

**CORKTOWN,
OR THROUGH THE
VALLEY OF DRY BONES**

BY JEFF AUGUSTIN



**DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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CORKTOWN, OR THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES was commissioned and premiered by Western Washington University (Beth Leonard, Chair of Theatre & Dance) in Bellingham, Washington, opening on May 22, 2014. It was directed by Rich Brown; the set design was by Meg McGuigan; the lighting design was by Robert Aguilar; the costume design was by Monica L. Hart; the original composer was Tim Albertson; the music director was Samantha O’Brochta; the stage manager was Ilene Adamson; and the production manager was Marcus Todd. The cast was as follows:

JACKEE	Yusuffer Asphy
CORNER PROPHET	Stacey Ejim
TY/BARISTA	Fred Tse
COP	Jeremy Urann
PHYLICIA	Shayla Harris
SHERMAN	Teague Parker
ATLAS	Scott Thorpe
REVEREND JOHNSON	David Vaughns
BUS DRIVER	Samantha O’Brochta
TEACH FOR AMERICA GIRL	Gabrielle Deede
ELLEN	Fatima Wardak
CLARKE	Trey McGee
COP 2	Curtis Gehlhausen
COP 3/HOMELESS PERSON	Joe Uhl
COFFEE SHOP OWNER/SAMMY	Conner Peirson
MOTHER	Trula Nichols
CUSTOMER ONE	Dylan Gervais
CUSTOMER TWO	Rachael Everson

CHARACTERS

- JACKEE — fourteen-year-old, then seventeen-year-old,
black male
- CORNER PROPHET — black woman, timeless in age
TY — teenage male, any ethnicity
COP — white American male
- PHYLICIA — seventeen-year-old, then twenty-year-old,
black woman
- SHERMAN — fifteen-year-old black male
- ATLAS — seventeen-year-old, then twenty-year-old,
black male
- REVEREND JOHNSON — black male
- BUS DRIVER — woman, any ethnicity
- TEACH FOR AMERICA GIRL — white American woman
ELLEN — woman, any ethnicity
CLARKE — white American man
- HOMELESS PERSON — any ethnicity/gender/age
COP 2 — any ethnicity/gender
COP 3 — any ethnicity/gender
- COFFEE SHOP OWNER — white American, any gender
SAMMY — white American male
- MOTHER — black woman, mother of Jackee/Phylcia/Sherman
CUSTOMER ONE — white American, any gender
CUSTOMER TWO — white American, any gender
BARISTA — played by the actor playing Ty

SETTING

Recent Past/Present Time/Future
Corktown — a once Great American City

NOTES

Doubling: Double as you feel fit or don't double at all. But the actor playing Jackee should not play any other character. And the Barista should be played by the actor playing Ty.

— : A silent moment when a character reveals or holds back a truth. A time when language is too much or not enough.

Parts One & Two: The set should not be elaborate. It should be more of a space. Feel free to suggest locations with props, chairs, blocks, tables, and bodies. Don't feel tied down to any kind of realism. It'll drive you crazy. Feel free to make it site-specific. Moving from space to space. The audience should feel a part of the world. Want to have the action be around them.

The more you can create with the cast the better, whether it's a sound effect, the creation of a location, lighting. It's okay for us to see the theater magic. This is about a community creating a world, an identity.

Part Three should return us to conventional theater, proscenium-style. It should feel very different from Parts One & Two.

CORKTOWN, OR THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

PART ONE: THE GREAT AMERICAN RUINS

Jackee enters with a crate of flashlights. He is a nerdy yet stylish kid.

He moves with an elegance, a fourteen-year-old who is very one with his body. He sets the crate down at his feet. He stares out at the audience.

When he's ready, only when he's ready, he begins.

JACKEE. Mounds of stone, brick, iron, and cement sprouted from the ground, from the core of the earth and grew into gods. Towers so large they could block out the sun, the moon on any given day. Gods of industry — combustion engines, alternative fuel, four-wheel power drive — pure Americana. We even created our own sound, born from the depths of our belly, released with a blues, a jazz, a funk.

(Softly, the cast can be heard in the wings, singing, joyously — like a hymn, like Motown. Their voices sounding like millions. He listens, moves.)

It became our anthem, our cry. Thousands descended to work, to live in the city. 1.6 million with some change to be exact. It was a time of high culture, economic gain, enlightenment. But, like the Byzantine, Roman, and British empires, we fell. Crumbled under our own weight, our own arrogance.

(The singing stops.)

What's left?

(Answering his own question ...)

Ruins. Fragments of memories and dreams to those who lived it. History to those who came after. A culture, a people fighting to regain what once was.

(A slight beat.)

It's strange how we always strive for what we were, rather than pushing towards something new, something that *will* survive.

(A hooded figure enters with a boombox, music blasting a dirty/ratchet rap song. We can't see their face. The figure pulls out a can of spray paint and begins their art on the back wall.)

For those who ain't paid yet, this shit ain't free. I don't know if you're aware, but this city is bankrupted. So work ain't easy to come by and a brother's trying to get to college. So pay up for a safe and proper tour of the Corktown.

Some ground rules. I know I'm young, but you got to follow my instructions. This is my hood, my place. I know how it works and how it doesn't.

You can call me Jac-KAY. Not like Jackie Onassis, but like Jackee Harry from 227. My mama was a big fan.

And please put your phones on silent. And no texting, I can see you. That shit's just rude. Oh and if the cops come as we're touring the ruins, run. And if you get caught, you're on your own. So please pay attention to the closest exit. It may not be the door, window, or back alley we enter through.

Alright grab a light.

Through the valley we go.

(Lights fade on Jackee. The music from the hooded figure takes over the speakers. His/her work is done. The figure steps back to admire it. It reads: HIPSTERS, GO HOME. The word "hipsters" has the circle and strikethrough line associated with No Smoking signs on airplanes. Proud of himself/herself, the figure exits, bobbing to the music. The music rises, crescendos. Blackout.)

Chapter 1

As if watching the sunrise, a vibrant orange and violet hits the back wall, illuminating the graffiti. We're on a street corner. Corner Prophet is giving her morning broadcast, some might call it a rant. She uses a megaphone.

CORNER PROPHET. Don't be this climate change's fool. It's winter. Pull out those nasty long johns, plaid shirts — not that white hipster shit plaid — the practical thick durable shit. And put away those 1990s cargo pants, strong flip-to-the-flops
(Spotting a young woman across the way.)

Hey girl, take off those jean shorts. I mean, I'm *loving* the sight of your sweet voluptuous flesh, but you need to get down, down with a down jacket.

(Ty enters.)

TY. Morning Proph

CORNER PROPHET. Morning Ty.

TY. What's the Times?

CORNER PROPHET. What section you interested in?

TY. Local baby

CORNER PROPHET. Well, Mrs. Jenkins on Third and MLK got rushed to the hospital, the sugar finally hit her, shame too. She been working hard to keep her glucose levels down — even stopped making her delectable apple pie, damn shame. She even cut out her daily Faygo pop —

TY. Aww, which flavor?

CORNER PROPHET. Red

TY. Awww ... that's the best

CORNER PROPHET. Don't she know. She even started running. Started a little club with a few of the other older ladies at the church. Sight to see. But sometimes late is as bad as never. Watch what you put in your body now kid. Remember it's a temple, treat it right.

TY. I got to send her some flowers. She's the only person to ever come into Crown Fried and ask me how I'm doing. I always got to ask people how they doing, but they never ask me.

CORNER PROPHET. People ain't comin' up right anymore.

TY. Ain't that the truth. What else you got?

CORNER PROPHET. Little Lionel on Hughes and Hurston got a full ride to some yuppie school in Boston — early decision too

TY. What ball that fool play?

(Cop enters unseen. He listens/leavesdrops.)

CORNER PROPHET. None, academic. But James on Fifth and MLK got football scouts up his ass. Genius Phylicia Jones is still waiting for her early-decision letter from that school across the pond.

The Combs are moving to Mississippi or Missouri or Minnesota or Montana, one of those M states. The Carver projects are being condemned, the city is giving free homes to writers while they got people like me plaguing the streets. You can cut down Fifth after work tonight. The Fifth Street boys are having a bachelor party for T. So they'll all be at the Player's Club all night and all morning.

TY. Nice watching out

CORNER PROPHET. Candice is having her sweet sixteen on Saturday. Ratchet-ass girl. You think Reverend Johnson would raise a civil child. And that little Jackee boy is giving people tours.

TY. Of what?

CORNER PROPHET. Corktown.

TY. Who the hell wants a tour of Corktown?

CORNER PROPHET. Everyone. It's The Great American Ruins, baby.

TY. He making money off of it?

CORNER PROPHET. A nice chunk of change. So watch out for him will you.

TY. Will do.

CORNER PROPHET. Your bus is coming, better run

TY. *(Checking his watch ...)* I got another five minutes

CORNER PROPHET. Naw, you don't.

(She points.)

Here it comes.

TY. Shit.

(Ty runs.)

CORNER PROPHET. Yo, Ty. The Times ain't free baby

TY. *(Running back ...)* Shit, sorry.

(He throws some change in Corner Prophet's can. Running off...)

Later Proph

CORNER PROPHET. Be good baby.

(Cop sneaks up behind Corner Prophet.)

COP. Excuse —

(Startled, Corner Prophet spins around and instinctively gets in a fighting position.)

CORNER PROPHET. Motherfuck —

(On realizing he's not a threat.)

What the fuck is wrong with you? You can't just sneak up on people like that.

COP. Sorry, didn't mean to —

CORNER PROPHET. Who the fuck are you?

COP. I'm the neighborhood officer.

CORNER PROPHET. Neighborhood who?

COP. Cop.

(A slight beat.)

CORNER PROPHET. I ain't bothering anybody.

COP. I know.

—
—

CORNER PROPHET. —

CORNER PROPHET. Then what are you doing here?

COP. Patrolling?

CORNER PROPHET. Someone get killed?

COP. No

CORNER PROPHET. Robbed?

COP. No

CORNER PROPHET. Then what you patrolling for?

COP. Your safety

CORNER PROPHET. Excuse me?

COP. Your safety

(Corner Prophet laughs.)

—

CORNER PROPHET. Oh, you're serious.

COP. Yes.

CORNER PROPHET. — COP. —

When did y'all start patrolling?

COP. Recently assigned to this area. A few of us are.

(Corner Prophet takes a moment, considering this new bit of info.)

CORNER PROPHET. Hhmmm

(There's more to that thought, that "hmmmm," but Corner Prophet offers nothing more.)

COP. I actually do have some questions.

CORKTOWN, OR THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

by Jeff Augustin

9M, 6W, 6 unspecified (doubling, flexible casting)

Jackee, a fabulous fourteen-year-old-boy, takes us on a tour of one of Detroit's oldest neighborhoods between 2007 and 2034. From the neighborhood's urban blight to the gentrified renaissance, Jeff Augustin chronicles the life cycle of a city, affected by and affecting the lives of its residents. This tale filled with gospel music, graffiti, and organic coffee shows how — even when the music gets turned down, the graffiti is painted over, and the streets become safer — there's a beating heart in a place's history that can't be erased.

Also by Jeff Augustin
LITTLE CHILDREN DREAM OF GOD

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