

I have never been a dramaturg before, but I have always been fascinated by both theatre and history. I was aware of the job, but never thought I would have an opportunity to practice the craft. Then I met Sal Trapani. I had Sal for Acting 1 in the fall semester, found out he was doing *Clybourne Park*, and leapt at the chance. Thankfully, he agreed to let me work on his show, and here we are now.

My job has many facets. The dramaturg has to be the resident expert on the world of the play, both the sociocultural/historical context as well as the psychology of the characters. I would lead discussions on the issues of the play, and Sal and I would talk about how we thought characters would react to developments, or the real history behind the events. A special challenge *Clybourne* presented was the character of Betsy, who is completely deaf and speaks in American Sign Language, which I had to interpret and then teach the actors.

*Clybourne Park* was written by Bruce Norris, a Chicagoan actor turned playwright. The show premiered Off-Broadway in 2010 and exploded in popularity, ending up on Broadway in 2012. *Clybourne* would go on to win the Olivier for Best New Play, the Tony for Best Play, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Sal describes it as a “searing and wicked comedy/drama” that has “a powerful and intense message about the racism and prejudice in each of us.”

The show functions as a loose spin-off of Lorraine Hansberry’s seminal work of African-American drama *A Raisin in the Sun*. The family from *Raisin* is planning on moving into the house where *Clybourne* takes place, and Karl Lindner, a minor character in *Raisin* goes to the house to try and get the current owners to renege on the deal. The second act takes place fifty years later, when a new set of characters, many connected to those from the first act, gather in the same house when it is being purchased and demolished, leading to a whole new discussion on injustice and race.

Unfortunately, it is grounded in an regrettable history of discriminatory housing policies. In 1934, The National Housing Act was passed as part of the New Deal, which allowed redlining, or selective discrimination by race in regards to housing. In Chicago, this led to more investment in the majority white suburbs rather than the neighborhoods in the inner cities populated by people of color. This led to segregated neighborhoods, and little chance of an African-American resident being able to move to a richer suburb, which is what starts the events of *Clybourne Park*.

Today, we face new issues of gentrification in neighborhood throughout the country. Nearly all of us have witnessed some facet of it in our lifetimes. Gentrification refers to a process in which the economic value of a census tract increases, but it often forces the relocation of established cultural communities. This gentrification typically occurs in areas occupied by people of color, forcing them to find new ways of life when the cost of living becomes too high. Some majorly gentrified cities include Portland, Washington DC, and Minneapolis. Chicago, the setting of *Clybourne*, is considered to be a moderately gentrified city, which becomes an issue in Act Two.

We hope the show makes you more aware of what is going on in the world around you. We have been working very hard, and hopefully you leave the theatre thinking.

Yours

Tony Harkin, Dramaturg