



THE KEEGAN THEATRE
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GOOD PEOPLE

by David Lindsay-Abaire



looking for
luck in all the
wrong places

GOOD PEOPLE by David Lindsay-Abaire
The Keegan Theater
"The Intersection of Class and Race"

AGENDA

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Acknowledgement of the Land

Overview and Insights

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INTRODUCTION

This play is called GOOD PEOPLE. Though this play is not centered on race, there is an intersectionality between race and class that resonates in the play and in our current social-political environment. Geography, religion, race, politics, wealth-disparity all filter through our echo chambers to define identity and our concept of “Good People”: our people.

And so the issues of class, poverty, racism, fear, gender, (dis)ability, violence, anger, feeling left behind are seen in GOOD PEOPLE and are a part of the current landscape.

The questions remain:

Are you going to engage, confront, or ignore?

What is an effective response?

DEFINITIONS

Intersectionality - the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Race - is defined as a group that is socially constructed on the basis of physical criteria, such as skin color and facial features, for the purpose of distributing advantages and disadvantages.

Racism - A system of advantage based on race. Racism, like other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology but a system involving cultural messages based on racial prejudice. Institutional policies and practices, and the beliefs and actions of individuals.

Antiracist - a person who rejects the dominant social constructs of race and racism, and of White supremacy ideology, and who takes action against this construct in the belief that eliminating oppression will benefit both White people and people of color.

Whiteness - “Racism is based on the concept of whiteness—a powerful fiction enforced by power and violence. Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (Kivel, 1996, p.19).

Classism - a belief that a person's social or economic station in society determines their value in that society

Activity 1

Artistic Group Discussions:

Good People Overview

1. The title is GOOD PEOPLE. What is the playwright suggesting in this choice of title?

2. Are the characters "Stevie, Margie, Kate and Mike" good people? Is a good person about actions or beliefs? If you believe you are a good person is that enough?

By what standards -societal? moral?

3. STEVIE: Stevie was born and raised in South Boston and hasn't gotten out. Is he successful? What about the way he treats Margie - does she deserve it?

4. KATE: Kate has been mistaken for someone else - In what circumstances have people been confused?

5. MIKE: How has Mike described his childhood to Kate? What are the omissions about?

6. MARGIE: What do you think of Kate's reaction regarding telling Margie she is "not nice"?

Where are we? South Boston, MA

Overview of African Americans and Boston

Excerpted from an article in Boston Magazine, "*How Has Boston Gotten Away with Being Segregated for So Long?*", there are many reasons that Boston is segregated and why African Americans remain hesitant to move to the area. Answering the question, "In Boston, where are all the Black people?" The article shares:

"The first part of that answer is: in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. While there has been some disbursement of the Black population in recent decades, an estimated two-thirds of Boston's Black residents still live in these three neighborhoods.

While Boston itself has certainly become less divided by race over the years, it is still nowhere near as integrated as it could be. Today, there are 10 census tracts that have a white population of 88 percent to 97.7 percent in a city that is majority minority.

Of the country's 51 greater metropolitan areas with large Black populations, Boston ranks 15th for segregation. And as of the most recent census, in 2010, the so-called index of dissimilarity for the racial distribution of Black and white people in Boston was 69, meaning that 69 percent of Bostonians would have to move somewhere else within the city for it to have an even racial distribution of Black and white people (any city with an index over 60 is considered highly segregated).

How does class intersect with race?

"There are some who attribute the divisions largely to economics rather than discrimination saying that anyone who has the money, no matter their race, can move to a (better) community. But these beliefs, says Robert Terrell, a Tufts University lecturer and the fair housing, equity, and inclusion officer at the Boston Housing Authority, ignore the fact that housing discrimination still exists and the fact that the city's wealth gap is largely due to decades of highly deliberate, racially discriminatory housing and lending policies.

Homeownership is one of the greatest drivers of wealth accumulation in this country, and it has also been the greatest engine of inequality. When we look at the now infamous and deeply embarrassing statistic from a 2015 Federal Reserve Bank of Boston report showing that the average white household's wealth in Greater Boston is \$247,500 and the average Black household's wealth is \$8, we have our housing system to point to. Even if we were to wave a magic wand and dispense with the stubborn remnants of a discriminatory housing market and our individual conscious and unconscious biases, these vast economic inequities, largely created by past policies, would keep segregation running on autopilot in perpetuity.

where are we? South Boston, MA

(cont.) "People need to understand the answers to: How did we get here? What were the causes? What role did my government play? What role did I play in it? And how did I benefit from it?" says James Jennings, professor emeritus of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts. "And this will be very controversial in some circles because people will want to say, 'Well, I worked hard and that's why I am here. ' Well, that's where maybe we need to look at history."

Schools, Desegregation and Boston

Massachusetts schools were under court order to desegregate.

Boston public schools carried out a system of compulsory busing from 1974 to 1988. The busing plan particularly affected Irish and Italian working class neighborhoods such as South Boston as well as black schools and neighborhoods. Public reactions were violent and long-lasting. In addition to riots, school enrollment dropped dramatically and the city experienced significant white flight to the suburbs, and it was evident that those in power and those who were financially able shielded themselves from participating.

Senator Ted Kennedy was criticized for publicly supporting the busing plan while sending his children to private schools.

Where are we now?

Even today, Boston is not a comfortable place for people of color. "There are places that you know about that it is very clear you don't move in certain neighborhoods. Some of it is class and some of it is race. The environment can be quite racially charged."

Activity 2

Discussion: Protected Ignorance & Bias

Do you have choices? Is there a choice that you can expand? You can get to know people and reach out. Expanding and listening for understanding and embracing others for who they are and what they can bring to the table.

Act 1, Scene 1

Margaret: Why pay me when you can give minimum wage to Chow Fun?

Stevie: That doesn't help your case, you know. The racist stuff --

Margaret: What racist stuff? That's her name.

Stevie: (Writes something down) You know that's not her name.

Margaret: You gonna put that in my file now? How I'm a racist?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How can you expand your circle?

How can you learn more about others and embrace differences?

Can you learn to be uncomfortable? Why is this difficult?

Activity 2

Discussion: Protected Ignorance & Bias

Bias:

Implicit or Explicit bias. Everyone has it – a bias that is about a marginalized group of people.

Act 1, Scene 4

Dottie: You take one look at those boys, and you know they're Mexican. And I said that to him too. Up at the VFW.

Margaret: No, you didn't.

*Dottie: Yes, I did, I said, "Bob, those boys are Mexicans,"
And he said, "Shut up, Dottie. They don't look like no Mexicans."
and I said "Well, you've never seen a Mexican then.
Because those kids are straight off the taco truck."
And then he got crazy mad, and I was asked to leave.*

Activity 3

Discussion about race and how it intersects

Proximity to Whiteness:

Kate's father

What makes someone normal? Attractive? Desirable? How do you achieve the normal? Race trumps Mike's class. Kate was raised to be able to marry out of blackness and proximity to whiteness.

The Fight:

Racial incident vs. Class incident

Penance - Manufactured Goodness

Margie recounts a story about a racial incident that could have ended with a murder of a young Black boy. Mike does not remember it (or admit to remembering) this as a racial incident. What do you read or interpret from his reaction? How do you think the victim of the violence might remember this incident differently? Though they were from the same general area, and similar class, a racial slur was used in the incident.

Closing Activity

Good People Discussion & Commitment

Now how do you feel about the characters (Stevie, Margie, Kate and Mike)?
Are they good people?

What does it mean to be a good person?

How will you commit to being a good person with action after this program?

What can you do to make a difference?

Are you going to engage, confront, or ignore?

What is an effective response?

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Warmth of Other Suns - Isabel Wilkerson

White Fragility - Robin D'Angelo

Talking to Strangers - Malcolm Gladwell

The Sum of Us - Heather McGhee

The Color of Law - Richard Rothstein

Caste - Isabel Wilkerson

FILMS

The Departed (2006)

The Boondock Saints (1999)

Good Will Hunting (1997)

Gone Baby Gone (2007)

Mystic River (2003)

Southie (1999)

FOR MORE DIGITAL RESOURCES:

<https://keegantheatre.com/portfolio/good-people/>

<http://www.challengingracism.org/goodpeople>