

# UNTIL THE FLOOD

A NEW PLAY BASED ON INTERVIEWS  
CONDUCTED IN ST. LOUIS IN THE  
SPRING OF 2015

BY DAEL  
ORLANDERSMITH



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

UNTIL THE FLOOD  
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UNTIL THE FLOOD was commissioned and produced by the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis (Steven Woolf, Artistic Director; Mark Bernstein, Managing Director) on October 12, 2016. It was directed by Neel Keller, the scenic design was by Takeshi Kata, the costume design was by Kaye Voyce, the lighting design was by Mary Louise Geiger, the sound design and composition was by Justin Ellington, the projection design was by Nicholas Hussong, and the stage manager was Tony Dearing. It was performed by Dael Orlandersmith.

UNTIL THE FLOOD made its New York Off-Broadway premiere at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (Daniella Topol, Artistic Director; Annie Middleton, Managing Director) on January 6, 2018, with the same creative team. It was performed by Dael Orlandersmith.

## CHARACTERS

*Note: The play may be performed by multiple actors  
or a single actor of any gender.*

LOUISA

RUSTY

HASSAN

CONNIE

REUBEN

DOUGRAY

PAUL

EDNA

THE NARRATOR

# UNTIL THE FLOOD

*Louisa Part 1*

*Louisa Hemphill/black/early seventies/retired school teacher/  
talks to audience.*

LOUISA. Would you like some iced tea? Yeah it was a nice service / real nice / that preacher really went at it didn't he? He sweated—the way he sweated—real old school. I happen to like that though—the old school preaching.

*(Beat.)* ...the way he spoke about that boy's death Michael Brown and all the stuff happening in Ferguson didn't surprise me a bit. That whole race thing—that was a long time coming. *(Louisa sips tea.)*

Back then when I was a young girl—no black policeman same as now...isn't that something?

I mean if you were standing outside of your OWN home talking to somebody—they'd yell at you *(Does a voice.)* "Get inside" ...I mean you're on your own property...or they'd pull black men over for no reason. *(Beat.)*

it was always like that...cops doing that or white boys / these crazy / Insane white boys in cars / drunk / sober looking for trouble / looking for something to Do / speeding past yelling out "NIGGER"... looking for something to do...my god

And

Of course they—the whites were protected by the law—especially the "Sundown law."

If you don't know what that is...it was a law / AWFUL law that stated if you were of color or Jewish you could not be in certain towns after dark. There were those signs *(As if reading.)*

"Don't let the sun go down on you in this town NIGGER."

We all saw those signs

Read those signs

Saw those signs

*(Pause.)*

I saw those signs

There were those of us who did indeed abide by that law

And

Who lived by that law

But

Those signs angered me

Really angered me

And

I showed how it angered me

Spoke about it

Sometimes yelled about it

My family would hear me out

They understood

But

It seemed to me that they took IT

Took “keeping their place”

It seemed to me that my family were passive racially

My father seemed like a man who did not outstep his bounds,

There was THAT racism as well...

Certainly there was the violence

But

There was also the UNDERSTOOD / quiet racism that did NOT include violence

Everyone knew their “place”

The whites stayed in west county

And

We stayed in Kinloch back then and later Ferguson

If we had to go shopping say in Normandy—it was understood we were there for JUST that / and the white folk there knew us by name and we knew them by name and smiles and even some conversation was had.

BUT

Then it was back to Kinloch

Back there before the sun went down

Back to OUR side of town

And

THEIR side of town  
Back to keeping your place  
(Pause.)

I would NOT (*Sarcastically.*) “Keep my place” / I refused to “KEEP MY PLACE”  
(Beat.)

I graduated high school and went to City College in New York  
By then it was the 60s  
And  
there were no race riots in St. Louis period

but  
when I was in New York  
I went to Protests  
I participated in boycotts  
and  
heard about the race riots in Chicago and Indiana—THOSE riots—  
my god!...put fire in ME

Yes

I was on FIRE

(Pause.)  
Sometimes when I came home to visit / I'd sense a hostility  
Not with my family but from certain White and BLACK people  
There was a HATRED directed towards ME

Once I was in a store in Normandy to get my mother some fabric.  
And

Again the woman—a white woman—I knew her all my life—Mrs. Wexton was one of the folk my family made small talk with when they came into her shop.

So this day I came in and by then it was 1969/70—and she said (*Does her.*) “oh Louisa! haven't seen you in such a long time” (*Becomes self.*) and I say “Well Mrs. Wexton, I've been Living in New York studying at City College”...

(Pause/back to audience.)

And  
Suddenly her face dropped

It just DROPPED

And

She said (*Does her.*) “Another one” (*Becomes self.*)

And

Then I said (*As if to her.*) “Mam?...” (*Becomes self.*) and she says (*Does her.*) “All the colored folk—sorry or should I say BLACK—’Cause all of you are BLACK now—ALL the Blacks are going to Chicago or New York—forgetting where they come from. Maybe it’s better you leave that way you won’t be causing any trouble HERE.”

(*Becomes self.*)

I looked at her in disbelief and again said (*As if to her.*) “MAM?”

(*Back to audience.*)

I then said (*To her.*) “Mrs. Wexton / I change my mind / I don’t want to buy anything from your store.”

(*Back to audience.*)

I turned around and walked out

(*Pause/beat.*)

Her mouth fell open

But

What stays with me is the Black girl that worked for her

(*Beat.*)

As Mrs. Wexton and I had this exchange / there was a black girl about my age sweeping the floor and putting things away

And

When I told Mrs. Wexton about my being in New York and attending college / the girl looked at me

We were about the same age

She looked at me HARD

She looked at me saying w/out saying (*Does a voice.*) “You think you’re better than me? You think ’cause you went east / talk different that you’re better than me?”

(*Pause.*)

And

As

Mrs. Wexton called herself telling me off / the girl was smirking  
There was a smirk on her face as if to say (*Does a voice.*) “that’s what you get for not keeping your place / that’s JUST what you get”...

(*Pause/back to audience.*)



In that moment / I was filled with HATE  
I was filled with hatred for her—THAT BLACK Girl  
And  
She HATED ME

*(Pause/beat/speaks quietly.)*

I drove back home

And

I told my family what happened

My father looked at me and said *(Does him.)* “Louisa, you should feel sorry for her / I know who she is / I know her family / you should feel bad for her” *(Stops/becomes self.)*

Then

I raved

I raved and said *(As if speaking to father.)* “That girl got mad at ME because I wasn’t cleaning Mrs. Wexton’s floor / she’s a TOM and I can’t believe you’re defending her” *(Back to audience.)*

And

Again my father said *(Becomes him.)* “Louisa, sometimes YOU can know so much and yet know so little.”

*(Becomes self.)*

And

When

he said that I was livid / I said *(As if to him.)* “THAT GIRL IS A TOM DAD / AND YOU DEFENDING HER MAKES YOU A TOM—” *(Back to audience.)*

and before I could finish my sentence / my mother pushed my father aside

and

She slapped me

She slapped me palm to face

And

Back hand to face saying *(Becomes mother.)* “DON’T you EVER call your father that / EVER / the reason why you’re ALIVE and have the education that you have is because he’s STRONG / IF you feel that he’s a TOM / then you leave this house and NEVER

# UNTIL THE FLOOD

by Dael Orlandersmith

1 n/s (flexible casting, may be done by multiple actors or a single actor of any gender)

Pulitzer Prize-finalist Dael Orlandersmith's UNTIL THE FLOOD was written in response to Michael Brown's death. Having interviewed scores of St. Louis residents, Orlandersmith portrays the many faces found within the community, giving each a chance to take center stage.

*"[Orlandersmith] brings the questions, the pain and even the unspeakable thoughts of hundreds, if not millions, to life. UNTIL THE FLOOD is an urgent moral inquest."*  
—**The New York Times**

*"...eye-opening and quietly moving... [Orlandersmith] gets under these black skins and white skins and finds the common humanity of people who are just...people."*  
—**Variety**

*"UNTIL THE FLOOD pointedly avoids easy sanctimony, instead challenging us to confront...deep, long-running societal fissures... [Orlandersmith] build[s] a sobering brick-by-brick portrait of a society still reckoning with racism in all its insidious forms. ...the effect is akin to that of a prayer, a poetic plea for understanding and peace that ought to be heard all across the land."*  
—**TheaterMania.com**

*"...powerful and thought-provoking... gripping theatre... a must-see show that will have a profound effect on everyone who views it."*  
—**BroadwayWorld.com**

*"Searing [and] bleak... It's a powerfully well-balanced examination of race relations in the United States... Orlandersmith skillfully organizes the material into short monologues that are revelatory, insightful and often tinged with humor."*  
—**TheaterScene.net**

**Also by Dael Orlandersmith**

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