



KUNSTLER

BY

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DRAMATISTS
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INC.



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For William and Patricia Snyder

KUNSTLER premiered at Hudson Stage Company (Denise Bessette, Dan Foster, and Olivia Sklar, Artistic Producers) in the Woodward Hall Theatre of Pace University on April 26, 2013. It was directed by Annette O’Toole; the scenic design was by James J. Fenton; the costume design was by Leslie Bernstein; the lighting design was by Andrew Gmoser; and the production manager was Doug Ballard. The cast was as follows:

KUNSTLER Jeff McCarthy
KERRY Keona Welch

KUNSTLER was revived in a revised form produced by AND Theatre Company, as part of the New York Fringe Festival, on August 10, 2014. It was directed by Meagen Fay and the production stage manager was Kian Ross. The cast was as follows:

KUNSTLER Nick Wyman
KERRY Gillian Glasco

The Off-Broadway premiere of KUNSTLER was presented at 59E59 Theaters and produced by the Creative Place International (Patricia and William Snyder) in association with AND Theatre Company (Kristine Niven and Janice L. Goldberg, Artistic Directors), on February 17, 2017. It was directed by Meagen Fay, the set design was by James J. Fenton, the costume design was by Elivia Bovenzi, the lighting design was by Betsy Adams, the music and sound design was by Will Severin, and the production stage manager was Mary Jane Hansen. The cast was as follows:

KUNSTLER Jeff McCarthy
KERRY Nambi E. Kelley

This production transferred to Barrington Stage Company (Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director), Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on May 18, 2017. The cast was as follows:

KUNSTLER Jeff McCarthy
KERRY Erin Roché

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM KUNSTLER

KERRY NICHOLAS

KUNSTLER

A space suitable for a speaker in a university. It is up to the director to choose between, say, a lecture hall with an Ivy League feel or a more modern facility. Initially, the set should read realistically, but as the show progresses it should be able to accommodate different lighting to enhance the shifting moods of the piece.

Today the space is set up for a speaker—a podium upstage center and two chairs nearby.

At the start of the show, we hear—as if from outside the hall—the sound of fifteen or twenty demonstrators repeatedly chanting, “Kunstler is a traitor” and similar anti-Kunstler slogans. Lights come up into a “work light” feel. Trash is strewn across the floor, the two chairs are up-turned.

The sound of the chanting outside becomes louder as a door in the audience’s section of the space opens, a door evidently leading to the outside where the demonstration is being held. Kerry, an African-American woman in her mid-twenties, enters. She is dressed in student-type attire (either skirt over opaque stockings—or 1995 slacks or jeans) chunky-heeled shoes, a shirt tied at the waist over camisole or body stocking top. She carries a backpack containing a light sweater (which she will switch out with the tied shirt) some notebooks, pen, etc... She turns and calls out...

KERRY. Keep it up. He loves the attention.

She closes the door and the demonstrators’ chants recede. Now she sees the mess, mutters in irritation as she walks down to the stage.

Oh come on! Real mature! (*Calling up to light booth.*) Jordan?!? Are you up there? Jordan? (*To herself.*) Damn it.

Realizing she is alone with this mess, she throws down her backpack, and exits through a door leading to a hallway.

Maintenance? Hello? Is anybody here?

“Kunstler must go!” chants are interrupted by a demonstrator yelling, “That’s him!” The crowd noise shifts into individual shouts overlapping—“Traitor!” “Hypocrite!” “Why are you defending rapists?” “Sellout!” “How much did Gotti pay you?” And then this gathers again into the chant of “Kunstler must go!” The sound increases as the door at the back of the house opens. Kunstler enters and, standing in the doorway, turns to them—

KUNSTLER. If you want to come in, we could talk about it. Have a conversation?

He evidently gets no takers and begins to make his way through the house toward the platform. He is wearing a gray summer-weight suit, off-white shirt—sleeves rolled up and with pen in his shirt pocket—and a tie. Under his arm Kunstler carries his suit jacket, a number of file folders filled with newspaper clippings, notes, pages of transcripts, etc. Each is wrapped with a rubber band. He also carries a yellow legal pad containing several pages of handwritten “Lawyer Jokes” and sections of a New York Times, as well as a flyer from the demonstrators containing his picture with the word “traitor” stamped across it. Below his picture, the words, “William Kunstler is a sellout and a hypocrite. His defense of traitors, terrorists, and rapists is an insult to the causes for which he once stood. Boycott Kunstler and let the University know that you will not allow your tuition money to be paid to a man who no longer stands for Civil Rights! Or Justice!” The pamphlet should include typos and misspellings, to which Kunstler will refer later. In the right hand pocket of his slacks should be a neatly folded, white linen handkerchief. Kunstler steps through the garbage. Registering the upturned chairs, he crosses to them, rights them and sits in one with his back to the audience, putting his feet up on the other. He takes out the yellow legal pad and sits quietly, writing. Kerry reenters from audience door dragging a gray plastic trash can with the intention of putting the litter into it. She sees Kunstler.

KERRY. Mr. Kunstler.

KUNSTLER. Hello—

KERRY. Mr. Kunstler, I'm Kerry Nicholas—

KUNSTLER. Kerry Nicholas, yes. Vice-chair of the program committee. My hosts!

KERRY. Yes, Matthew is—

KUNSTLER. Matthew is the committee chair and was supposed to be here.

KERRY. Yes, but—

KUNSTLER. He is currently on a train to Baltimore.

KERRY. Yes, family trouble. Matthew wanted me to tell you, he's very disappointed—

KUNSTLER. —he told me.

KERRY. He told you?

KUNSTLER. When he called me.

KERRY. He called you?

KUNSTLER. He tried to reach you.

KERRY. He did reach me. Actually, my answering machine. I just got it.

KUNSTLER. But he didn't reach you after he reached me to tell you he reached me.

KERRY. No.

KUNSTLER. But you'll soldier on despite your disappointment.

KERRY. My disappointment?

KUNSTLER. He happened to mention that—

KERRY. Oh?

KUNSTLER. —that you weren't in favor of inviting me.

KERRY. A number of distinguished people were proposed. It was put up to a vote.

KUNSTLER. That's democracy.

KERRY. We had a discussion, we had a vote—

KUNSTLER. And now you're stuck with me.

Chanting outside shifts to, “Kunstler is a self-hating Jew.”

KERRY. That’s overstating it. We’re honored to have you here. And your visit has excited a lot of interest.

KUNSTLER. So I hear.

Kerry begins to stuff the trash into the trash can.

KERRY. We usually have a hospitality table. Fruit, crackers... If you’d like me to—

KUNSTLER. Just water will be fine.

At the mention of water, Kerry starts to exit off to get it. She turns back to him.

KERRY. I don’t want you to think—

KUNSTLER. I don’t. Relax.

KERRY. I’m going to be introducing you. I was wondering if there were anything in particular you’d like me to say.

KUNSTLER. You might get a few ideas from the protesters outside. The signs. Might give it a certain snap, don’t you think? “I’m happy to present that notorious traitor and hypocrite...”

KERRY. I’m sorry about that.

KUNSTLER. No, sounds like that on a campus in 1995? It’s refreshing. Or were you planning on being out there?

KERRY. Why don’t I just—

Kerry exits off to get water and glass. Kunstler calls off to her.

KUNSTLER. Must say you get a better grade of insult from the newspapers. “The lawyer for causes of which none is more unpopular than he.” That was in the *Washington Post*. And someone in the *New York Times* called me “a *schlemiel* with an edge.” That one kind of hurt.

Kerry reenters with water pitcher and glass, which she places on the shelf inside the podium, then goes back to cleaning up the garbage on the floor and putting it in the bin.

KERRY. Oh?

KUNSTLER. You know what a *schlemiel* is?

KERRY. Not specifically.

KUNSTLER. A bumbler. Someone who habitually fucks things up.

KERRY. Ah.

KUNSTLER. I wrote a letter to them about that. That if they were going to call me names, they should come up with more accurate ones. Maybe a *chachem* or a *momser*.

KERRY. Don't know what those are either.

KUNSTLER. Then you probably shouldn't use them in the introduction. What kind of law?

KERRY. Excuse me?

KUNSTLER. You. What kind? Civil rights?

KERRY. Why, because I'm black?

KUNSTLER. No, you're right. I shouldn't assume.

KERRY. It's possible to be black and—

KUNSTLER. Of course, but something inspired you, made you want to do this. It's interesting to me what motivates people. You'd be surprised for how many people it's Atticus Finch. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The book. Or Gregory Peck. Of course, you don't want to take that too far. Maybe you remember, he loses the case and his client is murdered. Generally speaking, that's not the outcome you want to go for.

KERRY. Winning is better.

KUNSTLER. The client kind of thinks so. It makes me happier, too.

KERRY. Well, it's for insights like this we invited you here.

She's finished clearing the garbage.

KUNSTLER. So I take it that it wasn't Atticus Finch for you? I'm really asking you. I really want to know.

Kunstler starts to rise with difficulty. Kerry instinctively reaches to help him, but he waves her off.

KERRY. Actually, I'm just introducing you.

KUNSTLER. I don't mean to press, if you're uncomfortable...

KERRY. It seems to me that would be a longer conversation, and we don't have the time.

He gathers his stuff as she pulls the chairs into a side-by-side position at an angle and downstage from the podium. He follows her.

KUNSTLER

by Jeffrey Sweet

1 man, 1 woman

Famous for defending the Chicago Seven and his involvement at Attica and Wounded Knee, the radical attorney and civil rights activist William Kunstler had an outsize personality and a tremendous appetite for life. In this two-character play, tensions flare when he arrives on a college campus to give a seminar. The brilliant young law student assigned to introduce him objects to his appearance and is determined to confront him. Has Kunstler finally met his match?

"...wise and revealing... [a] skillful script... KUNSTLER is an eye-opening history lesson."
—**The New York Times**

"...a compelling portrayal of the high profile trial lawyer... This fascinating [play] provides a unique insight into Kunstler's life and times. ...Regardless of your opinion of William Kunstler, you will find KUNSTLER to be a captivating and entertaining show."
—**BroadwayWorld.com**

"A well-crafted and smartly organized script that's infused with generous dollops of humor... Sweet's vivid integration of so many...historic events is remarkable—especially the vivid recollections of the infamous Attica prison riots..."
—**CurtainUp.com**

"KUNSTLER excels at every level, bringing alive not only a famous character, but the era in which he lived and the controversies in which he played so lively a part. ...It is a fitting compliment to KUNSTLER to say that Kunstler, the theatrical iconoclast, would approve. So will you."
—**TheFrontRowCenter.com**

"...Sweet offers up a clever script exposing a fascinating behind-the-scenes account of what really went down during [Kunstler's] high profile cases. ...This is a captivating and powerful theatrical event that will leave you cheering."
—**StageBuddy.com**

Also by Jeffrey Sweet
THE ACTION AGAINST SOLSCHUMANN
THE VALUE OF NAMES
WITH AND WITHOUT
and others

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

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