

By **Dominique Morisseau**

Directed by **Jade King Carroll**

DETROIT '67



STUDY GUIDE

STUDY GUIDE OBJECTIVES

This study guide serves as a classroom tool for teachers and students, and addresses the following Common Core Standards and Connecticut State Arts Standards:

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

- **Grade 9-10:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **Grades 11-12:** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure

- **Grades 9-10:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details

- **Grades 9-10:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- **Grades 9-10:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- **Grades 9-10:** Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS FOR THEATRE

Theatre/Creating

- **TH:Cr1.1.HSII-b.** Investigate the collaborative nature of the actor, director, playwright, and designers and explore their interdependent roles in a drama/theatre work.

Theatre/Responding

- **TH:Re7.1.HSI-a.** Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.
- **TH:Re8.1.HSI-a.** Analyze and compare artistic choices developed from personal experiences in multiple drama/theatre works.
- **TH:Re8.1.HSI-b.** Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.
- **TH:Re8.1.HSI-c.** Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.
- **TH:Re8.1.HSIII-b.** Use new understandings of cultures and contexts to shape personal responses to drama/theatre work.
- **TH:Re9.1.HSI-b.** Consider the aesthetics of the production elements in a drama/theatre work.
- **TH:Re9.1.HSI-c.** Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a drama/theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience.

Theatre/Connecting

- **TH:Cn10.1.HSI-a.** Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.
- **TH:Cn11.2.HSI-b.** Use basic theatre research methods to better understand the social and cultural background of a drama/theatre work.

GUIDELINES FOR ATTENDING THE THEATRE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to Hartford Stage.

- How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?
 - › Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience affects the performance. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same—this is part of what makes theatre so special!
- Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. Audience members are more than welcome to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be?
 - › Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!
- Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off. Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be taken into the theatre.
- Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.

About the Playwright, Dominique Morisseau

By Sherry R. Boyd

Dominique Morisseau is a playwright and a performer. She is the author of *The Detroit Project*, a trilogy of works inspired by August Wilson's *Century Cycle*. In *The Detroit Project*, she paints an authentic picture of the city at three moments in time through the following plays: *Paradise Blue*, *Skeleton Crew*, and *Detroit '67*. Music features prominently throughout *The Detroit Project*, with Motown, jazz, and hip-hop tracks serving to accentuate a mood and underscore dialogue; Morisseau also captures the city's distinctive rhythms of speech to further convey the specificity of place.

Dominique is an alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop and has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Eugene O'Neil Playwrights Conference. Her work has been commissioned by Steppenwolf Theater, Women's Project, South Coast Rep, People's Light and Theatre, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival/Penumbra Theatre. She most recently served as Co-Producer on the Showtime series *Shameless*. Her awards include: Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award, Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, and being named one of *Variety's* Women of Impact for 2017-18. Dominique most recently was selected as a MacArthur Fellow. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people, effective institutions, and influential networks building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world.



Dominique Morisseau. Photo courtesy of John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Detroit Riots of 1967

By Krista DeVellis

Amidst the cultural unrest of the "Long Hot Summer" of 1967, the riots in Detroit were some of the most violent. Throughout the country people were fighting over desegregation and civil rights. Changes in the auto industry, which once thrived in Detroit, led to many white, middle-class residents relocating to suburban areas further from the city. This took away small business income and lowered the tax base, leaving many African-American residents behind in low-income housing. A common cause for conflict was police abuse in these predominantly black neighborhoods. In Detroit leading up to the riots, there were already many accusations of racial profiling and police brutality.

In the Virginia Park neighborhood in the early morning of Sunday, July 23, a party was held to celebrate the return of a few servicemen from the Vietnam War. This party was taking place at a "blind pig," one of the many illegal after-hours clubs in the area. This blind pig happened to be run off-hours out of the United Community League for Civic Action's office, a civil rights group. At 3:35 a.m. police raided the establishment and began arresting the



Myxolydia Tyler and Nyahale Allie in McCarter Theatre Center's production of *Detroit '67*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

partygoers. As they spilled into the street, an anxious crowd of onlookers began to form. Empty bottles were thrown, a small riot began, and more people joined the commotion from the buildings nearby.

The aggression escalated quickly; people began looting stores and fires broke out. Every police officer and firefighter in the city was called to contain the riots and the flames, but both continued to grow as the day went on. The mayor of Detroit, Jerome P. Cavanaugh, asked the Governor, George Romney, to send in the state police. Next, the National Guard was called in. On Monday, the riots raged on. By this point, thousands had been arrested, and 21 people had been killed, mostly by police. Governor Romney asked President Lyndon B. Johnson to send in U.S. troops, and on Tuesday, nearly 2,000 army paratroopers arrived with tanks. It was not until Thursday, July 27, that the riots finally subsided. Over 7,000 people were arrested. 43 people were killed, 33 of whom were black. About 1,400 buildings were burned, causing an estimated \$50 million in property damage. As the smoke cleared in Virginia Park, some 5,000 people were left homeless.

Economic and emotional scars from the 1960s still impair Detroit today. The automotive industry there has never returned to its former glory and much of the land where buildings were burned down remains empty.

Race Relations in the 1960s

February 1, 1960

In the first sit-in protests, a group of students sit at a “Whites Only” lunch counter in Greensboro, NC.

April 15–17, 1960

In Raleigh, NC, African-American students establish the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

November 8, 1960

John F. Kennedy wins presidency in tightest election since 1884.

May 4, 1961

An interracial group of protesters called the “Freedom Riders” travel south from Washington, DC, to test Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights.

September 30, 1962

James Meredith faces opposition when registering at University of Mississippi as the school’s first black student. The following “Ole Miss” riot kills two students and wounds 160 federal marshals.

August 28, 1963

Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his memorable “I Have A Dream...” speech to an audience of 250,000.

November 22, 1963

President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, TX. Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as President.

July 2, 1964

The Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination on basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

July 16, 1964

An off-duty police officer kills a fifteen-year-old African-American boy in Manhattan. After a rally to protest police brutality, a militant crowd marches to the Harlem police precinct and riots begin.

August 28, 1964

In Philadelphia, PA, a scuffle with police at a busy intersection begins the three-day Philadelphia Riot involving hundreds.

October 14, 1964	Martin Luther King, Jr., is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
February 21, 1965	Malcolm X is killed while delivering a speech in Manhattan.
March, 1965	Protesters in Alabama march 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery in an effort to register black voters.
August 6, 1965	The Voting Rights Act ends discrimination at the polls.
August 11-16, 1965	Six days of rage and riots in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, CA, leave 34 dead and \$200 million in damages.
November 8, 1966	Republican Edward Brook from Massachusetts becomes the first African-American Senator in 85 years.
October 15, 1966	The Black Panther Party is formed in Oakland, CA. This militant group supports violence for defense.
July 12-15, 1966	Violence begins in Chicago, IL, after police clash with a group of African-American youth for opening fire hydrants and playing in the water.
Summer 1967	159 race riots erupt across the United States throughout the “Long Hot Summer” of 1967.
July 12-17, 1967	Police in Newark, NJ, arrest and beat a black cabdriver. A crowd forms in protest, and police use force to clear the area. Rioting continues for the next five days.
July 23, 1967	Detroit Riots begin.
November-March, 1968	A five-month-long student strike at San Francisco University leads to the formation of the nation’s first ethnic studies program.
August 30, 1967	Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.
April 4, 1968	The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., leads to riots in Washington, DC, Chicago, and Baltimore.
November 5, 1968	Running on a platform of “law and order,” Republican Richard Nixon is elected President.
February, 1969	Weeks of violent student uprisings begin with an extended student strike at UC Berkeley, and continue with takeovers and sit-ins at University of Massachusetts, Howard University, and Penn State.

Detroit '67 and the Music of Motown

By Carly Oliver

“No matter how low you get, the music is something that lifts you out of your muck,” says playwright Dominique Morisseau in an interview with the Star Tribune, referencing the Motown tunes that appear in her show *Detroit '67*. “It speaks to our better selves, to places where we grow and live and love. That’s the way folks have been able to survive.” Not only is

the music of Motown crucial to the world of Morisseau's play, but it also played an important role historically. Motown lifted people up and brought them together across the U.S. and around the world. Motown Records popularized legendary recording figures such as Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross and the Supremes, and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. It broke down musical barriers between pop, soul, and R&B; according to the Motown Museum in Detroit, Motown music "brought together a racially divided country and segregated society, around the world, touching all people of all ages and races."

When African-American songwriter Berry Gordy founded Motown Records in Detroit in 1959, America was still in the throes of racial segregation. Although the Supreme Court had ruled that the segregation of schools was unconstitutional in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education*, President Lyndon B. Johnson would not sign the Civil Rights Act until 1964, officially putting an end to all segregation laws. And even that did not guarantee an end to discriminatory practices. "Back in those days," notes famed singer-songwriter Smokey Robinson, "especially if you were black, nobody was paying you what you should be paid, if they paid you at all. So Berry decided to start his own record company and give us that outlet" (Touré 44). Motown was an opportunity for young people of color in Detroit to have a future beyond factory work and the city's housing projects. When Gordy appeared on the scene, the recording industry was likewise racially divided; singles by African-American artists rarely escaped the R&B charts. By 1960, only four had landed high on the Top 100 pop chart, but Gordy set about to change all of that.



Above Motown band The Supremes sing on The Ed Sullivan Show. Public Domain.

Below Motown band The Temptations.



Gordy named Motown Records after Detroit, which, at the time, produced half of the world's automobiles and was known as "Motor City." He affectionately changed "city" to "town" and contracted the resulting "Motor Town" to create the name of his new record label. The automobile industry also influenced Gordy's business approach. He recalls his days working for Ford, watching metal frames go down the assembly line and emerge, transformed into new cars and said to himself, "Maybe, I could do the same thing with my music. Create a place where a kid off the street could walk in one door, an unknown, go through a process, and come out another door, a star" (Hirshey 47). And so he did, seeking out raw talent from Detroit's church choirs, bars, and clubs, and polishing it into musical acts that remain legendary to this day.

Besides reaching landmark musical success (more than 180 number one hits worldwide), Motown artists also began to break down social barriers. Black and white audience members danced together at their concerts as police gave up trying to enforce the rope lines that once separated the races. Similarly, singer Mary Wilson recalls an incident when her tour group enjoyed a poolside party alongside white motel guests in South Carolina. The white guests at first evacuated the pool when the band arrived, and only returned when they realized that the black swimmers were the musicians whose songs were playing on a poolside radio at that very moment (Hirshey 48). Such were the steps forward: small and laden with lingering prejudices.

Motown, however, persisted as a force for change. As the state of affairs in the U.S. became increasingly tumultuous in the late '60s and early '70s with the 1967 Detroit riots, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, and ongoing Vietnam War protests, Motown artists responded. Despite initial resistance on Gordy's part to promote politically charged songs, cheery tunes of love and revelry soon turned to searing social commentary. In his 1971 hit, "What's Going On," Marvin Gaye soulfully petitions:

Picket lines and picket signs,
Don't punish me with brutality.
Come on, talk to me
So you can see
What's going on.

In *Detroit '67*, the character Caroline describes Gaye's voice by saying that it "tug[s] at someplace deep in you. Somewhere no one else can touch and just...moves you in a way you didn't even know you could be moved" (Morisseau). Just as it tugs at the characters of Morisseau's play, the music of Motown tugged at the very fibers of American society. It bridged racial divides, opened doors formerly closed to musicians of color, and advocated for social change in a fractured world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider the impact of popular music on today's society. Can you think of any record labels or individual artists who are forces for social change? How so?
2. Imagine you were singer Mary Wilson during the incident described at the South Carolina motel pool. What would you have felt? How would you have reacted?
3. Can music change the world?

An Interview with Karin Graybash, Sound Designer

Interview by Krista DeVellis



Karin Graybash, Sound Designer.

What made you become a sound designer?

At a certain point in my childhood I discovered a love for novels. Reading the classics, I would get so involved in the stories that I felt they were happening to me. I enjoyed the way I could escape into these worlds. I enjoyed it so much I decided I wanted to be a literature teacher in order to share with others how to discover the inner life of a story. Then I discovered what theater was. I attended some plays and was amazed to see that people could bring stories to real life on the stage. Actually living out the amazing things that were in my mind.

But then it got even better—I discovered musicals. Which felt to me like a magical realm in which people sing and dance to show their emotions. From then on, I was hooked. I soon forgot all about teaching literature. I decided the best way to share my passion for storytelling was through theater, specifically through the music of it. It seemed the most natural way to portray the feelings and emotions of the stories in a heightened way. As a sound designer, I get to help guide the audience down the emotional path of a play through the music as an exciting journey.

What do you wish more people knew about your profession?

I wish more people knew what sound design is. Whenever I meet new people who are not in the theater industry, I get the deepest, longest blank stares when I tell them what I do for a living. It is as though they are dumbfounded that such a thing could exist. That someone could make money and survive doing what I do. But to me, that is the best part! I get to play and have fun creating sounds...and I get paid for it, too.

What is your process like when you are designing a show?

I have a few steps that I usually follow when creating an initial design concept for a show. First, I like to read the script as soon as I get an offer to design. This first read is my only chance to get that sense of what the audience will be thinking and feeling as they watch the show. I take notes on this initial read and then stew on the story. I will do this for a few weeks while I am working on other projects, just periodically thinking about the show in a sort of “what if” manner. The next thing is to chat with the director to find out what their approach to the production is. Because I’ve been thinking about it in different ways for a while by now, I will have a few ideas I can bounce off of him or her at this point, too.



Will Cobbs and Johnny Ramey in McCarter Theatre Center's production of *Detroit '67*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

After that I will go back and read the script again, this time taking in-depth notes as I read on what is needed for the cues. Here I am paying attention to practical things such as timings and locations of sounds. Then I will read the script a third time, paying attention to the feelings and attitudes of characters, scenes, and transitions. These notes are what I base my music choices on for the show, trying to convey all of those things to the audience.

What makes the design of *Detroit '67* unique?

For this production, I tried to juxtapose the two spaces of the play. Act One is an insular feeling place in this production. We are focused on the characters of the play and setting a sense of time and place. Therefore, we don't hear much going on in the basement of the house. It was then important to me to create a soundscape of the bigger outside world once the riots start. A sense of the outside happenings of the world pushing their way in. I created a constant bed of riot sounds to help create the tension under the second half of the play. But more importantly, it helped to create a moment of “deafening silence” that the director and I wanted to achieve. I find that sometimes a moment of silence in a play can be even more effective than the fullest sounds.

In the play, Chelle defends her record player and Lank praises his new 8-track player. Do you have any favorite sound systems, editing programs, or apps for sound?

I have a pair of beat up headphones that I've been using for over 20 years. The ear pieces have become tattered and I've had to repair them. But I just can't seem to replace them. I've tried a few times, but I just keep coming back to them because they feel like home. They are that comfortable feel and the perfect sound. I just can't find the same natural sound with any other pair.

What kind of shows do you enjoy working on?

I don't really have a certain type of show that I like to do. I enjoy working on all kinds, from an inventive new musical to a classic Shaw or Shakespeare play. But whatever the project, the important thing to me is to enjoy the collaborative process with my director and fellow

designers. I get a rush when I feel like we are all speaking the same language and that we can communicate our ideas to the audience in a cohesive manner.

Do you have any advice for students who are interested in sound design?

Introduce yourself to another sound designer. Find yourself fellow friends and mentors, either to pursue it as a profession if you are interested or to keep learning if you've already started. In talking with fellow sound designers, I have been amazed to discover that we are all very happy to share our knowledge and experiences with others. We are very excited to find young people who are interested in observing and learning something that we also love to do. We want to share our enthusiasm with others for what often feels like a niche field and see others excel at it.

Here in Hartford, 1967

By Sherry R. Boyd

Detroit was not the only city that experienced racial tension during the 1960s. The riots illustrated the legitimacy of systemic racism in the United States. Blacks faced discrimination and segregation throughout America, and Hartford, Connecticut, was no different. There was a series of riots in Hartford caused by the stark dichotomy between inner-city neighborhoods and white middle-class neighborhoods. Inner-city neighborhoods made up primarily of black and Puerto Rican citizens were plagued by a lack of jobs and affordable housing, discriminatory education, and police brutality. Many residents of these neighborhoods could not vote in elections for changes to their communities, as a literacy test was required to assess a person's ability to read and write. Literacy tests were administered by various government entities to prevent people of color and immigrants from voting.

Hartford was home to substantial economic disparity between white and black people during the first half of the 20th century, according to Jared Cyr of the *Hartford Through Time* website. In 1965, the Albany area of Hartford saw an increase in their black population from 25% to 75%, while the white population decreased from 94% to 25%. The flight of white residents from Hartford opened up the availability of loans for housing in the suburbs, while, the absence of loans for black residents led to housing shortages and produced overcrowding and substandard housing.

The segregation of blacks in Hartford's North End led to the establishment of several civil rights groups: the Hartford branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Catholic Inter-racial Council, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the North End Community Action Program (NECAP). In 1965, members of these groups met with representatives from the city of Hartford, but to no avail. According to Jared Cyr's article, the groups left frustrated and angry, and a representative of the Catholic Interracial Council prophetically stated, "I hate to think of the demonstrations in Hartford we're going to have if we don't get some action" (Cyr).



Marchers for better North End (Hartford) housing, West Hartford, 1967. Photo from the *Hartford Times* Collection. Courtesy of Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library.

"On July 12, 1967, the arrest of a black teenager for allegedly swearing at a waitress

led to charges of police brutality and four nights of rock-throwing, broken windows, and arson ensued,” stated Steve Thornton of ConnecticutHistory.org. Senator Thomas J. Dodd believed the riots were incited by outside forces, while Senator Abraham Ribicoff believed that the cause of the riots stemmed from “100 years of neglect” of the black community’s needs. Ribicoff said, “black Americans are now presenting the consequences to the nation of that neglect” (Thornton). Both of these Senators reflected the polarization of race in America. Dodd authored a bill for riot control, establishing a 20-year prison term for anyone who crossed state lines to incite a riot. Ribicoff submitted a \$1 trillion spending bill for housing and full-employment programs to help urban areas of the United States.



Black Caucus members at meeting in Hartford, 1967. Photo from the *Hartford Times* Collection. Courtesy of Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library.

At this time there were voices in America calling for non-violent protest. One of the loudest voices was Martin Luther King, Jr., who identified non-violence as the most potent weapon that black Americans had to defeat unjust policies established against them. King did not support the violent riots in America, but he understood why they were happening. He said, “The cry of black power is at bottom a reaction to the reluctance of white power to make the kind of changes necessary to make justice a reality for the Negro. And a riot is the language of the unheard and what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economics of the Negro poor has worsened” (Wallace). The question remains in 21st-century America: when will the judgment stop based on the color of a person’s skin, and start based on the content of their character?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Detroit '67* takes place during a period of social upheaval in the U.S. when people organized protest marches and demonstrations related to everything from civil rights to the war in Vietnam. Compare this situation to today. What social and political issues are at the forefront of people’s minds? Are there protests organized around these issues?
2. Do you know anyone who witnessed the events of 1967? Ask them about their experience.
3. Do you think that new laws on voter fraud are a way to keep people of color from voting in the 21st century? Why or why not?
4. What social and political issues are important to you? Why?

Detroit 1967: Outside Looking In

Interview by Grace Clark

On Sunday, July 23, 1967, Robert and Eileen Reid lived just seven miles outside the city of Detroit, Michigan, in the suburb of Pontiac. It was like any typical day for the Reids. Robert, an apartment complex manager, was out of town on business and Eileen, an acting coach, was at home caring for their young children. That day, she had left home to run an errand when she heard about the incidents taking place in the city—street riots punctuated by the burning of homes and bloody confrontations between police officers and black residents. Eileen did not know then the details of what was happening. Friends of the Reids, fearful for their safety, would call and ask them for refuge in their home. Among them was the

Reid's black housekeeper, Zelma. The Reids would take in many friends in their large house during the riots. We chatted with them about the riot and their anticipation of Hartford Stage's upcoming production of *Detroit '67*. Eileen and Robert Reid now live in Collinsville, Connecticut, with their family. They are regular patrons of Hartford Stage.

How did you come upon the Detroit riots in 1967? How did you get in the midst of that?

Eileen: We turned on the TV and there it was. All the TV stations had gone to the riot and our phone started ringing frantically from friends that were living in Detroit. We were on the outskirts of Detroit. That's really how we heard about it. [My husband] had sent me for a part for a piece of machinery that he needed for his work in Pontiac, which is right outside Detroit. As I was driving down a main road in Pontiac, I looked in the rear view mirror and saw a great big tank with a gun on it (moving from side to side) on the road, and I thought, "What in the world!" I saw three more tanks coming up and I knew something was really bad. I turned on the radio and everything was about the riots. People were burning houses and killing people and it was really bad. They had police, and the National Guard and everybody was out. They were covering all areas really, because they were afraid of it.

Robert: My mother lived over on eastside of Detroit, they had tanks there, too. I was flying in on Sunday at the time of the riots and there was a big cloud of black smoke hanging over the city. And as I was coming in the tower was saying, "Do not fly over Detroit!" They were warning all pilots to stay out of the airspace over Detroit.

Did you know the gravity of this event at that time? What did you think of what was happening?



Storefront damage from demonstrations, North End of Hartford, July 1967. Photo from the *Hartford Times* Collection. Courtesy of Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library.

Eileen: I was just stunned. I couldn't believe it when I turned on the television. It took me a while to realize what they were saying...that they were burning a house down, it was just incredible. It scared me to death. You just couldn't believe it. I thought that maybe they wouldn't come out there [where we lived], and if they did, what would I do? I had two little kids. I had good neighbors who were manning guns. I thought that was foolish, too, because these people were not hunters.

Our housekeeper was a black woman, and she was living right in the midst of it and they were burning a house down two doors down from her, and she said, "Could I come stay with you?" She thought they were going to get hers, too. We said "of course!" We had other calls, too. We had a house full of people for a weekend. How could you say no to something like that? I asked [Zelma, our housekeeper] why they were burning houses and she didn't know. It was just terrifying.

Even in your neighborhood, seven miles away, were you fearful?

Eileen: Very, very fearful. You saw people who were businessmen and executives at General Motors carrying shotguns. You knew something was bad. It scared you. Even the kids were scared, too. We had little children at the time and they were very frightened.

Given the climate of race relations back then, were you surprised at what was going on?

Robert: Not entirely. [Eileen's] friend taught in that area and she had to quit. She couldn't do it. Just walking in the halls, the racial tension was horrible, and with actual confrontations.

Eileen: Zelma was from the South originally and we had a couple incidents at a restaurant in South Carolina. We stopped for dinner. She said, “I can’t. I’m not going in there [because] they won’t serve me.” We heard stories from her first-hand that really were not good.

How do you think things have changed, if at all?

Robert: Well, I think they’re better, the tension is there all the while. It’s a shame. Why does it have to be?

Eileen: I think they’re getting worse. I really do. I think there is more antagonism between races, all races—black, white, brown. There is more antagonism and more fear.

What are some of the lessons you hope students will get, relative to the riots, your experience, and seeing the play?

Eileen: I’m hoping that they see people for who they are; not what color they are or religion they are, but the value of the single person. That would be wonderful. That would solve a lot of problems, if we would just see what makes a person up.

Why are you excited for Hartford Stage to bring *Detroit ’67* to the stage?

Robert: We’re excited about how they are going to depict it on stage and what parts of the whole riot they will show.

There have been other rioting acts in the country since *Detroit ’67*. What do you say to people who start them and government officials who are trying to prevent acts like rioting?

Eileen: I don’t know how proactive the government is. We need to do a whole lot more to promote race relations, religious relations and we’re not doing enough. I think we are worried about too many other things. It was such a terrifying experience. Fear is something that works people mentally and physically. It is very hard to get over that. It leaves a mark on you.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Name That Motown Tune

The music of Motown plays an important role in *Detroit ’67*. Having the right music is vital for Chelle and Lank in trying to bring people into their after-hours joint, and these songs are shown to have a strong emotional pull on the various characters in the play as well. Motown songs made musical history by crossing over from R&B to pop charts, many of them remaining popular today. Chances are you’ve heard some of them before.

Working in small groups, select one Motown artist per group to look up on YouTube. Some possibilities are The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Mary Wells, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, The Four Tops, and Diana Ross and the Supremes. Each group should choose 4-5 songs by their chosen artist and select a 15-20 second clip of each song to play for the class that does not include the title of the song. All groups should submit their song titles to the teacher to write on the board in no particular order. All groups must listen as the song clips are played and try to identify the title of each song from the list of songs on the board. The group with the most correct answers wins.

Create a Protest Poster

Detroit '67 takes place during a period of social upheaval in the U.S. Specifically, the play addresses the upheaval that took place in Detroit when long-simmering racial tensions between the city's African-American residents and largely white police force erupted into riots. In addition to the riots in Detroit during this time period, people across the country were taking to the street to protest a variety of issues, from civil rights to the war in Vietnam.

Think about political and social issues that you see in today's news. Choose an issue that is important to you and imagine you are attending a protest march to address it. Create a poster expressing your beliefs on the issue to carry at the march. Research images from the 1960s-'70s to draw inspiration. Then present your poster, explaining what issue you are addressing and why it is important to you.



Above Poster used for the Constellation Vote in San Diego, 1971. Artwork by John Kent.

Below *Come Together in Peace*, Yanker Poster Collection.

Write and Perform a Scene

In the play, siblings Chelle and Lank get into an argument when Lank decides to spend the money Chelle gave him to buy new 45s on an 8-track player instead. Chelle claims that the newly invented 8-track player is ugly and weird and that the sound quality of a vinyl record is sure to be much better. Lank argues that 8-track cassettes won't scratch like records and that people will be so excited to listen to Motown music with this new technology that they'll be fighting to get into Chelle and Lank's after-hours joint.

With a partner, write a 1-2 minute scene between Chelle and Lank, in which Chelle discovers how Lank has spent the money she gave him. The characters should make arguments for which is the better investment, new 45s or an 8-track player, and reach a conclusion. Rehearse and perform your scene for the class.



Research a Riot

In addition to the upheaval in Detroit addressed in the play, similar riots broke out in more than 150 cities across the U.S. in what came to be known as "the long, hot summer of 1967." 83 deaths and thousands of injuries were reported. Thousands more were arrested, and entire neighborhoods were decimated in flames.

Choose one U.S. city to research and prepare a brief presentation on the riots that took place there during the summer of 1967. Include at least one photograph, an explanation of what caused the violent outbreak, and details regarding the outcome of the riot. Possible cities to research include Newark, New Jersey; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Cambridge, Maryland; Tampa, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Buffalo, New York.

Detroit '67 Glossary

- 45** A record containing a single, played at 45 rotations per minute.
- 8-Track Player** A tape player, introduced in the 1960s, designed as an improvement on the record player because, unlike records, the cassettes wouldn't warp or skip.
- After-Hours Joint** An illegally operated nightclub, such as the one run by Chelle and Lank in the play. Also known as a "blind pig."
- Beethoven & Chopin** Classical composers from the 18th-19th centuries, contrasted in the play with Motown artists.
- The Big Four** Elite police units consisting of four officers in a single car, which gained notoriety for terrorizing African-Americans.
- Conkline** A chemical solution to relax curly hair and produce the "conk," a slicked down hair style popular for African-American men from the early 20th century through the 1960s.
- Dance Card** A card with a list of scheduled dancing partners.
- Gov. George Romney** Governor of Michigan during the 1967 Detroit riots; asked President Johnson to send in U.S. troops during the second day of rioting.
- Hi-Fi Record Player** A "high fidelity" record player that produces high quality audio.
- Joe Louis ("The Brown Bomber")** World heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1949 and the first African-American to hold the title in 22 years.
- Malcolm X** Activist and influential leader who combined advocacy of Black Nationalism with teachings from the Islamic faith.
- Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh** Mayor of Detroit during the 1967 riots; asked Governor Romney to send in state police when the riots broke out.
- Mecca** A city in Saudi Arabia; birthplace of the prophet Muhammad and holy city in the Islamic faith.
- Motown** Founded in 1959, the first African-American owned record label to gain national acclaim; popularized artists such as The Supremes and Stevie Wonder.
- Pig** A disparaging slang word for a police officer.
- Tuskegee Institute** A university located in Tuskegee, Alabama; the first black college to become a Registered National Historical Landmark (1966).



An 8-track player. Photo by Casey Fleser. This image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.

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