

We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915

By Jackie Sibblies Drury

Director Notes

by Kevin E. Jones

JACKIE SIBBLIES DRURY POSES MANY QUESTIONS FOR US TO WRESTLE WITH AND YET SHE OFFERS VERY FEW ANSWERS.

One of the questions Drury's provocative play asks is: What is our responsibility as artists to the stories that we tell and to the owners of those stories?

Is it actually possible in America, in the 21st Century, to tell a story about a distant genocide, without the story being appropriated by a contemporary conversation about race? In this day and age when we engage with information on a "sound byte" level, what is our role in sifting through the rhetoric and extracting useful meaning?

Drury gives the actor and audience member the opportunity to step out of the social labels and definitions that hold us all in place. I am grateful for the opportunity to get out from under our collective social agreements around race. I feel constrained by the myriad of projections put on to me as a middle-aged black man, an actor, a director, an activist and a social entrepreneur. I know I'm not alone.

As much as we appear to need certain social agreements to function as a society, I am ready to free myself from the ways those agreements constrain us as human beings. The question is *how*.

How do we exit this social construct called race and all the other "isms" that keep us in check? Drury offers me an opportunity to challenge myself and everyone else to consider our commonality, and our membership in the same biological family, regardless of our external appearance. Perhaps one way out is to accept the notion that we all share the same DNA code. Genetically we are not very different. In fact, we humans are among the most similar of all species on the planet. Yet, we embrace this idea of diversity and difference with fervor and self-righteousness. Therefore, are we not culpable of perpetuating the construct of race by holding tightly to and defending our social identities? Do we justify our hurtful behavior by claiming that our selfhood is being threatened? How do we help our audience navigate this seldom-chartered terrain? Theatre should mirror the culture from which it emerges and the culture should respond with commentary. To that end, how does theatre help people wake up and smarten up? How do we open ourselves to another context where we can imagine another world for ourselves?

I want to be challenged as an artist and social commentator to step out of pop culture's narrative about race. One that says that there are bad people and there are good people – that the good people are getting hurt and it's the bad people who are doing the hurting. This notion sets the stage for simplistic kinds of stories. I am bored with those stories. They're neither integral to how we live our lives today nor are they socially responsible in their lack of complexity. The victim/oppressor discourse forces us to stay

on the sidelines. It doesn't speak to us personally and it's not the kind of relationships that we're reaching for in our lives today. It's time for all of us to create a new story.