

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2015-16 SEASON

# PLAYGUIDE

March 16 - April 10, 2016

## THE REALNESS:

a break beat play

### MEET IDRIS:

The playwright, poet,  
and rapper tells all

### EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HIP-HOP BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK:

Where it came from, what  
it's all about, and how it  
took off.

### THE SET:

The design that's giving us  
something to speak about.

By  
**IDRIS GOODWIN**

Directed by  
**WENDY C. GOLDBERG**

SEAN DANIELS  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



PRESENTS

ELIZABETH KEGLEY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# THE REALNESS: A BREAK BEAT PLAY

WRITTEN BY  
**IDRIS GOOWDIN**

FEATURING  
**SEGUN AKANDE    JOY HOOPER    DIOMARGY NUÑEZ**  
**JESSIE PREZ    TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE**

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**LEE SAVAGE**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**ANNE KENEDY**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**BRIAN J. LILIENTHAL†**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**JOSHUA HORVATH**

PRODUCER  
**EMILY RUDDOCK**

STAGE MANAGER  
**CASEY L. HAGWOOD**

DIRECTED BY  
**WENDY C. GOLDBERG†**

**MARCH 16 - APRIL 10, 2016**

*The Realness* is produced by special arrangement with Mark Orsini,  
BRET ADAMS, LTD., 448 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036. [www.bretadamsltd.net](http://www.bretadamsltd.net)

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# PLAYGUIDE

## THE CAST OF *THE REALNESS: A BREAK BEAT PLAY*



**SEGUN AKANDE** (*Lord Style*)

**MRT:** Debut **NYC:** *The Green Plays*, *Naked Angels*; *Anna Nicole*, BAM. **Regional:** Arena Stage, Arden Theatre Company, Florida Studio Theatre, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Luna Stage, and Arrow Rock Lyceum. **Workshops and Labs:** New York Theatre Workshop, Eugene O'Neill Play-

wrights Conference, HBO/ABFF Showcase, Playwrights Horizons, Playwrights Realm, National Black Theatre, Classical Theatre of Harlem, and Arena Stage. **Film/TV:** *Mother of George*; *Aissa's Story*, FESPACO; *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. **Upcoming:** *Dirt*, World Premiere: Sundance 2016, Tampere 2016, Aspen Shortsfest 2016, New Directors/New Films 2016. **Other:** 2014 LAByrinth Ensemble Member. **Education:** Duke University, Political Science.



**JOY HOOPER** (*Professor Brown*)

**MRT:** Debut **Regional:** *The African Company Presents Richard III*, St. Louis Black Rep; *The Merchant of Venice*, New Jersey Shakespeare Festival; *Wit*, Pennsylvania Center Stage; *Jitney*, Milwaukee Rep; *Blues For an Alabama Sky*, Indiana Rep; *False Creeds*, The Alliance; *Doubt*, Cincinnati Playhouse in

the Park and The Actor's Theatre of Louisville (Co-Production), the world premiere of Walter Mosley's first play *The Fall of Heaven*, *The Piano Teacher*, Cincinnati Playhouse In the Park; and most recently *Good People*.

**TV:** *Cold Case*; *All My Children*; *As the World Turns*.

**Education:** The Baltimore School for the Arts; BFA, Howard University; MFA, Penn State University. **Other:** Joy C. Hooper is an actress, teacher, audio book narra-

tor, and private coach. Joy has been immersed in the arts since her early years in community theater. She taught with a program called ENACT for almost nine years, using creative drama techniques as a tool for social reform, in the New York City Public school system. Her most recent role is that of acting teacher and private coach through her own company 'The Joy Between Us.' With a very diverse list of clients from beginners to the most seasoned accomplished actors Joy also adds host coach to her list having coached Camila McConaughey for Bravo's third season of *Shear Genius* Joy is most proud of her adaptation of the novel *Push*, by Sapphire (a one woman show), performed at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, that has been turned into the film *Precious*. She is also proud to be a founding member, and artistic director of "the standard collective," a collective devoted to nurturing artists of every concentration, while focusing on developing new work and serving the community. Joy currently lives in Los Angeles, California.



**DIOMARGY NUÑEZ** (*Prima*)

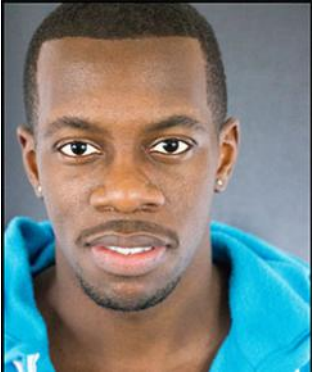
**MRT:** Debut **New York City:** *Frida Liberada* (Frida Kahlo), Urban Stages (Dir. Lydia Fort); *Diablo Love* (Mephistopheles), Summer Stage (Dir. Alfred Preisser).

**Regional:** *Patience*, *Fortitude*, and other *Anti-Depressants*, Encuentro Festival at LATC in Los Angeles (Dir. Daniel

Jaquez). **Film/TV:** *Law and Order: SVU*; *Money Monster* (Dir. Jodie Foster); *I Love You but I Lied*, Lifetime. **Education:** BA in Theatre, City College of New York.



**JESSIE PREZ** (Roy) **MRT:** Debut **Regional:** World premiere of *This is Modern Art*, world premiere of *How Long Will I Cry?* Steppenwolf Theatre; Chicago premiere of *Oedipus El Rey*, Victory Gardens Theatre; Chicago premiere of *Momma's Boyz*, Teatro Vista. **TV:** *Boss*, Showtime; *Chicago Fire*, NBC. **Other:** Jessie is a proud artistic associate with Teatro Vista. "Mom, this one is for you!"



**TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE** (T.O.): **MRT:** Debut **Off-Broadway:** *Dakota Atoll*, Lark Theatre; *Dunkfest '88*, P73; *Find and Sign*, Naked Angels. **Regional:** *A Christmas Carol*, Hartford Stage; *FLY*, Cincinnati Playhouse, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis; *How We Got On*, B Street Theatre, Actors Theatre

of Louisville Humana Festival; *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark*, Lyric Stage Co.; *Cardboard Piano*, *Imaginary Music Critic Who Doesn't Exist*, *The Solid Sand Below*, *Alligator*, The Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre; *Find and Sign*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Pioneer Theatre Co.; *The Crucible*, Trinity Rep Co.; *Othello*, Commonwealth Shakespeare Co. **TV/Film:** *Elementary*; *How To Win*; New Millennium Studios: *Blues in The Night*, *Troop 491*. **Other Selected Credits:** *The Threepenny Opera*, *Vieux Carre*, *The Lady From Dubuque*, *Blood Knot*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *We Are Proud to Present...*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Sally's Rape* (Director), *Betrayal* (Director). **Education:** Terrell holds an M.F.A. from Brown University/Trinity Rep and is a Yale University graduate. **Other:** Terrell thanks God and his loving family for their support and commitment. [www.terrelldonnellsledge.com](http://www.terrelldonnellsledge.com)



Terrell Donnell Sledge, Diomargy Nuñez, and Segun Akande. Photo by Meghan Moore.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE



## WENDY C. GOLDBERG

Set in the mid 1990's, *The Realness* explores love, loss, and identity in the midst of one of the most important and tumultuous times in hip-hop history. Our story takes place in between the deaths of rappers Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G, a fateful year in the hip-hop world. T.O, our narrator, has come to the city, fresh from the suburbs, aiming to delve into the authentic world of urban hip-hop culture. It is here that he finds inspiration, it is here that he finds himself and it is here

that he finds love. Although Idris and I come from different racial backgrounds, we both grew up in the same suburbs of Detroit—we were raised on MTV and introduced to urban culture through the music we listened to, the videos we watched and we both fell in love with the art form. We also shared a distance from the city itself— as our families' fortunes expanded, they moved out of the city and into the suburbs—this is where we find T.O at the beginning of our story. An urban dreamer from a suburban reality—when he finally lands in the city, he is searching for authenticity—he is searching for *Realness*. This coming of age story is the third of our collaborations having developed and directed two other break beat plays of Idris's, including the world premiere of his highly successful play *How We Got On*. We are thrilled to continue our collaboration here at MRT.

—Wendy C. Goldberg  
Director, *The Realness*: a break beat play

# IT ALL STARTED WITH A PARTY

**So where did hip-hop come from, anyway?** Here's a quick breakdown of some of the culture's most iconic elements, and how they came to be. And **it all started with a party:**

## The DJ:

The DJ spins the records; that much you probably knew.

But hip-hop traces its roots back to the **very first hip-hop DJ in the 70's**, a man who went by DJ Kool Herc—and, at a Bronx apartment building (1520 Sedgwick Ave.), made a name for himself as **the guy who could throw an epic party**. The first such party was a back-to-school fundraiser for his little sister; soon, Herc's booming PA system and impeccable funk/soul/r&b selections made his parties a staple of the Bronx, and a safe haven for teens who wanted to cut loose amidst some often tough surroundings.



DJ Kool Herc, the founding father of hip-hop

Musically speaking, his real stroke of genius was in isolating and looping sections of music. The funk records he was playing featured extended drum breaks; and those breaks were the spots where the energy on the floor really took off. So why not extend them? By using duplicate records on two turntables, Herc could drop a needle on the same spot over and over, **isolating and looping the "break beats" ad infinitum**.

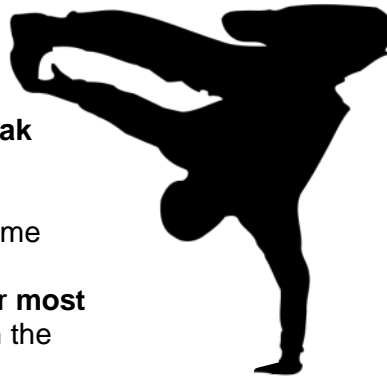


Vinyl records lay the beats, usually on dual turntables.

## The B-Boys (and girls):

The "break" in breakdancing? **It comes from "break beat."**

No one's completely sure where the term b-boy came from (break boy? Beat boy? Bronx boy?), but they formed the core of early hip-hop dancing. And their **most explosive, acrobatic** moves often came out when the break beats did.



Breakdancing

## The MC:

MC is **synonymous with rapper**: anyone laying rhymes, improvised or not, over a hip-hop beat.

But the first MCs were actually "hype men" for the DJs at parties. They'd rile up the crowd and draw folk to the dance floor. The DJ was the headliner, but MCs were indispensable, and it wasn't long before they broke away from their stock rhymes and call-outs with **extended, lyrical verses**.

Together with graffiti writing, DJing, MCing, and breakdancing are often thought of as the **"four elements of hip-hop."**



Lauryn Hill MCing

# Q&A: IDRIS GOODWIN



*Idris Goodwin is a Colorado-based playwright, spoken word poet, and hip-hop artist. He is the recipient of numerous honors and commissions, including Oregon Shakespeare's American History Cycle Commission and InterAct Theater's 20/20 Award.*

*The Realness is his second break beat play. The first, How We Got On, premiered in 2012.*

## What compelled you to write a love story?

I think as I have grown older my understanding of what love really

means has deepened. Love is actually about growth.

Love challenges you and helps you better understand who you are. You don't know yourself until you identify what or who you love and what you are willing to do in the pursuit of it. The first break beat play *How We Got On* was a "coming of age" story about teenagers who love hip-hop, and now this next one is about the young adults of hip-hop learning how to love one another.

## What is it about hip-hop that grabs you?

Well I want to make the distinction that when I talk about hip-hop I mean the whole of it. The culture. The aesthetics. The history. Not just the products. Not just music recordings, but rather all that was in the environment that led to the creation of the music. The dances. The colors. The styles. But even deeper, the ethos.

And of course, recognizing that it's a culture that has made a lot of people outside of it rich, while the urban epicenters from which it emerged still struggle.

Many of my plays engage with African American roots music and artistic expression—from negro spirituals to blues to jazz to R&B to rock 'n roll to hip-hop. I am constantly and consistently inspired by all of the rich history and complication of all of it.

But hip-hop played a major role in my development as a creative. I had no aptitude for many things. I was a terrible athlete. No good at math. And I wasn't interested in established "fine arts." Hip-hop told me: bring your sense of rhythm, your imagination, your sense of play. I started writing rhymes; that's where I learned about structure. About character. About flow and arcs.

Becoming a playwright was inevitable.

***"Hip-hop told me: bring your sense of rhythm, your imagination, your sense of play."***

## What would you hope someone who's not into hip-hop brings with them to this story?

I would just hope that folk would come with the same open mind they would to any other play set in a milieu in which they aren't familiar. I mean, isn't that the point of all this? For us to experience the world through the eyes of

someone who is not us? It is the particularities of another's story that help us better understand our own.

That said, I am also writing these plays for my fellow hip-hop heads. For those of us who were born between 1970 and 1982 who remember those first two decades of hip-hop culture. Who remember the analog sacredness, who went to roller skating rinks and dubbed cassette tapes in the basement and used to videotape every episode of *Yo! MTV Raps*. Who lived outside of New York and LA, and yet felt part of this exciting black/brown youth-motivated culture as they were developing their own regional hip-hop style and sound.

I want to create a body of dramas for us that will hopefully be one small patch on the theatrical quilt of human experience.



## What are the break beat plays?

A series of plays that engage with hip-hop in both form and content.

What do the primary hip-hop aesthetics look like in the context of drama? *How We Got On* is structured like a DJ-narrated mix tape for the stage; scenes and characters are treated like records on a turntable. *The Realness* is underscored by beats and employs a style evoking that of hip-hop magazines like *The Source* and *Ego Trip*. But thematically, they're exploring questions of representation, identity, and class.

## Did you ever have a teacher like Professor Brown? And as a teacher, do you run into students like T.O.?

When I've presented this play in staged readings folk have asked, "So are you basically T.O.?"

And to a degree I was—but mostly these days I am Professor Brown!

I've been teaching for the past 10 years or so. And these days I am a full time undergrad professor at Colorado College. Working with these brilliant, yet totally scattered young creatives who're asking the same kind of questions as T.O.

## Any other characters influenced by people you know?

Having myself performed in various hip-hop and spoken word scenes since the early aughts, much of the play is influenced by that. I knew a lot of Primas and Lord Styles.

This play is a tribute of sorts to those talented working class wordsmiths.

## Can you talk a little about the idea of Culture vs. Cultural Product?

This has been one of hip-hop's many wonderful, complex, and contradictory struggles.

How do you represent yourself and your experience and your community and your values, but also embrace growth and the outside, and also make a buck or two? And as a fan, how do you embrace the culture

from a distance, and not mistake investment in cultural product as investment in the culture itself?

To me culture is very sacred and very important—even cultures we are reared in that we don't or no longer identify with. But to what do degree can an outsider participate in a culture in which they were not reared?

***"I knew a lot of Primas and Lord Styles. This play is a tribute of sorts to those talented working class wordsmiths."***



Jessie Prez, Segun Akande, Terrell Donnell Sledge, Diomargy Nuñez, and Joy Hooper. Photo by Meghan Moore.

# WHAT HAPPENED WHEN HIP-HOP WENT BIG

*Hip-hop came out of the Bronx in the 1970's as a street culture. Financially and artistically, it was driven by the urban, mostly-black youth who were both its core artists and its biggest audience.*

*But by 1994, hip-hop would not only take over 10% of commercial music sales; it would become a cultural and economic tidal wave, upending the way Americans of all demographics listen, think, and shop—and challenging the heart of the hip-hop world itself.*

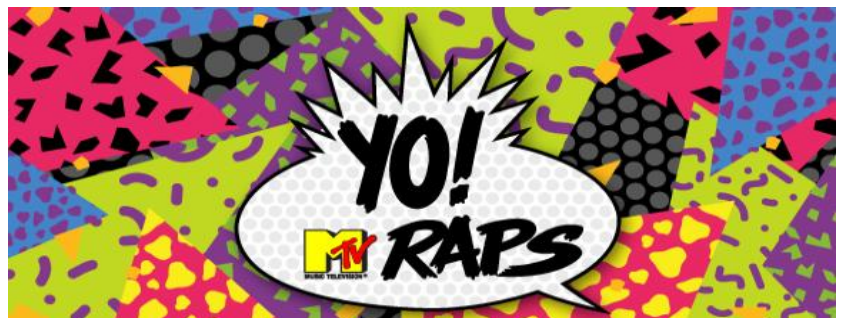
*So what happened?*

## Media boom

In in 1988, two middle-class, white Jewish kids took Harvard by storm with a love of hip-hop and one big idea: a nationally-distributed rap magazine. David Mays and Jon Shechter launched *The Source* from their dorm room, and in a few years it was everywhere. Rap had been covered in other magazines—*Billboard*, *Rolling Stone*—but *The Source* read with an authenticity that no other publication could capture. Mays and Shechter immersed themselves in hip-hop culture. What used to be decidedly underground was coming up to the sunlight.

Simultaneously, MTV tapped that same potential. Dozens of local stations had aired hip-hop shows with considerable success, so MTV swooped in with its first hip-hop program, *Yo! MTV Raps*, also in 1988. Mere months later, it was MTV's most-watched show.

Videos of Dr. Dre and Snoop's "Nuthin' but a 'G Thang'" and "Let Me Ride" went huge. A new generation was heralding its own definition of "all-American music," and it didn't sound like the Beach Boys.



*Yo! MTV Raps brought hip-hop into suburban living rooms across the nation.*



*The Source was a defining force in hip-hop journalism*

## The power of product

As the hip-hop audience grew, so grew the hip-hop economy. *Vibe* magazine followed hot on the heels of *The Source*, and its sleek, ultra-classy look commanded multi-thousand dollar ad pages. The allure of this “new cool” had reach all the way to the suburbs, and corporations recognized the opportunity—even necessity—of buying in. One endorsement from a rapper could be a windfall.

The Gap. Sony. AT&T. To be associated with hip-hop meant to be desirable, so selling rap wasn't just about selling music, or poetry, anymore—it was about selling a lifestyle. If you wore the right jeans or drank the right vodka, maybe you too could be hip-hop.



Big money was on the line when it came to hip-hop product endorsements in the late 80s and 90s.

## New World Order

While hip-hop burst out into suburbia, the places where hip-hop had been born found themselves in some tricky spots.

In a 1990 speech to Congress, President George H.W. Bush promised a "new world order," referring to the end of the Soviet Union as the dawn of a global era ruled by law. But in lots of American cities, the new world order looked bleak. It was an order of soaring incarceration rates and police crackdowns, project housing and unaffordable college tuitions. Hip-hop youths donned combat boots and camouflage, calling each other "souljah" and toting M. William Cooper's manifesto of conspiracy theories *Behold a Pale Horse*.

Still, the brands found a way in. Politically conscious hip-hop was, after all, still hip-hop; a market within a market. So alternative hip-hop developed its own set of alternative brands. You'd ditch Versace for Ecko, Alizé for Sprite.



M. William Cooper's *Behold a Pale Horse* outlines numerous conspiracy theories.

And through it all, just ten companies controlled nearly all of American media—down from fifty a decade earlier. When one hit song could turn into a music video, movie, and high-end fashion line, big money was on the line.



Many urban youth donned camo garb in response to the coming “new world order.”

As rapper Talib Kweli said, "We're survivalists turned to consumers."

# A SET THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES

Set designer Lee Savage envisioned a world completely defined by the music T.O. loves. Here's how we made a set that has hip-hop literally coming out of the walls:

## Searching for old speakers Building the set for *The Realness*



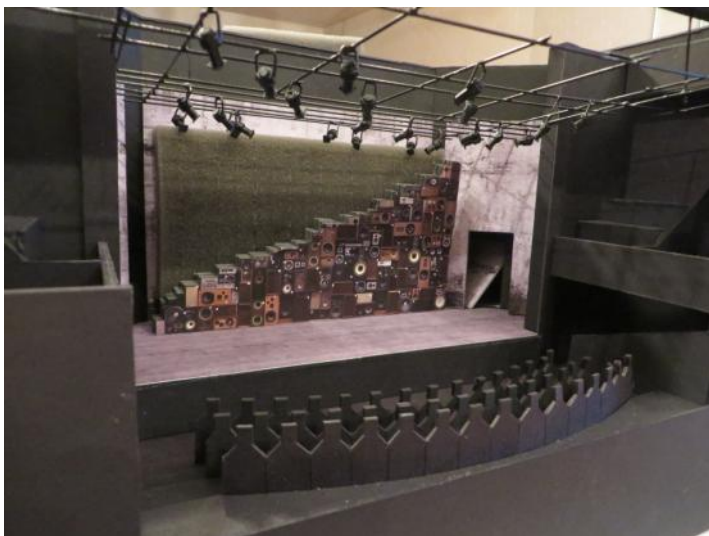
The image that inspired the set design

Have old speakers around that you don't use? You could see them onstage at MRT this spring. The set for *The Realness: a break beat play* will incorporate dozens (maybe more) speakers. We're looking for speaker systems from the 1960s through the mid 1990s. These are typically large cabinet speakers that have either a wooden or plastic housing. If you have any of these items, send dimensions and/or photographs to [emily.ruddock@mrt.org](mailto:emily.ruddock@mrt.org). Please note: We will not be able to return these items as they will get bolted together. Your name will be included in our program as an in-kind donor.

READ MORE

## Crowd sourcing

Back in December, we put out a call in our newsletter and social media for speakers dating anywhere from the 60s to the 90s. So our amazing audience had a hand in building the set!



## The model

Lee Savage's **scenic model** shows what the speaker wall will look like on the MRT stage.



## In the shop

The speaker wall was first assembled at **BeNT Productions**, MRT's scene shop. Every speaker was numbered so that the wall could be **reassembled in the same order** on the MRT stage.



## A purpose for everything

Some of the speakers are wired to light up; some have hinged covers to open and serve as cubbies to store props; still others actually work as speakers (“practical”). In the shop, **everything was labeled** for its ultimate purpose.



## Hold it together

All the speakers are connected from the back with plywood bracing. The whole structure is also bolstered with steel supports. The speakers sit just a few feet from the “brick” wall behind them.



## The final product

The set finally installed on the MRT stage. Segun Akande, Terrell Donnell Sledge, and Diomargy Nuñez. Photo by Brian J. Lilienthal.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND REFERENCES IN *THE REALNESS*

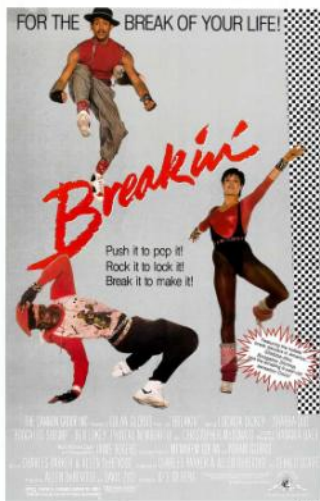
**ALIZÉ:** An alcoholic drink that blends passion fruit juice and other exotic fruits with French cognac. Its popularity increased after an appearance in rap videos including Tupac Shakur's "Thug Passion."



**BARRIO:** Spanish for neighborhood. In the US refers to an area with a high Spanish-speaking population.

**BORICUA:** Someone native to Puerto Rico. The island's original name, Borinquen, is a derivation of "Borikén," which means "Land of the Valiant Lord."

**BREAKIN':** Comedy/Drama from 1984 following a young jazz dancer as she is introduced to breakdance by two street dancers. Its sequel, *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*, was released later that same year.



**CHEESECAKE FACTORY:** Mid-priced casual dining known for its large, opulent restaurants. In 1996, the company operated 16 restaurants in seven states and the District of Columbia.

**COINTELPRO:** COunter INTELLIGENCE PROgram. A series of covert, and sometimes illegal, FBI projects aimed at surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting and disrupting domestic political organization such as the Black Power Movement and anti-colonial movements for Puerto Rican independence.

**Dutch Masters**



**DUTCH MASTERS:** A brand of natural wrapped cigars sold in the United States since 1911. In the early 1990s, it was popular to break down the cigars and reroll them with marijuana (called a "blunt.") Commonly referenced in hip-hop songs of the day.

**GARVEYITE:** The body of thought and organizational activities associated with Marcus Mosiah Garvey, a black Jamaican who taught in the 1920s. Promotes unification and empowerment of African Americans and a return to their homeland of Africa.

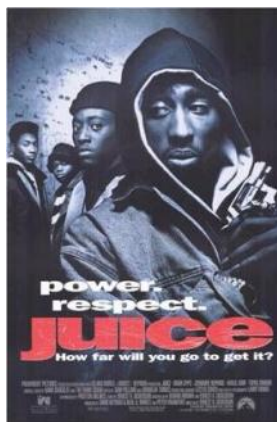
**GRAFF WRITER:** Graffiti artist

**LAURYN HILL:** American singer, songwriter, rapper, and actress. Hill has been lauded for ability to flow seamlessly from rapping to lyrical singing, and became the first woman to be nominated for ten Grammy Awards in a single year (1999).



Lauryn Hill

**ILLUMINATI/ NEW WORLD ORDER:** A conspiracy theory of world domination by an authoritarian government. Based on a secret society of Illuminati which was founded and suppressed by the government in Germany during the late 1700s.



**JUICE:** Crime Drama starring Tupac Shakur released in 1992. Tells the story of four friends growing up in Harlem, one of whom competes as a DJ. Touches on issues of police harassment, gang violence, and inner city crime.

**MC:** Another word for Rapper; see page 7.

**MEDGAR/MALCOLM/MARTIN/HAMPTON:** Medgar Evers; Malcolm X; Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Fred Hampton; all assassinated leaders of the Civil Rights movement.

**RASTAFARIAN:** An Africa-centered belief system developed in Jamaica. Claims Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I as God as well as promotes the influence of Jamaican culture, resistance of oppression, and pride in African heritage.

**ROTHKO:** American painter (1903-1970) born in what is now Latvia. Identified by others as an abstract expressionist. Some of his paintings tended to be large, blurred blocks of various colors. He advocated intimacy with the art, recommending that viewers position themselves as little as eighteen inches away from the canvas.



Rothko's "Orange and Yellow"

**THE SOURCE:** Pioneering hip-hop magazine. See page 10.

**SQUARES:** Slang for cigarettes. Comes from cigarette packages resembling a square.

**STARTAC MOTOROLA:** The first ever clamshell/flip mobile phone. Marketed as the smallest cell phone available and capable of SMS text messages. Originally sold for \$1,000 starting January 3, 1996.



The StarTAC Motorola

subject of sexual harassment allegations by attorney Anita Hill in 1991.

**CLARENCE THOMAS:** Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The second black justice appointed to the Court, Thomas is widely viewed as its most conservative member, and was the

## TUPAC AND BIGGIE



Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.

Perhaps the most infamous rapper rivalry was that between Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. (otherwise known as Biggie Smalls). What began as a personal beef would escalate into an East Coast/West Coast feud leaving both of them dead.

Though he was raised in the East (and trained in acting at the Baltimore School for the Performing Arts), Tupac put down West Coast roots in California's Bay Area. When he survived a shooting outside a New York recording studio in 1994, he personally blamed Biggie Smalls, of East Coast label Bad Boy Records.

When Tupac signed with Death Row Records—a West Coast label run by a man named Suge Knight—the conflict escalated. They taunted each other on tracks like Biggie's "Who Shot Ya" and Tupac's "Hit 'em Up." Other artists jumped in the fray too. Then on September 7, 1996, Tupac was shot while riding in a car with Knight in Las Vegas, and died a week later.

While Biggie never claimed responsibility for the shooting, many suspected his people were behind it; the following March, he too was shot dead.

Both murders remain unsolved, and their rivalry and deaths shook the hip-hop world to its core.

# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Playwright Idris Goodwin said,

*“As a fan, how do you embrace the culture from a distance, and not mistake investment in cultural product as investment in the culture itself?”*

Do you think T.O.’s “investment” is really in hip-hop culture, or just in hip-hop cultural product? Does that change by the end of the play?

2. We never find out why Prima and Lord Style break up. What do you imagine the reason is?

3. T.O. and Prima are both writers. How does their writing serve different ends? In what ways do being a journalist vs. an MC set them apart?

4. Idris Goodwin also said,

*“Love is actually about growth. Love challenges you and helps you better understand who you are. You don’t know yourself until you identify what or who you love, and what you are willing to do in the pursuit of it.”*

How do you see this idea embodied in the play? Do you have the same view on love?

5. T.O. insists that the play is not a race story. Do you think it’s possible to talk about culture and history without also talking about race?

6. At the beginning of the play, T.O. tries to figure out what kind of story it is. What kind of story do you think it is?

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING, LISTENING, AND VIEWING

### BOOKS:

*Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* by Jeff Chang

*Icons of Hip Hop* by Mickey Hess

### DOCUMENTARIES:

*The Show*: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvJ1J6plj0w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvJ1J6plj0w)

*Style Wars* (Graffiti): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EW22LzSaJA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EW22LzSaJA)

*Scratch* (DJ): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEKRAAn-ZleM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEKRAAn-ZleM)

*Freestyle* (Rap): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY2925-ptqo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY2925-ptqo)

### MUSIC:

Lauryn Hill & The Fugees:

“Fu Gee La:” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPIb9HoOCxs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPIb9HoOCxs)

“Ready or Not:” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIXyKmElv8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIXyKmElv8)

Notorious B.I.G.:

“Juicy:” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_JZom\\_gVfuw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JZom_gVfuw)

Tupac:

“Changes:” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXvBjCO19QY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXvBjCO19QY)

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