

*When the Walls Come Down – TRUTH!* is the product of an international theater collaboration between Buffalo State Theater, The Anne Frank Project and Mashirika Theater Company (Rwanda). This devised production culminated a cultural, humanitarian and artistic two-week visit to Rwanda this past January where ten university students experienced the power of theater as a tool for social justice first-hand. The play utilizes multi-cultural storytelling traditions to explore non-western approaches to performance. Actor-generated themes are explored including reconciliation, forgiveness, the abuse of authority and the assumptions (Walls) we carry with us in our lives until we choose Truth. All storytelling elements of dialogue, poetry, song, shadow play and dance were created by the student artists from Buffalo and Rwanda. This production brings the theory of storytelling as a cultural bridge-maker and tool for conflict resolution to *Action*—This is the essence of what we are training our students artists to do in the world. As the Walls come down the future of our world looks brighter.

Drew Kahn  
Director

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When the Walls Come Down-Truth!

By

Buffalo State College Theater Department,  
Mashirika Performing Arts and  
The Anne Frank Project

An International Collaboration  
Born in Kigali, Rwanda (Africa)  
Developed in Buffalo, New York (USA)

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The Anne Frank Project  
Buffalo State College  
State University of New York

NO EXCEPTIONS

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ACT I

Prologue: Birth of the GRIOT

*PROLOGUE SONG: MWARAMUTZE*

*Cast Sings with drums, percussion, sounds Cast enters from offstage, through audience. Re-enact BIRTH OF GRIOT/TREE behind screen, in silhouette while CAST sings/views*

*GRIOT Speaks directly to Audience:*

GRIOT

Mwaramutze--Good Morning! Buenos Dias, Bonjour! A fresh beginning! Thank you for watching MY beginning, my birth. Who am I? I am the Griot of course! What's a Griot? I sing! I act! I dance! A traveling poet! An oral historian! A purveyor of wisdom...a...a...I tell stories (Smiles).

I come from generations of storytellers, so you can imagine what's in store for you?! Folktales, fables, rhymes and verse run through my veins. Do you believe "poetry slams" are something new? Children, my soul has been slamming, rapping, expressing, pontificating, proclaiming, educating, conveying, sharing and...revealing since the world became peopled. While I was born in Rwanda--The Land of a Thousand Hills. I appear in every culture...my stories are universal...they are color-blind, race-blind, faith-blind...they are simply and always about You...and me (smiles). Stories protect our history: Its how we know what has passed and what will come to be. "The future emerges from the past " This proverb was told to me when I was young--I now give it to you--free of charge. Don't worry, I have MANY more...(laughs).

I am the grandfather's grandfather, the mother's mother, the family "Shaman," the keeper of traditions, the...(spins) Ah, you are admiring my coat. It is made from the leaves of the Baobab and Banana tree: The Baobab because it is the "Tree of Life,"(points to Baobab tree silhouette on screen--needs to be a big deal--the play's metaphor) a rich source of practical and spiritual food in Africa for thousands of years. Water, shelter, food and spirit--the Baobab is our measurement of Life in the village. It is the tree I, and all Griot, come from. The leaves of a Banana tree because, well, because I like banana (smiles). The Banana leaves smell of my home.

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GRIOT (cont'd)

We must tell you where you are and what the rules of our story will be--yes, YOU have a place in the story too. You, you and you too!

Welcome to Gacaca!

*Cast moves, sings through Gacaca ritual where grass is laid on stage floor, villagers come from "over the hills," judge bench placed--it is beautiful--upon the completion of the ritual, the cast freezes in their Gacaca positions, active in mid-thought.*

GRIOT

"Justice on the Grass"--a Rwandan judicial system where the community, the people of the village are responsible for the fate of the accused. Whether it be a dispute over land, possession or life, the participants of Gacaca determine the verdict. Victim, Accused, Witness and Bystander come together to listen, discuss, respond and resolve disputes. No lawyers, no loopholes, no--WALLS--just People and Truth.

*Cast unfreezes-Gacaca in motion*

JUDGE1

Remember why you are all here. This is your national obligation to participate in Gacaca. It is my responsibility to remind you that withholding information that may help us find the Truth is punishable by imprisonment.

JUDGE2

In order to expedite the judicial process the intentions of Gacaca are as follows:

1. To provide a mechanism for Conflict Resolution
2. To intimately involve the villagers in Judicial process
3. To Foster Unity and Reconciliation
4. To Avoid the Lengthy Delays of Western Justice
5. To Establish the Truth

JUDGE3

As our government clearly states "Justice delayed, is Justice Denied." Gacaca returns to the scene of the crime where justice can be sought by the village for the village where injustice was committed by a villager

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