



WILL COUNTS COLLECTION/INDIANA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

## WHAT STRIKES MOST PEOPLE

upon first visiting Little Rock Central High School is how massive the place is. Even if you've seen photos of it in the Civil Rights Movement chapters of textbooks, those images don't capture the full span of its brown stone wings, several stories high, anchored by a regal entrance rivaling that of any university hall. Likewise, the history books lack the panoramic scope to tell the full human story of what really occurred at Central in 1957.

When the Arkansas school opened in 1927, the opportunities its grandeur represented were intended only for white students; black kids attended smaller, less generously funded institutions across town, just as they sat on benches "For Coloreds Only" all across the American South. Thirty years after Central's construction, however—and three years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that squelched the "separate but equal" excuse for segregation—a cohort of African-American students who became known as the Little Rock Nine arrived at its doorway. The standoff that resulted between Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus and President Eisenhower—and the barefaced displays of racism captured on street level

# THE STATUS OF A SYMBOL

A KALEIDOSCOPIC DOCUDRAMA PUTS A HUMAN FACE ON  
LITTLE ROCK'S INTEGRATION CRISIS—AND GIVES VOICE  
TO THOSE WHO LIVE ITS LEGACY 50 YEARS LATER

BY NICOLE ESTVANIK



PHOTO: STEPHEN THORNTON. SCULPTURE: "TESTAMENT"; JOHN AND CATHY DEERING

by newspapers and the fledgling television medium—drew the gaze of the entire nation, and sealed the fame of Central High as a major battleground for civil rights.

On a scorching hot day in August 2007, a group of 10 actors approached Central along its long, curved footpath lined with pink-flowered crape myrtle trees and up the steps to those heavy doors, imagining what it would have been like to do so as a teenager in 1957, surrounded by a hostile mob and flashing cameras. The actors had just arrived for their first day of rehearsal for Arkansas Repertory Theatre’s docudrama about the integration crisis, *It Happened in Little Rock*. They walked down tiled halls past rows of lockers, recalling first-person testimony from the script (“some boys urinated on my clothes and books...no one said they saw anything”) and ran their hands along the solid wooden railing of the stairs down which, they were told, the frailest member of the Nine had been pushed. “I felt like my head was going to explode,” says Destan Owens, who was cast as the play’s narrator figure.

The next thing on the actors’ agenda was a meet-and-greet of an unusual variety at which, it seemed, half of Little Rock was present. Actors: meet your characters.

## WHY ARE WE STILL HAUNTED?

In *It Happened in Little Rock*, the characters identify themselves by name and occupation. They are real people, and their lines are excerpted verbatim from an exhaustive string of nearly 100 interviews that took place over three years.

The interviewer was New York-based director and writer Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj. His personal head-exploding first visit to Central took place in 2004, while he was in town directing *Dreamgirls* at Arkansas Rep. He went as a tourist, only to be stopped in his tracks by a display case in the lobby, in which photos of the teenaged Nine in 1957 were mounted alongside current portraits. Their

adult accomplishments are listed on the plaques: teacher, activist, investment banker, author, real estate broker, social worker.... Staring at their faces, Maharaj was deeply moved; he began to shake and cry. He wasn’t sure what his reaction meant—but he knew there was a play in it. Arkansas Rep, led by producing artistic director Robert Hupp, thought so, too. Maharaj began to plan a new production with a firm deadline: the 50th-anniversary commemorations in September 2007.

The endeavor, originally labeled *The Legacy Project*, involved not only excavating facts about the 1957 crisis but illuminating multiple perspectives and investigating the progress of racial relations in the past half-century. Maharaj’s springboard question in interviews was deceptively simple: Why are we still haunted by the events of 1957?

From there, as the playwright puts it, the “Oprah factor” took over. His subjects reminisced about shoe-shopping, slumber parties, missed proms, pick-up games of basketball, homeroom teachers; they held forth on prison statistics, neighborhood profiles, hip-hop culture. “He’s the type of person who can crack you wide open,” says Spirit Trickey, a ranger at Central High, which was named a National Historic Site in 1998. (In addition to participating in *The Legacy Project*, Trickey contributed a script about her mother, Nine member Minnijean Brown Trickey, to the Rep’s inaugural Voices at the River new-play development program, which Maharaj helped establish.)

The interviews were videotaped, and will eventually be

Opposite, Hazel Bryan shouts at Elizabeth Eckford in Will Counts’s iconic photo, taken Sept. 4, 1957. Above, the cast of *It Happened in Little Rock* visits bronze figures of the Little Rock Nine on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol; back row from left, J. Bernard Calloway, Arthur W. Marks, Julian Rebolledo; middle row, Mary-Pat Green, Vanessa Lemonides, Gia McGlone; front row, Nick Petrie, Shannon Lamb and Taïfa Harris.



donated to a local archive; a pair of volunteers, both court reporters, churned out transcripts. “In Little Rock, everyone knows everyone,” Maharaj discovered. “Once the word got out, people were like, ‘I want to be in the play.’” Several of the Little Rock Nine sat down with him, along with past and present Central students and staff, and a wide swathe of the city’s residents. “I wanted to speak to people from all walks of life,” he says. Some of those he approached refused to talk, but everyone he interviewed signed a waiver that their words and names could be used to create a piece of art over which they’d have no further control. Such a leap of trust is a tribute to Maharaj’s disarming smile and inclusive outlook. But it also points to an eagerness on the part of Little Rock’s residents to chip away at the city’s status as a symbol.

## A LIGHTNING ROD

In this magazine in 2000, dramatist Moisés Kaufman wrote:

There are moments in history when a particular event brings the various ideologies and beliefs prevailing in a culture into sharp focus. At these junctures, the event becomes a lightning rod of sorts, attracting and distilling the essence of these philosophies and convictions. By paying careful attention in moments like these to people’s words, one is able to hear the way these prevailing ideas affect not only individual lives, but also the culture at large.

Kaufman was writing about his own *Laramie Project*, which transformed the voices of a traumatized town into a play that continues to be widely performed. Maharaj cites *Laramie* as a major inspiration for *It Happened in Little Rock*, along with a list of role models: Lynn Nottage, Anna Deavere Smith, August Wilson, Gandhi and two Kings (Doctor and Woodie).

The play traverses between 1957 and the present. In brief scenes of dialogue from half a century ago, a black reporter played by Owens arrives from New York City with a notepad and lots of questions. Moving ahead 50 years, the reporter becomes an artist who remains nameless (though the colorful shirt he dons for the closing scenes was nearly identical to the one Maharaj wore to the first public preview). Maharaj’s earliest talks with citizens took place in a town-hall-style forum; that’s the setting he recreates for the 21st-century scenes, as one community member after another steps forward to deliver a slice of his or her perspective on life in Little Rock.

Maharaj’s personal take on “legacy” posits a shared responsibility between artists and journalists (indeed, the line between the two is blurred) for amplifying stifled and often unpopular points of view. In the opening sequence—underscored by the ensemble’s humming of the anthem “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Freedom”—the artist summarizes the challenges his research uncovered: “Many people still have an inferiority complex when it comes to the South’s legacy in regards



Barred from Central High, the Little Rock Nine gather to study in mid-September 1957.



Resistance to integration didn’t end when the Nine entered Central High. Above, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus in 1958; right, protesters at the Arkansas State Capitol in 1959.



to race.... If you try to get people to talk you’re labeled a troublemaker.... America suffers from a severe case of selective historical amnesia.... The new crisis in America is not just one of race but economics, class, culture and faith.... I’m sick and tired of people saying ‘can’t we all just get along’ who really don’t want to get along at all.”

Interspersed with his speech are lines spoken by the ensemble on behalf of the Little Rock Nine, while their names are projected on the back wall. The interjections are inspirational, or marked with wry humor, but as the music swells their words betray anger—“It took me almost 30 years to be able to finally speak about what happened to me publicly,” says a woman identified as Carlotta Walls LaNier. The name Elizabeth Eckford appears on the screen: Throughout the rest of the play she’s an almost heartbreakingly soft-spoken presence, but here she hurls out a resolute challenge: “An apology is *not* an apology if you can’t name what you did!”

One of the play’s strengths is in giving glimpses of the Little Rock Nine as individuals, who had varying reasons for volunteering to integrate Central, from feeling a moral imperative to wanting access to a better biology lab. While the play doesn’t allot enough time to any individual for these to be full portraits, the script shows the Nine in moments of silliness, frustration, disagreement and fear. It would be no great feat for a saint or a symbol to have endured what those teenagers did; in showing the Nine as real, imperfect people—real *children*—the play contextualizes their exceptional bravery.

Maharaj and the project’s dramaturg, Sybil Roberts Williams, had a tricky task in balancing artistic and personal concerns (theirs and others’) with the pressure to be historically accurate. Some characters’ seemingly incompatible claims—that the opposition and violence were worse than reported, on the

one hand, or that they were greatly exaggerated by the press or unfairly pinned on Little Rock residents—beg further investigation. Hupp, who took part in that creative struggle, puts it this way: “People’s recollections change. There’s rarely an objective account. The interpretation of the facts is where the story turns.” Says Williams, “We allowed ‘inaccuracies’ to be maintained as a means of bearing witness to the frail nature of memory and truth.” She adds, “Also, some of the ‘selectivity’ was so interesting!”

In resisting the temptation to neaten up fumbling or contradictory comments, the collaborators sacrificed some aesthetic polish. In discussions about race, however, neatness doesn’t have much of a place. And by allowing (and requiring) participants to take public ownership of their exact words—some of which are quite eloquent on their own terms—the piece gains authenticity and power. “Someone didn’t put these words in their mouths,” observes cast member

emotional scenes. Blues guitarist Steve Hudelson loiters on the perimeter of many scenes. His evocative picking of spirituals and protest songs—into which the cast launches at times with soulful abandon—helps the jigsaw puzzle of voices fit together. “These songs are part of the fabric of our country,” Maharaj says. The lack of music in the present-day scenes poses questions: “What are the freedom songs of our generation? What are we marching for?”

To help the audience toggle between time periods, black-and-white 1950s images alternate with live color video close-ups of the town-hall speakers. Both the video and the slides—and of course, Owens’s dual reporter/artist character—underscore the role of the media in the Little Rock crisis. On a basic level, publicity is what prompted federal intervention: President Eisenhower ultimately could not turn a blind eye to images of the Arkansas National Guard, mobilized by a politically calculating governor, blocking the way of students who had the Supreme Court on their side. The coverage also began overdue discussions about race in other parts of the country.

Some of the real-life journalists of the ’50s unexpectedly became a part of the story. In a moment recalled by Eckford in the play, white reporter Benjamin Fine stepped in to comfort her when she was surrounded by a menacing crowd at a bus stop. And when the students finally managed to slip inside the school, it was partly because segregationist protesters were otherwise occupied with brutally attacking a group of black reporters. That incident, too, leaves its mark on the play. A blank tombstone, which stands like a podium for the artist character during the play’s stormy opening, becomes the resting place of his reporter counterpart, who is felled by a segregationist wielding a brick.

## I JUST WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

On Sept. 12, during preview week, *It Happened in Little Rock* was transplanted for one day (in abridged form and with skeletal production values) to Central High School, for two assemblies packed with 1,200 kids each. Nine member Melba Pattillo Beals’s memoir, *Warriors Don’t Cry* (which, incidentally, was adapted last year by Eisa Davis for Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles) is required reading at Central. But never before had the story of their school been enacted for these kids in 3-D. That morning, principal Nancy Rousseau included a definition of “docu-drama” in her P.A. announcements.

Following the first assembly, the buzz in Central’s hallways was reportedly enthusiastic—the show was about kids their age, it was in-your-face, and those actors could sing! Some students were initially surprised to realize that in the constantly shifting mix of roles, white actors were sometimes assuming black roles, and vice versa. At the second presentation, principal Rousseau called Maharaj out on the stage—to the kind of boisterous applause reserved for minor celebrities—and he explained his philosophy about casting across ethnic boundaries. He quoted Minnijean



In the weeks following the integration of Central, federal troops guarded its entrance, below, and escorted the Nine to and from the school.

COURTESY OF CENTRAL HIGH MUSEUM HISTORICAL COLL./UALR ARCHIVE



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Arthur W. Marks, whose roles include senior Nine member Ernest Green.

While interviewees’ phrasing was left as intact as possible, the editorial and artistic voice of Maharaj and his collaborators is present in the selection of pieces that form the collage. Thanks to the play’s long creation period, four vastly different drafts got readings at the Rep and in New York City. The first was nearly four hours long. Hupp says, “We knew from the first reading there were four or five plays here—Rajendra had to choose which story *we* were going to tell.” Originally, past and present were dealt with in separate acts, but the creative team realized the time periods were most interesting if juxtaposed and uninterrupted.

In lieu of an intermission, music came to function as a deep breath after



Brown Trickey: “The Little Rock Nine have been a symbol of hope internationally, and it’s not just about color.”

“The kids got it,” is Maharaj’s verdict, weeks later over lunch in New York. He expects nothing less. The idea that the casting might be a sticking point for some audience members reveals a crack in his otherwise patient veneer. “If you can’t get past the fact that a black woman is playing a white woman or vice versa, then you can’t even see my play—there’s no entry point for you, because you’ve got to work on that first!” His own ethnic background—father from India, mother from the Caribbean, and a Jewish grandfather, for good measure—surely has a bearing on that. “I grew up really not knowing about race until I came to America. I’ll never forget the first day of school [in Long Island], dressed up in penny loafers and a bowtie, and the kids called me a nigger. I came home, and my mother looked it up for us in the dictionary.” Another time, he recalls, “she threw a huge tub of crayons on the floor and said, ‘Look—they’re different colors, but they’re all crayons.’”

The casting of *It Happened in Little Rock* makes a point by moving fluidly across the boundaries of race. Sometimes it’s a harsh point—as with the play’s climactic animation of the most famous photograph from the crisis, snapped on the day the Nine first tried to enter the school, by Will Counts of the *Arkansas Democrat*. The image captured a stylishly dressed young white woman, Hazel Bryan, her face contorted in rage as she followed close on Eckford’s heels. On stage, as the reporter cajoles the Nine to share their painful recollections, Shannon Lamb transforms into Eckford exactly as she was seared into the American consciousness, wearing dark glasses and a crisp white collared dress with checkerboard trim on the skirt. Taïfa Harris assumes the role of Bryan, brandishing a picket sign and snarling, “Get the Negra bitch. Lynch her!”

The jarring sound of those words from the mouth of a African-American performer effectively focuses the audience’s shock, boiling down the question, “How could a white girl say those words to a black girl?” into a simpler one: “How could *any* human being say those words and mean them?”

Harris pauses when she’s asked how she



At center, Owens’s reporter, with, from left, Green, McGlone, Steve Hudelson, Lemonides.

BENJAMIN KRAIN

could bring herself to step into the shoes of a woman many have labeled “the poster child of hate.” She says thoughtfully, “To be Hazel Bryan, and to try to be true to her story too, is very hard. I know she was probably, at least in my character development, brought up with hate. But to have to scream ‘nigger! nigger!’ to someone black....” She shakes her head. “At first I really did stay back from it, and just created a character. But I don’t think that’s fair to her.”

Among the students at Central, that particular moment created electricity. Scattered, nervous giggles at the racial epithets died down as the Eckford character recalled brokenly, “When I got home, wrung out my new dress, it was filled with yellow spit, dirt and sweat.” In the same auditorium in which the real-life Eckford had suffered harassment during every assembly, that ruined dress, and all the naïve hopes it represented, was a devastating detail. Her cry, “Why is this all happening to us? I just want to go to school!” reverberated through a room quieter than you’d ever imagine a crowd of more than a thousand kids could be.

## WE’RE THE ICON

Ranger Spirit Trickey reports that among the 45,000 visitors to the National Historic Site each year, the most common misconception is that Central High was the first Southern school to integrate. In fact, several Southern high schools, colleges and universities had already admitted black students without much clamor following *Brown v. Board*. An exception was the case of Autherine Lucy, who in 1955 won her petition to be admitted to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, only to be driven out by racist violence. But there was little reason to expect something like that would happen in Little Rock, which was considered liberal by regional standards. Some residents still seem dazed that their town will forever be associated with such an ugly moment in American history.

Commemorations of the crisis, not surprisingly, tend to focus on the courage of those who rose to the challenge. The 30th- and 40th-anniversaries were big to-dos in Little Rock, but there was something especially poignant about the half-century mark, perhaps because



Williams and Maharaj.

LESLIE GOLDEN



Members of the Little Rock Nine join the cast on stage for the closing number.

KELLY FORD

CONTINUED ON PAGE 77

the main players now have the vantage point of a lifetime. An old tourist website that had been established for the opening of the Clinton Presidential Library, [www.ArkansasGlobecoming.com](http://www.ArkansasGlobecoming.com), was reactivated to help visitors navigate the month's events. Among them: the ribbon-cutting of a shiny new visitor center, lectures and symposia, book signings, an ecumenical service, art exhibits, film screenings, a concert, an NAACP convention, an Emancipation Proclamation display courtesy of the National Archives, a two-day festival titled "The World Is Watching Us," a speech by Ernest Green to the Political Animals Club and more.

The centerpiece of the month was a ceremony honoring all of the Nine on the steps of Central, with the Clintons topping the list of dignitaries. Stories rehashing and analyzing the crisis ran in papers all over the country and on National Public Radio. An 11,000-word story in *Vanity Fair* was devoted to Eckford and Bryan, who had shared, years after their notorious photo was snapped, a brief and peculiar rapprochement. And HBO aired a new documentary, *Little Rock Central High: 50 Years Later*, created by Little Rock natives Craig and Brent Renaud. The film takes the controversial standpoint (debated in the play) that an insidious form of segregation persists at the school today. Several students and teachers are quoted in the documentary saying that Central is "two schools in one."

There are many indications that the school is thriving. *Newsweek* has ranked Central in the top echelons of U.S. high schools nationwide. Posters of the top-tier colleges to which its graduates can aspire line the walls. If you break down this year's population of 2,400 students along racial lines, 52 percent identify as black, 43 percent white and 5 percent other races. But, as the HBO film points out, the corresponding statistics for the number of kids taking Advanced Placement classes and, conversely, those in suspension, are far less racially balanced (so are the school's socioeconomic brackets, as is true throughout much of the country). Popular wisdom holds that if you want to understand a school, you should visit its cafeteria. Visitors from the media frequently poke their heads in, observing that white and black kids are keeping to their own tables.

In the play, those who spend their days at Central speak frankly about what goes on within its walls. Says one sophomore in

the script, "I'm taking AP classes. So when somebody says, 'We don't have enough African-American students taking these classes,' I can raise my hand and say, 'Yeah, we have a few that get out there and try.'" A senior complains, "Some blacks have a problem with me because I speak properly and have manners, so they say I'm acting white." A student who grew up in rough East Little Rock decries the assumptions others make about him, proudly labeling himself "a sophisticated thug, an educated thug." The in-school suspension coordinator asserts that the mostly black males under her authority have landed there as "a cry for help." And a civics teacher reasons, "If you grew up in a segregated neighborhood then you go to schools that are largely segregated; we create these self-reinforcing zones."

The topic of race relations at Central is

something principal Rousseau has obviously had to address for outsiders more times than she would care to. A friendly, no-nonsense woman who hails from the northeastern U.S. but has lived in Little Rock for 33 years, Rousseau insists race is an oversimplified explanation for how her students interact. "Everyone else who comes in and looks focuses on it, but the kids don't at all. When people criticize them for it, they just kind of roll their eyes and say, 'These are my friends, I don't have a problem with anyone else, but these are the people with whom I'm comfortable and that's just kind of the way it is.'" It certainly creates an uphill battle for initiatives such as the "mix-up days" Rousseau promotes to get kids socializing outside their comfort zones.

Rousseau knows and admires Maharaj. After seeing his handiwork, in which she

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appears as a character, her verdict is that “the play has balance to it. It has to be credible, because the words are supposed to be people’s quoted words. But you’re still taking people out of context and anytime you do that, you run the risk of being misinterpreted, misunderstood. My husband’s comment to me was, ‘What your part doesn’t show is how much you love the kids.’”

When Mary-Pat Green discusses the experience of playing Rousseau, that’s what she zeroes in on. “She’s an amazing woman who loves those students and that school. To be sure that I am portraying that in a very short speech...it does create a lot of anxiety.”

What about the anxiety of the students who attend Central? Their conduct is scrutinized, their friendships parsed, to a far greater degree than adolescents in the rest of the country. “Central is in the limelight so much of the time that the children here are almost like pigeons in Central Park—they’re used to seeing TV cameras and reporters,” says Rousseau. “We have an extra responsibility that no one else does, and we feel that. We’re the

icon.” The upside to that pressure is a unique energy the students have harnessed through such projects as an online oral history archive for which they themselves are the interviewers. Maharaj put it this way to a group of drama students: “The tenacity of the Little Rock Nine is in the marrow of this building, and you get to soak it up every day.”

According to Spirit Trickey, the same applies to the city, which shares the pride/shame dichotomy that comes from being a symbol of both racial estrangement and positive change. “What happened in 1957 is almost an incentive for the city to try really hard to undo a bad reputation and strive toward better race relations,” she contends.

Maharaj believes after extensive time in Little Rock that the town has further to go in that regard than many there would like to admit. He was sensitive to the fact that when the multiracial cast went out together, they drew quizzical looks. Hupp, another north-eastern transplant, has a different perspective: “People here wrestle openly with the issue—it’s not swept under the table. Consequently I

think a lot more progress has been made here than in other places I’ve lived.”

“It is an open conversation whether people want it to be or not,” says Trickey. “With the play, the anniversary, all the media attention, it’s on the table now.”

### THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Difficult conversations rarely begin on their own. Imagine what might end up “on the table” if a team of artists could be assigned to every town in the U.S. to ask, “What’s the issue that both divides and unites you?” and to create art from the responses, along with a safe space to discuss it. That’s the rather extraordinary gift Arkansas Rep and the play’s creative team have given Little Rock.

Founded in 1976, the Rep is the state’s largest not-for-profit professional theatre and draws audiences from the Ozarks and out toward Memphis. While the theatre has premiered locally focused works before on such topics as immigration and the work of a hometown poet, *It Happened in Little Rock* is by

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far its most ambitious commission. One of the initial aims of the project, for which the Rep received a Theatre Communications Group grant, was audience development; there may be no better way to bring people into a theatre than to put reflections of themselves and their neighbors on stage.

Everyone who bought a ticket received a packet of dramaturgical background, but Hupp says that where the company really put its resources, once the play was complete, was in talkbacks following every performance. No one knew what to expect from the first one, but the conversation lasted nearly as long as the play—a sort of Act 2, especially considering that about half the participants that night were characters in the script.

Several audience members asserted that the play's question, "How far have we come?" has a dismaying answer. "I have to question whether we're *still* in 1957," said one woman, referring to the uproar in Jena, La., where a group of black students had just gone on trial for the attempted murder of a white classmate, allegedly in retaliation for threats and racial slurs. (She might have added that recent Supreme Court decisions limiting integration efforts have, in the eyes of many, unraveled the promise of *Brown v. Board*.)

A middle-aged husband and wife sitting in the second row—he black, she white—were among those who took the microphone. The man began tentatively. He recalled being brought up to accept an inferior status—a mindset he didn't question until he joined the military. His demeanor made an impression on Rep associate producer Leslie Golden: "The timbre of his voice...you could tell that because of the performance, he felt open enough to make these comments. When he gave up the microphone, there was a physical sigh from him, a release, I think, from the tension of what he needed to say."

Near the close of the run, the Little Rock Nine, in town for the commemoration, attended the play en masse. They were invited to join the cast on stage for curtain call and to sing the closing song, "I'm On My Way." After returning to her home in Europe, one of them, Gloria Ray Karlmark, sent a gracious e-mail saying, "I was truly moved by Rajendra's play.... I hope that it will be viewed by audiences across the country. It is not only well written and honest; it provides a reflection of times past and present in a palatable way." And Maharaj proudly paraphrases Ernest Green's

words during curtain call: "He said, 'I haven't cried in years about the crisis. I wept for who we were as children. Thank you so much for reminding me of my childhood—not just the pain but the joy of it.'"

Back in New York, Maharaj has the distance to mull over the results of what many of the collaborators still refer to as *The Legacy Project*. If the myriad testimonies in his script add up to any legacy at all, it's an ambiguous phrase: "The struggle continues." For her part, dramaturg Williams remains perturbed: "I came into the project with a number of questions that I posed to Rajendra. One of them was, 'Was it worth it to sacrifice the lives of nine children to secure this integration?' I still ask that question."


Maharaj believes that "the blessing of this play is people who never liked each other, or people who talked *about* each other but never talked *to* each other, sat together for an hour and 40 minutes and had an experience. The true legacy of it is if people are kind to one another, start to see themselves reflected in every other human being.

"The talkbacks influenced me immensely," he continues. "I feel like this is going to be a three-part journey, with this artist character. The next piece I want to work on is about the churches and how Sunday is the most segregated day of the week in the South."

*Will It Happened in Little Rock* have legs, as the success of *The Laramie Project* suggests is possible? Says Hupp: "In the back of our heads has always been the idea that the work is not only textually transportable, in that the themes of the play would have meaning way beyond Little Rock, but in terms of the design: it's a unit set, with public domain music. Certainly, we hope that happens." Then he adds: "Of course, it was not remotely close to our primary motivation—we created this play for our theatre, for our community."

Still, there's tremendous value in what one community can teach another. "This has been the greatest Ph.D. in American sociology—three years of talking about race in Little Rock," Maharaj reflects. "I feel more like an American than ever." ❧

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