

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 23, 2018

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Stage Adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*
Explores Systemic Racism in 1930s South Side Chicago

Theatrical Retelling and Special Events Help to Open Dialogue

CHICAGO— The Theatre School presents the stage adaptation of Richard Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son*, adapted by Theatre School alumna Nambi E. Kelley, and directed by Mikael Burke (MFA Directing candidate 2018). The production is being presented on the Fullerton Stage February 9- 18.

The story takes place in 1930s South Side Chicago and explores the systemic racism and poverty that oppressed a young man named Bigger Thomas from birth. Bigger lands a job with a wealthy white family but his fate is sealed when a violent act unleashes a chain of events that cannot be undone.

"Racism is a poison that destroys everything it touches, and people have to recognize and confront their role in it, whether explicit, implicit, or complicit," Burke explains. "What is so genius about the novel and the adaptation is that it is asking us the hard question of those in power: Is Bigger born a black rat, or is his monstrous behavior the result of your treatment of him?" Burke said.

Burke mentions that dealing with such polarizing issues in a theatrical setting isn't always easy, but it is useful to investigate the hard topics through art. "Is this difficult to watch? Certainly. Uncomfortable? Absolutely. But it is nonetheless true. And as more Black lives hang in the balance over racist thinking, we should all do what we can to expose and undermine racism, even if that means taking a good hard look in the mirror," Burke explains.

The Theatre School and DePaul University's Center for Black Diaspora will host several events in conjunction with the run of *Native Son*.

February 8, 2:30 p.m.

Rashad Shabazz and Dr. Beryl Satter facilitate a panel discussion on the topic of literary geographies in the Fullerton Stage Lobby. Shabazz is the author of *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. Dr. Satter is the author of *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*, which won the Liberty Legacy Award in Civil Rights History and the National Jewish Book Award in History, and was a finalist for the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize and the Ron Ridenhour Book Prize. Co-Sponsored by DePaul University's Center for Black Diaspora and the DePaul University Geography Department.

February 12, 5 p.m.

The Theatre School and DePaul's Center for Black Diaspora hold a screening of *Black Boy* in The Theatre School room 546 hosted by Dr. David Akbar-Gilliam, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Modern Languages, Spanish; Critical Ethnic Studies Faculty, DePaul University.

February 13, 5 p.m.

The Theatre School will hold a screening of the 1951 film adaptation of *Native Son* starring Richard Wright in room 546, facilitated by Diversity Advisor Dexter Zollicoffer.

February 14, following the 7:30 p.m. performance of *Native Son*

Ted Anton will hold a post-show discussion. Anton is a professor in the English Department at DePaul University and Chair of the Age Studies Executive Committee of the Modern Language Association.

February 16, following the 7:30 p.m. performance of *Native Son*

Juelle Daley hosts a post-show discussion on the topic of Richard Wright, *The Expat*. Daley is the Assistant Director of DePaul University's Center for Black Diaspora.

About the production

Native Son opens February 9 and runs through February 18 on the Fullerton Stage at The Theatre School at DePaul University. Performances are Wednesdays-Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. Previews are on February 7 and 8 at 7:30 PM. The February 15 performance will be interpreted in American Sign Language. Tickets are \$15, preview tickets are \$10, and student tickets are always \$5.

Subscriptions and group rates (6 or more people) are available. Active military and their families can receive tickets for a discount (with valid ID). All tickets are reserved seating. Tickets are available by calling 773.325.7900 or visiting <http://theatre.depaul.edu>.

The cast features **Matthew James Elam** (*Bigger*), **Delaney Feener** (*Mary*), **Matthew Hannon** (*Mr. Dalton*), **Thalis Karatsolis** (*Britten*), **Jack Lancaster** (*Jan*), **Jayson Lee** (*Buddy*), **Matthew Lolar** (*Gus*), **Jessica Morrison** (*Hannah*), **Michael Morrow** (*Black Rat*), **Courtney Peck** (*Bessie*), and **Ashlea Woodley** (*Mrs. Dalton*).

The production team includes scenic design by **Joy Ahn**, costume design by **Megan Pirtle**, lighting design by **Simean Carpenter**, sound design by **Camille Demholm**, technical direction by **William Young**, dramaturgy by **Bri Schwartz**, and stage management by **Marguerite Hoffecker**.

Mikael Burke (Director) is a director, deviser, and educator currently pursuing his MFA in Directing at The Theatre School at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. When not in school, he serves as Creative Director of Young Actors Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana, and previously served as Associate Artistic Director of Indianapolis' NoExit Performance. He is a proud recipient of the 2012 Robert D. Beckmann Emerging Artist Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis and is also a 2017 Princess Grace Award winner in Theatre. Mikael received his B.A. in Theatre from Butler University in Indianapolis. Directing credits include: *Still*; *Hedda Gabler*; *Eurydice* (The Theatre School); *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*; *Middletown*; *Medea*; *Macbeth*; *I Am Peter Pan*; *The Pillowman* (NoExit).

For more information visit <https://theatre.depaul.edu/> or contact the box office at 312-922-1999.

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The Theatre School trains students to the highest level of professional skill and artistry in an inclusive and diverse conservatory setting.