AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER  
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PRESENTS

WORDS on PLAYS  
INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Blood Knot

BY ATHOL FUGARD  
DIRECTED BY CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT  
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER  
FEBRUARY 8–MARCH 9, 2009

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Words on Plays is made possible in part by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

A.C.T. is supported in part by the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art, and the donors of The Next Generation Campaign.

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South African man passing whites-only beach sign before the end of apartheid (photo by Ulli Michel, © Reuters/CORBIS)
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Blood brothers Zachariah and Morris, by costume designer Sandra Woodall
CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF

BLOOD KNOT

The world premiere of The Blood Knot (original title) took place at the Rehearsal Room of the African Music and Drama Association, Johannesburg, South Africa, September 3, 1961, under the author’s direction. The original U.S. production opened at the Cricket Theatre in New York, March 2, 1964, under the direction of John Berry. A 25th-anniversary production of the revised Blood Knot opened at the John Golden Theatre on Broadway, December 10, 1985, also under the author’s direction.

CHARACTERS AND CAST

MORRIS  Jack Willis

ZACHARIAH  Steven Anthony Jones

Zachariah is dark skinned and Morris is light skinned.

THE SETTING

All the action takes place in a one-room shack in the “nonwhite location” of Korsten, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The walls are a patchwork of scraps of corrugated iron, packing-case wood, flattened cardboard boxes, and old Hessian bags. One door, one window (no curtains), two beds, a table, and two chairs. Also in evidence is a cupboard of sorts with an oil stove, a kettle, and a few pots. The shack is tidy and swept, but this only enhances the poverty of its furnishings. Over one of the beds is a shelf on which are a few books (including a Bible) and an alarm clock.

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1. Late afternoon. Morris is lying on his bed. When the alarm clock rings, he jumps to his feet and begins to prepare for his brother Zachariah’s imminent arrival by resetting the alarm clock and putting out footsalts and a basin of warm water. Zach comes in and sits on his own bed, removing his shoes and putting his feet in the basin. Zach is tired and angry: his white employer forced him to spend the entire day standing at the gate of the whites-only park where he works. He doesn’t want to talk about Morrie’s plans for the future—they are saving money to buy a small two-man farm—and complains that, before Morrie moved in a year ago, he used to have fun with his friend Minnie. When he went out in the evenings with Minnie, Zach recollects, there were women involved. Morrie
suggests that Zach find a female pen pal. At first, Zach is skeptical, because he cannot read or write, but Morrie offers to write the letters for him, and Zach agrees to purchase a newspaper with advertisements for pen pals the following day.

Morrie reads their nightly Bible passage and encourages Zach to pray for what he really wants. Zach prays, “Dear God, please bring back Minnie,” and asks Morrie why he returned to Korsten after being away for so long. Morrie reminds Zach that they are brothers. Zach falls asleep.

Scene 2. The next evening. Zach has bought a newspaper, and Morrie reads to him about three available young ladies: Ethel Lange from Oudtshoorn, who is “18 years old and well-developed”; Nellie de Wet from Bloemfontein, who is “22 and no strings attached”; and Betty Jones from Roodepoort, who is looking for “gentlemen friends of maturity.” Zach is not very interested in the entire pen pal endeavor, but eventually they settle on Ethel. Though ostensibly only transcribing for Zach, Morrie comes up with most of the letter. After they finish, Morrie reads that night’s Bible passage, and Zach asks if Morrie has ever been with a woman. Morrie resists; he doesn’t think about sex and women in the same way that Zach does, because he “touched something else once.” Zach is asleep before Morrie finishes speaking.

Scene 3. A few days later. Morrie counts their savings while he waits for Zach. When the alarm clock rings, he prepares the footbath. Zach arrives, exhausted from another day of standing at the gate. He has a reply from Ethel, but does not seem to care. Morrie tries to engage Zach by showing him the photograph that Ethel has included, and Zach becomes a little more intrigued. When Morrie takes a second look at the picture, however, he realizes that Ethel is a white woman. Horrified by the punishment they face if caught communicating with a white woman, he instructs Zach to burn the letter and the photograph, but Zach is suddenly very interested in Ethel, and demands that Morrie read him the letter.

Zach thinks it is funny that Ethel is a white woman who thinks he is a white man, although he tells Morrie it would not be so funny if it were Morrie writing to Ethel, because Morrie’s light skin means that he could pass for white. Morrie does not think it is funny at all. They have learned from the letter that Ethel’s brother is a policeman, and it would be much safer to destroy all evidence of their relationship with Ethel and never write to her again. Zach argues that it would be wrong not to respond to such a nice letter, and Morrie reminds him that he wasn’t interested before Ethel turned out to be white. Zach agrees, saying that the idea of “this little white Ethel” is better than all their plans for the future, and the “best thought I ever had.” They write a second letter, and this time,
Zach is quite eloquent. When the letter is finished, Morrie begs Zach to burn it: “You’re going to get hurt,” he says, “you’re playing with fire.” Zach suggests that he never had much to play with as a child, and they begin to reminisce about their mother.

Zach remembers their mother’s damaged feet and not having many toys, but Morrie doesn’t remember that kind of hardship; they even remember different sets of lullabies. Morrie is upset and agitated, until their memories agree on a driving game they played as children in the ruins of an old Chevy. They re-enact the game and agree that “those were the days.” But Morris is worried: “Now there is Ethel as well and that makes me frightened.” To Zach, however, Ethel is just “another game.”

Scene 4. An evening later. Zach is happy because another letter has come from Ethel. Morrie reads it: Ethel is coming to Port Elizabeth for a holiday in June, and she wants to meet Zach. Zach is suddenly frightened. Morrie encourages his fear, forcing Zach to imagine what will happen if he and Ethel do meet, how Ethel will scream at the sight of him, and how her uncle and brother will beat him. Morrie forces Zach to admit that he can never have Ethel, because she is white and he is black. Seeing Zach’s pain, Morrie wishes he had been born as black as his brother.
The alarm clock rings for bedtime, but Zach has an idea. He points out that Morrie is light-skinned enough to pass for white and suggests that Morrie go to meet Ethel in his place. Morrie protests that there is more to a gentleman than skin color, and Zach decides that they should use their savings—their “future”—to buy a gentleman’s suit for Morrie to wear. At first, Morrie resists, but Zach is persuasive and eventually he agrees to the plan.

**Scene 5. The next day.** Zach arrives home early, after leaving work in the middle of the day to shop. He presents the new suit to Morrie, but Morrie is nervous. He has passed as white before and knows there is an attitude to whiteness that is more than skin color and clothes. Zach encourages him to try on the suit—“just for the sake of the size,” he claims—and eventually Morrie puts on the hat and the jacket, as well. They act out a scene: Morrie the white man walking with Ethel, and Zach the black man selling peanuts. Zach encourages Morrie to be harsher and meaner, to act more like a white man would to a black man. He pushes Morrie until Morrie, deep in the role, calls him “swartgat,” a harsh, derogatory term for a black person. Zach is shocked, and Morrie immediately apologizes, protesting that he didn’t mean it. They’re brothers, he insists, taking off the hat and jacket so that Zach can recognize him again. “That’s funny,” Zach says, “I thought . . . I was looking at a different sort of man.” Morrie explains that he was that other sort of man, when he was away, and that he came back to Zach and Korsten because he is “no Judas.”

**Scene 6. Night.** Morrie sleeps. Zach wakes up and puts on the suit and hat. He addresses his mother, wondering which of her sons she loved better, and begging her to accept him even though he is not “white” like Morrie. When his imagined mother begins to cry at the question, he offers her a gift of beauty that is more than “skin deep.”

**Scene 7. The next evening.** The shack is in disarray, and Morrie sits alone, his alarm clock and Bible in a bundle on the table. Zach comes in as usual, but when there is no footbath prepared he notices that something is wrong. Morrie explains that he was planning to leave, but found that he couldn’t, and has “given up instead.” Zach tries to cheer him up by producing a new letter from Ethel, but Morrie doesn’t want anything to do with Ethel. Zach convinces him to read the letter anyway, for safety’s sake. It turns out that Ethel is now engaged, and won’t be coming to visit or writing them any more letters. Relieved, Morrie unpacks his belongings; now that the Ethel threat is over, he thinks things can go back to the way they were before.

Zach, however, pushes Morrie to put the suit on again. Morrie is surprised and nervous, but Zach is insistent. “We’re only playing,” he says. They act out a scene in which Morrie is a white gentleman at the park where Zach works. At first, Morrie tries to be a kind and
gentle white man, but Zach pushes him to be meaner and harsher, just as he did before. This time, the game goes much further: Morrie beats Zach savagely with the umbrella. Then the power shifts, and Zach stands over Morrie on the point of violence. In the nick of time, the alarm clock rings and breaks the tension. They prepare for bed. Morrie reflects on how they got “carried away,” but “it was only a game.” He tells Zach that it’s a good thing they have that game, because they have a lot of time left together in the shack that is their home, without a future. Zach wonders if there is some other way for them to be, some alternate destiny, but Morrie does not think there is: “We’re tied together,” he says, “It’s what they call the blood knot . . . the bond between brothers.”
In October 1961, Athol Fugard, a 29-year-old white South African playwright with two short dramas (*No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*) to his name, and his friend Zakes Mokae, a black jazz saxophonist-turned-actor, made theatrical history when they took the stage together for a single Sunday-night performance of Fugard’s third play, *Blood Knot*. By necessity a clandestine engagement given the apartheid government’s ban against multi-racial events, the performance took place in an abandoned button factory in Johannesburg’s Dorkay House. The actors converted the space into a theater for the bare-bones two-character production, hanging costumes over the windows to muffle the street noise. Crowded into the hot, unventilated room, a double-capacity audience sat rapt through a premiere that has since taken on the status of legend and launched the career of South Africa’s preeminent dramatist.

“They had never seen anything like it,” Mokae recalled years later of the predominantly white audience’s reaction to *Blood Knot*. They were “streaming in week after week to sit as if fascinated by a snake,” said novelist Nadine Gordimer. The act of watching a black man and a white man onstage as brothers—struggling alongside their restive countrymen to honor their family bond, their “blood knot,” and to right their imbalances without succumbing to violence—was itself a charged event, and as such the play became not only artistically but also politically significant. (Four years after the play’s premiere, the apartheid regime declared mixed casts illegal, and in 1967, in response to a BBC television broadcast of *Blood Knot*, the police confiscated Fugard’s passport.) The original production went on to transfix audiences in a six-month tour across South Africa, while subsequent stagings brought Fugard—and his country’s life-and-death struggle—to the international stage, with performances in London and New York. A 1985 Broadway revival, with Fugard and Mokae reprising their original roles, earned a Tony Award nomination for Best Play.

*Blood Knot* also became the model for many of Fugard’s subsequent plays: close, condensed, finely wrought studies of two or three people linked in a love-hate bond of blood, marriage, or friendship. His best-known works (all of which were written under apartheid—*Boesman and Lena*, *A Lesson from Aloes*, *The Island*, *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*, and “*Master Harold*… and the boys”—are also potent metaphors in which characters voice their personal desires with an urgency that continues to speak to their country’s need to shed its divisive, troubled past and to find a common ground on which to build a humane future.
Fugard, who for many years has divided his time every year between Nieu Bethesda, a semidesert village in South Africa’s Eastern Cape, and the beach community of Del Mar, California, spoke with A.C.T. Contributing Editor Jessica Werner Zack from his American home as Blood Knot rehearsals got underway. In conversation, while acknowledging theater’s essential ability to heighten and even provoke political consciousness, Fugard stressed the universal, existential nature of Zachariah and Morris’s plight in Blood Knot. These brothers are defined in Fugard’s mind, as all his characters have been, more significantly by their shared humanity than by any government’s restrictions.

**WHEN BLOOD KNOT PREMIERED IN THOSE FAMOUS PERFORMANCES IN JOHANNESBURG IN 1961, WERE YOU AWARE THAT SOMETHING SPECIAL WAS HAPPENING? WHAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MEMORY LOOKING BACK NOW?**

What I remember most about those performances is that I was such a novice at theater, and that I had the chutzpah—I think that would be the only right word—to take this on. I knew something about writing already at that stage, but I had never really been a director or an actor, and there I was prepared to go onto a stage as director and actor and author. It was really the first time I wore all three hats, which for better or for worse is something...
that has happened to me time and again in my 50 years in theater. And what an amazing contrast it is between that first performance in an abandoned little loft space and 25 years later when the same two actors in the same play ended up on a Broadway stage [laugh].

**DID YOU FEEL AT THE TIME THAT YOU WERE TAKING A RISK IN WRITING AND PERFORMING IN THIS PLAY?**

You know, people have called this a serious failing of mine, yet, fortunately for me, it has always worked to my advantage—I have never worried about consequences. The act of writing something you believe in, that you feel must be written, is a compulsion that cannot be ignored. When you are sitting with blank paper and a pencil in your hand, obsessed with a set of images, you just can’t argue with that or qualify it in any way. You just have to hold your breath and jump right into the deep end.

**SO, THINKING BACK TO BLOOD KNOT’S PREMIERE, WHY DO YOU THINK IN THAT OPPRESSIVE AND DIVIDED ATMOSPHERE THAT THE APARTHEID GOVERNMENT ALLOWED YOU TO KEEP PERFORMING THE PLAY, A BLACK MAN AND A WHITE MAN ONSTAGE TOGETHER?**

Well, eventually I lost my passport because of it. The government changed its attitude as time went along, but initially they dismissed theater as of any significance or threat whatsoever. They thought, We’re not going to worry about that. If it gives us a little adverse publicity, let’s just let the idiots do it. Who cares? Well, they were wrong.

**WHEN WE LAST SPOKE, WHEN A.C.T. PRODUCED “MASTER HAROLD”... AND THE BOYS IN 2001, YOU SAID THAT A VERY SPECIFIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE PROMPTED YOU TO WRITE THAT PLAY. IS THERE A CENTRAL IMAGE THAT INSPIRED BLOOD KNOT?**

There is a very specific image that sparked Blood Knot, and it is an image that has stayed with me through all these years. It was during my few years [as a student] at University of Cape Town. I had hitchhiked back to my hometown to spend the Christmas holidays with my family. I knew my brother, who had been away from home for some time, would also be there. I arrived late at night, and my mother let me into the darkened, everybody’s—still—sleeping house, and in whispers we moved to the bedroom I had always shared with my brother. I could see my mother was a little disturbed, and when she held out the candle so I could see my brother, I saw that he had suffered a lot during those few years. The pain, even in that sleeping face in repose, was written very powerfully on his face. Instead of the powerful, broad-shouldered man I remembered, who I had always been a little jealous
of because of his physical prowess and good looks, I saw somebody who had really taken some hard knocks.

It was unquestionably that image of a sleeping man, which is actually embodied in the monologue that Morrie has at the end of the first scene when Zach has fallen asleep, and nothing related to the politics of South Africa, although I went on to realize that the politics of South Africa gave me a perfect way of exploring that relationship. The seminal image is an existential one. There is me, and there is you. I had been reading a lot of existentialists at that stage, and this was such a perfect embodiment of one of the fundamental elements of existence: the other.

I WONDERED READING THE PLAY IF YOU WERE ALREADY INTERESTED IN BECKETT WHEN YOU WROTE IT.
Well, more importantly than Beckett, he is preceded by Sartre and Camus, and those are the two that I had read at that stage. So, my reading of Sartre and Camus—Beckett came years later—made me aware of the existential quality of that moment. I and the other. I loved my brother, but what the hell could I do about his life? I couldn’t live his life for him. I couldn’t wrap him up and put him in a bottom drawer to keep him safe from more danger. So, it starts with that. Then, I suppose the South African situation, which defined my life to a great extent at that point and really has to this day, in which people are divided by the color of their skin, gave me a way of dramatizing the difference between me and the other. So that’s how it all comes together. It ended up in the writing of a play which I rightly describe as the moment that I found my voice as a playwright. There had been a few apprenticeship works before that, but that was the moment I found a voice that I realized nobody but myself could write, and that’s what finding your voice means.

IT MIGHT BE HARD FOR YOU TO SAY SINCE YOU WROTE IT, BUT TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE THIS PLAY’S ABILITY TO CONTINUE TO SPEAK TO SO MANY PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES OVER SO MANY YEARS, DIVIDED AS WE ARE IN SO MANY WAYS?
That is a good question. Whether they realize it consciously or not, it is about that existential dilemma, overlaid by race in certain situations: There is me, and there is the other. That is the issue that really makes it still relevant to people today and, well, whenever.

SO TO YOU THE IDEA OF A “BLOOD KNOT” IS MORE UNIVERSAL THAN THE BOND SHARED BY BROTHERS, OR BY TWO MEN OF DIFFERENT COLORS. IT’S THIS NOTION OF INTERDEPENDENCE, THAT WE ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED
WITH ONE ANOTHER REGARDLESS OF NOT JUST RACE BUT EVERYTHING THAT OUTWARDLY SEPARATES US.
Yes. It all started with this sense of existential guilt one feels if one is looking at the faces of Darfur, or the faces of people in Pakistan at the moment, or in Iraq. You know, we are responsible [for one another]. We are our brother’s keeper.

IN SOUTH AFRICA UNDER APARTHEID, THE POLITICS OF PASSING, OF A LIGHT-SKINNED BLACK MAN BEING ABLE TO LIVE UNNOTICED AMONG WHITES, MUST HAVE BEEN A TREMENDOUSLY FRAUGHT ISSUE.
Oh, gosh. There were so many tragic stories about that, about a member of a family having to disown his relatives because by the whims of genetics he or she was born with a skin that could pass for white, whereas the rest of the family without any question or testing was obviously nonwhite, or, more specific to South Africa, was colored. That was what Zach and Morrie would have been, of mixed heritage. Oh, so many tragic stories.

ZACH WORKS DAILY TO THE POINT OF EXHAUSTION, AND MORRIE CARRIES AN OBVIOUSLY HEAVY BURDEN OF GUILT FOR HIS ABILITY TO HAVE PASSED AS WHITE. DID YOU INTEND AUDIENCES TO SEE BOTH BROTHERS AS EQUALLY OPPRESSED?
Very definitely. I wasn’t conscious of this while I was writing it, but there is a kind of prophetic note in the play. In the first half, Morrie is dominant. And then in the second half you see Zach at that moment when he emerges and is proud of his blackness and knows what it is, but then Zach sets up that terrible game in the end and takes control of their life in that little shack in which they live. I knew in my bones that South Africa was heading for violence, and that the violence was going to come from the oppressed, as it has always done. We just have to look at world history. Zachariah, in his assumption of power, inevitably discovers his potential for violence. It can’t be avoided.

YET YOU HAVE DESCRIBED SOUTH AFRICA’S EMERGENCE INTO A DEMOCRACY WITHOUT UNTOLD BLOODBED AS A MIRACLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY.
You know, there was enough bloodshed on the way. If I’m guilty of saying there was no bloodshed, it is a bit of a misnomer. I don’t know what the difference is between a cupful of blood and a bucketful.
YOU MAKE A VERY GOOD POINT. MAYBE IT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BLOODSHED AND OUTRIGHT APOCALYPSE.

Absolutely. We’re speaking in relative terms, because we must remember the breakdown of South Africa’s population: Four-and-a-half million whites imposed their brutal rule on 19 million black people [1978 statistics]. When those black people rose up, it would be a tsunami, there would be nothing left of that little white island. That was in the cards.

SO WHEN YOU WROTE BLOOD KNOT, DID YOU ENVISION THAT RACIAL APOCALYPSE WAS POSSIBLE?

My answer is yes. The dangerous game Morrie and Zach play [at the end of Blood Knot] is no doubt going to be played again. What happens if one night that alarm clock doesn’t ring? They’ve been conditioned like a pair of Pavlov’s rats to respond to that ring-ring-ring. But alarm clocks sometimes do not ring. And if that happens in South Africa, what then?

HAVE YOU ALWAYS FELT A RESPONSIBILITY AS AN ARTIST TO CONFRONT IN YOUR WORK THE INJUSTICES YOU SEE IN THE WORLD, AS OPPOSED TO WRITING FROM A MORE STRICTLY PERSONAL PLACE OR TO ENTERTAIN?

I’ll tell you what I realized, and I can describe the moment that I realized it. What I realized was that with the gift of creativity comes responsibility and obligation. If it’s given to you, then it’s given to you not to be selfish with. I was 21 or 22, and I had just come back home from being a sailor and found a job freelancing for a newspaper. One of the thoughts I had for a story was to visit a night school in one of the black townships, a black ghetto, really. I thought it would be a good story, these black people trying to learn to read and write. And there they were, seated behind their desks. There were a couple of middle-aged men and women, and then I noticed there was one very old man. Really old. With a beard the color of the one I’ve got on my chin right now and with the head of hair to match. He was so beautiful. And he had a pencil in his hand, and in front of him was open an exercise book, and laboriously he was writing out the alphabet. I stopped and asked him why in his old age did he want now to learn to write? And he said to me, “If I can’t read the white’s man’s notices, I will be in trouble.”

Walking away from that little school, I became very conscious of the power of literacy. I thought about the fact that I could read and I could write, and that there were the likes of him who couldn’t. And in that instant was born a sense of responsibility in me, responsibility to him. Because I had a gift of putting words on paper, I was obligated to do something that was of some use possibly, some use to my fellow men and women and children.
A THREAD OF HOPE RUNS THROUGH YOUR WORK, DESPITE THE DIFFICULT CONTEXT IN WHICH MUCH OF IT WAS IMAGINED. DO YOU SEE BLOOD KNOT AS A HOPEFUL PLAY?
Yes, it is. It’s just what the title says. There is a blood knot that ties every human being to another human being. It’s a knot we each share that cannot be untied.

SINCE YOU SPEND SO MUCH TIME IN THE UNITED STATES, DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS ABOUT HOW THIS PLAY SPEAKS TO AMERICA RIGHT NOW?
I think we are going to answer that question a lot more clearly after the Iowa caucuses. More importantly, after the presidential election. America’s hunger for change is so great right now, and I must admit that I feel absolutely honestly that with respect to the Democratic nomination, if it’s change America wants, you’ve got to vote for Obama. I really passionately believe that. There is no question that John Edwards and Hilary Clinton are going to end up powerfully influenced by corporate interests, and I see the possibility that Obama might rise above that. That is the devil in Washington politics. And it will continue to get even worse as time passes.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT SOUTH AFRICA STILL SUSTAINS YOUR CREATIVITY?
Yes.

YOU HAVE SPOKEN IN THE PAST OF HAVING “UNMET APPOINTMENTS,” IN TERMS OF HAVING EXPERIENCES OR MEMORIES WHICH YOU INTEND TO “MEET” AGAIN IN WRITING. DO YOU STILL THINK OF YOUR WORK THAT WAY, AND DO YOU HAVE MANY SUCH APPOINTMENTS IN YOUR HEAD?
Oh very definitely. In fact, I’ll be going back to South Africa in a month’s time for a long stay in my home there. It is for that very reason, just to look at my appointment book again. And I’m afraid I’m looking at the clock and I haven’t at this moment got as much time.

ARE THESE APPOINTMENTS STILL WITH SOUTH AFRICA DURING APARTHEID, RATHER THAN SINCE IT FELL?
Oh no, I’ve kept some appointments with postapartheid. I’ve got a play [Victory] opening in Los Angeles in a couple weeks’ time which is about postapartheid South Africa.

HAVE YOU BEEN SADDENED BY THE COURSE THE COUNTRY HAS TAKEN SINCE APARTHEID FELL, THAT THERE IS STILL SUCH CHAOS?
Oh yes, that play is very much about that.
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

ATHOL FUGARD has been working in the theater as a playwright, director, and actor since the mid 1950s in South Africa, England, and the United States. His plays include: No-Good Friday, Nongogo, Blood Knot, Hello and Goodbye, People Are Living There, Boesman and Lena, Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act, Sizwe Banzi Is Dead, Dimetos, The Island, A Lesson from Aloes, “Master Harold”... and the boys, The Road to Mecca, A Place with the Pigs, My Children! My Africa!, Playland, Valley Song, The Captain's Tiger, Sorrows and Rejoicings, Exits and Entrances, and his most recent play, Victory. He has been seen onstage in South Africa, in London, on and off Broadway in New York, and in regional theater in the United States. Film credits include The Road to Mecca, Gandhi, The Killing Fields, Meetings with Remarkable Men, Marigolds in August, Boesman and Lena, and The Guest. He has written the novel Tsotsi, a film version of which was made in South Africa and won the 2006 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, as well as the Michael Powell Award and the Standard Life Audience Award at the 2005 Edinburgh Film Festival, the People’s Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival, and the Audience Award at the Los Angeles AFI Film Festival. He has also published his Notebooks: 1960–1977 and the autobiographical memoir Cousins.

If there is a human predicament, this is it. There is another existence and it feels, and I feel it feels, yet I am impotent. . . . I don't feel innocent. So then how guilty am I? . . . Maybe guilt isn't all doing. Maybe just being is some sort of sin. I'm sure Morrie says that somewhere. If he hasn't, he should.

—Athol Fugard, in the introduction to an early version of The Blood Knot, quoted in Truths the Hands Can Touch, by Russell Vandebroucke
FROM FUGARD’S NOTEBOOKS

1960
London. Notes for a play
Korsten in Port Elizabeth: up the road past the big motor assembly and rubber factories, turn right down a dirt road, pot-holed, full of stones. Donkeys wandering loose. Chinese and Indian grocery shops. Down this road until you come to the lake—the dumping ground for waste products from the factories—a terrible smell. On the far side—like a scab on the hill rising from the water—is Korsten location: a collection of shanties, pondoks, and mud huts. No streets, no numbers. A world where anything goes—any race, any creed. When the wind blows in the wrong direction, the inhabitants of Korsten live with the stink of the lake.

In one of these shacks at Berry’s Corner are the two brothers Morris and Zachariah. Morris is a light-skinned coloured who has found out that to ignore the temptations to use his lightness, is the easiest way to live. It has not made life better, but it has made it simple. He is a coloured and that is that. He must suffer for it, but rather than live with fear and uncertainty. He has some education, can write and read—and the latter is his escape from life. He reads avidly and as a result has picked up a sort of education. He is calm, controlled, rational. A man of few words unless he gets talking about something that interests him.

In contrast there is his brother, Zach. The contrast is, to begin with, physical. Zach is a dark-skinned coloured, almost an African. The contrast is also in the character. Zach has no education—has made no attempt to acquire any, will never have any. Morris is a man who has discovered the subtleties to colour—rather than the mental torture of “trying for white” he has chosen the crude, physical hardships of being a coloured, but Zach can never be anything else, he is black and that is that. There was no choice for him—his one reality is the brutality of a dark skin, which allows of no subtleties. This has made him direct, straight, resentful. He has no control. In a moment he can be both happy and laugh loud, or hate completely to the point of violence.

Morris, if anything, hates himself.

Zach hates the world that has decided his blackness must be punished. . . .

Their relationship as brothers: Zach is confused. At this year in his life he has seen enough to have inside him the seeds of suspicion and envy. The question—Why? It was the same mother! The same father! He is emotional—and goes to the other extreme. While Morris has real love and pity for Zach. Once Zach went away—after a fight as boys—and when he came back there were lines on his face, age, that moved Morris deeply.
The blood tie linking them has chained them up. They are dead or dying because of it. Zach might have been content to live, as he had been born, a coloured. But his brother is almost white. This is what unbalances him. Morris knows it. Morris has invented the game of writing to newspapers.

Morris, because of his personal problem, ignores the white world, and allows himself to feel nothing. Zach thinks about it resentfully. He can never have it.

1961

October. People must be loved. That is the really crucifying experience in the short time we have as human beings—that intimacy which breaks through our defensive isolation and shows the capacity—if need be no more than that—just an awareness of the potential—of someone else’s suffering.

_The Bird Street flat:_ Retrospect—pain, musty cupboards, mouldy leather.

Two rooms—the large folding doors separating them. In one room my father (dying) and my mother. In the other, Sheila (pregnant) and myself—writing _The Blood Knot._

The departures and arrivals. My father to hospital, there to die. Sheila to hospital, to give birth. Returning with Lisa.

Also a door to our room. Watching the world from it—starlings, sunshine on white walls, rain. Visitors to the door—Petros, the basket boy from Korsten . . .

The room—my life, its privacy, its contact with other lives, its moments of peace, inadequacy.

Only one perspective for the act of love—from within.

1963

February. _Port Elizabeth_—returned home after _The Blood Knot_ production in London. . . . In a hurried note written before I left London, I said to John Berry (director of the production)—“And now, the most humble and enormous thank you . . .” What is the nature of my debt to that man—how did he move me?

The many moments when he said something about Morris and Zachariah that made me realize how much he understood, how total was his understanding—“. . . those two impoverished, mutilated bastards.” “Don’t you understand,” he said to Ian Bannen, who played Morrie—chopping off the top of his head with his flattened hand—“something’s missing. They’re not complete. Who the hell for that matter is? That’s what the play’s about, man. They want something.”
So he understood—and he understood because he loved. An angry, burning, bitter, beautiful love. And I know that he could cry—does, or will, or has . . .

Something else he said to Ian Bannen about Morrie: “There’s one question, present if unspoken, behind everything this man does in that room. ‘What am I?’ That question is his life—at all levels. Is he white or is he black? Is he friend or is he enemy? Is he real or is he a dream? And who the fucking hell knows the answers to that lot! Do you, Ian? We are dealing with a search for identity.”

March. The wheel has turned. Two years back, about this time, at this same table, I started to write The Blood Knot. I realized this last night when I woke in the dark to hear rain dripping from the gutter. My father was dying, my daughter unborn—and I was writing my play into the face of nothing. Full cycle—not quite. It implies a return—and there cannot be—Lisa is too loud and noisy and hungry and demanding not to remind me that time has only one direction. . . .

[John Berry] was always wrestling with my deepest level of meaning—man and man, not just white or black. At one stage he thought that the best dramatisation of this statement would be a moment when, either through lighting, or because Morrie and Zach sat with their backs to the audience—it would be impossible to tell who was Morris and who was Zach. . . .

Yesterday, for the first time since my return from London, one of those intensely blue and very “deep” days that I only seem to find here in [Port Elizabeth]. Spent the afternoon at Summerstrand—also took my first swim . . .

Butterflies on the beach. February–March is obviously their month. A strong, provocative image—skipping over the sand and even quite far out on the water. At one stage I waded out quite a good distance on a gradually sloping rock-shelf. Several of them flew up to me, turning away only at the very last minute, which prompted the fancy that they had mistaken me for a tree.

A bright scrap of time dancing unconcerned on the face of eternity.

There is a divine madness—almost an extravagance—in the way they used up the day. Their fragility, delicacy, makes them so mortal I think they must almost be conscious of it—accept it and fly away into the sun—a laugh given colour and wings.

God, how deep is that image in The Blood Knot.

June. I look at the landscape out of the window and realize that South Africa’s tragedy is the small, meager portions of love in the hearts of the men who walk this beautiful land. . . . South Africa is starving to death from a lack of love. This country is in the grip of its
worst drought—and that drought is in the human heart. We all live here loving and hating. To leave means that the hating would win—and South Africa needs to be loved now, when it is at its ugliest, more than at any other time. . . .

“Are you all I get to love? You are mine. I will never possess anything as surely as I possess you. You make me poor and you make me rich; happy and sad; bitter and sweet. Are you all I get to love?” Morrie could have said it to Zachariah.

December. The sea—swimming and sun—as never before. It is more than just “getting away” from my work. Conscious that an “indifference,” a “silence” is being forged—learning to live without hope. Simply to Live—the invitation and the ideal. Courage and lucidity—and no “appeal.” The only certainty is flesh—what it feels and wants. . . .

Far from “leaping,” Morrie and Zack wake up to find themselves heavy, hopeless, almost prostrate on the earth. . . .

What is more obvious than that I should be drawn, be overwhelmed by Camus. Morrie and Zach at the end of The Blood Knot are men who are going to try to live without hope, without appeal. If there is anything on that stage before the curtain drops it is lucid knowledge, consciousness. In effect, Morrie says: “Now we know.”

1967


Midgley—unlike John Berry—never really talked about Morrie and Zach on any level other than that of race conflict. I was not unduly worried about that though because the other realities that I like to think are in the play, look after themselves if that at least is treated with honesty, i.e. the existential “hell” of another existence. But operating on that level Midgley did manage to dig up things that had been missed in all the other productions. Most exciting was his treatment of the first letter-writing scene—“Address her”—which he turned into an essay in illiteracy—two levels: Zach sweating as the words clot in his mouth, laboring to put three sounds together and make sense, terrified by paper and pencil, and then Morrie squirming with impatience and frustration, or radiant with pride when he gets down the “introduction.” Both men damp with sweat and effort at the end, looking in amazement at the piece of paper and its childish scrawl.

Midgley was always asking of other Zachs ( James Earl Jones, Zakes [Mokae], etc.) “Did you believe he couldn’t write?”

What and where is “home”? That’s the question that most of Athol Fugard’s plays ask and where many of them take place—in someone’s home, or in a place a character has made into home. Since the early 1960s, when Fugard first attracted international attention, audiences, theater makers, and critics have experienced this “home” as a metaphor for South Africa, and we have looked at his plays through that prism, refracted by the fact of apartheid. Since Fugard fiercely opposed that ruthless system from the first, and because it’s no exaggeration to say that his plays helped change the conscience of a nation, it’s reasonable for us to regard his plays as outcries against inhumanity as specifically practiced by the government of South Africa between 1948 and 1991. However, viewing them solely in this one way is also restrictive: it lets us label Fugard as a “political writer” and put his work in a box where we no longer need consider what else it or he may be. In the apartheid years, Fugard admitted to being bothered by the automatic linking up of his work to his native country’s politics. “It saddens and depresses me,” he told an interviewer in 1988, “when my work is bracketed between those words ‘race’ and ‘apartheid.’”

Works of art are created in response to internal as well as external pressures, and the sources of those internal pressures are deep, personal, and, in the end, not knowable in any but a most provisional way. Now that apartheid, the exterior pressure that worked on Fugard the artist, is gone, perhaps we can find meanings in his plays that lead beyond the political history of South Africa, and hear other, internal resonances, especially in one of the most crucial words in Fugard’s vocabulary, “home.”

The ironic thing about viewing Fugard’s work entirely through the lens of apartheid is that the word is Afrikaans for “apartness.” The hallmark of his plays, however, is a tight bond between two people that can either nurture or smother or, most frequently, both. “My plays are a series of burning focuses on tight relationships,” he said in the same interview.

The basic Fugardian situation is an intense relationship between two people where one almost inevitably turns against the other: consider “Master Harold” . . . and the Boys, in which the loving relationship between the young, white Hally and the black employee Sam is altered forever in one horrible moment. The tragedy—or the triumph—of the bond that connects them is that even in betrayal it won’t break. After the dreadful words are spoken or the act committed, two people are still joined, by blood or history, looking across the broken ground in some place they call “home.” That home may be the tea house where Hally takes refuge with the family’s black employees Willie and Sam, or a comfort-
able house such as the one Piet and Gladys uneasily inhabit in *A Lesson from Aloes*, or the rudimentary shack shared by Zachariah and Morris in *Blood Knot*, or the desolate mudflat where a weary couple alight but don’t rest in *Boesman and Lena*. A home takes many forms in Fugard’s plays, and it can never be summed up in a single adjective. It is, as Fugard has said, “both a blessing and curse.”

Whatever else it may be, home is a place that his characters carry with them. In *Boesman and Lena*, the first thing we see are the entrances of a colored couple (“colored,” in the South African lexicon of apartheid, meant, among other things, someone of mixed race) who have been forced from their home, not for the first time, by the government’s policy of residential segregation. Boesman and Lena carry their belongings on their heads, and from there it’s a short leap to the understanding that they carry their home in their heads, too. Boesman and Lena’s home is wherever the other is, a condition that, in their emotionally straightened circumstances, doesn’t lead to happiness. Wherever they walk in their years of forced wanderings, the sight before Lena’s eyes is unchanging: Boesman’s back, and his shadow threatening to engulf her. He is her husband and her oppressor; she knows who she is by the fact that he beats her. “When I feel it I’ll know. I’m Lena,” she says. She also says, “Sometimes, loneliness is two . . . you and the other person who doesn’t want to know you’re there.” One doesn’t need apartheid to feel apart from other people, especially the person who shares your home. “Just our clothes, and each other,” she says. “Never lose that. Run your legs off the other way, but at the end of it, Boesman is waiting.” With his beatings and his silence, Boesman is more Lena’s home than any temporary shelter he assembles from fugitive bits of firewood and tin, and she is his. Home is a deep loneliness.

In “Master Harold” Hally can’t stand his home, a place ruled by his ailing, tyrannical father. (“Home-sweet-fucking-home,” Hally says. “Jesus, I hate that word.”) He is terrified on this particular day that the doctors will allow his father to come home from the hospital, meaning that Hally will have to put up with his abuse and empty his stinking chamber pots “full of phlegm and piss.” Hally has made a happier home for himself in the tea room his mother runs in Port Elizabeth. There he’s cared for and learns life lessons from Willie and Sam, but his father’s reach isn’t easily escaped. Into this relative paradise Hally brings the flawed apartheid morality he learned at the sick man’s bedside, and in a single vicious gesture destroys the one real home he had. For Hally, home will always be the painful memory of bringing down the one place where love and understanding were at least possibilities. Home is a fragile place, easily susceptible to the sickness of the outside world.

In *A Lesson from Aloes*, Piet and Gladys, a white couple, share an anxious truce of a marriage in their house in Port Elizabeth. He was once an antiapartheid activist before a wave of government arrests ended most protest in the country. His colleague, Steve, also a
former activist and a colored man, has come to visit before leaving South Africa for exile in England. Some years earlier, Steve was the victim of a government informer, imprisoned, tortured, and almost driven to suicide. The same informer led the security police to Piet’s and Gladys’s home, which they tore apart before seizing Gladys’s diaries—a violation that brought on a severe breakdown, causing her to spend the intervening years in and out of mental institutions. She’s learned that neither home nor husband could provide her with sanctuary. As for Piet, a hearty Afrikaner with a weakness for English poetry, he’s suspected of being the informer who betrayed his wife and best friend. On the eve of his leaving, does Steve come to say goodbye, or to accuse Piet of being a traitor? Home is where you’re under suspicion.

Home is more complicated than that. It is where Sam tries to teach Hally that life can be a place where “nobody trips or stumbles or bumps into anybody else,” and where there is often music and laughter. In Blood Knot, it is where Zach and Morrie plan for a better future and where they relive the favorite game of their youth (which happens to be pretending to drive a car 100 kilometers an hour away from home). It is the place, ramshackle and primitive though it is, to which Morrie returns, although he could pass for white and live in that comfortable world. It is where Zach dreams of offering his mother a butterfly, a symbol of his own beauty. It is also a haunted place, where Morrie wonders which of her children their brown mother loved best: the dark one or the light one?

In Victory, Fugard’s newest play, a person’s home is once again a nexus of love, comfort, betrayal, and violence: an elderly man’s house is broken into and he discovers that the daughter of his late housekeeper helped the burglars gain entrance. Was the act his own fault for not seeing to it that the girl didn’t fall into poverty when her mother died? The play takes place in the present, years after the dismantling of apartheid, yet its effects are still felt: they still are part of what home is in South Africa now.

“Home” is many things for Athol Fugard: it’s South Africa, but it’s also a very personal inner landscape. It’s the thinnest of membranes through which passes the clean or filthy outside air. It’s every inescapable human emotion. It’s the people you are bound to in a blood knot. “You can’t explain it,” Fugard has said, “you can only say it. It’s where you finally belong and where you have to go back to. It’s where you are owed. Home is a very deep transaction.”
DIRECTOR CHARLES RANDOLPH–WRIGHT
ON BLOOD KNOT
Excerpts from a Conversation with A.C.T. Staff, November 10, 2007

This piece scares me. This play is disturbing on so many levels, and what I finally realized is that it’s important that it’s disturbing. For example, the scene when Zachariah remembers his first sexual experience, with a young woman named Connie, bothers me so much. I really want us to love Zachariah. I want us to embrace him and go with him on this journey, but it’s that stereotype of, well, he has to be the good guy because he’s the oppressed guy, and the white guy has to be the bad guy. But I realized that Fugard immediately disarms us with this idea that Zachariah has committed a rape. And what’s even worse is that he doesn’t know that’s what he did. This is a beautiful memory to him—he keeps bringing Connie up—but it’s something that to us is appalling. In the first few pages you start to love him, but then you’re disarmed, and you have to go back and reconsider. It forces each of us to deal with our own flaws.

Today, the black character on television has moved into another realm. We’ve moved up from the maid, we’ve been the policeman, but now all my friends play coroners on TV shows. So, that means they’re intelligent, they went to medical school, they have many degrees. But they usually appear in the first five minutes of the show when the victim dies, and you don’t really see them much again. They don’t have real lives. As opposed to seeing the coroner who is smart and does have all these accomplishments, but who also has a problem—who may have a family issue, something personal, whatever makes them a complex, flawed human being. It’s that thing where, when you portray anyone ethnic, you end up trying to salvage past images by making them perfect now. As a director just starting to work on this play, I want to identify these two brothers immediately when I see them and put them in categories. But Fugard doesn’t allow me to do that. The way I want to set them up and the way I want to play with them, the play immediately tells me, “No, you can’t do that.” It makes me look at life differently, and that’s what I want this play to do for the audience.
I want us to have a conversation about race and identity in this country that we don’t have anymore. We don’t think we need this conversation, we think it’s been done. We think having that conversation is from the 1960s, that it is archaic. But when you realize that San Francisco now is only four percent black, then I think one realizes we need to have this conversation. To me, coming to this play is a conversation. It’s a conversation about where we are now, who we are now, and what we’ve dealt with. I remember as a kid reading and hearing about apartheid, and everyone talked about how horrible it was: “Look at those people over there—how could they do this?” But I also thought, “Wait a minute—I live in South Carolina. I couldn’t swim in the pool in my hometown until I was 15. I remember separate bathrooms, I know what that is—and you’re saying they’re the evil ones?”

We lived in such a box: the world is black and white. We were comfortable in our categories, and then you have someone who comes along and shakes all that up. I keep bringing up Barack Obama, who is the perfect image of someone that everyone in this country knows is not just a black man. He’s one of the first people I can remember that our world is aware of that way. You don’t necessarily think of Halle Berry as being biracial: you think of her as a beautiful black actress. You don’t think of August Wilson as biracial; he’s our premiere black playwright. But Obama has that identity, and I think it’s because of the world we live in today. It’s no longer just black and white. And this play helps us talk about that now.

It’s so interesting, all of these mixtures. I remember comments people made when a friend of mine married a blonde woman. He’s black, but his mother is German. And the woman he married looks like his mother. He married his mother, you know? But he’s had grief from some people: “Oh, you had to marry a white girl.” And my best friends are a couple in L.A.: he’s white, and she’s black, and they have two daughters. They put “golden” on the birth certificates for the babies’ race. They’re so excited that this world of “golden” children exists. But, you know, in this culture, those two girls are considered black. Even though their father’s white, they’re black.

And then there’s my friend Vy Higginsen—[a Gospel educator, writer, producer, and director] who wrote the musical Mama, I Want to Sing. Recently, she was on 60 Minutes and Oprah because she did DNA testing, and thought she would find out that she descended from African royalty [laugh]. But she found out that she in fact has cousins who are white cattle ranchers in Missouri. She went to Missouri for Thanksgiving, and they came to Harlem to visit her. They are not what she expected, but they’ve become family. And tests have shown that Barack Obama has genetic links to both President Bush and Dick Cheney. What is more outrageous than that? Back there somewhere, there’s this DNA link. I love that. Dick Cheney and Barack Obama should do this play!
We could also talk about my two cousins in Congress—I have a white cousin and a black cousin in the u.s. Congress. The white cousin is from my hometown [York, South Carolina], and our families go way back. He recently started acknowledging our heritage, so I went down and campaigned for him. Even I have these two relatives. Who are we, really?

When this play was written and first performed in the sixties, there was a clearly identifiable “enemy” in the apartheid government. Since that system was officially dismantled years ago, who is the enemy now? Is there one?

My immediate reaction is that the enemy is in each of us. The enemy is inside. We are so disconnected from each other, because we are hooked up to our iPhones and the internet and everything else, that we don’t have the conversation, we don’t have the connection, and if we do it’s not face to face. And, we’re all complicit, in our way. It was so much easier, what I initially wanted to do with these characters: I wanted to make Zach the hero, and Morrie, the light-skinned brother, the enemy. But, as I said, Fugard disarms that immediately. Who is the enemy?

[Costume designer] Sandra Woodall told me that she worked with a [white] South African, years ago, when apartheid was just ending. He said to her, “We didn’t know. All this stuff you’re seeing on the news, it’s not true.” A lot of people really, honestly and truly, didn’t see it around them. They were so myopic, and so entitled, even though they were the minority, they really didn’t see what was glaring all around them. What does that mean? I often talk about how it’s been much harder for me, as an artist of color, to do what I do. But the thing is, I’ve realized as I’ve gotten older, that show business is difficult for everybody. But at least I know it’s going to be hard for me. I have the knowledge that they look at me differently and they treat me differently, whereas some of my friends, who feel entitled, go in, and they aren’t prepared for what happens. Because you don’t think it involves you, you become trapped in your own little world. So, yes. The enemy is inside.

Do you think this is a hopeful play?
I don’t like to do projects unless I feel there’s hope in them. I definitely feel that this play is hopeful, because these brothers ultimately communicate, and they tell the truth. They deal with each other in a way that all their lives they haven’t dealt with each other. When Morrie puts on that suit, and becomes that other person, they are forced to acknowledge each other, and they acknowledge what their lives have been and who they are and what they think or don’t think. What happens from there? Where do they go from there? I don’t
know. But they had this moment of truth, as harsh as it is. That’s the hope to me, whether it hurts or not, whether we all take responsibility—we have to communicate.

To me, Zachariah is very comfortable with who he is, what his life is, and what his world is. And Morris isn’t at all. What does that mean? Why did Morrie have to come back to Zach? How do their roles, and their images of their mother, shift and go back and forth? They are forced to acknowledge all those things. They each live in their own little world, and by being brothers and coming back together they have to communicate. But they could easily choose not to do it, as most of us do. They could easily not ever have the hard conversations that they must have. So the hope to me is in that they start . . . they may not make a huge step, but they make a step. Little steps indeed can become huge.

What role will the mother serve in this production, and in the partnership with Tracy Chapman? Where do you see that going?

At this point, we’re still just talking about what the female voice will be. The mother is present, always, to both of these men. And I want the audience to feel what they feel. The voice of Tracy Chapman takes us in that way. It’s what a soundtrack does in a film. It’s what her voice can give you, tell you; it can take you back in time, take you forward, that’s what music can do, and that’s what we are playing with. I think simply hearing this female voice, whether you think it’s the mother or the girlfriend or the woman Zach wants—whatever it is, hearing this female voice makes you realize the presence, as well as the lack thereof, in their lives. To me, the voice reiterates the “blood knot.” The bond between us all. And what a perfect voice to be the blood knot—the consummate artist Tracy Chapman.

So she’s writing new songs that she will sing for this production?

Right. That’s what we’re working on now. There’ll be parts of songs, a score, etc. that she creates and we’ll discover how to use it. Music helps us go inside the characters’ heads, so when Zach is talking about [his old friend] Minnie and going to parties, there’ll be the idea of what that party is to him. And when they’re in the car and imagining driving, I want to make that more visual by using sound. Today’s generation watches music. They don’t listen to music; they watch it. I want to use that. And working with Tracy is one of the thrills of my career.

What are the risks that you’re taking personally, and the risks for A.C.T., in doing this play now?

Well, you’d think a play from the 1960s would be safe to do now. That’s more than 40 years ago. But we are still in boxes, and to step outside of that box, not just professionally, but
personally, really is an emotional journey. This is an emotional ride for me, with my whole family, with my personal dealing with those issues in my family—racial issues, society issues, class issues, all those things. This piece pushes all those buttons for me. I feel that whatever you do as an artist, you have to end up exposing yourself, if it’s honest, so I have to go to that place, and directing this piece for me I have to really take it to that place. I want to do that for an audience. I want them to take that journey with me. But I also want them to be entertained.

YOU HAVE A DEFINITE STYLE IN THE WORK THAT YOU DO, AND YOU’VE TALKED ABOUT USING VIDEO AND LIGHTING AND SOUND TO ENRICH THIS PRODUCTION. BUT THE SETTING OF THIS PLAY IS FAIRLY SIMPLE: TWO MEN IN A PRIMITIVE SHACK IN A VERY POOR PART OF PORT ELIZABETH. GIVEN WHERE YOU ARE IN THE PROCESS OF THIS, WHERE DO YOU SEE THE PRODUCTION GOING?

Well, it has to evoke two men in a shack, but I want to take full advantage of the tremendous grandeur and technical possibilities of the Geary Theater. So while you are watching these two men, I’m able to put you in their minds by showing you the scope of the world in which they live. I want you to see the sky, the water, the neighborhoods. The things they see, which we evoke through the set, the lighting, the sound. So that you’re able to get in that shack with them, but you’re also able to get out in the real world with them. The design is definitely the confined space of that shack, so you can feel claustrophobic and isolated, like Zach and Morrie do in their world, but then it can also be open.

I don’t want this to be a history lesson, but I do want, in the beginning of this piece, to take people back, just very quickly, visually [with a series of projected images], to a sixties mentality. I just want them to know that it’s not a contemporary piece. We are watching it, and I’m directing it, in 2008, so we have a contemporary point of view, but I want us to remember that we are looking at what it was then. I want us to understand the context of where and when this play takes place. And then at the end of the play to say, “Okay, let’s talk about now.”

I KNOW YOU’VE WORKED WITH A.C.T. CORE ACTING COMPANY MEMBER STEVEN ANTHONY JONES MANY TIMES, BUT YOU’VE NEVER WORKED WITH JACK WILLIS, WHO OFFICIALLY BECAME A MEMBER OF THE CORE COMPANY JUST THIS SEASON. THE TWO OF THEM TRAVELED TO SOUTH AFRICA TOGETHER LAST FALL TO GET A FEEL FOR THE PLAY’S SETTING, AND IN THE
PROCESS CAME TO KNOW EACH OTHER VERY WELL. HOW DO YOU SEE THESE RELATIONSHIPS AFFECTING THE PRODUCTION?

They need to have the kind of relationship they have to do this play every night, because I don't know how you do the difficult parts of this play and then just say, "Okay, great, see you tomorrow!" It's like having to do a rape scene onstage every night. No matter what your "style" is as an actor, that kind of thing has to affect you, and you have to deal with it. I think that's especially true with these two, because they're so connected and so committed. But the fact that these characters have a devastating experience, and attempt to overcome it, is the hope of this play.

I also really have to find the humor and the music and the joy in this piece, so that people are willing to take this journey. Just hearing this play read, by the time you get to the end of it, you're devastated, because you don't get to visually have the joy and the full range of experience these characters have with each other. The words alone just decimate me. I feel that Steve and Jack's connection, their comfort and their love for each other—like what these brothers share—will help us get through this.

If two actors who didn't know each other just showed up on the first day of rehearsal, this would be impossible. We're all ahead of the game because of Steve and Jack's relationship, and their experience on that trip—some people [in South Africa] even thought they were brothers, but treated them differently anyway, because of their skin color. Even now. These guys are such characters, two of our greatest actors. I couldn't resist working with them.

WHAT ABOUT THE BROTHERLY ELEMENT? WE'VE HEARD ABOUT THE RACE ISSUES, WE'VE HEARD ABOUT THE POLITICS, BUT THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN THIS PLAY THAT COULD ONLY HAPPEN IF YOU ARE SIBLINGS.

Family gives you permission, whether you like it or not, to strip away those protective layers. What you can do as family and how you can ultimately hurt somebody and ultimately love somebody is all about family. There are conversations that can't happen between two unrelated people; you would stop yourself, you wouldn't typically go that far. There is a great song that Prince wrote for Mavis Staples called "Blood Is Thicker Than Time." Blood enables you to cross boundaries, to be inappropriate, to step on toes, to go much further than you normally would. That's the great thing about working with Steve and Jack; they've become family and they're able to even go further in this piece than they would have otherwise.

You can decide not to see your family, you can decide not to be around them, not to speak to them, but they are still your family no matter what you end up doing. That is it. And you were dealt that. You didn't choose that.
In this play Morrie chose to come back home. He chose to go out into the world and he chose to come back. But he didn't choose to be Zach's brother. So, the idea of family is that you have no choice. It's interesting, because Morrie has a choice about his race, but he doesn't in family. Am I going to be black or white? Out in the world, he says there were people who were darker than him but who were able to own being white; he couldn't do that.

**WHAT ELSE DO YOU THINK THE AUDIENCE NEEDS TO KNOW BEFORE SEEING THIS PLAY?**

They need to know they'll be okay. A piece like this, they need to know it’s going to be okay, because if they know that, they can truly listen. The white audience may come in feeling guilty because of the racial issues, and the black audience may come in pissed off. The question is how to bring them together and let them know, it’s okay to be pissed, it’s okay to feel guilty, but it’s going to be all right. This play should and must lead to conversation. This play changed a country. This playwright changed a country.

Fugard is an artist who made an astonishing difference. And if this play disturbs you and it makes a difference—if it makes you hurt, laugh, whatever it is—he used the power of art to change. And that’s extraordinary. That one person singlehandedly had such an effect on that government, on that society—I feel the necessity to honor that, and to let our audience know that.

**DO YOU THINK THE BROTHERS ARE OKAY AT THE END OF THE PLAY?**

I'm not sure what okay means in this. This experience is going to take them on a journey. And we’ll see what we see. I guess it depends on where you come from. Are you a glass half-empty or a glass half-full kind of person? “They’re going to fight the rest of their lives”—are you that person? I don’t know what’s going to happen. What I do know is that they have changed, and I think that’s what’s good. Even if the relationship is strained and not what it should be, it’s honest, and that is the most important thing.

In this country we’ve been lying for too long. We don’t communicate. Yes, maybe if you tell the truth it’s going to hurt and maybe it’s not going to be what people want to hear, but that’s so much better to me than lying. I don’t want the lies. I want to know what really is happening, and I think most people want that. I hope they want that. At the end of this play I want people to make their own decision. I don’t know what Fugard’s decision was, but I know he changed a country. Look at where South Africa was when they first did this play, and look where it is now. And this play had a part in that. Knowing that alone gives me hope.
A GUIDING HOPEFULNESS
An Interview with Tracy Chapman on Blood Knot

BY JESSICA WERNER ZACK

Tracy Chapman has been well known around the world as a singer-songwriter with a social conscience ever since her politically charged eponymous debut album raced up the charts in 1988 with such hit tracks as “Fast Car” and “Talkin’ bout a Revolution.” That same year she achieved worldwide fame after performing in London at Nelson Mandela’s 70th birthday concert, which was broadcast in more than 50 countries. (Mandela, South Africa’s future leader, at the time was serving his 24th year of a life sentence.) A year later she left Boston (where she had started her career busking with her guitar in Harvard Square) for San Francisco, which has been her home ever since. Seven more albums, multiplatinum sales, and four Grammy Awards have followed, and her reputation has endured as an artist whose songs evince her passionate belief that individual humanitarian acts are redemptive and that, one by one, we can each help to make the world a more just place. She told the San Francisco Chronicle last year, “I think we’re all responsible for doing what we can to create the world we want to see, and on a personal level I try to do that.”

Chapman has attended numerous A.C.T. productions in recent years. Although she has been courted by numerous directors and producers to write commissioned music for theater and film projects, it wasn’t until A.C.T. Artistic Director Carey Perloff gave her a copy of Blood Knot that she decided to make her theatrical debut. Director Charles Randolph-Wright, an ardent fan of Chapman’s music, heard in her lyrics, persuasive and soulful, a guiding hopefulness that is also a hallmark of Fugard’s finest plays. Randolph-Wright worked closely with Chapman to develop original songs and transitional music for his A.C.T. production that amplify the emotional life of the play’s two characters, Zachariah and Morris, as well as the “blood knot” itself that binds them as brothers and as country-men in a South Africa wholly divided by apartheid. In conversation with Jessica Werner
Zack last month, Chapman discussed her process in creating a musical life for Athol Fugard's powerful drama.

**WHEN YOU SPOKE BRIEFLY ON THE FIRST DAY OF REHEARSAL, YOU SAID THAT THIS PLAY CHALLENGES YOU. COULD YOU ARTICULATE WHAT YOU FELT THOSE CHALLENGES WERE?**

This play deals with some difficult subjects. For one, obviously, the play deals with race and people's perceptions of race, and the characters struggle with their own sense of self and racial identity. And there are some things that are revealed about the characters as they struggle with those issues that are disturbing. But I found myself engaged by the play on many levels because I felt that it was an honest portrayal. I'm not sure how anyone could read this play and not feel moved by what these characters go through.

**HAS IT BEEN IMPORTANT TO YOU TO CONFRONT ISSUES OF RACE DIRECTLY IN YOUR WORK?**

I found it enormously helpful to discover, in reading your interview with Fugard, that his creative process as it related to this play all started from a personal reflection. It's the same for me. I don't sit down with a list of topics and issues that I want to explore. I generally am starting from a more personal place, whether it's just what is in my mind and imagination at the time, or some combination of that and influences around me, but it felt familiar to hear him say that.

**IN WORKING ON BLOOD KNOT, ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC IMAGES OR WORDS THAT HAVE HELPED SPARK YOUR CREATIVE, MUSICAL IMAGINATION?**

Mostly, I'm trying to take care and show respect for the text. I don't want the music that has lyrics to get in the way of Fugard's work. I really approached it by just immersing myself in the play—in the words, and in trying to understand the lives and the minds of the characters. I read and reread the play, and I did a lot of research into the history of South Africa. I also have been listening to South African music and looking at biographical material about Fugard. I did some reading of the Bible, because there are passages that show up in several scenes. The story of Cain and Abel, and possibly seeing the mother as Eve, those things were on my mind. And then I had an assignment from the director, who has thoughts about how he wants the music to relate to the play. One thing Charles wanted to explore is trying to add a female voice in some way. He was hoping that some of the music might be able to do that, and specifically he was looking for the mother’s voice.
IN PAST INTERVIEWS YOU’VE TALKED ABOUT THE RACIAL TENSION YOU FELT GROWING UP IN THE 1970S IN CLEVELAND, A CITY STRUGGLING WITH DESEGREGATION. DOES ANY OF THAT FEEL RELEVANT TO YOUR WORK ON BLOOD KNOT?

I’ve been considering the question of whether there are parallels between the system of apartheid and slavery and racial discrimination in America. There are certain parallels, but I think overall the two experiences are very unique. And I think the psychological response on the part of the people who are suffering under the injustice is different.

This play definitely has themes that are universal, but, for me, anyway, it’s very context-specific. There are some people who have talked about what it means to be mixed-race in America, as opposed to a mixed-race person in South Africa. But I don’t think you can actually compare those experiences.

I think the challenge here is to see that the experience represented by these characters in this particular play may not look like anything any of us has ever seen. But there is still a place where we can find connection, because we see their humanity and see their struggle in trying to come to terms with their identity. In general, I don’t think we need to see ourselves in a work of art to believe that it is relevant. If in the end the audience leaves thinking that the two men onstage are brothers, if they have made that mental leap, then the play has worked and the actors have achieved at least one of the things I think Fugard was trying to do.
**A BLOOD KNOT GLOSSARY**

**OLD HESSIAN BAGS**
Hessian is a strong, coarse cloth made of a mixture of hemp and jute.

**LISTEN, HE COULD DO A VASTRAP, THAT MAN, NON-STOP, ON ALL STRINGS AT ONCE. HE KNEW THE LOT. POLKA, TICKEY-DRAAI, OPSKUD EN UITKAP, EK SÈ.**
The vastrap, tickey-draai, and opskud en uitkap are all traditional South African folk dances, and ek sé translates literally from Afrikaans as “I say,” or, more idiomatically, as “right!” or “okay!” A tickey is also a coin roughly equivalent to a nickel, so the tickey-draai is, loosely, a “nickel-dance.” Opskud en uitkap can also be translated as “get up and go.”

Chick-a-doem-doem is onomatopoetic; it is meant to imitate the rhythm of the music.

“ZACK,” HE SAYS, “OU PELLIE, TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT—”
Ou pellie means “old friend,” or “chum.”

**CHASING THOSE DAMNED BABOONS HELTER-SKELTER IN THE KOPPIES.**
Koppies are small hills.

**YOU TALK ABOUT GOING OUT, BUT FORTY-FIVE RANDS—**
The rand is the monetary unit of South African currency. The rand replaced the South African pound—which in turn had replaced the British Pound Sterling in 1920—on April 14, 1961, at a rate of 1 pound to 2 rand. The rand is divisible into 100 cents; coins range in denomination from 5 cents to 50 rand and banknotes from 10 to 200 rand. During the apartheid era banknotes were decorated with historical figures from the apartheid regime, but since the end of apartheid the notes have featured colorful images of wildlife, including the 10-rand rhinoceros, 50-rand lion, and 100-rand buffalo. In 1961, 45 rands would have been equivalent to about 32 U.S. dollars.

**BECAUSE WHEN I REACHED THE FIRST PONDOKKIES AND THE THIN DOGS, THE WIND TURNED AND BROUGHT THE STINK FROM THE LAKE.**
Pondokkies are shacks.
ETHEL LANGE, IO DE VILLIERS STREET, OUDTSHOORN
Oudtshoorn is a town in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, located about halfway between Cape Town to the West and Port Elizabeth to the East. It was named after Baron Pieter van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, who was appointed governor of the Cape Colony in 1772 but died en route. Oudtshoorn was first settled in 1847 and became a town in 1887. The town’s major exports include dairy products, fruit, vegetables, tobacco, alfalfa, and, most notably, ostrich feathers. In fact, Oudtshoorn is famous for its enormous ostrich population. It is also the largest town in the Little Karoo region of South Africa—a fertile, semidesert valley bounded on the North by the Swartbert and on the South by the Langeberg and Outeniqua mountains—with a population of approximately 87,000 in 2004. (Population approximately 18,900 in 1950.)

NELLIE DE WET . . . SHE’S IN BLOEMFONTEIN
Bloemfontein, or “fountain of flowers,” is the capital of Free State Province and the judicial capital of the Republic of South Africa. While historically an Afrikaner settlement, Bloemfontein was officially founded by Major H. Douglas Warden in 1856 as a British outpost. The city was home to the British-administered Orange River Sovereignty 1846–54, and then the Orange Free State (an independent Boer republic) 1854–98. In 1889, the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference resulted in the Second Anglo-Boer War, or the South African War (1899–1902). In the 20th century, Bloemfontein became a hub for South Africa’s railways; the city’s development was also fueled by the discovery and exploitation of the Free State goldfields in 1948. Bloemfontein is known for natural beauties like the 300-acre King’s Park and institutions like the National Court of Appeal and the University of the Free State. The city’s population was estimated at 379,000 in 2005. (Population approximately 112,600 in 1960.)

BETTY JONES. ROODEPOORT
Roodepoort—“red valley” in Afrikaans—is a city in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It lies immediately west of Johannesburg and is home to Johannesburg’s most famous botanical garden, Witwatersrand National Botanical Gardens (recently renamed Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens). While the first discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand—in 1884, by brothers Fred and Harry Struben—proved unprofitable, gold-mining camps quickly sprung up throughout the Witwatersrand. The ramshackle town that grew around these mining camps became the Roodepoort municipality in 1904. Through annexation of other nearby mining settlements, Roodepoort became a city in 1977. The eastern section of the city is largely industrial, while its western section is
primarily residential; in addition to the still-profitable goldfields, the city has diversified manufacturing. Today, however, Roodepoort no longer has its own municipal government, and the Roodepoort municipality, with a population of approximately 225,000 in 2005 is part of the city of Johannesburg. (Population approximately 95,200 in 1960.)

“HEY! COOKIE . . . OR . . . BOKKIE”
Bokkie is equivalent to “cookie,” or “sweetheart,” a slang term of endearment for a girl.

AND THIS WHITE WOMAN HAS WRITTEN TO ME, A HOT-NOT, A SWARTGAT.
Hot-not and swartgat are abusive terms for nonwhite South Africans. Hot-not, a corrupt form of “Hottentot,” a term formerly used to refer to the San tribespeople of Africa, more or less translates as “native,” but is a swear word. Swartgat literally means “black ass.”

DID SKOP AND SKIP THE PRETTY GIRLS.
Skop is South African slang meaning “physically violent and threatening behavior or activity,” which originally comes from the Afrikaans skop, meaning “to kick” or “to enjoy yourself.”

I’LL BE STAYING WITH MY UNCLE IN KENSINGTON.
Kensington is a suburb of Port Elizabeth.

. . . WITH BUNS, IF SHE’S HUNGRY. HOT-CROSS BUNS.
Hot-cross buns are sweet, spiced buns made with currants and leavened with yeast. They are decorated with crosses—hence the name—which can be made out of pastry, glazed, or frosted on top of the bun, or cut into the bun before baking. Hot-cross buns are traditionally eaten on Good Friday, and the cross is a symbol of the crucifixion. Some historians date hot-cross buns back to the 12th century.

NOW, SEE! I WOULD HAVE JUST BOUGHT MONKEY-NUTS.
A monkey-nut is a peanut, particularly one still in its shell; this is chiefly a British term.

A PRETTY DOEK IN CASE THE WIND BLOWS HER HAIR AWAY.
A doek is a scarf.
EK SE! JUST LOOK! HOE’S DIT VIR ‘N DING! LINKS DRAAI, REGS SWAAI . . . AITSA! OU PELLIE, YOU’RE STEPPING HIGH TONIGHT!
This line translates, more or less, as: “Let’s see! Just look! Go man, go! Turn left, swing right . . . Ooh! Old friend, you’re stepping high tonight!”

VOETSEK! . . . HAMBA! . . . KAFFERMEID! . . . OU HOER! . . . LUISGAT!
These are dismissals, swear words, insults, and racial slurs: voetsek is a rude expression of dismissal or rejection; hamba means “go away” or “be off”; kaffermeid is feminine and refers to a woman in a relationship with a black man; ou hoer means “old whore”; luisgat is an abusive term for nonwhite South Africans.

TEST OF THE COMB
During apartheid, there was a famous test to determine racial origin: “When somebody’s origin was in doubt, a comb with fine teeth would be used to comb his or her hair. If the comb ran through it easily, then that person could be classified as white. Sometimes, in the same family, a child would be declared white while his brother or sister was not” (Tadjo).
A LITTLE BIT ABOUT PORT ELIZABETH

Port Elizabeth is a port city on Algoa Bay, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Sir Rufane Donkin, acting governor of the Cape Colony, named Port Elizabeth—established in 1820 as a British settlement around Fort Frederick—after his late wife. Port Elizabeth became a city in 1913 and was incorporated into the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality in 2001. As of 2001 the city had a population of 237,503, and the urban agglomerate had a population of 1,005,776. The 2001 census of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality revealed the following demographics: of the 1,005,776 people and 260,798 households, 58.90% described themselves as black African, 23.48% colored, 16.51% white, and 1.12% Indian/Asian. Of the reporting residents, 57.3% speak IsiXhosa as their primary language, 29.7% Afrikaans, and 12.1% English. Of reporting residents 89.4% described themselves as Christian. In 1960, the population of Port Elizabeth was approximately 249,200, and the population of the urban agglomerate about 290,700.

Port Elizabeth has many parks, including the Donkin Reserve, St. George’s Park—home to the Port Elizabeth Cricket Club—Settlers’ Park Nature Reserve, and the Edwardian Pearson Conservatory. Tourists are attracted to the city’s beaches and museums. Port Elizabeth is also home to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, founded in 2005 when the University of Port Elizabeth, PE Technikon, and the Port Elizabeth campus of Vista University merged.

Variously called the “Detroit of South Africa” and the “Liverpool of South Africa,” Port Elizabeth is a manufacturing city. Cheap power and water made Port Elizabeth a particularly appealing center for manufacturing, especially automobile manufacturing, which Ford began there in 1924; GM followed in 1926. The port also imports goods for Zambia and Zimbabwe and exports wool, fruit, manganese ore, and petroleum products.

During the Second Boer War, Port Elizabeth was home to a British concentration camp for Boer women and children. During the apartheid era, the nonwhite population of Port Elizabeth was forced to relocate under the Group Areas Act of 1962; the whole of the South End was depopulated and flattened in 1965, and relocation continued until 1975. In 1977, antiapartheid activist Steve Biko was interrogated and tortured in Port Elizabeth before being transported to Pretoria.

Korsten, where Morris and Zachariah live, is about a five-mile walk from Port Elizabeth. It is a poor residential area which was established as the legally permissible housing area for coloreds under the Population and Registration Act and Group Areas Act of 1950.
APARtheid

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, apartheid is “the policy that governed relations between South Africa’s white minority and nonwhite majority and sanctioned racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against nonwhites.” It was also called “separate development.”

The system of apartheid (Afrikaans for “apart-ness”) in which Morris and Zachariah find themselves was not something that sprung up quickly or overnight. Not unlike the imprisonment of Asian Americans in the United States during World War II, apartheid, which was officially named and put in place in 1950, was the logical development of segregationalist policies that extended back many years and through many South African governments.

Apartheid’s roots stretch back almost as far as the settlement of the area around the African cape by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-17th century. Within a hundred years, a society based on agriculture, worked by slaves imported from other African nations (as well as from India and Malaysia), was in place.

From the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Slaves were treated harshly, and punishments for slaves who assaulted Europeans were brutal—one of the most heinous being death by impalement. Escaped slaves formed groups called Maroons—small self-sufficient communities—or fled into the interior. Because slave birth rates were low and settler numbers were increasing, in the 1780s the Dutch stepped up the enserfment of surviving Khoe (also spelled Khoi; pejoratively called Hottentots) to help run their farms. Those Khoe who could escape Dutch subjugation joined Xhosa groups in a major counteroffensive against colonialism in 1799–1801, and there were slave rebellions in the outskirts of Cape Town in 1808 and 1825.

The Dutch refusal to grant citizenship and land rights to the colored offspring of unions between Europeans and Khoe or slaves produced an aggrieved class of people, known as Basters (or Bastards), who were Christian, spoke Dutch, and had an excellent knowledge of horses and firearms. Many fled north toward and over the Orange River in search of land and trading opportunities. After merging with independent Khoe groups, such as the Kora, they formed commando states under warlords, three of the more successful being the Bloem, Kok, and Barends families, who were persuaded by missionaries in the early 19th century to change their name to Griqua.
Already, in other words, three separate categories of people had been more or less established: white, colored (of mixed race), and blacks (or Bantu), with the latter two groups subjected to the political, social, and economic policies of the first.

In 1806, the British seized the Cape area, which became a vital link to their interests in India. The character of the Cape government began changing from one that had been essentially Dutch to one dominated by the English. English became the language of officialdom, replacing Dutch, and the pound sterling replaced the Dutch rix-dollar as the basic currency. British settlers began arriving in large numbers in 1820, and this, according to Britannica, along with highly inefficient land usage, led to a shortage of available acreage—which the British solved by seizing vast tracts of land from Africans.

The British presence in Africa grew throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, culminating in a virtual seizure of all the African kingdoms and Boer republics through warfare and other colonial means when diamonds and gold were discovered in South Africa in the last quarter of the 19th century. (The Boer republics, such as the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, were those areas founded, beginning in the 18th century, by the Trekboers, Dutch settlers who moved inland from the cape to escape the control of the Dutch East India Company.)

Tensions between the British and Boers finally erupted in the Boer War (1899–1902), in which the Boers tried to throw off British control. The Boer forces were crushed, and the British solidified their control of the country, but they made a crucial concession: Britannica tells us that the British “promised that the ‘question of granting the franchise to natives [blacks]’ would be addressed only after self-government had been restored to the former Boer republics. The treaty thus allowed the white minority to decide the political fate of the black majority.”

In 1905, an interim government commission suggested policies to solve “the native question.” They proposed that black and white land ownership be separated into different territories, that a system of urban segregation be created by the establishment of “black locations,” that black workers “squatting” on white farms be removed and replaced with white workers, and that blacks be excluded from the political realm. The commission’s suggestions would become the basis of most of the apartheid policies that South African governments would put in place later in the century.

In 1910, the Union of South Africa was born as part of the British empire, comprised of the three Boer republics of the Transvaal, the Cape Province, the Orange Free State, and Natal. Its government was run by Afrikaners, and before long, it began to put in place policies meant to exclude blacks, mixed-race peoples, and, increasingly, Indian immigrants, from not only political power, but from all of the social and economic benefits enjoyed by
the white minority. The 1910 constitution prohibited blacks from holding elective office. From Britannica:

Two “entrenched” clauses, on language and franchise, could be amended only by a two-thirds majority vote in parliament. While Cape delegates favored a color-blind franchise, those from the Transvaal and Orange Free State demanded an exclusively white electorate. A compromise simply confirmed existing electoral arrangements. The former republics retained white male adult suffrage and did not consider female suffrage (white women finally won the right to vote in 1930). In 1910, 85% of Cape voters were white, 10% colored, and 5% black. Representation was further limited on racial lines: even in the Cape, only whites could stand for parliament.

During the Boer War, most black South Africans had sided with the British, who had promised “equal laws, equal liberties” for all races. The treaty that ended the war, however, withdrew these promises by allowing the reconstituted white government all power regarding questions of race relations. In response, blacks and coloreds began establishing their own political organizations devoted to fighting for the rights the Afrikaners were bent on denying them. One, the African Political Organization, had been in existence since 1902. Mohandas Gandhi, then a young lawyer who had come to South Africa to assist on a case, became involved in the struggle for freedom in the Transvaal, where between 1906 and 1909 he led a protest against a law requiring Indians to carry passes. In 1912, in response to the repressive policies of the new government and constitution, a group of black activists from the middle class met in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State and formed the South African Native National Congress, later renamed the African National Congress or ANC.

In 1913, the government passed the Native Land Act. At this time, black Africans were moving into the cities in large numbers. According to historian Brian Lapping, by 1910, 100,000 blacks were living in Johannesburg in the Transvaal, and “the ability of whites there to keep themselves to themselves, was threatened.” Also, as the 1905 commission had noted, many blacks were living on vast tracts of land owned by white farmers. Now the farmers wanted to evict these “squatters” and sell much of the land for industry or mining. Finally, some black landowners were trying to buy land in white areas. The Native Land Act was a response to all of these trends. The law prohibited blacks from buying land outside newly designated “reserve” areas which, the historian Alistair Sparks writes, constituted less than 10% of the total country. In fact, the new law meant, according to Lapping, that 67% of the population could own or rent property in only 7.3% of the land
area (except in the Cape, where courts ruled that the new law conflicted with black voting rights). Writes Sparks:

The new law also made it a crime for any but servants to live on white farms and ordered the eviction of those who were ‘squatting’ there. At a stroke, the indigenous black population became aliens in South Africa, a country that now belonged only to whites…. [The Land Act] prohibited the further purchase of land by blacks, put a stop to the tenant and sharecropping systems, removed the foothold of independence, and poured nearly a million blacks back into the captive labor pool.

A decade later, the government passed the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. This law segregated urban living space and created “influx controls” to limit the number of blacks allowed to move to the cities.

**THE INTRODUCTION OF APARTHEID**

In 1948, the National Party won the national election and introduced a new series of segregationist measures using the word “apartheid” for the first time. Apartheid existed on two levels, the “petty” and the “grand.” Petty apartheid established segregation in the small, routine areas of daily life: on buses, in taxis (even hearses); in movie houses and theaters, restaurants and hotels; trains and railway waiting rooms and beaches. Grand apartheid operated on a higher level, separating the races geographically into separate living and working areas.

*South Africa: A Country Study,* published by the Foreign Area Studies project of American University in 1981, sums up the politics of apartheid South Africa succinctly:

Formal political power legally concentrated in the hands of the country’s White minority. National Party, based largely on Afrikaner segment of the White population, dominated government and all political activity after 1948. Expression of opinion on national issues and establishment of political groups by nonwhites severely controlled and frequently suppressed by statute and broad exercise of police powers. Nationalist cabinet essentially dictates course of public policy, but legislative excess to some degree held in check by some White parliamentary opposition groups, critical English-language press, reactions of disenfranchised nonwhite majority, and foreign opinion.

Among those measures made into law by National Party governments beginning in 1949 were:
population registration act (1950), which classified all South Africans by race and have this classification stamped on their identity card or “pass,” which every nonwhite had to carry. Brian Lapping: “Boards, set up to decide if borderline cases were white, colored, or native, caused great distress, particularly among coloreds; 100,000 people appealed against their classification. Some who were downgraded lost their jobs or had to move home. Some found they were married to spouses with whom continued habitation made them liable to arrest.”

prohibition of mixed marriages act (1949) and immorality act (1950), which prohibited interracial marriage or sex.

suppression of communism act (1950), which defined communism broadly as any opposition of the government. It gave the government the power to detain anyone it thought might further “communist” aims—that is, anyone opposed to any government policy, especially apartheid.
GROUP AREAS ACT (1950), which divided cities and towns into segregated residential and business areas. Brian Lapping: “In some towns, people of all colours lived side by side. The Act empowered the government to mark off areas for residence, occupation, and trade by the different ‘races’ and then to move each race into its ‘own’ area, by force if necessary.”

NATIVE LAWS AMENDMENT ACT (1952), which, according to Sparks, “limited blacks with a right to live permanently in the urban areas to those who had been born there, those who had lived there continuously for fifteen years, and those who had worked for the same employer for ten years.” Everyone else would have to return to the “reserve areas”—newly renamed “Bantusans”—belonging to their tribes.

BANTU EDUCATION ACT (1953), which brought all schools for black children under the direct control of the government, abolishing all of the schools established by Christian missions. The new schools stressed teaching be done in native languages—which would put the children at a considerable disadvantage in a society where the official languages were English and Afrikaans. Also, the native languages had few words that enabled teachers to teach modern sciences or math.

EXTENSION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ACT (1959), which prohibited established universities and colleges from accepting black students. It created universities segregated by race and staffed them with whites friendly to the National Party’s apartheid policies.

INDEMNITY ACT (1961), which empowered policemen to commit acts of violence and torture and to kill in pursuit of their official duties (it’s no wonder that Zach and Morrie get cold feet regarding Ethel when they learn that her brother is a policeman).

A group of laws passed between 1950 and 1959 established eight, then ten, Bantusans, or black homelands, based on tribal affiliation. These were extensions of the existing “national homelands” where blacks were allowed to own land: that is, 7.3% of South Africa’s land area. The new laws established public authorities to tax, control public works, and regulate licenses and other commercial concerns. The authorities were headed by black politicians deemed to be “cooperative” in the efforts of the white national government to control the lives of its black citizens. The Bantusans were meant to be, in effect, states within a state,
but were utterly economically dependent on the national government. A further act, the **Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970**, made every black South African, regardless of where she or he lived, a citizen of their tribal Bantusan, effectively removing them even further from the political life of South Africa. All blacks not working outside their “homeland” were required to live there. If a black person lost a job he’d held for less than ten years in a city outside his Bantusan, he had 72 hours to find another, or lose his right to remain in the city. He then had to move to his Bantusan. Also during this period, the existing “pass laws,” which required nonwhites to carry written authorization to be in designated white zones, were strengthened.

**WHO WAS COLORED?**

From *The Mind of South Africa*, by Allister Sparks:

The Populations Registration Act, which is really the cornerstone of the whole apartheid structure, defines the “coloreds” with an impressive attention to ethnic detail. According to the act there are seven subgroups: [1] the Cape Colored group; [2] the Malay group; [3] the Griqua group [descendants of racial mixing between whites and outlying tribes on the northern fringes of the Khoikhoi area—see above]; [4] the Chinese group [“Persons,” the Act explains, “who are generally accepted as members of a race or tribe whose national homeland is China”]; [5] the Indian group; [6] the Other Asiatic Group (consisting of Zanzibari Arabs and anyone originating from anywhere in Asia other than China, India, or Pakistan]; and [7] the Other Colored Group (which means anyone who is not in any of the above groups and who is neither white nor African).

Cape Colored—according to Brian Lapping:

Many of the early white settlers married slaves, particularly women from the Indian state of Bengal. Later, such mixed marriages as occurred were more often with local women of mixed race. Thus was founded the significant population group known as the Cape Colored—varied in racial origin, but Dutch-speaking, Christian, and, after a generation or two, predominantly European in culture.

Malay: According to the website Capeconnected (http://www.capetown.at/heritage/peoples/index.htm#malay), the Malay population originated from Islamic slaves who were political prisoners of the Dutch from Malaysia.
A BLOOD KNOT TIMELINE

COMPiled BY aRIEL FRANKLIN-HUDSON

FOURTH CENTURY Bantu-speaking groups settle in what will later become South Africa, joining the indigenous San (“Bushmen”) and Khoikhoi (“Hottentots”).

1441 Portuguese explorers take ten native Africans from the Gold Coast (now Ghana) as a gift for Prince Henry the Navigator, marking the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade.

1482 The Portuguese build the first permanent slave-trading post at Elmina on the Gold Coast. By the 18th century the port has passed through Dutch and English hands and is exporting 30,000 slaves each year.

1488 Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias becomes the first European to travel around the Cape of Good Hope.

1502 The first enslaved Africans arrive in the Americas.

1562 Sir John Hawkins becomes the first British slave trader. Over the next five years he makes four voyages to Sierra Leone River, taking 1,200 Africans across the Atlantic to sell to Spanish settlers in the Caribbean.

1615 The British establish a short-lived settlement at Table Bay in South Africa.

1619 The Dutch enter the slave trade and begin transporting Africans to the Americas. On August 20, a Dutch ship carrying 20 African slaves arrives in Jamestown, Virginia.

1652 The Dutch East India Company establishes a settlement at Table Bay that will later become Cape Town.

1691 Virginia is the first British colony in North America to pass a law forbidding free blacks and whites to intermarry.

1698 The British Parliament legalizes the slave trade; for most of the 1700s, Britain will dominate the transatlantic slave trade.

1699 White farmers of Dutch descent (called Trekboers or Boers) begin to move inland from the Table Bay settlement, seizing land. The Bantu, Khoi, and San are decimated by smallpox, systematically slaughtered by the Boers, and forced into servitude on colonial farms. The migrating Trekboers also have children with natives, giving birth to the mixed-race population of South Africa.

1756 Dutch settlers in South Africa import slaves from West Africa, Malaysia, and India in an effort to establish the dominance of whites over nonwhites.
1773 Phillis Wheatley, a slave in Boston, publishes *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*; it is the first book published by an African American in the Americas, and the second by an American woman. Wheatley earns critical acclaim in England and America.

1779 The Frontier Wars, for control over territory inhabited by Xhosa chiefdoms, begin; they will continue for the next 100 years.

1780 The transatlantic slave trade reaches its peak, with a slave ship leaving Britain almost every other day.

1790 William Wilberforce presents the first abolition bill to the British House of Commons, but it does not pass.

1791–1804 A slave uprising in St. Domingue, led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, begins the Haitian Revolution. On January 1, 1804, St. Domingue is declared the independent republic of Haiti, becoming the first independent black state outside of Africa.

1795 British forces seize the Cape Colony from the Netherlands. The territory will be returned to the Dutch in 1803, who will cede it back to the British in 1806. British occupation will be confirmed following the Treaty of Vienna in 1814.

1807 Britain and the United States ban the slave trade.

1810 British missionaries criticize the racist practices of the Boers, urging them to treat Africans more fairly; the Boers, however, continue to claim white supremacy.

1811–17 Many countries—including Spain and most of the Spanish colonies, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France—abolish the slave trade.

1816–26 Shaka Zulu founds and expands the Zulu empire—an African state in what is now South Africa—creating a formidable fighting force.

1820 Four thousand British settlers arrive in Algoa Bay, South Africa. Five years later, they will establish Port Elizabeth, which will become an important harbor and trade center.

1831 Nat Turner leads the only effective and sustained slave rebellion in U.S. history. Turner is hanged on November 11, after the defeat of his insurrection, but the rebellion puts an end to the white southern myth that slaves were either too contented or too servile to mount an armed revolt.

1832–33 Britain abolishes slavery and provides for the emancipation of enslaved people in the British West Indies; the British Abolition of Slavery Act stipulates that former enslaved people must serve a period of apprenticeship before receiving full emancipation. Wilberforce dies on July 29, three days after the Abolition of Slavery Act is passed.
1835 The “Great Trek” begins: thousands of Dutch and Dutch-descended families—Boers and Afrikaners—migrate north and east to escape British rule. They found the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, paving the way for European occupation of other parts of South Africa.

1836 In the United States, Alexander Lucius Twilight becomes the first African American elected to public office. He is also the first African-American college graduate.

1838 Slavery is formally abolished in South Africa, but seizure of African women and children and government-sanctioned serfdom continue.

1843 The British annex Natal, a region that was part of the Zulu kingdom in South Africa.

1847 Frederick Douglass begins publication of the *North Star*, an antislavery newspaper. Douglass will become one of the most important human rights leaders of the 19th century, a forerunner in the abolition movement, and the first black citizen to hold a high office in the u.s. government.

1850 Escaped slave Harriet Tubman guides members of her family to freedom via the Underground Railroad. She comes to be known as the “Moses of her people.”

1852 The British South African government recognizes the Orange Free State and Transvaal as independent republics.

1856 Natal separates from the Cape Colony.

1857 In the Dred Scott decision, the u.s. Supreme Court legalizes slavery in all the territories.

1860 The Civil War begins in the United States—after the succession of the southern slave states—when the Confederate army opens fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

1861 James Stone is the first African American to fight for the Union in the Civil War. He is light skinned and married to a white woman, and his racial identity is only revealed after his death in 1862. Slavery is abolished in the Dutch colonies of the Caribbean.

1863 President Abraham Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation and frees all slaves in the rebellious states.

1865 The 13th Amendment to the u.s. Constitution outlaws slavery in the reunited United States of America.

1867 Diamonds are found along the Orange River, and diamond mining begins in South Africa. The Kimberley mine, founded in 1871, will become the richest diamond mine in the world. Black Africans are given the most dangerous jobs in the mines, paid far less than
white workers, and housed in fenced, patrolled barracks. Oppressive conditions and constant surveillance keep them from organizing for better wages and working conditions.

1870 Hiram R. Revels is the first black member of the U.S. Senate; he completes the unexpired term of former Confederate president Jefferson Davis.

1875 The U.S. Congress passes the Civil Rights Bill, banning discrimination in places of public accommodation. The Supreme Court overturns the bill in 1883.

1879 The British conquer the Zulu kingdom and the Pedi tribe.

1880–81 The Boers rebel against British rule in the first Anglo-Boer War. Among the Boers’ grievances are British attempts to educate blacks and allow opportunities for advancement to Indians and coloreds of mixed race. The Boers lose the war, but the British agree to maintain racial restrictions and share political power with the Boers at the expense of the African, colored, and Indian communities.

1895 Booker T. Washington delivers the “Atlanta Compromise” in Atlanta, Georgia; Washington preaches self-reliance, urging African Americans to pursue vocational careers and concentrate on improving economic conditions.

1896 In Plessy v. Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the concept of “separate but equal,” endorsing Jim Crow laws and the state-mandated discrimination of public facilities and transportation.

1899 The second Anglo-Boer War begins.

1900 With the defeat of the Xhosa in 1878, the collapse of Zulu resistance in the 1880s, the invasions of the Gaza and Ndebele kingdoms in 1893–96, and the crushing of Venda resistance in 1898, there are now no autonomous African societies left on the subcontinent.

1902 The Treaty of Vereeniging ends the second Anglo-Boer War, and the Transvaal and Orange Free State are made self-governing colonies of the British empire.

1903 What Happened in the Tunnel features the first interracial kiss in U.S. film. W. E. B. DuBois publishes The Souls of Black Folk, which declares, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” The book rejects the gradualism of Booker T. Washington and calls for action on behalf of African-American rights. In 1905, DuBois will found the Niagara Movement, an organization of black intellectuals that is a forerunner of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

1907 Mohandas K. Gandhi organizes his first satyagraha (“holding to the truth”) campaign of civil disobedience in nonviolent resistance to unjust laws in South Africa. In 1914 he
will secure an agreement from the South African government promising the alleviation of anti-Indian discrimination.

1908 A constitutional convention is held to establish South African independence from Britain. The all-white government decides that nonwhites can vote but not hold office.

1909 In the United States, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded as a biracial organization committed to fighting racial discrimination and segregation.

1910 The Union of South Africa is formed by the unification of the Cape Province, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. The new constitution specifically denies all non-Europeans—black Africans, coloreds, and Indians—the right to vote in three of the four colonies. Power in the Union of South Africa is split between the primarily British-oriented United Party and the primarily Boer/Afrikaner-oriented National Party. Numerous laws are passed reserving skilled jobs for whites and stripping blacks of property rights.

1912 The South African Native National Congress is formed in response to the formation of the Union of South Africa. Renamed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923, it will become the leading black nationalist organization in South Africa, dedicated to bringing all Africans together as one people, defending rights and freedoms, and eliminating apartheid.

1913 The Native Lands Act gives 7.3% of the country’s land to black Africans, who make up 80% of the population. Black Africans are prohibited from owning land outside their designated region and are only allowed to be on white land if they are working for whites. In the United States, President Woodrow Wilson’s administration begins government-wide segregation of workplaces, restrooms, and lunchrooms.

1910–30 In South Africa, blacks are fired from jobs that are then given to whites. Some Africans educated at missionary schools attempt to organize a resistance against white rule. Their efforts are weakened by the fact that few Africans are literate, communication is poor, and access to money and other resources is limited.

1918 The First Pan-African Congress meets in Paris, France, under the guidance of W. E. B. DuBois. In the summer of 1918—called the “Red Summer”—there are more than 25 race riots, with more than 100 deaths, across the United States.

1922–29 The Harlem Renaissance marks an epoch in black literature and art.

1930 Paul Robeson, the first black actor to attempt the title role of Othello since Ira Aldridge’s 1825 performance, kisses white actress Peggy Ashcroft onstage in London.

1932 Athol Fugard is born in Middlefield, South Africa.
1936 The Representation of Voters Act weakens the political rights of many Africans in South Africa, allowing them to vote only for white representatives. American track-and-field athlete Jesse Owens wins four gold medals in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin; his victories derail Adolf Hitler's plan to use the games as a show of Aryan supremacy.

1946 South African mine workers are paid 12 times less than white mine workers. More than 75,000 South Africans go on strike in support of higher wages, but the police use violence to force them back to work; more than 1,000 workers are injured or killed.

1948 A “pure” and “reunified” National Party—led by Hendrik Verwoerd and other hard-line Afrikaners—wins a majority in the South African parliament and promises to counter the “black threat” with apartheid (“apartness”) laws. Apartheid quickly becomes official state policy. Over the next four years, dozens of laws are passed requiring racial registration, prohibiting interracial sexual contact, segregating public facilities, abolishing black village councils, and prohibiting black membership in labor unions. The laws are intended to separate whites from nonwhites, blacks from other nonwhites, each black ethnic group from other black ethnic groups, and rural blacks from urban blacks.

1950 The Suppression of Communism Act is passed in South Africa, with language so broad that virtually any individual or organization opposed to the National Party can be censored or arrested. The Population Registration Act divides South Africans into three racial groups: white, colored (mixed-race or Asian), and native (African/black). Marriages between races are outlawed in order to maintain racial purity. The Group Areas Act divides cities and towns into segregated residential and business areas, and the government removes thousands of coloreds and Indians from areas classified for white occupation. The vast majority of black Africans are restricted to rural reservations called “homelands,” with movement into and within white territory restricted by “pass” laws. Day-to-day survival on reservations is impossible without the wages of relatives working outside. Young, single men are allowed to work on farms, in mines, and in cities, where they receive minimal wages and live in segregated, subeconomic townships tightly controlled by whites. By 1983, the government will have forced more than 3.5 million blacks onto reserves.

Ralph J. Bunche, undersecretary of the United Nations, is the first black to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; he receives the award for his work as the United Nations mediator in the Arab–Israeli dispute in Palestine. Gwendolyn Brooks becomes the first black to win a Pulitzer Prize.

1951 The Bantu Homelands Act declares the reservations independent nations and strips millions of South African blacks of their citizenship. Blacks are now considered foreigners in white-controlled South Africa and need passports to enter.
1952 The ANC and South African Indian Congress launch the Defiance Campaign, a civil disobedience campaign based on Gandhi’s passive resistance model. It lasts more than six months before bloody riots and government action bring it to an end.

1953 The Preservation of Separate Amenities Act establishes “separate but not necessarily equal” parks, beaches, post offices, and other public places for whites and nonwhites in South Africa. The Bantu Education Act restricts curriculum, budget, and salaries in black schools and openly states that the goal of educating black students is to prepare them for menial occupations. Blacks are expelled from universities.

1954 On May 17 the U.S. Supreme Court rules unanimously in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka that racial segregation in public schools violates the 14th Amendment.

1955 The Congress Alliance is formed in South Africa by the leading activist groups of the antiapartheid movement: the ANC, South African Indian Congress, Colored People’s Congress, white South African Congress of Democrats, and South African Congress of Trade Unions. The ANC drafts a Freedom Charter, which states that discrimination is to be eliminated and civil rights for all population groups are to be guaranteed. The police relocate 60,000 blacks, at gunpoint, from their homes in Johannesburg. Black-owned property is razed and replaced with white suburbs. In the United States, Rosa Parks, secretary of the Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of the NAACP, refuses to surrender her seat when ordered by a local bus driver, leading to the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56.

1956 With his wife, actress Sheila Meiring, and a small group of friends, Fugard forms an amateur theater company in Cape Town. The company, Circle Players, gives Fugard his first productions: The Cell and Klaas and the Devil.

1960 At a nonviolent protest against the pass laws in the black South African township of Sharpeville, 70 unarmed black civilians are killed and more than 180 wounded by the police. Most of the victims are shot in the back as they are running away. Thousands of workers go on strike. In Cape Town, 30,000 blacks march in peaceful protest. The government mobilizes the army, declares a state of emergency, outlaws the ANC and Pan-African Congress (both of which go underground), and arrests more than 11,000 people. In the United States, the sit-in movement is launched when black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, insist on service at a local segregated lunch counter.

1961 South Africa becomes a republic and leaves the British Commonwealth. In solidarity with striking Bay Transport Company workers, the black population of Port Elizabeth boycotts Bay Transport buses for 40 days, walking 12 to 28 miles to and from work. Black drivers receive a wage increase and other benefits equivalent to those of white and colored
workers, but three years later, ten of the striking busmen are sentenced to four and a half years in prison for subversive activity. *The Blood Knot* premieres at the Rehearsal Room in Johannesburg, with Fugard as Morris and black actor Zakes Mokae as Zachariah; this is the first time a white and black actor have appeared together onstage in a public performance, a milestone in South African theatrical history (black and colored roles have traditionally been played by white actors in blackface).

1962 The United Nations establishes the Special Committee against Apartheid to support a political process of peaceful change.

1963 Under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., blacks in the United States begin a campaign against discrimination. Civil rights protests across the nation culminate in the March on Washington on August 28, where King delivers the “I Have a Dream” speech. It is the largest civil rights demonstration in history. For his performance in *Lilies of the Field*, Sidney Poitier becomes the first African American to win an Academy Award for Best Actor.

1964 Nelson Mandela, a leader of the ANC, is arrested for treason and sentenced to life in prison on notorious Robben Island. The U.S. Congress passes the Civil Rights Bill, banning discrimination in voting, jobs, public accommodation, and other activities. At 35, Martin Luther King, Jr., becomes the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965 Malcolm X is assassinated.

1966 South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd is assassinated. The Black Panther Party is founded in Oakland, California.

1967 Fugard’s teleplay of *The Blood Knot* is broadcast by the BBC, with the playwright again in the role of Morris. In response, South African authorities confiscate Fugard’s passport. Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African American to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down Virginia’s antimiscegenation law (prohibiting marriage between whites and nonwhites) as a violation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Similar laws still in effect and enforced in 17 southern states (all the former slave states plus Oklahoma) are rendered void. Nonetheless, it will take South Carolina until 1998 and Alabama until 2000 to officially remove defunct antimiscegenation laws from the books, with 62% of voters in South Carolina and 59% of voters in Alabama voting to remove these laws.

*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* features the first interracial kiss in a Hollywood mainstream movie, between Sidney Poitier and Katharine Houghton.
1968 Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. The assassination is followed by a week of riots across the nation. Captain Kirk (William Shatner) kisses Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) on Star Trek in u.s. network television's first interracial kiss.

1969 President Nixon's administration develops the first affirmative action program, requiring that contractors on federally assisted projects set specific goals for hiring minorities.

1972–73 Resistance to apartheid increases, and whites join blacks in demonstrations. Under the leadership of Steven Biko, the all-black South African Students Organization helps unify students through the Black Consciousness Movement. Black trade unions organize a series of strikes for higher wages and improved working conditions. The u.n. General Assembly declares apartheid to be “a crime against humanity.”

1975 The Jeffersons features the first interracial married couple on prime-time u.s. television.

1976 More than 600 people are killed, and thousands more injured and arrested, when a group of students in Soweto (short for South Western Townships)—a black residential area near Johannesburg—riot and demonstrate against educational discrimination. The revolt is triggered by the insistence of authorities that Afrikaans, the language of whites descended from the Dutch Boers, be used to teach in Soweto high schools.
1977 Biko is arrested and killed in police custody. All organizations associated with the Black Consciousness Movement are banned. The U.N. Security Council unanimously votes a mandatory embargo on the export of arms to South Africa. Alex Haley’s *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*—an epic story tracing Haley’s supposed ancestor, Kunta Kinte, from his childhood in Gambia, West Africa, through his capture by slave traders in 1750, to his life as a slave in America—is adapted into a miniseries and becomes one of the most popular shows in the history of American television.

1978 Pieter W. Botha becomes state president of South Africa. His administration repeals bans on interracial sex and marriage, desegregates many hotels, restaurants, trains, and buses, and repeals the pass laws. A new constitution creates separate parliamentary bodies for Indians and for coloreds, but blacks are still denied the vote.

1980 People and governments around the world launch an international campaign to boycott South Africa. Some countries ban the import of South African products, and some major companies pull out of South Africa, with a crippling effect on the South African economy and government. There is a major increase in civil disobedience, demonstrations, and other acts of protest.

1982 Fugard’s “*Master Harold*...and the boys” premieres at Yale Repertory Theatre and, a few months later, on Broadway.

1984 Long-standing apartheid critic Archbishop Desmond Tutu wins the Nobel Peace Prize. The Free South Africa Movement is launched in the United States: labor unions, civil rights organizations, students, and church groups organize a series of demonstrations, bringing national attention to the situation in South Africa and garnering public support.

1986 Violence increases in South Africa as hundreds of militant action groups mobilize at local, regional, and national levels. A nationwide state of emergency is declared, and for three years, police and soldiers patrol black townships in armed vehicles, destroying black squatter camps and detaining, abusing, and killing thousands of Africans. Rigid censorship laws ban television, radio, and newspaper coverage. The U.S. Congress overrides President Reagan’s veto and passes the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which imposes economic sanctions on the apartheid government.

1988 Conversations begin between National Party leaders and exiled and imprisoned ANC leaders. Desegregation of schools and some public facilities begins.
1989 Botha resigns and F.W. de Klerk becomes president of South Africa. Public facilities are desegregated, and many ANC activists freed. In the United States, General Colin L. Powell is named chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

1990 In a dramatic address to parliament on February 2, de Klerk announces a program of radical change. Nelson Mandela is released after 27 years in prison and leads multiparty negotiations with the goal of ending apartheid.

1991 The major apartheid laws are repealed and the state of emergency revoked. Mandela and de Klerk begin negotiations for a new constitution. There is fighting between the ANC and the Zulu Inkatha Movement.

1992 Carol Moseley-Braun is the first black woman to serve in the U.S. Senate.

1993 An interim constitution—based in part on the Freedom Charter, guaranteeing political, social, and economic rights for all the peoples of South Africa—is written and approved by all parties. Mandela and de Klerk win the Nobel Peace Prize. Toni Morrison wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1994 South Africa holds its first democratic elections, in which 19 parties contest for seats in the new parliament. The ANC receives a majority of the vote and Mandela becomes president. A new “government of national unity” is formed, with the goal of providing Africans with improved education, housing, electricity, running water, and sanitation. Commonwealth membership is restored, remaining sanctions are lifted, and South Africa takes a seat in the U.N. General Assembly after a 20-year absence.

1995 Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell ends months of speculation by announcing that he will not run for the U.S. presidency in 1996.

1996 In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, begins hearings on the human rights crimes committed by the former government and liberation movements during the apartheid era. Parliament adopts a new constitution, and the National Party withdraws from the coalition.


1999 The ANC wins the general elections and Thabo Mbeki takes over as president.

2000 President-Elect George W. Bush announces the appointment of several African Americans to his cabinet: Colin L. Powell as secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice as national security advisor, and Dr. Roderick Paige as secretary of education. For the first time, Americans are allowed to identify themselves on census forms as members of more
than one race, with a matrix of 63 possible racial choices, compared with five a decade before. About 6.8 million people (2.4% of the population) describe themselves as multi-racial.

**2001** Thirty-nine multinational pharmaceutical companies halt a legal battle to stop South Africa importing generic AIDS drugs. The decision is hailed as a victory for the world’s poorest countries in their efforts to import cheaper drugs to combat the virus. For her performance in *Monster’s Ball*, Halle Berry becomes the first African American to win the Academy Award for Best Actress.

**2003** The South African government approves a major program of drug-distribution centers and preventative programs to treat and tackle HIV/AIDS.

**2004** The ANC wins a landslide election victory in South Africa with nearly 70% of the votes, and Thabo Mbeki begins a second term as president. Condoleezza Rice becomes the first black female secretary of state in the United States.

**2005** In South Africa, investigators exhume the first bodies in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigation into the fates of the hundreds of people who disappeared during apartheid. President Mbeki fires his deputy, Jacob Zuma, in the aftermath of a corruption case. One hundred thousand gold miners strike, bringing the industry to a standstill.

Stanford University sociologist Michael Rosenfeld calculates that more than 7% of the United States’ 59 million married couples are interracial, compared to less than 2% in 1970.

**1997** Demographic trends suggest that by the middle of the 21st century, whites will no longer make up a majority of the U.S. population, and blacks will have been overtaken as the largest minority group by Hispanics.

**2006** Former deputy president Jacob Zuma is acquitted of rape charges by the High Court in Johannesburg and reinstated as deputy leader of the ANC. South Africa becomes the first African country, and the fifth country in the world, to legalize same-sex unions.

**2007** President Mbeki, often accused of turning a blind eye to crime, urges South Africans to join forces to bring rapists, drug dealers, and corrupt officials to justice. Hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers take part in the biggest strike since the end of apartheid; it lasts for four weeks and causes widespread disruption to schools, hospitals, and public transport. Zuma is elected chairman of the ANC, placing him in a strong position to become the next president. Prosecutors bring new corruption charges against him.

**2008** United States Democratic Party presidential candidate Barack Obama places first in the Iowa Caucus.
SOUTH AFRICA’S “COLOREDS”: A GROUP TORN BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE WORLDS

BY ALAN COWELL (1985)

The boy of fair skin—but not what is called white in South Africa—came home from school the other day and told his mother, who is dark of skin, that blacks smelled bad.

As she recounted the story, the mother told her four-year-old son, the child of a white man and a dark-skinned woman, that his assessment was wrong. After all, she said, she was black and did not smell bad.

But the boy persisted, she said, saying he loved his father because he was white like him and did not love his mother. So she told the boy a truth derived from South Africa’s web of racial definitions: Despite the fact that he looked the same as his friends who were technically white, he was not white.

“He cried and cried and said: ‘What am I?’ the mother said. Because of his parentage, the answer in South African law would be “colored.” And his cry might be echoed by many others in this land of racial distinction.

A Zulu boy helps his white classmates learn the Zulu language after the fall of apartheid (photo © Ed Kashi/CORBIS).
A GROUP DEFINED BY NEGATIVES
South Africa’s people of mixed descent are torn between white and black, but embraced totally by neither, a racial group of complexities and stratifications defined, in law, only by negatives.

To be “colored” is to be neither black nor white, more privileged than blacks but less privileged than whites, living a segregated life drawn from roots that deny segregation, labeled “colored” by the authorities, as if that denoted a homogeneous group, yet drawn from disparate roots. The label of “colored” is one of convenience, lumping together those who do not fit elsewhere in apartheid’s great racial divisions.

In the racial unrest that has spread here in recent days, spilling at one point into a white suburb but most often contained in mixed-race areas, many of those involved in the fighting with the police have been of mixed racial descent, and their participation in it seems to give some insight into a special anger.

“The law gives the colored people a certain identity,” said Professor Richard van der Ross, the principal of the University of the Western Cape—an institution where mixed-race students predominate. “But the law is unable to define the identity. Being colored is a matter of being of mixed descent. But you cannot find any physical characteristics, social habits, institutional ties like religion or language, that typify these people.”

SYSTEM OF COMPARTMENTALIZATION
Apartheid legislation is based on the notion that definable, separate groups should be kept apart, nurturing their own traditions and ways in geographic separation from one another. Yet the laws seem to contradict themselves. All of those who are not black or white or Asian are colored, the law says, suggesting a unified group of people.

But in its classification of “colored” the law includes many subclassifications—Griquas, Cape Coloreds, Cape Malays, and “other colored”—that defy the notion of homogeneous minorities on which apartheid is based. The Cape Malays practice Islam, while many other people of mixed race worship in a branch of the Dutch Reformed Church, initially founded by their white Afrikaner overlords to institutionalize racially segregated religion.

For the fair-skinned boy, whose mother asked that he not be identified by name, the tension seemed less abstract. He went to school, she said, in a rare private establishment that permitted children of all races to attend classes together, and there he had fallen in with a group of young white boys, whose comments sometimes reflected those of racially prejudiced parents. Because he seemed so light-skinned to the other boys, they accepted him.
So, to maintain the esteem of his peers, the mother surmised, he had adopted their attitudes, unaware that by law, the nonwhite targets of South African racism included himself and his mother. Until that moment, the mother said, her son had not seemed to notice that his skin color was any different from that of his father.

**ORIGINS OF COLORED GROUP**

South Africa’s mixed-race population numbers 2.8 million—about the same size as the dominant Afrikaner group. It has been around, mixed-race people like to say with a smile, since just after the first Dutch settlers landed at the Cape in 1652. Its roots lie, according to Professor van der Ross, in 17 different groups ranging from slaves and Bushmen to whites and Mauritians. The bulk of its members live in Cape Province.

It is a community the existence of which gives pause to Afrikaners bent on compartmentalizing the races, since its existence is a reminder of long-forbidden liaisons.

Hans Heese, an academic at the University of the Western Cape, concluded in a study that many of the most prominent Afrikaner families were drawn from racially mixed bloodlines.

“Is not our very existence due to such intermingling?” Professor van der Ross said in a study, published in 1979, that suggested that the Afrikaners’ ambivalent attitude to mixed-race people was a product of guilt.

**THOUSANDS BELONG TO GANGS**

In the mean, low tenements of the Cape Flats outside “white” Cape Town, life for the mixed-race poor is hard. The reputation is of violence and crime and drunkenness, a quickness with the knife in a community pervaded by the power of myriad gangs and criminal brotherhoods. Last year, around 80,000 young people of mixed race were reckoned to belong to gangs involved in drug smuggling and territorial battles. But that image is not all-embracing.

The stratifications range from rock-throwing radicals to what seems to be an emergent middle class caught in the deference towards whites that apartheid has spawned over decades.

When a reporter arrived at a mixed-race church gathering, a woman handed him her hymn sheet so that he could better join in the service. Early the same day, the reporter’s car had been stoned by young men of mixed race, who accompanied the fusillade of rocks with racial epithets. Yet, ten minutes later, another man of mixed race had rescued the reporter, taken him to his home and offered him a cassette tape of music and conversation as a gift.

Thus, despite the law that seeks to lock them into a simple group definition, South Africa’s mixed-race people defy such labeling and the ambiguity of their status is acute.
SPENDING FOR EDUCATION
Unlike black people, mixed-race South Africans do not need to carry passes, and they may live in whatever part of the country they choose. Yet wherever they live, like black people they may only reside in neighborhoods set aside for them. The authorities spend more on the education of a mixed-race child than on that of a black child, but that amount is far less than the amount spent on a white child. Mixed-race people may vote for representatives in their own house of the country’s three-chamber Parliament, formed under a Constitution that sought to shift the crucial color distinction in the country from a division between white and nonwhite to one between black and nonblack.

Yet, in places like liquor outlets or rest rooms where there are separate entrances, the distinction still is between white and nonwhite.

“Over the past 40 years,” Professor van der Ross said, “coloreds have moved away from the whites and more towards the blacks.” Yet that alliance is frail, undermined by geographic separation and differences in language and customs, he said, threatened by old prejudice and economic distinctions and by the new Constitution that excluded black people while it sought to involve those of mixed race in a junior capacity.

ATTITUDE TOWARD WHITES
The effect of the new Constitution remains uncertain, for the image implanted in the minds of many mixed-race persons is not of a benevolent white authority, but of an authority that, until last year, had moved inexorably for more than three decades to deprive mixed-race people of the rights they had enjoyed in the 1940s.

“These days,” a political activist of mixed descent said, “we prefer to call ourselves black. We are united within the black struggle against apartheid.” After political discussions, however, the activist said, black and mixed-race people did not tend to socialize together, heading for their own distinct lives and segregated areas. But that implies no coziness with whites.

“You whites,” a 16-year-old high school student told a white reporter, “you have moved us without our consent, and put us in places where we did not want to go. You are the system that gives us worse education than the whites have. It is your police that whips us.” Professor van der Ross, who sees mixed-race cultures as being West European rather than African in style and content, put it more mildly. “When the Government says: ‘We are your friends,’ ” he said, “we say: ‘Hold it, what’s your track record?’ ”

Driving out of Cape Town’s city center, on the freeway leading east, there is attractive open ground that might seem a valuable piece of real estate, a place where high-rise apartments and office buildings might be expected. But for the most part it is occupied only by
old churches and mosques surrounded by open ground. It is a place called District Six, a name that is a rallying call of mixed-race discontent, an explanation of mistrust and hatred toward white authority.

**A NEIGHBORHOOD DESTROYED**

On February 11, 1966, said the Rev. Basil van Rensburg, the authorities began to raze District Six, a tangled slum of narrow streets and bazaars where many mixed race people had lived for years.

Between 40,000 and 50,000 mixed-race persons were moved out to tenements on the Cape Flats in what Father van Rensburg, a Catholic priest who runs the Holy Cross Church and primary school in District Six, called “the largest uprooting of a community based on color in the world.”

The razing was justified in terms of the Group Areas Act, part of the interlocking legislation that supports apartheid. At birth, all persons in South Africa must be classified by race. Then, the Group Areas Act decides where they must live with those classified like them.

District Six was declared part of a white area, so mixed-race people had to move, possibly, Father van Rensburg thought, because, as is the case with much of South Africa’s racial housing policies, security concerns played a large part in forming Government policy. Most black townships, for instance, have few entrances and are thus easily sealed.

**TOO NARROW FOR A TANK**

District Six lay close to the city center and was, by most accounts, a warren, a place, the priest said, where the streets were “too narrow for a tank to penetrate.”

The destruction of District Six still figures in mixed-race perceptions of the authorities, an emblem of rejection by whites who once, in a long-distant and mostly forgotten past, had seemed warm.

The mixed-race person “owes his origin to us,” said Gen. J. B. M. Hertzog, the then-Prime Minister, in 1925, “and knows no other civilization than that of the European.” The mixed-race person, he said, “even speaks the language of the European as his mother tongue. There can thus be no talk of segregation.”

That attitude, according to Professor van der Ross, had various results. There was a time, he said, when “colored” was not seen as a pejorative term, and when limited numbers of mixed-race people were included on the common voters’ roll in Cape Province, although they could only vote for white candidates. Since the National Party came to power in the
1940s, however, he said, those limited rights had been removed and mixed-race people had been offered only what was seen as token representation.

**ALIENATION REINFORCED**

The destruction of District Six and the relocation of its inhabitants to the Cape Flats tenements and, later, the sterile “new town” called Mitchells Plain, reinforced the alienation.

The man who signed the order that led to the razing of District Six, Father van Rensburg recalled, was P. W. Botha, then a cabinet minister, and now the President, the architect of a policy of limited liberalization that seeks to undo the damage of decades.

Yet those same changes have offered further division to the mixed-race community, throwing into conflict such leaders as the Rev. Alan Hendrickse, one of two nonwhite members of Mr. Botha’s cabinet, and the Rev. Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, who opposes Mr. Botha’s program and seeks to construct a wider coalition against white minority rule.

Dr. Boesak, who has been in detention for almost two weeks, is regarded as a leader by those mixed-race persons who deny the label given them by the authorities, preferring to confront the authorities with demands for dismantling of apartheid. Dr. Hendrickse, by contrast, seeks change from within the system that once detained him, too.

Since the widely boycotted elections in August 1984, that created a segregated 80-seat chamber for people of mixed descent, Dr. Hendrickse said, there had been changes.

Legislation forbidding sex and marriage across the color line, he said, for instance, had been repealed, and that could induce “a domino effect” on other aspects of apartheid, once the children of those relationships wanted schools and a place to live.

“It is a nibbling away,” he said, “but there’s an indication of movement.

“My job is to see that the movement is accelerated,” he said. Unlike Dr. Boesak, he seems to see the power of the white authorities as too strong to confront, and chooses, therefore, to negotiate. The high school students who battled the police in mixed-race areas, he seemed to say, were misled. They seemed, he indicated, to think that their motto should be “liberation before education” while refusing to acknowledge that they, too, were part of a system that brought some limited privilege over blacks to people of mixed race.

“It is no longer a question of protest” in the high schools, he said, “it is an attempt to give the impression that a revolution is in progress.”

“Our participation is in order to change,” he said, “whereas those using these youngsters are looking for white capitulation.”

TEN THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RACE

Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese. But what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today?

There’s less—and more—to race than meets the eye:

1. Race is a modern idea. Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class, even language. The English language didn’t even have the word “race” until it turns up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.

2. Race has no genetic basis. Not one characteristic, trait, or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.

3. Human subspecies don’t exist. Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven’t been around long enough or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are one of the most similar of all species.

4. Skin color really is only skin deep. Most traits are inherited independently from one another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability, or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone’s skin color doesn’t necessarily tell you anything else about him or her.

5. Most variation is within, not between, “races.” Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population, be they Italians, Kurds, Koreans, or Cherokees. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.

6. Slavery predates race. Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or war, even debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, ours was the first slave system where all the slaves shared similar physical characteristics.

7. Race and freedom evolved together. The United States was founded on the radical new principle that “All men are created equal.” But our early economy was based largely on slavery. How could this anomaly be rationalized? The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

8. Race justified social inequalities as natural. As the race idea evolved, white superiority became “common sense” in America. It justified not only slavery but also the extermi-
tion of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a
nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were institutionalized within
American government, laws, and society.

9. Race isn’t biological, but racism is still real. Race is a powerful social idea that gives
people different access to opportunities and resources. Our government and social institu-
tions have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power, and resources
to white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.

10. Colorblindness will not end racism. Pretending race doesn’t exist is not the same as cre-
ating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism,
we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage
some groups at the expense of others.

Excerpted from Race: The Power of an Illusion, the online companion to California Newsreel's three-part documentary about race
DEVELOPMENT OF THE NOTION OF RACE
What Do the Experts Say?

You say on your website that the first use of race in English was in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar. What about other European languages? For instance, even today in France, race is used to denote breed (e.g., cattle). Did the English borrow the French usage? Did other European imperial powers develop the notion of race as applied to humans in similar ways?

GEORGE M. FREDRICKSON, EDGAR E. ROBINSON PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF U.S. HISTORY AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY
Well, I would talk about the Spanish word *raza* and the way in which that was applied first to breeds of dogs and horses; *raza* as a race of dogs, a race of horses. And then it begins to be applied, however, to people of Jewish and Moorish descent. In other words, the term *raza* begins to be applied to what we call ethnic groups. And you know, they talked about races of nobility, the nobility was described as being like a race of horses and dogs. There was the idea of people handing on certain characteristics to their descendants, but I think it begins to be applied to large human groups only about in the 16th century.

AUDREY SMEDLEY, PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
When it comes to looking at the origin of the term in English, my research shows that in about the 16th century, the English, especially those who were trading with the Spanish, got it from the Spanish. It was a general classificatory word in Spanish, which as George says was usually used for breeds of animals. Even today the Spanish *raza* has somewhat different connotations than the English term. You can think of breeds of flowers or breeds of animals, but you can also use the term *raza* for your own people. If you are, let’s say, Mexican from a particular area of Mexico, or a small town in Mexico or Venezuela, or someplace, you might very well use *raza* to mean your people, the ones you were raised with, not so much as a hereditary thing, but people who are part of your ethnic group.

JAMES O. HORTON, BENJAMIN BANNEKER PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES AND HISTORY AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY AND DIRECTOR OF
THE AFRO-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY AT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Let me take the latter part of that question. All European nations developed a concept of race. But these concepts were quite different from one another. For example, if you go to parts of Latin America, you find very important distinctions being made between blacks, whites, and mulattoes. In the United States with a few exceptions, the primary distinction is just black and white. So why is that?

Well the first thing is that English settlers generally settled in family units, to a greater extent than did the Spanish, Portugese, Dutch, or French in other parts of the Americas. So their contacts with blacks were generally contacts between people who needed labor and people who were forced to provide labor. In the Spanish, Dutch, French areas, obviously these contacts were also between people who needed labor and people who were forced to provide labor, but there were also sexual unions that produced children.

This happened also in the United States, but it was more blatant and prevalent in other European—let’s say the Latin American and Caribbean areas of the New World. And often in the Latin American and Caribbean areas, these European masters lived with their nonwhite sexual partners, and functioned with them, sometimes as families. Obviously this was an exploitive relationship, but the people produced by these relationships, the mulattoes, often then assumed a status that was closer to the master class than was true in the United States, where there were lots of mulattoes produced but they generally assumed the status of slaves.

GEORGE FREDRICKSON

I think what you have in the Latin American case is a sense of difference based on color, but it’s a graded sense, kind of a chromatic hierarchy. In Brazil, they have 30 or 40 different descriptions of peoples’ race. The whiter you are, the better, although color is not all determinative; wealth and education also can whiten you, as they say, lighten you. So it is racial, but not in the sense of black versus white. People of mixed race are an intermediate category, or there may be several intermediate categories.

I think that it results from the high extent of miscegenation or intermarriage that existed in the early period, and the fact that, unlike Virginia and the American colonies generally, entire families didn’t arrive from Europe, but rather new kinds of families were created in these circumstances. I even found that true, to some degree, in South Africa, in the 17th century where you have a lot of intermarriage going on of a very complicated sort, leading to a system where the daughters of the mixed relationships marry Europeans, but the sons become the ancestors of the so-called colored people of South Africa. A lot of the
original marriage led to the founding of families that are now part of Afrikaner popula-
tion. Even in South Africa, in that early period, you had a lot of this mixing going on, so
it wasn’t strictly a Latin phenomenon. It also had to do with whether there was a supply of
women coming from the mother country, which there wasn’t in South Africa.

AUDREY SMEDLEY
Right. I think that there are some similarities between South Africa and the Latin
American countries. While they recognize the mixture of people, there is also a preference
for the light skin, of course. Light skin in Spanish countries meant that you were closer
to the pure Spanish. What’s interesting is that the terms used for race categories in Latin
America, Brazil, and other places, really reflect phenotype, not exclusive categories. You
can have a family of six people, and every one of them will have a different phenotype and
be called by a different term.

JAMES O. HORTON
I think another important factor in these different European conceptions of race is their
prior experience or lack of experience with African peoples. When the Portugese and the
Spanish first went into Africa, they had lots of different terms for the varieties of African
people that they saw, beyond simply black and white. A lot of this has to do with the fact
that the people of the Iberian peninsula, that part of Europe where Spain and Portugal are
located, had had extensive experience with African people. In 711 the Moors had invaded
the Iberian peninsula and ruled that area for several hundred years. So their experience
with Africans was more varied. By contrast, when the English went into Africa, the over-
whelming description they provided was that which distinguished black people, which
they thought they saw in Africa, and themselves, which they defined as white. It was partly
the nature of these different settlements, but it was always something about the cultural
backgrounds of the English versus the Spanish or Portugese.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. *Blood Knot* was first performed in 1961, at the height of South African apartheid. Do you think that the end of apartheid has altered the message of the play? If so, how? If not, why not? Do you think the play has as much impact in 2008 as it did in 1961? Why or why not?

2. How is race defined in the play? How do you define race? Does your understanding of race change over the course of the play? How and why (or why not)?

3. Morrie and Zach play games and tell stories throughout the play. What purpose do these games and stories have in their lives? In the play? In the metaphorical context of the play? What do they reveal about Morrie and Zach?

4. What is the significance of the play’s title? What does the play say about family? How are Morrie and Zach allegorical of South Africa and apartheid? Of the world today?

5. While the women in the play—Ethel, Connie, and Zach and Morrie’s mother—are all offstage characters, they are extremely important. What do we learn about Morrie and Zach from their discussions of the women? What do you think of the way the women in the play are treated? What might the treatment of the women in the play say about the society in which Morrie and Zach live?

6. What is the role of the music in the play? How does it further the story? What other stories does it tell?

7. What are the key events of the play? In an effective drama, something must change by the end. What changes in *Blood Knot*? How does each character change? Where are they at the end of the play? Where might they go from there?

8. Compare and contrast race relations in the United States to the situation in South Africa. Consider these points for each country: the treatment of indigenous populations by European colonists; the comparative size of racial populations; the history of slavery; the legal barriers to racial equality in the 19th and 20th centuries; continuing discrimination and conflict even after the legal barriers were removed; and hope for the future.

9. How are Zach and Morrie the same? How are they different? How are they same as or different from you? Do you sympathize with Zach? With Morrie? Why or why not?

10. What do you think the role of theater is and/or should be in the pursuit of social and political change?
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION...


