

# Characters, Cast, and Synopsis of *Race*

The original Broadway production of *Race* opened December 6, 2009, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City. A.C.T.'s production is the West Coast premiere.

## Characters and Cast

HENRY BROWN .....	Chris Butler
JACK LAWSON .....	Anthony Fusco
CHARLES STRICKLAND .....	Kevin O'Rourke
SUSAN.....	Susan Heyward

## Setting

An office.

## Synopsis

**SCENE I.** Henry Brown, a black attorney, and Jack Lawson, his white partner, grill a prospective client: Charles Strickland, a rich white man accused of raping a black woman in a hotel room. The fast-talking lawyers send Strickland out into the waiting room to write down every incriminating thing he's ever done; this buys them time to debate whether or not to take the case. They decide to call Nicky Greenstein (an attorney who has already turned Strickland away) for information, and they tell their associate, Susan (a black woman), to call a man named Kelley to get documents about the crime scene. Jack learns that Greenstein rejected Strickland because two witnesses (a white preacher and his wife) came forward to say that, through the hotel-room wall, they heard Strickland say, "I'm going to fuck you now, you little nigger bitch." The partners decide not to take the case.

Susan reenters with the documents the partners requested and a check from Strickland. Henry is furious with Susan for taking the check and almost issuing Strickland a receipt—an act that would have contractually obliged the firm to defend him. No harm done, an innocent mistake, Jack tells Henry. He asks Susan to thank Kelley for the documents. Susan admits that she did not get the documents from Kelley;

**OPPOSITE** Outside the Joan Little trial, 1975. *The News & Observer*, Raleigh, North Carolina. Courtesy Danielle L. McGuire, [atthedarkendofthestreet.com](http://atthedarkendofthestreet.com).



she got them from the district attorney's office. As a result, they are now listed as the attorneys of record and are obligated to defend Strickland.

Jack has an inspiration: he realizes there were no sequins mentioned in any of the statements related to the case, including those made by the chambermaid who cleaned the room. The alleged victim was wearing a red sequined dress and claims Strickland "ripped it off" her: if the dress had been ripped, sequins would have flown everywhere. No sequins, no ripping; no ripping, no coercion, no rape. Jack begins to devise a defense.

SCENE 2. Jack decides that they will stage a dress-ripping demonstration in the courtroom and suggests they use Susan as the model. Strickland enters with a statement of apology he wants to take to the press; the lawyers try to talk him out of it. Jack continues to talk their defense through with Susan, who interrupts his line of argument and begins to cross-examine him about the investigation he undertook before hiring her. She thinks he investigated her more thoroughly than is usual; Jack owns up to this, explaining that he had to be especially sure she would be a good employee because if he ever wanted to fire her she (as a young black female) could allege discrimination. Susan lays into Jack about the illegality of applying differing standards of investigation to employees of different races, but Jack gets Susan to admit that she is actually upset because he asked her to wear the dress in the courtroom. Jack apologizes. Henry barges in with new evidence: a postcard written by Strickland in college to his black roommate. In it, he compares the Caribbean night to "being in some hot, black . . ."

SCENE 3. Jack and Henry question Strickland, who is genuinely surprised to hear that the postcard could be considered racist and is subsequently overcome with remorse. He again proposes apologizing to the press, and, again, the lawyers attempt to dissuade him.

Susan enters with news that the chambermaid has amended her statement: she now remembers finding sequins in the hotel room. Jack wonders what could have prompted “a half-literate illegal hotel maid” to return to the police to change her story.

Henry dismisses Susan and tells Jack that he thinks she sold them out. Henry has always been wary of “her privileged, Affirmative Action self,” and he reminds Jack that he did not want to hire her, in part because of her views on race, as articulated in her college thesis, “Structural Survivals of Racism in Supposedly Bias-Free Transactions.”

The partners bring Susan back in, and she admits that she has believed Strickland was guilty from the moment he stepped into their office. They accuse her of selling them out, and Jack orders Susan to leave. As she does, Henry gets a call informing him that the first responding police officer from the hotel crime scene has turned in a “missing” part of his report: it includes information about sequins. He also learns that Strickland has confessed.

Jack wants to know whether Susan betrayed him. She says it does not matter either way, “because, White Man, he was guilty.”

Early costume renderings for Jack Lawson (opposite) and Susan (right), by costume designer Candice Donnelly

