the price! Because every day that we are delayin, people are dyin. Organize people to write letters. Make calls to their congressmen, to the President, to the Governor. Flood their doggone offices with requests to DO something! This is ridiculous! Don't tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They NOT here! It's too doggone late! Now get off your goddamn asses and do something. Let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country!

(Blackout.)

(Lights up on SOPHIE, sitting, dumbstruck.)

SOPHIE

I had to stop watching the news coverage almost immediately. I couldn't really stomach it. There was just too much suffering. I'll never forget these images of people walking around with rings on their bodies…their ankles, their waists, their chests. Rings from how high the water crept up on their skin. These people are still there, weeping and sweating and dying back in New Orleans. Since no news, literally, no news was good news, it was like, why even try…and I'm a little ashamed to say this…like, I think it makes me sound bad, but I think maybe part of the reason I couldn't do it, couldn't watch the hours of news coverage that was like oxygen for Aubrey was because the news was so global and I was so focused on myself. I was a senior in high school, and I was one of those kids who was like, you know, this is going to be the pinnacle of everything I have worked for my whole life, and you know, suddenly, I was completely removed from that. And as miserable as I was, I was better off than all those people still back in New Orleans. And I wanted to be miserable. I wanted to be the *most* miserable. Sounds terrible, I know. But

sometimes seeing someone else's misery makes it harder to wallow in your own. And that was basically all I wanted to do.

That first week in Lafayette was a little bit stressful. A lot bit stressful. Everyone was just trying to tread lightly on the eggshells that had blown in with the hurricane. It was hard for all of us but I think it took the greatest toll on my mother. Though Aunt Kathy is by far least offensive of the Hebert siblings, I could tell that she was starting to grate on Mom's nerves. The reason she and Kathy are the closest of the five is that they are the only ones that ever even really stood a chance. They're the two oldest, and so they were both out of the house before my grandfather died and their mother stopped being a mother and Jason spun out of control. They hadn't lived together since they were teenagers and I think they had both forgotten exactly how much they didn't have in common. There's something I should probably explain about Kathy so that you'll fully understand her. My grandmother Rita, that's Mimi, my mom's mom, she actually was engaged to this guy who was in the army, I think it was some kind of arranged thing, or at least I think Gra-maw had planned who she was going to marry, and when the guy was off at basic training or whatever, Mimi met this young handsome redheaded man and fell head-over-heels in love, broke off the engagement and much to my great-grandmother's displeasure, married him. She immediately got pregnant and shortly after realized that she and this man were actually not really very compatible. They separated and Gra-maw decided that the baby couldn't be raised by Mimi alone, so she took Kathy. Somewhere in the mean time my grandparents reconciled and had my mother, but Gra-maw didn't trust them enough to give Kathy back just yet. So she raised her until she was six years old. Mom still remembers begging to be allowed outside to play with Kathy, not realizing that most kids didn't need to cross the street to see with their older sisters. As a result, Kathy is kind of half in my mom's generation and half in the generation before. She speaks Cajun French fluently and is fiercely loyal to the old world values. So when they graduated from high school and my mom was trying to leave Abbeville for New Orleans or Shreveport or basically anywhere that wasn't there, Kathy stayed. She got a job at the Burger Chef fast food chain and now works as a child protection officer for the state department. But it's like, if you put them side-by-side and compare, now, it's weird, same genetics, completely different outlook. When I was little I used to get them confused because they have all the same basic features, curly hair, long oval faces, and big friendly smiles. But looking at them now, my mom's thick waves of silver hair and Kathy's thin color-treated ringlets, mom's strong jaw and Kathy's hint of a double chin, and my mom's bright white smile, aided by a few years of adult braces, and Kathy's snaggly teeth faded gray…it's so clear. Sleepless nights arguing with my grandmother, trying to talk a belligerent Jason into going peaceably to his bedroom and fighting futile verbal battles with Aunt Lisa had been hard on her. Years in Cajun country had worn Aunt Kathy down in a way my mom couldn't and didn't want to ever comprehend.

And it wasn't overt, but like, I would say in all the tiny little conflicts we had there, when we were staying with Aunt Kathy and her husband Patrick, you know, the uncomfortable instant when my mom asked to turn to the television from CMT to CNN, that brief tension filled moment before Toby Keith dissolved into Nancy Grace… there was this really small hint from them, I'm saying the smallest most subconscious insinuation that

we were just these jerks, these city slickers who thought we were better than everyone else, and that we sure did appreciate the little people, these simple country folk for their kindness. Which was never our intention, but…I mean, I think we were all trying to separate ourselves from them, at least within our own minds, because none of us, especially my mom, were ready accept that this place was our new home.

Like okay, I just want you to stop and think. Imagine today, when you leave this room, you have to leave town. Immediately. And that you're never allowed to go back to your house. Or your school or work or whatever. But obviously you don't know that yet. You have to leave because it's just a thing you do once a year or every two years because it's part of where you live, like it's a ritual almost. But so you just have to up and go and leave and find a new place to live and hang out with the relatives you try to avoid on national holidays and now they're your only friends and you depend on them for everything. And all of a sudden you have this realization that you can't go back for a while. Like, that that is not going to even be an option. So you start looking for apartments and schools for yourself or for your children and a new job and you're trying to just learn how to get around in a new place. And how can you even begin to do that when you don't have enough underwear, because why would you bring four months worth of underwear when you think you're going to be away for three days. And you're so focused on "well, when I get to go home…" or like "once I'm back at the house…" and it's like, no, stop right there. This is your home, these are your people. This dirty dusty ignorant place is your home. And once you're there, you know, once you've lived with them and become one of them, then how will you ever really go back to your "real" home? I mean what even is your "real home?" Just imagine that. Okay, stop thinking about it. I did. You have to. Because if you keep thinking about it then that's all you have.

SOPHIE

Life in Lafayette was a bit of an adjustment. The people were just so different from home. My mom is really proud of her culture. And even though she kind hates where she comes from, she kind of loves it too. She makes the best shrimp etouffee and crawfish fettuccini and jambalaya you've ever had. And my parents always had books in our house that were really pro-Cajun heritage like the Cajun Night Before Christmas, which is about what it sounds like, and this one called Feliciana Feydra LeRoux which is about the adventures of a spunky little Cajun girl who hunts alligators. And I grew up with mom telling these countless funny stories about the little old Cajun fishermen. But here in Lafayette, I didn't see quaint vivacity of those books or stories. There weren't, you know, that many men in shrimp boats yelling Aiyee or "You gotta suck da head on them there crawfish." I mean, so many people were just kind of…trashy. Lafayette is cane fields and strip malls and graffiti. Tweetiebird tattoos and beer bellies and excessive eyeliner. Like, once we moved out of Aunt Kathy's house and into a little fourplex out in the boonies, it seemed like that was all there was….well, let me first say, my father's a lawyer, I think I said that, and though we don't really live, like, in the lap of luxury or anything, we have a big house with lots of room in Uptown New Orleans down the street from Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's summer house. And this fourplex was the opposite of that. Instead of Hollywood celebrities, our neighbors were a family with four rowdy kids under the age

of 6, whose patriarch attempted to sell Aubrey crystal meth within a week of us moving in, and our landlady, Tracey, who was bipolar and made a living constantly selling and buying all of her belongings on eBay. Sometimes at night I could hear her muffled voice screaming at her son Cory about lithium. Cory was like a year younger than me, but for some reason he wasn't actually enrolled in school.

It was just different than what I was used to. Like, I was raised to be very open and accepting of other people's beliefs, but at the same time I was also taught about the things you're not supposed to talk about at dinner parties. You know religion, politics, money et cetera. But it was just different here. People talk about politics like constantly in Lafayette, because mostly everyone has the same political beliefs. Like, there are a lot of really staunch Republicans…or at least some kind of conservative, so you know they don't really worry about getting into a political argument or debate or offending someone, because it's the norm that everyone just agrees. And that was just something we weren't used to. Mom had created her own beautiful universe in New Orleans, filled with bamboo knitting needles, book groups and friends who passionately protested the war in Iraq. Everyone in Lafayette had done the same thing, made their own place where they feel comfortable, but there was just no overlap in mom's and their beliefs.

Okay, so here's a story. My mom started knitting a lot while we were in Lafayette because it's a stress reliever, so we started going to Hobby Lobby a lot. Even the craft stores were different from home. Almost everything at this Hobby Lobby was based on one of three themes: American flags, wide-eyed babies dressed as angels or kittens. And one time we go and she runs across this Christmas cookie tin with a picture of two red cardinals, posed lovingly next to each other on it. She got the ultimate kick out of it, because apparently, female cardinals don't look like that, like they aren't red, they're brown. So it was two male cardinals on this tree in, you know, kind of a romantic situation. And so it was this cookie tin that was basically saying that it was okay to be gay, which down there, it's like, the opposite. And so, she went up to someone working there and was kind of just goading her…I mean my mom's not a bully or anything, but I think she just was so fed up with everything, and she went up to this employee and said "You know, I think it's great that Hobby Lobby condones homosexual relationships," and then she showed the woman the cardinals on the tin. I think she was a little bit looking for a fight, like she wanted to see what the woman would say; how she would react to the fact that her Hobby Lobby, her employer, was I guess technically, through error or prank or activism or whatever, supporting gay cardinals. The lady looked outraged. She stuttered for a bit, and finally settled on "They're brothers. Or that's his daddy" and she walked away with her head held high, all in a day's work to defend Hobby Lobby's reputation. My mom still talks about it. It was probably one of the Lafayette highlights for her, the one time she ever left a political discussion feeling like she'd won.

Even though at the time she had totally humiliated me by accosting that employee and making her talk about gay birds, I was starting to understand why she did it. Mainstream Lafayette didn't stand for any of the same things that she did. And she wanted them to know that she wasn't one of them. She wanted everyone to know that she was an outsider. Still, I didn't have that luxury. I was just trying to make it through school and

blend in with the crowd. At Lafayette High, the last thing I wanted to do was stick out. Everyone hunts and fishes and they eat and breathe football and Bill O'Reilly. Okay, I guess it's not everyone, but that's the prominent group and the people that don't fit with that stereotype tend to try to lay low and not make waves. It's like, the Cajun thing, you know, they only see things one way, and if you're swimming upstream, well, it's amazing how bad good old boys can get.

My new school didn't have a drama club. They did however have an abstinence club, a patriotism club, and a parking lot club, which…I still don't quite know what the parking lot club did. The closest thing there was to being in a play was a speech, debate and theater course that I was taking. Most of the kids in the class were fulfilling their elective requirement with what they hoped would be en easy A, but it was there that I met probably my best friend at Lafayette High, Jeremy. We first met when we had to do a love scene from the play *The Rainmaker* and we had to kiss and it was so awkward for me, and I couldn't stop laughing and like he was like "Okay, what's wrong why can't we do this?" And I was like super weird about the whole thing, and I said "You know, I've never kissed a boy before" and then I immediately regretted it because come on awkward 17-year-old Katrina refugee that's not really anything to brag about, and, he just looked at me and said very simply and earnestly "I only want to kiss boys, so you know, I think we can overcome this" so we just giggled, and then he said "I knew I could tell you." And you know it was like this ultimate kind of vulnerability that we were sharing and we just became really close. And, I didn't realize it at the time, but like, he hadn't really told anyone yet. He hadn't denied it, but it wasn't common knowledge. And, like, since it really wasn't okay for him to be attracted to men, everyone just pretended that Jeremy was the sensitive type. He told me his grandmother described him as "almost too delicate for matrimony." And even Arielle, one of his best friends in the whole school, she didn't get it. She didn't even know because, he didn't tell her because he didn't feel like she would approve. In speech, I did a performance of something by Ellen DeGeneres, and afterwards when we were all talking, and she said to both of us "You know, I used to not like Ellen because of the whole lesbian thing, like she's so out about it and she flaunts it, you know, but she makes me piss my pants she's so funny."

Thanks…?

In her defense, I think she thought it was a compliment…but Jeremy was a little heartbroken. She had just basically confirmed for him that his own best friend couldn't understand or accept who he really was. I mean, sure, it wasn't like she had called him a fag in the hallways or anything, something he had gotten used to after having heard it every day since he was thirteen, but it meant he could never really be comfortable in his own skin. He didn't end up coming out until he left high school, left Lafayette forever. He couldn't stand it there and he studied really hard and ended up graduating like a full year early, and then he moved to Disney World to be one of those dancers in their parades and stage shows. When I think about it, there's nowhere better for him to be. Too bad he was born in South Louisiana…it's a shame you can't grow up in Disney World.

As months passed, I think I started to get used to the people there, I even had made friends with some of the Cajun stereotypes I had initially loathed. I was realizing that I had made some snap judgments, and you know just because it was, yeah, it was really different, it wasn't necessarily bad. Like I went to a football game. And I liked it. Still something was holding me back, I didn't really feel completely secure. Sure, I had Jeremy and I had made a few pretty cool new friends, but my only real, 100% best friend was my mother. And even though she was trying to put on a happy face for me and for my dad and brothers, I knew she was miserable. First it was my Uncle Robbeaux who was wearing her down. He had a bad habit of dropping in on us unannounced, something my mom couldn't stand. His real name is Robert, but everyone calls him Robbeaux, that's R-O-B-B-E-A-U-X, which is his stage name. He's sort of a jack of all trades. He used to be an alligator wrestler and carved things out of wood for a while and he briefly made a living on growing, brining and selling his own brand of pickles, Alabama Bill's Bread and Butter Chips… But for the most part he's the front man of a cover band called the Calico Cats, and they play at pubs and casinos and bars all over the Louisiana and in parts of Mississippi and Arkansas. He's got these long wild curls that stretch half-way down his back, and he collects football jerseys and NASCAR caps. What's funny is, you meet him, and he seems like a total hick, and I guess in a way he is, but my mom once told me this story about how when he was in fourth grade, he got scarlet fever and missed almost an entire school year. Mom would bring him his homework assignments, and he would just do them in his bed…he didn't need to be taught the material, he just taught it to himself. He taught himself the fourth grade…I mean how smart do you need be to do that? He's a longtime bachelor, and he and Uncle Jason used to play music together I think and both did a lot of drugs and drinking but I think for the most part Robbeaux is clean now. Still, one day he came to visit and this young guy, maybe 24 or 25, saw him walking into our apartment.

HEY ROBBEAUX.

And Robbeaux says hi back and then starts freaking out. Sweating and getting all nervous and everything and my mom keeps asking like "Who is that, Robert? Who is that boy?" and he keeps saying nobody that's nobody just someone who likes him, some kind of fan, but the whole thing is so suspicious, I mean because he's so nervous but also because I'm pretty sure the Calico Cats don't have any young male groupies, but my mom just won't let it go. She keeps pestering him. "Is that a drug dealer Robert? Are you using again? Robert, answer me!" And then he cracked.

THAT'S MY KID, OKAY?!

What?

Yeah, Uncle Robbeaux has a son who is nearly a quarter of a century old…that none of us even know exists. And he lives on our street. All my mom did was laugh. I mean what else could she do? It was bizarre, that's for sure. But I mean at that point, bizarre was the new normal…so at the time it didn't seem all that weird. So she laughed it off and Robbeaux wiped the beads of sweat off his forehead, but it was clear that it was more

than just a weird funny story. I think she was a little offended that he hadn't had the courage to tell her about his son, who it turns out was born just months after Mom had had Stephen, but I think there was more to it. The whole thing just made her depressed…just embarrassed her. After Robbeaux drove away in the 1979 Suburban that he had just spray painted to look like camouflage, she heaved a loud sigh and looked at me.

I'm sorry that this was how you had to find out that you're white trash.

Mom, we're not white trash.

I know, but they are.

About a week later is when it happened. Basically our Hebert family world exploded. Jason was arrested for child abuse. See, at that point in time, Jason and Gwyn, his lady friend I guess you'd call her, were living together with my grandmother because they had had a kid, Leela, who my mom swears wasn't actually related to us because she had a cleft in her chin or something. Gwyn had four other kids, four boys, Tyler, Link, Clyde and Rock and apparently one of them had talked back to Jason and he just headbutted the kid. Like literally, headbutted him, like, in the head. Even though my grandmother begged and pleaded with the police not to take Jason away, they had to, you know, because of the whole abusing a child thing. Mimi came over asking my mom for money so she could bail Jason out and then everything kind of blew up. My mom said absolutely not, that Jason needed to learn his lesson, that he needed to be in jail because he was a danger to himself and others. That he was self-destructing and had been ever since he was nine years old. There was crying and yelling and a slammed door, but it seemed like it was over. But it was just the calm before the storm.

(A phone rings.)

Enter Aunt Lisa, who we hadn't talked to since we had even moved here, utilizing her ultimate weapon of mass destruction: the telephone.

He's your brother. I guess you don't love him.

It's not that I don't love him I don't love his actions—

You don't love any of us! You think just because you moved away that you're not part of this family anymore? Just because you went and married some lawyer and moved to the big bad city that you're not one of us? Well, let me tell you something. No matter what you do, you're always going to be an Hebert. I know Daddy's looking down from heaven and he is ashamed of you. No stop it! Don't even try to talk, don't even try and defend yourself. I told her this would happen. I said, Mama, Jackie has always been a *selfish bitch*, but you can try and ask for money. Well, I would like to thank you for proving my point today. I owe it to you.

But I—

And then Lisa hung up. My mom was completely rattled and then she just started to cry. I had to give Aunt Lisa credit. It was a stealth mission that couldn't be answered.

She was right of course, in a way. About mom. And I think that's why her argument was so effective. My mom *had* left them. As they had all lined up behind the Pied Piper, my grandmother, stubbornly leading them into the swamps to drown, Mom had slipped out. She was the only one with a college degree, the only one with a big house in New Orleans, the only one who could afford to send her kids to private school. But now that we were here, in the middle of every dysfunction and humiliation, she couldn't ignore them anymore. No matter how proud she was of her Cajun cooking and her smattering of French colloquialisms, she had abandoned them for the etiquette and culture and status that she had acquired in New Orleans. She had turned her back on them and she knew it. She had abandoned them the same way I had, those many years ago, when I chose to take Spanish over the language of my people. Maybe that's why she was so against it. Maybe she was still smarting from that little tinge of regret of doing the same thing years before. Feeling guilty that she had finally gotten free.

EPILOGUE

We left Lafayette for home in December of 2005, four months after we had arrived. Though we were all happy to leave, happy to be home, happy to be in a place where we could be ourselves again, I think we could all feel it a little bit…that the "ourselves" we were being now weren't exactly the same as the ones we were before the hurricane.

Whenever I think about our time in Lafayette, I can't help but have a flash, a millisecond of a flash to the face of Clotile Sophie Doucet and the long trip she made down to bayou in 1755. I think about the life she would've wanted for her descendents, and I think it's pretty close to the one my mom has now. And I think Clotile Sophie would be pretty pleased with herself. After all, if she hadn't gone on her exodus, the journey from French to Cajun French, well, I know for sure we wouldn't have been able to go on ours.

I think my mother has finally forgiven herself for being who she is. Things aren't perfect with her family, Jason's been in jail for a DUI charge for the last six months and there have been more than a few big blow-out arguments, but I think for the most part, going back to Lafayette has really made my mother understand them a little bit better. And they understand us a little better also. That, you know, we know we're like them, but we we're like us, too.

As for me? Well, I did pick up a little bit of the French language while I was there.

Je m'appelle Sophie Drake, et je suis une Cajun fière.

Blackout.

End of Play.

Reflection

I finished my first complete draft of *Ragin'* on February 27, 2010. Exactly three weeks later, I had the pleasure of producing a staged reading of the play (casting myself as Sophie) for an extremely open and wonderful group of friends and colleagues in the black box theater at Emory's Burlington Road Building. I initially thought that I had learned everything I could from the text through the countless hours I spent writing, reading and rewriting. But as I discovered during my rehearsal process, as well as my performance on March 20, there was so much reading the text aloud and getting it on its feet could show me about my own work.

On paper, the structure of the narrative is pretty clear. The play begins with an anecdote from my childhood: the story of telling my Cajun-French family that I had chosen to take Spanish in school instead of French. It then moves on to a very brief introduction to Cajun culture and some of the ways that Cajun people I know perceive the world. Then, it eventually transitions into my experiences with Katrina and being forced to live with my mother's family in Lafayette. After zooming in on that specific incident in my life, the play closes with a broader look at the impact the event had on me, my mother and the rest of our family.

As I was writing, structure was not one of my biggest focuses. I spent so many late nights in my dorm room and the library just writing down the natural progression of my thoughts as I told my story. It was not until I was rehearsing for the reading that I realized that the structure of the play is perhaps one of its greatest strengths and one of

the reasons why it is so effective. In my rehearsal process, I broke down the text into the parts so that I could find acting beats and moments that overlapped within each segment. Studying the text and reading it aloud allowed me to discover that there were patterns within each section that I had completely unwittingly created. For example, I used similar metaphors and symbols throughout, most notably war metaphors and ring imagery. For instance, without even realizing it, I made comments on my aunt's ringlets, the mayonnaise ring around the mouth of a girl in my class, and the rings of mud and sludge surrounding New Orleans Katrina victims. Similarly, instead of meandering through introduction of who I am or who my family is, the play starts off with a story that immediately intrigued my listeners. The introductions of the characters are woven through the initial story, resulting in a narration that shows who characters are through their actions as opposed to just telling. Examples include the histories of family members as they enter the narrative. Furthermore, although I did not know it at the time (because I had not written or even imagined the end of the play at that point), the story about abandoning French for Spanish serves as such a strong conceit for the entire message of the play and the narrative as a whole and mirrors the structure and storytelling of the entire piece.

Another structural strength of my piece was the use of Hurricane Katrina as a storytelling device. The primary focus of the play is not the hurricane and its effects on New Orleans. *Ragin'* deals mostly with family and identity, and the hurricane only serves as a catalyst for Sophie's return to her roots. However, by framing the play around a catastrophic event that received so much national attention, I was able to tell

the duality of the stories, interweaving Sophie's cultural and familial experiences with the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and its influence on her life.

The reading and rehearsal process led to more than just learning about the play's structure. When I read it for the audience and I spoke with people afterwards, I was overwhelmed by how many people said to me "Your thesis was hilarious." Though I obviously appreciate their kindness and compliments regarding the humor of my piece, it genuinely surprised me that many people left the black box thinking that the play was a comedy. I think that since I have had this idea in my head for so long, and I have been pitching it as a "Katrina story," I remained blind to its impact as a comedic piece. Indeed, as I was writing, there were very few moments that I purposefully wrote in as funny, and it was a pleasant surprise that so many people thought it was amusing.

In a completely opposite vein, I was also a little bit surprised by the emotional intensity with which other people responded to the piece. After reading the play for the first time for an audience, an audience of one (my stage manager), I was shocked to see that she had started to tear up several times during the play. Additionally, one of my close personal friends came up to me after my presentation weeping uncontrollably. His body shook and convulsed as he cried unstoppable, hysterical tears. I had never seen him cry before and I have never seen anyone cry like that.

Of course, when I was writing the play, I imagined that Katrina-related subject matter would tug on a few heartstrings, but I have been immensely interested to find out that many people were emotionally impacted because I was so forthcoming with information about my family, my culture and a particularly difficult time in my life. I, as a person, tend to have no privacy, no secrets and no shame, and sharing information

in that way was not particularly hard for me to do. Still, I think for people who do not have the same ability to share painful information with others, the play, and my own openness, was moving.

In addition to illustrating some of the emotional reactions to the play, reading it aloud really pointed out some of its verbal weaknesses. At the point in the story where I describe my family's dining room, I mention our "hardwood floorboards." Nothing describes the floor of our dining area better, so I did not really think anything of using in my play. It was not until I performed it for the first time reading the whole thing straight through that I realized that my tongue, fatigued by two full pages of monologue, simply could not pronounce it. No matter how hard I tried, the only words I could ever get out were "hardwood floored boards" or "harwood floor boars." On the day of my dress rehearsal, I ended up changing the line to "cypress floorboards," which is just as apt as a description and much easier to pronounce.

Although that was really the only phonetic problem I ran into with my text, over the course of the rehearsal process and the reading, I did encounter some difficulties with subject matter. One example of this was when I, during the dress rehearsal improvised a short riff on my grandmother. There is a portion of play where I describe all of my Uncle Jason's shortcomings and offenses and my grandmother's subsequent reactions. I originally had chosen not to include my grandmother's response to when Jason stole a bike from a child with Down Syndrome, but in the heat of the reading, I decided to tell a tidbit that I had originally chosen to leave out.

"And my grandmother responded by saying it was okay… 'A little retard doesn't need a bike,' she said."

It's true. She did say something like that and it was horrible and embarrassing at the time…but the moment I uttered it during the performance, I remembered why I had left it out. There was just a certain chill in the air that I could sort of just feel. I felt like everyone in the room was judging my grandmother for that comment. And while she did say that statement and while it is despicable and totally crosses the line of what is appropriate, I just had this very striking, sad feeling.

In no way is my grandmother perfect. She continues to enable my Uncle Jason, leading him down a dangerous path that my mother believes will eventually kill him. But more than anything, to me, she is a sympathetic character. She is an old, fragile widow who is so dependent on the love of her ne'er-do-well son that she cannot see clearly anymore. She is pathetic and crazy, but she is not evil, and I love her. And by highlighting one of her lowest moments for everyone in that audience, my play achieved two things that I hoped it never would: it made my grandmother an unsympathetic villain, and simultaneously made me feel like I was somehow exploiting her. I knew then that I would not use that quote in the actual performance and that I would probably never even mention it again.

This brief improvised line almost completely sums up one of the biggest issues that I faced when I performed my thesis play: How do I tell stories about my family, about people that mean so much to me, without feeling like I am somehow benefitting from or reveling in their dysfunction? How should I feel when people laugh or cry at someone in my family? What does that say about me? Am I capitalizing on their hardships?

The day after I read my play for an audience, I had an email conversation with my eldest brother, Josh (Stephen in the script), about the play. I was excited to tell him about all of the positive reactions I had encountered. He was doing his best to be happy for me, but I could tell that something was bothering him. He very reluctantly told me that when he read the play, it had upset him. I was a little surprised. I would never have purposely depicted him in a way that was unflattering and I never thought I had. The following is a portion of what he said:

> "I'm not trying to guilt you here, [but] on some level my portrayal in your play hurt my feelings. I guess the whole feel of it was that you saw me as a big weird nerd, and I guess I've always thought of myself like that and hated it. I can't speak for the rest of the family, but I can imagine they may feel like you essentially wrote it as this almost cinderellaesque kind of story where you're Cinderella and we're the ugly stepsisters. We are depicted, on the whole, either as, snobbish, eccentric pretenders to culture, or as, in Andrew's [Aubrey's] case, just eccentric. You are rather inexplicably presented as this utterly different voice of reason for the most part. The only one really presented as positive or normal. Interestingly (perhaps intentionally?) this is exactly how I always thought mom's relationship with her own family was.
>
> As far as my own portrayal, I think what bothered me was that I was completely reduced to pretty cliché nerd character tropes. In my first scene I am reading a comic book and acting like a smug asshole, in the second, I am described first as clumsy, and then second as spacey. Sure it's not terribly insulting stuff, but it's all that's there."

I was taken aback. I had never expected this, but as soon as he said it, I had the same sinking feeling I had had when I had improvised that line about my grandmother. This discussion with my brother, which eventually blossomed into a full-fledged sibling fight (I was not initially very receptive to his criticism and found his Cinderella comment highly offensive), caused me to break down in tears. For reasons I could not explain at the time, I cried hysterically for about three hours. Even when he apologized, saying he felt awful just for bringing it up, I was completely inconsolable.

Over the course of the next few days, I reflected a great deal. Why had I reacted so strongly? What had driven me to weep with enough force to make my face swell up for the next 24 hours? After having a while to decompress, I think that I have figured out exactly why my brother's comments, which were never intended to upset me, had affected me so deeply.

First, the knowledge that I had created something—poured my heart and soul into something—that had hurt my brother in that way absolutely devastated me. Because I had just had the reading the day before, I was still glowing with the compliments of people who had enjoyed my project. Somehow, I had unwittingly preyed on all of his insecurities. And the very notion that something that had acquired me such warm critical praise could actually hurt someone I love absolutely broke my heart. The realization of the negative power *Ragin'* could have on my family members really hit home at that moment. I suddenly felt like the whole event had been cheapened. I felt like I was profiting off of my family's misfortune.

Then I thought about my brother's reaction. Of my siblings, Josh and I are the most similar. More than anything, I really wanted him to love my play. And though he said he liked it, and he was extremely proud of me for writing a thesis, he seemed to be dwelling on his own depiction in it. Was this how it was going to be with all of my family members? Since they are all characters in my play, I became highly concerned that they would never be able to appreciate the way outsiders would. I began to consider the possibility of never being able to share something that meant so much with the people I love the most. Simply writing this play had caused me to feel so much closer with my

family members, and the idea that it would actually push them away seemed completely horrible.

In retrospect, I know that these questions and fears are mostly unfounded. I genuinely believe that my family is mature enough to be able to separate themselves from characters in the play, but I do think that there are potentially portions that I need to revise. More than anything, Josh's comments pointed out that I wrote him (and my other brother) into the play as a completely one-dimensional character. One of the reasons I was so surprised that Josh had taken offense to the play was that the character based on him was so completely minor, but now I realize that that was precisely the problem. "Stephen," because he is featured so briefly, never gets his side of the story told like some of the other characters, namely Uncle Robbeaux. Josh believed the few details that were added portrayed him as a nerd, and I, as a playwright, wrote in no evidence to the contrary. Thus, that is a failure on my part as I should make characters with more depth than just a stereotypical nerd (which, for the record, my brother Josh is not).

I came to Emory planning to major in journalism and eventually to become reporter. I was the editor of my high school newspaper and have always been very comfortable with the journalistic style of writing. Then I took a playwriting course in the fall of junior year and fell in love. Although many probably would not immediately associate journalism and playwriting, I have discovered that the two actually overlap. Both seek to share human experience, just through different means. However, for this project, I wanted to really find the disconnect between the two. I tried to abandon the news writing I have learned in high school and college and embrace a stream-of-

conscious playwriting style. I did not focus on word count or verbal efficiency; I put all of my energy into creating a solid, honest narrative.

This project has made me realize that in the future, in at least some capacity, I would like to continue working with playwriting. Additionally, *Ragin'* has solidified my desires to continue writing and performing semi-autobiographical narratives. As for the play itself, I hope that it would one day develop into a longer, full-scale production, potentially remaining a one-person piece or perhaps being rewritten into a monologue-style play with three or four actors playing a variety of characters.

From the moment the seed was planted at the end of my junior year until now, *Ragin'* has been an all-consuming effort. I have spent so much time racking my brain for memories that I have spent years trying to forget, hours and hours trying to condense all of those times and people into some kind of logical order, and even more time finally putting them on the page. The result has been one of the most important theatrical events of my life. As an actor, as a writer, as a New Orleanian, as a Cajun, and as a human being, the experience of composing and sharing this tale has changed the way I approach storytelling, acting, and my own way of life.

Works Cited

Elam, Harry and Alice Rayner. "Echoes from the Black W(hole)." *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*. Ed. Jeffrey D. Mason and Ellen Gainor. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2002. Print.

Hebert-Leiter, Maria. *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. Print.

McMillan, Michael and SuAndi. "Rebaptizing the World in Our Own Terms." *Black Theater*. Ed. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2002. Print.