

BEST OF ENEMIES

BY MARK ST. GERMAIN

BASED ON *THE BEST OF ENEMIES*
BY OSHA GRAY DAVIDSON



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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based on the book *The Best of Enemies*
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BEST OF ENEMIES
by Mark St. Germain

based on *The Best of Enemies* by Osha Gray Davidson

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The following acknowledgment must appear on the title page in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play:

Originally produced at Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA,
Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director and Tristan Wilson, Managing Director.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

BEST OF ENEMIES, suggested by the book by Osha Gray Davidson, is the true story of the relationship of black civil rights activist Ann Atwater and C.P. Ellis, Exalted Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan. Fueled by the hatred they felt for each other, Ellis and Atwater faced off as co-chairpersons of a committee formed to debate school desegregation in Durham.

BEST OF ENEMIES exposes the poison of prejudice through Atwater and Ellis who, by confronting their hatred, discover the real enemy they share.

BEST OF ENEMIES received its world premiere at Barrington Stage Company (Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director; Tristan Wilson, Managing Director) in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on July 21, 2012. It was directed by Julianne Boyd; the set design was by David M. Barber; the costume design was by Kristina Lucka; the lighting design was by Scott Pinkney; the sound design was by Brad Berridge; and the production stage manager was Michael Andrew Rodgers. BEST OF ENEMIES was sponsored by Sydelle and Lee Blatt. The cast was as follows:

C.P. ELLIS John Bedford Lloyd
ANN ATWATER Aisha Hinds
BILL RIDDICK Don Guillory
MARY ELLIS Susan Wands

BEST OF ENEMIES was subsequently presented at George Street Playhouse, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, opening on November 30, 2012. It was directed by Julianne Boyd; the set design was by David M. Barber; the costume design was by Kristina Lucka; the lighting design was by Scott Pinkney; the sound design was by Brad Berridge; and the production stage manager was Thomas Clewell. The cast was as follows:

C.P. ELLIS John Bedford Lloyd
ANN ATWATER Aisha Hinds
BILL RIDDICK Don Guillory
MARY ELLIS Susan Wands

CHARACTERS

C.P. ELLIS — Exalted Cyclops of the Durham Ku Klux Klan. White.

MARY ELLIS — Wife of C.P. White.

ANN ATWATER — Civil rights activist and civic leader. Black.

BILL RIDDICK — College educated, community organizer. Black.

TIME

1971.

PLACE

Durham, North Carolina.

BEST OF ENEMIES

April 4, 1968.

Pre-show, recording of "Stand Up and Be Counted" by National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

KLAN MEMBERS.

*Stand up and be counted
Show the world that you're a man
Stand up and be counted
Go with the Ku Klux Klan
We are a sacred brotherhood who love our country too
We always can be counted on when there's a job to do
We serve our homeland day and night
When there's a job to do
And proudly wear our robes of white
Protecting liberty*

C.P. Come on, boys! I can't hear you!

ALL.

*Stand up and be counted
Show the world that you're a man
Stand up and be counted
And join the Ku Klux Klan*

C.P. One bullet! One bullet, that's all it took! Right here, through his jaw, down his spine and he dropped like a monkey from a tree! Truth is, boys, I was a little sad they killed him. (*Angry shouting.*) Hold on, now! I'm sad he never made it here to Durham next week or we could'a done the job ourselves! (*Laughter.*) Here's to the gunman who shot Martin Lucifer Coon! (*C.P. raises his beer as fellow Klansmen cheer. Lights down on Klavern as the sound of the cheer blends with the sounds of a crowd's protest chant.*)

CROWD. (*Offstage.*)

We shall not, we shall not be moved

We shall not, we shall not be moved

Just like a tree that's standing by the water

We shall not be moved

Black and white together, we shall not be moved

Black and white together, we shall not be moved

We shall not, we shall not be moved

Just like a tree that's standing by the water

We shall not be moved

We're fighting for our children, we shall not be moved

We're fighting for our children we shall not be moved

Just like a tree that's standing by the water

That's planted by the water

We shall not be moved

(*Lights up on Ann Atwater facing an unseen receptionist at the Durham town hall. She is a veteran warrior for civil rights.*)

ANN. Put down that phone! Yes, you heard me! And don't touch it again when I'm talking to you! How much of Durham do you want to see burn down tonight? We are not a mob, we are citizens who demand to see our mayor, and not some pissant councilman! You tell the Mayor Ann Atwater wants him down here now to tell us how he's going to lower the flag, close the schools and explain how this city plans to honor Doctor King. Now pick that phone up and dial. And if you call the police you'll be talking on your way out that window. (*Lights down on Ann as we hear the sound of a car driving into a gas station and the "ring" of the gas station's line as it drives over it. May, 1971. Lights up on the gas station of C.P. Ellis. There is a radio on the cash register desk next to a stand of motor oil and a Confederate flag and pictures beside it, including an 1867 picture of KKK member and Civil War hero Nathan Bedford Forster in Confederate uniform. Bill Riddick, a black man in his thirties wearing a jacket and tie, enters the gas station and listens. He holds a clutch of flyers.*)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. On the third anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Joe Etha Collier, an eighteen-year-old black girl, was shot dead in broad daylight coming out of a sweet shop with her classmates in her hometown of Drew, Mississippi. Drew High School has been recently desegregated. (*Bill turns up the radio as C.P. Ellis enters behind him, wiping oil off his hands with a rag.*) A white farm worker was put under arrest only 4 hours later. It is suspected

that a county voter drive aided by Civil Rights volunteers from the North escalated racial tensions. Joe Etha Collier was known as a good student and Drew High School's champion sprinter.

C.P. Not fast enough. Turn off my radio and wipe the dial. I don't want your germs on it.

BILL. (*Catching the cloth, he looks at C.P. and smiles. Nothing deters him.*) Good morning. I'm here to invite you to a meeting next Tuesday night. It's our first to discuss the problem of school desegregation.

C.P. I can solve that problem right now. You people stay in your own schools.

BILL. That is definitely a solution to consider.

C.P. (*Not the reaction he expected.*) Who are you?

BILL. Bill Riddick. I'm a community organizer.

C.P. "Community organizer." Does that make you a Commie or a union boy, boy?

BILL. I'm from the Department of Education. We have a grant to create programs addressing racial issues in our schools. The process is called a "charrette."

C.P. A "charrette."

BILL. It's French for meetings between people of different points of view to come to an understanding, and we keep meeting 'til they do. (*Hands him flyer.*)

C.P. Well, don't this beat all. You talk French, drive a nice new car and dress like you're wearing a white man costume on Halloween. I can't wait to go down to your "charrette"; we'll all hold hands and sing "Dixie." (*Crumbles up invitation.*) Now wipe off my dial and get out before I call the police. Looks to me like you're about to steal it.

BILL. We both know how much violence there's been in Durham. Don't you want to stop it?

C.P. I will. As soon as I get my city back. The dial.

BILL. Lot of oil on this cloth; your hands must be filthy, Mr. Ellis.

C.P. You know who I am, do you?

BILL. C.P. Ellis. Exalted Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan, Lodge Nine, Durham Klavern. Rumor is, you also sell the finest white lightning in the county and store it in that grease pit —

C.P. (*Takes a tire iron from behind the counter, slams it down.*) You get your black ass off my property, nigger, while you can still walk.

BILL. We meet Tuesday, 8 P.M., at the YMCA. Hope to see you

there. (*Tosses rag to C.P. and exits. C.P. goes to the phone and dials.*)
C.P. (*On phone.*) Denny, it's C.P. You call us an emergency meeting ... Tonight, that's when. Seven o'clock. Tell anybody who can't come they better give me a damn good reason. (*Lights down on C.P., as lights reveal Ann entering her living room with Bill.*)

BILL. Can we sit down?

ANN. You won't be here that long. You know what the Good Book says is the greatest sin?

BILL. Not reading the Good Book?

ANN. Pride. Pride opens the door to every other sin there is.

BILL. You think I'm prideful?

ANN. Either that or your mama dropped you on your head as a baby.

BILL. Huh, she always told me that was an accident. School segregation's been against the law for years. It's about time Durham faces that.

ANN. Face it? We've been living it. Police shooting black students just for sitting out front of their dormitory. Us burning down the Housing Authority and so many stores the mayor called in the National Guard. We've had more folks die than you've had birthdays and you think you can come down here from the North, and make Durham give a damn about any laws but our own?

BILL. Actually, I'm from North Carolina, too.

ANN. Where?

BILL. Hartford County.

ANN. That's still north of here.

BILL. Mrs. Atwater, everyone's tells me you're an important leader in this community. We need you at this meeting.

ANN. But unlike you, I'm not being paid to be there. All I'd get out of it is high blood pressure and a sore throat from shouting things I've shouted all my life. I'll save my strength for cleaning up after you're gone.

BILL. I just met C.P. Ellis.

ANN. Sweet Jesus. Then get to church and dunk yourself in holy water. I see that man every time I walk a picket line. If looks could kill, there wouldn't be a black face left in town.

BILL. I invited him to the charrette.

ANN. You are a damn fool. Since C.P. Ellis took charge, the Klan's grown so big they built a new hall twice the size of the old one. He also started a Youth Klan to start poisoning the children early. And

that man doesn't just hate, he wants to kill. Last year, one of his baby Klanners got his bus money stolen off him by a couple of black boys downtown by the Sears. There's nothing in this world that could have made C.P. Ellis happier. He filled his car with guns and rednecks and went hunting. He found some black men standing on the corner, just down the street here. When Ellis shouted, "Where were you niggers today?" my neighbor Lincoln King yelled right back, "Who you calling 'niggers'?" Ellis opened fire. Lincoln would be dead today if that cracker could shoot straight. That's the man you invited. And he's going to pack the place with more like him.

BILL. That's why I need people there who aren't afraid of them.

ANN. I'm not afraid of anybody. But when I see a snake I don't talk to it, I cut its head off.

BILL. I hear there are people afraid of you. They call you "Roughhouse Annie," don't they? Roughhouse Annie who can "kill anybody who wasn't already dead."

ANN. That's me.

BILL. Mrs. Atwater, if I didn't know any better I'd say that's a smile full of pride. (*Lights down on Bill and Ann.*)

KLANSMAN. (*In darkness.*) Let us bow our heads in prayer. (*Lights slowly rise, revealing in shadows a Klansman robed in red leading the Klavern's prayer. Behind him, the banner: "UNITED KLANS OF AMERICA, UNIT 9."*)

KLANSMAN and KLAN MEMBERS. Our Father, God of Life and Liberty, we humbly thank Thee for opening the eyes of all good people to the evil which has been forced upon us. Help us to overcome our enemies, and give our hearts the courage to destroy these agents of Satan. We ask this in the name of Thy Son, Christ Jesus, Amen. (*Lights fully up, C.P. removes his hood and addresses the membership.*)

C.P. You all heard the government's trying to make Hillside High into darkie heaven. I got a call today from Councilman Nash, you know Ferris, and he wants us to go to their meeting. I said, "Ferris, I do not intend to associate with a bunch of niggers or nigger lovers." But Ferris said he needs us. If we don't go, who's going to be there but niggers and whites who hate their own race? We are the last patriots. We've got to protect our wives and children. So I'm thinking, this, this is no meeting, it's a goddamn war. We fight now for what we know is right or before you say "spade" they'll be in our classrooms sniffing after our daughters. Now I want to hear

BEST OF ENEMIES

by Mark St. Germain

based on *The Best of Enemies* by Osha Gray Davidson

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Based on the bestselling book by Osha Gray Davidson, BEST OF ENEMIES is a true story about the relationship between C.P. Ellis, a Grand Cyclops of the KKK, and Ann Atwater, an African-American civil rights activist, during the desegregation of the Durham, North Carolina, schools in 1971. BEST OF ENEMIES exposes the poison of prejudice in the hearts of Atwater and Ellis who, by facing each other, are forced to face the worst, and best, in themselves.

"In the annals of strange political bedfellows, few alliances can have been stranger than that of Ann Atwater and C.P. Ellis ... Their unlikely partnership, and the even more unlikely friendship that flowed from it, is the subject of Mark St. Germain's fine new play, BEST OF ENEMIES."

—The Boston Globe

"Fact makes fiction more powerful. That's certainly the case with the world premiere of Mark St. Germain's BEST OF ENEMIES ... [The play] is a window into a darker time in our collective past. Yes, it preaches to the converted, but it also reminds us that there are many still waiting — but not wanting — to be converted."

—The Times Union

Also by Mark St. Germain

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THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

JOHNNY PYE

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