

# Public Square Bonus Episode 2 Transcript

Speaker 1  
The Public Theater is...

Speaker 2  
To me, The Public Theater is.

Speaker 3  
The space that can be filled by real people.

Speaker 1  
Where I can see bold and experiment until theater.

Speaker 3  
The Public Theater is a gift.

Speaker 4  
Revolutionary. The Public Theater is like a neighborhood, you know. You know, when you live in a neighborhood or on a block, you can go to each other's house and feel welcome. When you walk in, you feel like you're at home. That's what The Public Theater is for me.

## GARLIA CORNELIA JONES

Hello and welcome to Public Square 2.0. My name is Garlia Cornelia Jones, the Director of Innovation and New Media at The Public Theater. Public Square 2.0 is a new and exciting opportunity to take a look behind the curtain and embrace the actors, staff, and stories connected to one of the nation's oldest theatrical institutions. As part of our new season, we will, from time to time, be periodically bringing you shorter audio-only bonus episodes.

These periodic pockets of audio will exist as another opportunity for you to get to know us. In our first bonus episode, we featured a conversation with two incredible women, Imani Perry and Tracy Heather Strain. On this episode, Dr. Perry makes a return to our stage, accompanied this time by her colleague at Princeton, Dr. Eddie Glaude. The two of them sat down last October to discuss another piece from our season, *Baldwin and Buckley at Cambridge*, a co-production with Elevator Repair Service during the fall of 2022. As the chair of both the Center and the Department of African-American Studies at Princeton University, Eddie Glaude, Jr.

Is an acclaimed writer whose recent books include *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*, for which he won the 2021 Stowe prize. You can also catch him every now and then as a contributor on MSNBC. Currently, the Hughes Rogers professor of African-American studies at Princeton University and a faculty associate with the programs in law and public affairs, Gender and Sexuality Studies,

and Jazz Studies. Dr. Imani Perry is the author of six books, including the award-winning *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*. If you were unable to see the production, the renowned theater company Elevator Repair Service returned to collaborate with The Public for *Baldwin and Buckley at Cambridge*. A profoundly relevant

presentation of the legendary debate between virtuosic writer James Baldwin and the father of American conservatism, William F. Buckley, Jr.

The production concluded with an imagined scene between Baldwin and his close friend Lorraine Hansberry, which was researched and written by longtime ERS company members April Matthis and Greig Sargeant. Here is a portion of the conversation that took place on Saturday, October 22nd, 2022.

JUSTIN K. SLOAN

This episode of Public Square 2.0 includes some strong language and a bit of cursing, just a heads up.

GARLIA CORNELIA JONES

And I just want a shout out Dr. Perry, she was here last night and is here again this evening at *A Raisin in the Sun*, And now at *Baldwin and Buckley*. And so we're just going to we have a couple other members of the cast who also join us. So we will start, and then they will, they will come out and you can read their, their extensive bios in your, in the little pamphlet.

And so without further ado.

JOHN COLLINS

I'll introduce myself. I'm John Collins. I'm the director of the show tonight and the director of Elevator Repair Service. We are expecting Greig Sargeant, who plays James Baldwin and Ben Williams, who plays William Buckley to join us as well, but they have to take a few things off in the dressing room before they come down. So, but I suppose we can begin. I mean, I would love to hear any reflections the two of you have on, on this debate that's just seen recreated.

DR. IMANI PERRY

Well, you know, I would just say I mean, I would love if we can have and I was going to ask my my colleague here, who is a preeminent thinker on James, the arc of James Baldwin's work. But to sort of think about it contextually, right, in the arc of his career. Wonderful job, both of you. Thank you so much.

Magnificent. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. But. But, but but one of the things that I that immediately struck me was actually so, we know historically that it is understood that Baldwin won the debate. Right. But I was so struck by actually how much of what Buckley said resonates with how the political conversation that we have today, that those ideas are not actually were not only were they not remote then, but they're certainly not remote now.

Right.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Well, first of all, it's amazing thinking wonderfully done. Remember, Goldwater loses in 64. Buckley support, supported Goldwater, realized that the campaign was a disaster and in some ways the candidate it was. And immediately started to pivot, and he began to see that they may have lost that election. But in fact, the groundwork had been laid to take advantage of a white backlash to begin to think about how to appeal to Southern white Democrats.

And we began to see the broad outlines of what would become eventually the Southern strategy here already. I mean, if some of us heard in Buckley's remarks, Buckley. Buckley's remarks,

Buckley's remarks, you could hear the the echo of those remarks in Tucker Carlson today, almost verbatim in some ways, some of the structures of the argument. So, yeah. So and just so you give an idea, I notice the way in which you read, you interpreted Baldwin's remarks.

There were a lot of clenched teeth, anger. And the interesting thing is that, you know, *Blues for Mister Charlie* had just been performed. Jimmie Lee Jackson is going to be dead in Marion within days. Within a week, Malcolm is going to be assassinated. And then, of course, by March, the next month, the Edmund Pettus Bridge will happen.

So and in.

DR. IMANI PERRY

And, Lorraine Lorraine had died on January 12th.

GREIG SARGEANT

Six weeks before

DR. IMANI PERRY

Yes, exactly six weeks before. Yeah.

GREIG SARGEANT

[Laughs] My book hasn't come out yet.

[all laugh]

DR. IMANI PERRY

I mean, I do. I mean, I am interested as someone who, I wrote a biography of Lorraine Hansberry, and hearing I mean, one of the things I loved about this, about this piece was not just that Lorraine appears and in her language. So the, the, in their interchange at the end, there's actually a verbatim language that comes from sort of observations that Lorraine made.

And part of their relationship was discussing is that, you know, both national politics around race, but also international politics. But that for me, hearing Baldwin's formulations, where he in the context of the Cambridge Union right, disrupted the notion of the American dream and American exceptionalism and the idea of the shining city on the hill by referencing the the project of colonialism.

Right. Not separating the transatlantic slave trade from the project of colonialism and then rendering it, at rendering Cambridge as sort of a place of inception. Right. And then attaching the particularity of the struggle for Black Americans to a global structure in the midst of an anti-colonial moment. Right. Is a to so that it disrupted the frame of reference.

And then he does this other brilliant move, right, where he claims a kind of what we, you know, what we call in the law standing right before the law. Right. A kind of eye and brings his entire community with him, and they reference to 'we' repeatedly, right, a collective 'we' in that to to make a claim is a brilliant rhetorical strategy.

And for me so deeply connected to his relationship with Lorraine, because she's an internationalist leftist in a very kind of doctrinal way. Baldwin's genius is in part understanding the particularity of his experience and then being able to read through that questions of

domination and injustice. And so there's this moment, you know, it's almost as though there's a sort of way in which he channels, I think, their relationship, their set of ideas, their discussions in that moment.

So soon after her, her departure.

JOHN COLLINS

I have a question. Well, for you, as someone who knows about Lorraine Hansberry in this particular way, that you do, I think something that we we we stumbled upon a little bit in our epilogue was a kind of friendly tension between the two of them in their, in their orientation toward what must be done. And that, at least from my limited understanding, is that she, she was a little bit more of a radical than than he was.

DR. IMANI PERRY

Yes.

JOHN COLLINS

[Laughs] But, but well, so I would love to hear you comment on that.

DR. IMANI PERRY

Well, doctrinally. I mean, we should talk about it, right? She's a doctrinal leftist. She's a socialist. Right. She's an anti-colonial...

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

She's also the pupil of Paul Robeson.

DR. IMANI PERRY

And DuBois. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, I mean, but I. But I also think, you know, we're. You know, that moment when, when, you know, Baldwin goes through he talks about what he talks about, you know, South Africa. He's talking about he's talking about Algeria, his particular brand of politics is, is that he reads, right, conditions of domination wherever he goes.

Right. So he doesn't have that ideological commitment to the socialist state in the way that Hansberry does, but has the same kind of critical depth.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Yeah, because remember, in his early days as a young man, he's a Trotskyite.

JOHN COLLINS

Yeah.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

For that. For quick, quickly. But he's not ideologically rigid in any way, shape or form or fashion. And remember, in in the in the debate, he he says that the U.S. nation state was made possible by cheap labor.

JOHN COLLINS

Yeah.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

So there is an attentiveness to material conditions, but he's just not reading it in the same ideological way that Lorraine reads it.

So no, he's not. Also, he's not going to conferences across the globe like Lorraine. He's I mean, because when Paul Robeson's passport is snatched away from him, you can read all of this in *Looking for Lorraine*, by the way, she she's she she speaks in his stead. But I think it's and they enjoyed this relationship that's really, really fascinating.

You know, I came across a moment, the letters where Baldwin is begging her to to to read, to place one of his plays. And she calls him "with your begging self." Right. So. So there's there's this interesting relationship between the two voices. Now.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

I have a question related to that, because, you know, we were really interested in how this resonates right now in front of a live audience in 2022. How does that last line resonate for you of of Lorraine's that the American white liberals should stop being liberals and become American radicals? I mean, I can only imagine how it would have resonated in the sixties.

But how does it resonate for the two of you now?

And I have I have.

DR. IMANI PERRY

I mean, I have a chapter called American Radical for a reason. Yeah. I mean, it is based, but I mean, I will say it it resonates in this in this sense, because there's a way in which what Buckley says we can hear iterations of this of the of the argument, of course, on Fox News. But it also is quite has a lot of currency in liberal circles.

Right. What would you have us do? It's too extreme. You want to dismantle the whole. There's a lot of progress. There was a Black president. Right. I mean, you know, so as opposed to Robert Kennedy saying there could be a Black president, there was one. Right. And I also say, you know, in that in that context, right after the after the the discussion, the debate.

Right. Buckley says, oh, they started cheering Baldwin before when he walked out and they and he won because he was Black and he was gay. Right. And so that line of argument. Right. Where where the assumption is that Black achievement is a product of pity and charity. Right. Still has currency across the board. It's very similar to what Mike Wallace said to Lorraine Hansberry when she wins the Drama

Critics Circle, "wasn't it? Don't you think it was because you were a Negro?" Right. Right. And we say when we look in the past, we think, oh, that was such an absurd thing to say because there was so much oppression. But today, when people say it, people don't say, Oh, that's such an absurd thing to say. Right. And I think that there's something and it was said in 1880, it's all I mean and it always that formulation.

Right. That there's some there's there's there's a lack of merit, any time that Black people break through actually undermines the project of opening up the society. So we're living in a moment in the present where that and I think that's the the point about radicalism that there's a debate that the argument that in radical has a different it registers differently today than it did then.

Right because we don't have the same kind of articulated sort of left mainstream. But the idea that there has to be a deeper critique of the structure of the society in order to get past those practices, I think. Yeah.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

I think, so just a footnote to that. The most dangerous combination to America discovering itself is the combination of the loud racist and the white liberal who's afraid we've gone too far. It's in that moment that change is always arrested. And Buckley is very very clear and explicit. The moment you challenge or threaten my self-interest, we're going to, in effect.

And then he goes to the war metaphors. Right. And this is what Heather McGhee was reaching for in *The Sum of Us*. Right. If it's viewed as a zero sum game where you sit on this political spectrum, right, you will end up in some ways defending the status quo. So it's that dangerous combination, right? So when when she when she invokes, we need less liberals.

Right. Because even the language of concern.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Oh, yeah.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

And Baldwin's remember in Baldwin's last paragraph? The last I'm not your missionary charity. Right. The language of concern is, in fact, a reflection of the philanthropic relationship to the question of racial inequality, of racial justice. Right. That equality is something that I possess to give to you. Right. Right. And that formulation, that idea still obtains right now, even among the white liberals.

And Baldwin says, "I saw what they did." Just be really, he says, "I saw how they behaved in the McCarthy era. I saw who they turned their backs on, what they sold out, who they sold out." So he's very skeptical. Skeptical, He says, I'm skeptical of somebody who wants to do something for me as opposed to with me.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Mm hmm. I have an anecdote that's really unrelated to this. And in 2019, in the summer of 2019, my wife and I were, who is also a Faulkner scholar, by the way, we were at the Faulkner Conference, which is something that Greig and John and I have all participated in a few times over the years. And I found myself at a moment, this is before the Democratic primaries.

Bernie was looking okay. Elizabeth Warren was looking okay. And I found myself in a moment talking to Dr. Hortense Spillers, one of the great scholars in the U.S., and also a Black woman who lives in the South in my home state of Tennessee. And we were talking about this, you know, and she said something like, to the effect of everybody needs to stop messing around and line up behind Joe Biden.

And I was like that. But but when you do that, the thing that I'm still trying to reconcile, you know, like and of course, she was 100% right, you know, and so that when I hear this Lorraine line at the end, I'm like, oh, right. But I also go back and see my family in the South. And I'm like, you know, I see what what they have to deal with every day walking out the door.

And I'm like, What is it? How do you how do you deal with that in a way? And I know that both of you have written about your own personal experiences traveling around the south and further south.

DR. IMANI PERRY

This question of national politics, I think.

[all laugh]

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

This is the way Lorraine treated Jim.

I understand the practical consideration driving Dr. Spillers' insistence in this moment. But it's amazing at least to me, how the imagination is captured by the practical that we can't seem to imagine otherwise for fear, Right. Of of what the imagination holds. So we will we we refuse to take a step. Right. Because people will say to do so is to risk everything.

When in fact, if we listen to Jimmy, the moment requires of us to risk everything. It seems to me

DR. IMANI PERRY

And I mean and we have good evidence in the meeting that Jimmy and Lorraine had with RFK.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Right.

DR. IMANI PERRY

And so much of that. Right. And that in 1963, when, you know, they were called to the Kennedy apartment on Central Park West -

GREIG SARGEANT.

Uh, South.

DR. IMANI PERRY

Okay,

GREIG SARGEANT

I'm sorry, because I live right there.

DR. IMANI PERRY

No, no, please.

And and were asked the you know, the idea was the meeting was called if we're going to bring these Black people here who can function to quell all protests in my home city, Birmingham, Alabama. Right. Because it's politically dangerous. It's politically disruptive to the Democratic Party. Was bad for Kennedy. Right. And the idea was that you're going to get these leading Black public figures to it to discourage, you know, these these troublesome southern Black folks from being so disruptive.

And the and the refusal. And the meeting, you know, turns it turns not just, I mean, Lorraine winds up being described as the hero of the meeting, but it really is Jerome Smith who is there, who was in New York. He'd been so badly beaten in Mississippi. He was in New York for surgery and he was a core worker.

And he spoke and RFK was dismissive of him because he wasn't the type of person that he was actually interested in speaking to. And this incensed Lorraine. Right. And she says, "that's who you're supposed to be speaking to, actually." And and and switches the conversation and says, "not only are we not going to do this work of actually trying to quell Black people for in the service of a national political party, but we want a moral commitment from you on the question of civil rights."

And part of the I think and you know, both Lorraine and Baldwin working with SNCC and SNCC's you know, commitment was that they were not they were not moved about by national politics. Right. If they had been right, they would not have actually done the work that radically transformed the country. Right. So the question I think we have to ask, right, is, is as a matter of historical reflection, if we're constantly moved about by election cycles every four years, what won't we get done?

JOHN COLLINS

I have question for you, Dr. Glaude. I was reading and I'm sorry, I'm not going remember where I read this recently, but you said something that really struck me about how, about backlash and about how progress of any kind tends to create a sort of reciprocal anger and fear on on the other side among white people.

And and it's struck me listening to Buckley tonight, that's very much what's going on at the end of his speech, that he, that he goes from being, you know, condescending to being terrified in a way, and angry. And I wonder, you know, because he starts talking about, you know, well, if it if it comes to a radical confrontation, then then, like you British young men did in World War II, well, we'll fight the Negroes on their own behalf.

You know, but it's but it's a it's a startling way for it to end. And I wonder how much of that you hear now.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Oh, absolutely. And you see, you can easily see the shift in the National Review. Mm hmm. Right. He understands the political cash value of the backlash. Goldwater lost the election, but by 1980, Goldwater won. What else is Reaganism, but Goldwater, right? He's. He's remember, many of us are old enough to remember that election, when people were saying that if Reagan was elected this, he would cause World War III.

George H.W. Bush would describe it as, his economics, as voodoo economics. Right. You remember that? Some of you do. Some of you obviously don't. And so so there's a sense in which Buckley was, had spied early on the nature of that shift. And there's also these gross misreadings purposely of Baldwin's work. Right? Right. The way in which he he misreads the way in which Baldwin criticizes or describes Christianity in *The Fire Next Time*.

It's grossly misread. Some baked Hebrew. So Baldwin is referencing trying to disrupt a certain kind of whitening of Jesus in that moment. But this gets read as dismissal, the way in which he



kind of says the eventual outcome of Christianity is to show - that's just not right in the way in which he's reading the text and to come, Right.

So so there are moments where you just see him purposely misreading it and he's doing it in order to what, stoke fear and to deepen white grievance for his own political gain. It's all there. The point that's really important about Buckley is that, how can I, he is the principal architect of modern American conservatism. Or I should say it more accurately, he is the principal proponent or propagator of modern conservatism in all of its various forms.

And so that ending statement, the threat to civilization. Right. That that that still resonates. What else is the threat of white replacement? Right. What is what else is underneath replacement theory? But this idea that we're going to be wiped off the planet of the Earth.

JOHN COLLINS

Is fascinating because it has resonance with the kind of populist anger now which, you know, Buckley, on the surface was no populist. You know, he makes this argument that we should disqualify 65% of the white people. But then in the end, he drops something that that that there's a straight line from that to.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

He's a patrician to the core. Right. And he's a conservative. He's a Burkean conservative in the sense that when he any dramatic change. Right. Unleashes the chaos of the mob. And so no matter what seems to suggest what are the contradictions of a particular society, it cannot be resolved by abrupt, dramatic change, because fundamentally, he's an institutionalist.

Right. So that Burkean sensibility still holds, but he's just like the southern plantation owner. Right. Who became populist, Right. In order to defend their class interest. Right. The class, which is always operative, is always super ordinate for these folks. So populism is only used for certain ends, not because it's a value in and of itself. Right.

JOHN COLLINS

Should we take some questions?

They're sitting here, I know they've been talking.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

I want to hear what you guys think.

JOHN COLLINS

Okay, great. Okay. Right here. So we need to put this down just for a...

AUDIENCE SPEAKER 1

Fabulous job. Absolutely incredible. You know, my question is really in two parts. I don't know anything about what Baldwin said after the fact at any time. In his life about the debate. I don't know if he ever wrote about it or commented informally. I'd like to know that. And if I may just quickly add excuse me, when I watched the debate on YouTube, you know the BBC clip, I could not help thinking when they would cut away to Baldwin while Buckley was speaking. What the hell is Baldwin thinking while Buckley's speaking?

And Mr. Sargeant, I don't know if you wish to give away any actor subtext, but I wonder if you have any comment about that.

GREIG SARGEANT

Well, you know, we've been working on this for a very long time, and I sit at that desk and every performance I hear something different. It's just so outrageous to me not, you know, as an as a person of color, of course, but as a human being. It's like. So my actual reaction is just in just playing it for what it is.

It's just, you know, heartbreaking in a way and disheartening. And it's, you know, and the reality of the world that I live in. So I don't really know much about what he said after the debate. I mean, I know that they sort of had another debate again, that he sort of I think the perception was he didn't win that one.

JOHN COLLINS

No Buckley won.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

No, it was a debate. It was it was a it was a televised debate, like in the early eighties or something that was on late night. I got to mic. It was on like late night TV and went on and on and on for like couple of hours or something. And and I mean, it's it's footage that doesn't exist anymore, but you can read about it in the Buccola book, *The Fire is Upon Us*, which, as was your text, was also part of our research for the last several years.

But but yeah, it was it was it was a weird thing. And that footage doesn't exist anymore. It's just vanished. And but he interviews people who watched it and they just said that, you know, at a certain point, Baldwin got tired and was like, I just don't I can't even deal with this.

JOHN COLLINS

And cancer was eating his throat at this point.

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Yeah.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Buckley was obsessed because he lost. And as Professor Perry laid out, you know, he's talking about it's just emotions and the like. Baldwin, You know, celebrated with Gloria and some students right afterwards. Gloria's sister, who was his assistant. But remember what we said? Death happens immediately. The reality of '65 is upon him.

He's having dinner in London when Gloria brings him the news that Malcolm has been assassinated and he explodes.

GREIG SARGEANT

Three days later.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Yeah, it's. It's horrifying. Right. And then, of course, by '66, what's happened? You have the March Against Fear where we're Stokely Carmichael and say they're going to go against freedom now or they're going to talk about We want Black Power. October '66, Black Panther

Party was organized. He could give less than a damn what Buckley's thinking at this point you know and then the moment just that the second part of the question, you remember the moment when Buckley says to Baldwin, "I'm not going to speak to you as a Negro.

I'm going to speak to you as a white man" and white man here stands in for a human being. Right. And Baldwin removed the stain. Baldwin has a look on his face when he is being when he's literally consumed with rage. And it looked like he wanted to choke the shit out of him.

[all laugh]

JOHN COLLINS

Yes, that's right. Yeah. Pretty much covers it right there. Yeah. Yeah.

GREIG SARGEANT

You said you had a question?

One last question.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER 2

Oh, oh, oh. Well, I was listening to the debate. Maybe attack a little bit, but does Buckley even address the proposition? I mean, if the proposition is the American dream as being at the Expense of the American Negro, Buckley doesn't even talk about that?

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

Yes.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER 2

He's like "what else are you going to do, burn it down?"

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Buckley doesn't really have much of an argument to stand on there. Like it's it's it's in shambles. He makes these huge leaps in logic, cherry pick some data and some quotes. But yeah, he certainly doesn't address that.

I think because had he done that, it would have been a lost cause, you know? Yeah. The only thing that he can do is really attack Baldwin's argument by mischaracterizing it.

JOHN COLLINS

Well, one thing that he does that I've picked up on over the course of listening to this is that he lays out a kind of cleverly crafted denial, not that clever, but denial of systemic racism. He says he says the problem boils down to two things. And he's quoting one of his professors when he says this. He says he goes, Yeah, right.

He says that there's a problem on the one hand of individual people who perpetuate discrimination. You know, in other words, that the few bad apples, you know, the those bad people whom we acknowledge, they're bad. So there's that. And then the other problem is the Negroes themselves, who have failed to make certain exertions that were made by the Italians and the Irish.

And so that's, that's his argument in a way is to deny systemic racism by saying all he's talking about is that, yeah, there are some bad people out there. We acknowledge that and otherwise black people just need to work harder. I mean, that's his argument.

DR. IMANI PERRY

And I just think it's worth keeping in mind how frequently people say that today. that exact same formulation has so much currency.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

And just just to your point, he opens up by trying to level the horror of American slavery. Right. So if you remember in this speech, he's going to be he's going to in his response, he's going to begin by talking about the fact that human beings have done evil things and that if we look across human history and he uses, I forget the word, it's like liquid?

What is that word? It starts with an L. I can't remember it. I'll pull it up in my phone in a second. And he says this. And then as he's going through this list, this is what human beings do. Americans aren't unique in it in this regard. A student stands up and he has to recognize them, and he says, Could you please answer the, address the motion?

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

And everybody laughs

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

And everybody laughs

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

Yeah. And every time that happened, he would find some way to kind of like, dodge and feint and get people to laugh at him. And and in the original debate, he what we're still doing here tonight is is still an edit of of the original thing. It's a longer than what's on YouTube which is the BBC cut.

But what we're doing here is still not the entire text because Buckley talked forever

JOHN COLLINS

29 minutes

BEN JALOSA WILLIAMS

And it was like 10 minutes of what about ism, you know? Right. And he gets interrupted a lot. And every time it happens, it's like people who watched it were there in '65 thought, oh, my God, he might actually win the debate because he keeps getting people to laugh with him.

You know.

JOHN COLLINS

It was a choice that we made. It was a difficult choice that we made, not to include. We included one interruption that you hear someone say, "Why don't you let him vote in Mississippi?" There were several others, and it was a, while it made the debate a little bit more exciting in a way. There it was. It was the nature of that audience, that Cambridge Union audience was much more you know, they felt much more comfortable shouting at the speakers and we didn't want to do something.

I mean, our purpose was to sort of have to let you be the audience and not have there be an imagined audience. So we decided not to include some so many of the audience interruptions that happened in 1965 because, you know, it was a choice to make you feel more present as the audience. And that was very much what we had in mind.

DR. IMANI PERRY

It worked. It was wonderful.

GARLIA CORNELIA JONES

Okay, one more.

AUDIENCE SPEAKER 3

I think just listening to Baldwin and that rage, he had to transform into an articulation of Black rage. And I think the biggest fear here for the conservative and the liberal is Black rage, because not everyone could articulate Baldwin's comprehensive idea of what it means to be a Black person in America. So I think it's the fear of Black rage on both sides.

So therefore, there's nothing political that will be done. It's just an observation.

JOHN COLLINS

And that comes back to what Lorraine says at the end.

DR. EDDIE GLAUDE JR.

You know, I was particularly interested in the way in which you interpret these remarks. Say a little bit more.

GREIG SARGEANT

Well, it was very important to me when we started this project that we did not recreate the 1965 version of this debate. I you know, when I first when I first read the transcript and I saw the YouTube video, the first thing I thought was we could be having this conversation today. So, you know, my experience as a Black man living, you know, in this world for almost, you know, 60 years was enough, was a solid background for me to inhabit these words for today.

My biggest challenge as an actor, I tend to be an angry person, was not to scream the whole the scream, the whole speech, because in that nobody would listen. But, you know, the whole thing. Every time I do it, I get so enraged. So I just try to find ways to, like, tell the story now., Of course, I'm a little bit more emotive than James Baldwin is.

He's he's the intellect. I'm the creative. So I have a lot more emotion. Or perhaps I'm allowed to show more emotion or be more emotional in 2022 than he was in 1965 at Cambridge University. But, but I really think that, you know, any person of color reading this to anyone would have the same amount of rage now, especially knowing that these words were spoken 57 years ago.

JOHN COLLINS

So I think we have to wrap it up. Okay. Thank you guys so much.

GARLIA CORNELIA JONES

Next time on Public Square, we take a look at a new musical adaptation of a movie *The LA Times* called “timeless and universal.” We drop in on *The Harder They Come*. So join us next time right here Thursday at the public square.

JUSTIN K. SLOAN

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For a full list of credits, please visit our website, [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org), for the show notes