



TRAVISVILLE

BY
**WILLIAM
JACKSON HARPER**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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Dedicated to Chuck Patterson

TRAVISVILLE received its world premiere at the Ensemble Studio Theatre (William Carden, Artistic Director; Sarah A. McLellan, Executive Director) in New York City in October 2018. It was directed by Steve H. Broadnax III, the scenic design was by Milagros Ponce de León, the costume design was by Suzanne Chesney, the lighting design was by Adam Honor, the sound design was by Shane Rettig, and the production stage manager was Lloyd Davis, Jr. The cast was as follows:

MINISTER ORA FLETCHER Bjorn DuPaty
ELDER ALDEN HEARST Brian D. Coats
MINISTER D. L. GUNN Nathan James
ZEKE PHILLIPS Sheldon Best
AINSLEY GILLETTE/
JASTON HONEYCUTT Denny Dale Bess
MINISTER THURSTON BEASLEY/
ORTHELL DAWSON Shawn Randall
MINISTER HOWARD MIMS/HOLLIS BURCH Ivan Moore
LAVERNE CAMPBELL/BETHANY FLETCHER Stori Ayers
GEORGIA DAWSON Lynnette R. Freeman

Special thanks to Jim Schutze for his fine journalism and for writing *The Accommodation*, which inspired so many of the voices in this play.

—W. J. H

CHARACTERS

MINISTER ORA FLETCHER

A minister at New Mount Olive Baptist. A protégé of Alden Hearst. *Black, late 20s to mid-30s.*

ELDER ALDEN HEARST

The retiring elder of New Mount Olive Baptist. Suffers from a terminal illness. A manipulator and deal-maker. *Black, mid- to late 50s*

MINISTER DARRYL “D. L.” GUNN

A minister at Lighthouse Church of God in Christ. Running from his past. *Black, early to mid-40s.*

EZEKIEL “ZEKE” PHILLIPS

A recent graduate from Morehouse and an activist. Not afraid of *anyone*. Clear-headed if a bit naive. *Black, early to mid-20s.*

MAYOR AINSLEY GILLETTE

The mayor, balancing the tensions of the old guard and a new era. *White, mid-late 40s to early 50s.*

MINISTER THURSTON BEASLEY

A local pastor. Loud, thinks he’s smarter than he is. *Black, 30s.*

JASTON HONEYCUTT

A land developer, favors himself a progressive. *White, mid-late 40s to early 50s.*

MINISTER HOWARD MIMS

Another local pastor, quieter, wiser, and snarkier than Beasley. *Black, 50s.*

HOLLIS BURCH

A Fannin Gardens resident with a history of run-ins with whites in town. *Black, 50s.*

LAVERNE CAMPBELL

A Fannin Gardens resident and widow. *Black, 30s.*

ORTHELL DAWSON

A Fannin Gardens resident and owner of a body shop in the neighborhood. The kind of guy that puts it all into perspective. Husband of Georgia. *Black, 30s.*

GEORGIA DAWSON

A domestic, though college-educated. Tough, pragmatic, always the voice of reason. Wife of Orthell. *Black, 30s.*

BETHANY FLETCHER

Ora Fletcher's wife. Wise, patient and kind. *Black, 30s.*

THE BREAKDOWN ON DOUBLING

Minister D. L. Gunn

Minister Ora Fletcher

Zeke Phillips

Elder Alden Hearst

Ainsley Gillette / Jaston Honeycutt

Bethany Fletcher / Laverne Campbell

Thurston Beasley / Orthell Dawson

Howard Mims / Hollis Burch

Georgia Dawson

Or whatever works best for you.

NOTES

/ inside a line of dialogue indicates when the actor with the next line should start speaking.

I've indicated some overlaps, but the more you discover, the better. Think of periods as purely a line of demarcation. That said, while scenes are meant to be played with a sense of pace, it is not paramount, it should not come at the expense of truth, or in-the-moment discovery.

—W. J. H.

TRAVISVILLE

CHAPTER ONE

Scene 1

Fall 1964. Minister D. L. Gunn and Minister Ora Fletcher wait in Mayor Ainsley Gillette's office. It is raining.

FLETCHER. (*Looking out the window.*) Looking mean out there.

GUNN. Yeah?

FLETCHER. Yeah, Angry. S'gonna open up any minute... Yep. Don't wanna get out in that. Folks just drive so foolish, when it gets like this. Don't nobody ever wanna slow down.

GUNN. No sir, they do not.

FLETCHER. Never made no sense to me... What time you got?

GUNN. Quarter to three.

FLETCHER. Hope the mayor don't get caught in that mess.

GUNN. He will.

Pause.

FLETCHER. I'm nervous.

GUNN. I noticed.

FLETCHER. You're not nervous.

GUNN. I'm always nervous. It's a condition.

FLETCHER. Ha. I'm serious, Minister Gunn.

GUNN. I'm serious too! It's a very serious condition...relax... He probably just wants to meet you since you're taking over for Elder Hearst.

FLETCHER. Right. That.

GUNN. Yeah. That.

FLETCHER. Still getting used to the idea. We sure I'm the guy we want?

GUNN. No... Yes, Ora, you're the guy we want. Consistency is key. That's what you bring to the table. That's why we voted for you.

FLETCHER. I'd like to think I bring more than that.

GUNN. Of course you do. But it's comforting to have some idea of what to expect.

FLETCHER. For who?

GUNN. Who you think? They need to know you'll play nice. I don't care who they are, or what they claim to believe, nobody likes a hard-headed Negro.

FLETCHER. Negroes do.

GUNN. Aw come on now, Ora. You know better than that.

FLETCHER. You don't think so?

GUNN. I mean, some folks? Sure. But other folks? They're just out here trying to make it through the day, and they ain't got time for no craziness. And if you're gonna be head of the Minister's Alliance, these white folks are banking on you to take that into account.

FLETCHER. Hm... Which one are you?

GUNN. What?

FLETCHER. "Hard-headed" or "Just trying to make it through the day"?

GUNN. Depends on when you ask me.

Silence. Fletcher paces.

You gonna be alright?

FLETCHER. Yeah.

GUNN. ...Why don't you step out for a few minutes. Get some air.

FLETCHER. I don't need to.

GUNN. Splash some water on your face.

FLETCHER. Nah, never could do that. Dries me out. That doesn't dry you out?

GUNN. Fletcher.

FLETCHER. What?

GUNN. Calm down. You wouldn't be here if you weren't supposed to be.

FLETCHER. I'm calm.

GUNN. You sure?

FLETCHER. Yeah.

GUNN. Okay.

FLETCHER. Why didn't you put your hat in the ring for head of the Alliance. You've been to more of the meetings than I have.

GUNN. Because I am one hundred percent certain I am the wrong man for the job.

FLETCHER. I'm not sure that I believe that.

GUNN. You're grown. You don't have to believe anything.

Mayor Gillette enters in a whirlwind, soaking wet, crosses to the window.

GILLETTE. This is ridiculous. From the car to the door. This. (*Indicates his clothes.*)

GUNN. That is something, Mr. Mayor.

GILLETTE. It's some bullshit, is what it is, D. L.

GUNN. Sir.

GILLETTE. You must be Reverend Fletcher?

FLETCHER. Pleasure to meet you.

GILLETTE. Yeah... Yeah, Well, you know? I wish I could say the same. I really do, but we would not be meeting at all if the city was not on the brink of unmitigated lawlessness.

FLETCHER. / What?

GILLETTE. But, if circumstances were different, I'm sure it would be an absolute goddam pleasure.

GUNN. Unmitigated / lawlessness?

GILLETTE. Gentlemen you will have to excuse me, my language. Obviously, I'm wet. I'm out of sorts. The road is full of... Excuse me.

FLETCHER. / Of course.

GUNN. Certainly, um you just said the city is on the brink / of unmitigated lawlessness—

GILLETTE. Ainsley Gillette, by the way.
FLETCHER. Oh, I know who you are.
GILLETTE. Right. Just never properly introduced / myself.
FLETCHER. / Right
GILLETTE. Wanted to. Before we got down to business.
FLETCHER. Of course
GILLETTE. Yeah. So. You're taking over for Elder Hearst over at New Mount Olive.
FLETCHER. Yes sir.
GILLETTE. And you are my new point man, is that correct?
FLETCHER. Point?
GILLETTE. Word is you're next up to head the Minister's Alliance?
FLETCHER. / Um.
GILLETTE. Have I got that right?
FLETCHER. / Yeah.
GILLETTE. Tell me if I'm wrong, now.
FLETCHER. No sir. You're not. I am "being groomed," so to speak.
GILLETTE. Okay. Hearst. How's he doing? By the way?
GUNN. We keep him in our prayers, sir.
GILLETTE. Well I'll do the same.
GUNN. Thank you sir.
GILLETTE. Of course. So... Zeke Phillips. I mean... (*Chuckles.*) For fuck's sake. What can you tell me?
A silence.
FLETCHER. Um. Nothing? Zeke Phillips?
GILLETTE. SNCC, CORE, SCLC?
FLETCHER. I'm not sure we follow, Mr. Mayor.
GILLETTE. You don't know about this?
FLETCHER. / No.
GUNN. No sir.
GILLETTE. Yesterday? Sit-in, at lunch time, at Olin's downtown. Three arrests. Zeke Phillips and a couple of rednecks.

GUNN. Huh.

GILLETTE. Y'all haven't heard anything about this?

FLETCHER. No sir.

GUNN. Sit-in?

GILLETTE. What?

GUNN. It's not exactly against the law for a Negro to sit at a lunch counter anymore. It just sounds like a fight to me.

GILLETTE. Right. But...come on.

GUNN. ...Come on what?

GILLETTE. This is gonna take some time. This can't...this won't just happen overnight.

GUNN. Of course. However, to be fair, this hasn't been overnight.

GILLETTE. I know. I know. But you see what I'm saying. I mean, to put it plainly: The dumbass—Certain white folk ain't gonna like it.

GUNN. Right.

GILLETTE. They're gonna have something to say about it.

GUNN. / Right.

GILLETTE. I mean...it's just... *(Turning his attention to Fletcher.)*
You know what I'm saying.

FLETCHER. / Sure.

GILLETTE. You got your Negro leaders using the whip when they oughta be using the carrot. Tends to rub certain people the wrong way. And those people always turn out to be a pain in everyone's ass.

GUNN. I see.

GILLETTE. So...I need to see if we can't get out in front of this.

GUNN. How so?

GILLETTE. Just see what his deal is. See if we can't get this guy reined in.

FLETCHER. Reined in?

GILLETTE. He could throw a real wrench in things. If we don't nip this in the bud.

FLETCHER. What?

GUNN. Travisville.

TRAVISVILLE

by William Jackson Harper

7 men, 2 women (doubling)

In 1960s Texas, one city has so far avoided the tumult of the Civil Rights movement. Through the efforts of an alliance of black church leaders, a wary peace has been maintained with the city's white mayor and citizens. But when the mayor partners with a private developer to gentrify the black neighborhood and uproot its residents, and a movement organizer from Atlanta comes to town, the Minister's Alliance will need to choose between the nonconfrontational status quo and standing up for the interests of their community—and weathering the risks resistance incurs.

"...[TRAVISVILLE] is a polished jewel of writing... The play doesn't wring its hands; it interrogates a moment in history, populated not by heroes and villains but real people negotiating dangerous quandaries." —**TheDailyBeast.com**

"[TRAVISVILLE] takes place in 1964, but its preoccupations have...contemporary resonance: What is the best way to carry out change? When does negotiation turn into collaboration, especially compared to disruptive activism? ...Mr. Harper has serious writing chops..." —**The New York Times**

"...[a] terrific drama... [Harper] write[s] fine dialogue [and] he has a precise touch for characterization. What's most exciting is how well he orchestrates the pressures of event and argument: His whole created world breathes." —**Time Out New York**

"Harper shows a knack for colorful dialogue throughout: funny at unexpected moments, eloquent during serious ones. ...most impressive about TRAVISVILLE, however, is Harper's clearheaded willingness to embrace the agonizing complexities of his subject. ...A humane attention to real-world nuance infuses Harper's play with genuine emotional stakes beyond the political strategizing..." —**TheaterMania.com**

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