



BY PAUL OAKLEY STOVALL  
DIRECTED BY PHYLCIA RASHAD

MARK TAPER FORUM APRIL 22 – JUNE 7, 2015  
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Center Theatre Group  
L.A.'s Theatre Company

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Welcome to  
Center Theatre Group  
and *Immediate Family*  
by Paul Oakley Stovall  
a new comedy about  
family.

When the Bryant siblings come together to attend a wedding, the family reunion becomes a family showdown. Secrets are revealed and old beliefs are challenged as a wild game of cards brings all of the family dysfunctions to the table.

Before we tell you more, take a moment and think about the title — *Immediate Family*. Who is your immediate family? Is it the family you were born into? Is it one that you choose and shape? How do you stay true to yourself as an individual while being part of a family?

*Immediate Family* is a comedy that explores serious subjects such as marriage equality, homophobia and racism. What is the power of using humor to explore serious topics? Can comedy help us dive more deeply into difficult truths? Do you think people listen better when they are laughing?

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers. See what questions this information raises for you and what discoveries the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *Immediate Family*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

**“BEING  
AFRAID  
is just  
acting  
as if the  
truth were  
NOT true.”**

— Ronnie, *Immediate Family*



# “You’re home. YOU’RE HOME.”

—Evy, *Immediate Family*

PAUL OAKLEY STOVALL’S *IMMEDIATE FAMILY* IS A COMEDY about a group of siblings that haven’t all lived together in a long time, but are coming home to celebrate. Tony, the youngest, is getting married. Their parents are no longer alive, but the house hasn’t changed much. Eldest sister Evy lives there now with Tony, where she is the self-elected guardian of the family home and their parents’ memory.

Evy can’t wait to have her siblings reunited, but not everyone is as excited as she is. Middle brother Jesse is nervous about coming home, afraid he can’t really be himself there. He’s invited his boyfriend to the wedding, but has made up a story to avoid coming out to Evy and Tony, who don’t know that he is gay. He has a plan... pretend his boyfriend, Kristian, is just the wedding photographer.

Ronnie, the Bryant’s half-sister, is eager to spend more time with her recently discovered siblings. Ronnie has become close to Jesse and Tony, but is painfully aware of Evy’s refusal to accept her as part of the family.

The weekend before the wedding, the Bryants struggle to balance celebrating a happy event and hiding the emotions they’ve covered up for years. But when everyone is under the same roof, secrets are sure to come out.

With humor, trash-talk, and high-stakes card games, *Immediate Family* looks at what happens when siblings decide to get real with each other about the big things — race, sexuality, and religion — even if it hurts.

Is there a character that reminds you of yourself or anyone in your family?

If you could describe your thoughts about family in a quote, what would you say?

“Life isn’t always fair... We all make choices.”

The oldest of the Bryant children, Evy stayed home to care for their aging parents. Since their passing, Evy often acts more like a parent than a sister to her siblings. She is deeply religious, conscientious, and inclined to bossiness.

Evy

“My point is... when you get finished cryin’, I got your back. Okay?”

The youngest, Tony is good natured and laid back. He can be a little immature and self-centered, but Tony is taking a huge step — he’s getting married! His family, though, is still waiting for him to grow-up and take responsibility for his wedding.

Tony

“Why are you trying to talk me out of being who I am?”

The middle child and a struggling writer, Jesse is still trying to find his way. Outside his family, his relationship is strong — he and his boyfriend are talking about marriage. But Jesse has avoided sharing that part of his life with his siblings because he’s afraid they won’t accept him.

Jesse

“Extra family, that’s icing, man. I mean, it’s like God sending angels to look out for you.”

A visual artist, Ronnie is technically the oldest in the Bryant family, but has a different mother. Having grown up in Belgium, where she still lives, Ronnie didn’t meet her half-siblings until later in life. Being connected to family matters more to her than anything.

Ronnie

“But you gotta give them their choice, and then accept them for who they are...”

The Bryant family’s “play sister” and Jesse’s best friend, Nina grew up in the house next door, but now lives in New York City. She’s openhearted, outrageous, and opinionated. Openly gay, she’s found a way to live with and laugh about her mother’s belief that she just hasn’t met the right man yet.

Nina

“Who am I supposed to be?”

Jesse’s boyfriend of three years, Kristian moved to America from Sweden and works as a professional photographer. When he arrives at the Bryant home, he discovers that Jesse hasn’t told his family about their relationship. He is sympathetic to Jesse’s feelings, but is also hurt that their life together is hidden.

Kristian

AS WE WATCH THE BRYANT SIBLINGS STRUGGLE to connect with each other, one thing becomes very clear — family is complicated.

Being with our families can be the safest place, surrounded by people who know us the best, and who love us no matter what. And yet, family can also bring up complicated emotions, as we struggle to be ourselves, and communicate truthfully. Expectations, loyalty and different beliefs can make staying true to yourself, while staying part of a family, an emotional roller-coaster ride.

Playwright Paul Oakley Stovall titled his play *Immediate Family*. Why do you think he chose this as the title? What title would you give this story?

Why is it sometimes hard to be ourselves with our families? How do you stay true to yourself as an individual while being part of a family?

If you could say one thing to any person in your family, what would you want to share?

“So you went as far away from home as you could get.” — Tony, *Immediate Family*



THE BRYANTS ARE COMING HOME FOR TONY’S WEDDING. While Evy and Tony have lived their entire lives in Hyde Park, Jesse, Nina, Ronnie and Kristian have traveled great distances to celebrate the event.

## HYDE PARK, CHICAGO

The setting of *Immediate Family* is the Bryant family home in modern day Hyde Park on the South Side of Chicago. Hyde Park is very diverse, and changing demographics have been a big part of its history: while Hyde Park was 98% white in 1930, it is now 50% white, 33% African American, 11% Asian, 6% other races and mixed race households.

Hyde Park has also been the setting for many famous works of literature, including *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris. Famous residents of Hyde Park include Muhammad Ali, Clarence Darrow, Amelia Earhart, Ray Bradbury, and the Obama family.

Do you have family members that live far away? What special events bring your family together? Who and what will you always come home for?

## Immediate Family

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The Young Audiences Program student matinees for *Immediate Family* are brought to you in part by the Renee and Meyer Luskin Theatre Discovery Experience.

Renee and Meyer Luskin with students at a Joe Turner’s Come and Gone Young Audiences Program performance. PHOTO CREDIT: RYAN MILLER/OUTLINE IMAGING

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**Civil rights: "Positive actions government should take to create equal conditions for all Americans."** (Independence Hall Association)

## HEROES

"These kids need to be made aware of the words and actions of our Black heroes, the people who got us from chains to where we are today." — *Evy, Immediate Family*

"I ask that if you teach your children one new name from the heroes of black history, please let it be Bayard Rustin." — Henry Louis Gates

IN THE OPENING SCENE of *Immediate Family*, Evy is working on a lesson for her high school students about African-American heroes of the Civil Rights Movement. Ronnie believes Evy's list is missing some important people, and suggests adding people that are not as well known today — people in the shadows of history for perhaps the same reason Evy excluded them from her lesson plan. Although she doesn't say it directly, Evy implies that she's chosen not to teach about them because they were gay.

Two of the historical figures talked about in *Immediate Family* are Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin.



**BAYARD RUSTIN (1912-1987)**

"If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society." — Bayard Rustin

RUSTIN WAS AN INFLUENTIAL CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER, writer, and mentor and highly trusted advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1947, Rustin coordinated and led the very first Freedom Rides protesting bus segregation. For that, he was arrested and sentenced to 22 days hard labor on a chain gang.

Rustin traveled to India in 1948. He learned Gandhi's principles of non-violent resistance and direct action protests — such as coordinated sit-ins and walk-outs, hunger and labor strikes. He is credited with teaching these principles to King in the 1950s when Rustin became a key player in the growing Civil Rights Movement. He helped organize the bus boycotts of 1955, and established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with King in 1957.

Rustin's largest accomplishment was the 1963 historic March on Washington. He was responsible for all logistics — everything from security and speeches, to buses and food for a crowd of over 250,000 people.

Rustin was arrested several times for civil disobedience, but an arrest in 1953 for sex with a man would affect the rest of his career, as well as his legacy. At a time when homosexuality was deeply stigmatized, opponents to racial equality would take advantage of anything that could discredit the movement. Rustin's sexuality was feared to be too great a liability for the movement and while he continued to be a force in the Civil Rights Movement, his role was kept hidden. Despite this, Rustin continued to fight for equality for all people. Rustin did not hide his sexuality; he refused to bury one part of his identity for the sake of another.

To restore his rightful place in history, President Obama awarded Bayard Rustin the Medal of Freedom posthumously in 2013.



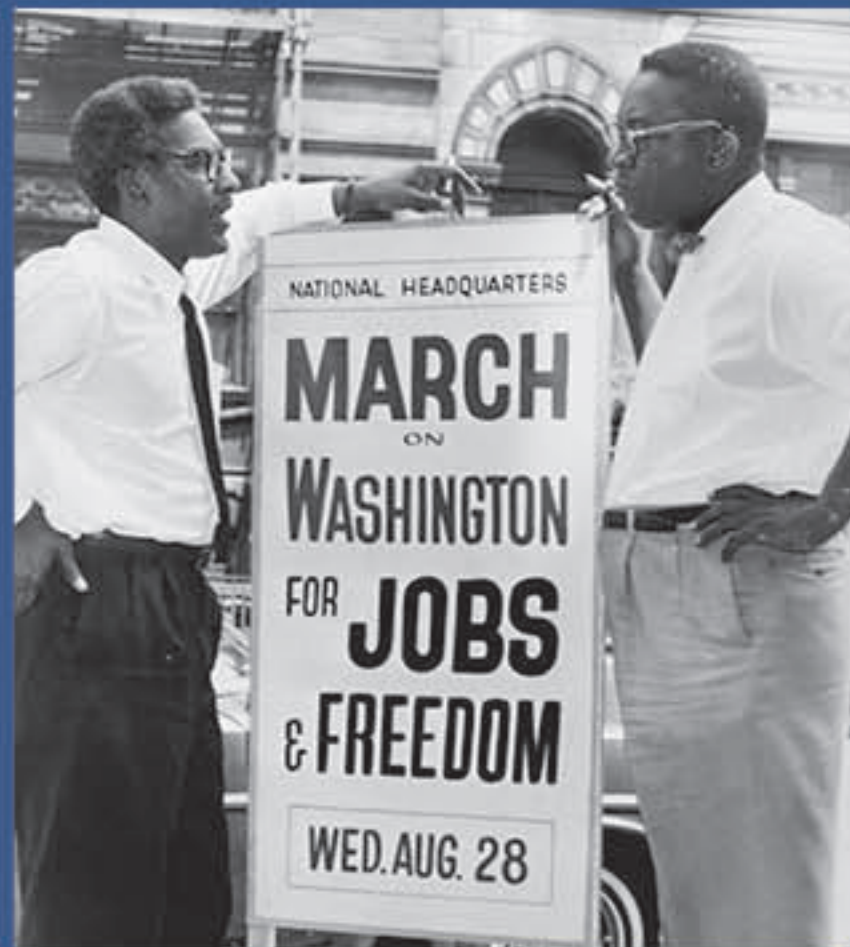
**JAMES BALDWIN (1924-1987)**

"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain." — James Baldwin

NOVELIST, ESSAYIST, POET AND PLAYWRIGHT, Baldwin wrote about and often harshly criticized the dynamics of race, sexuality, and class in America. He and Rustin were the only prominent members of the Civil Rights Movement who were openly gay.

Baldwin's books and philosophy provide two of the characters in *Immediate Family* — Evy and Kristian — with common ground. As they discuss his books *Giovanni's Room* and *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, they come to realize how many beliefs and values they share, despite their very different backgrounds.

Other important Baldwin works include *Notes of a Native Son*, *Another Country* and *Going to Meet the Man*.



L-R: Bayard Rustin and Cleveland Robinson.

Why do you think the playwright included these heroes in his play?  
Who are some other heroes of the Civil Rights Movement?  
Who is someone from history or your own life you consider a hero? Why?

# Civil Rights

## THE RIGHT TO MARRY

THE IDEAL OF MARRIAGE is finding a person who you love and who loves you just as you are, someone to spend your life with. But marriage is not only about love. It is also a legal contract. Governments throughout history have always made laws about marriage: defining what marriage is, who can be married, and what rights and protections married couples are guaranteed by law.

Some of the rights married couples have are: child custody and adoption, hospital visitation and medical decision-making, tax benefits and inheritance, and protection from being forced to testify against one's spouse in court.

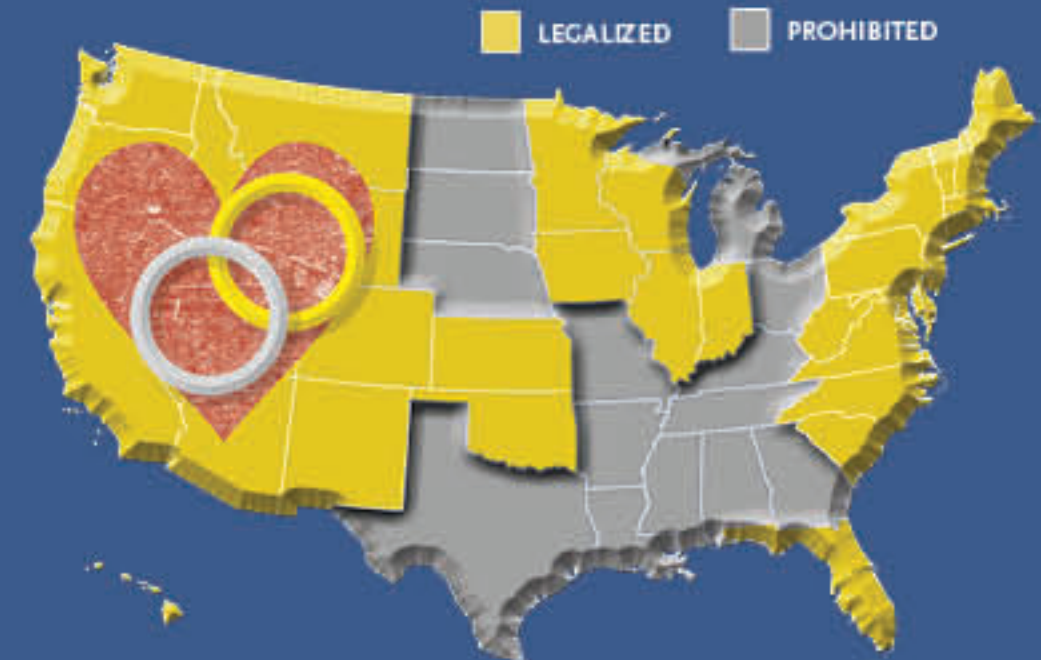
But not everyone has those rights today. Currently, extending marriage rights to all Americans regardless of their sexual orientation is a hot button topic. Less than fifty years ago, interracial marriage was also illegal, and attempts to make it legal produced equally intense emotions.

It wasn't until 1967, that the court case *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967) officially made interracial marriage legal and declared that marriage is a civil right that all Americans, regardless of race, are entitled to.

As of February 2015, same-sex marriage in the United States is legal in 37 states, the District of Columbia and some counties in Missouri. In April 2015, the Supreme Court will rule on whether or not marriage is a Constitutional right for everyone and by extension, whether or not individual states have the right to impose bans.

"Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under Heaven really matters?"

— James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1955).



Why do you think extending marriage rights causes such intense emotions and divisions?  
Do you consider marriage a civil right?

## BLIND SPOTS, BIAS AND BIGOTRY

RONNIE: "When you talk that way about white people you're talking about me."

TONY: "But I don't see you that way."

— *Immediate Family*

WE ALL HAVE BIASES, and often without being aware of it. Unconscious prejudices, while they aren't as combative as out-right bigotry, become blind spots that take away our ability to truly see those around us, to recognize and respect them as individuals.

It is unlikely Evy would consider herself prejudiced or homophobic. But as the audience, we can see her biases clearly. She describes the type of relationship she wants Jesse to have, a relationship with "someone who will support you unconditionally, someone who will forgive you when you are wrong, someone who will expect the best of you... someone who has a good and moral heart, who honors and loves you just as you are." She doesn't realize that her bias against homosexuality is preventing her from seeing that Jesse already has exactly that kind of relationship with Kristian.

Tony is the kind of person that gets along with everyone. But in an argument with Jesse, he makes generalizations about white people that Ronnie overhears and is hurt by. She reminds him that she's biracial, and to be more thoughtful, saying, "BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY, THINK."

Like Evy and Tony, many of us are operating with unconscious biases about race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class or political beliefs. Can we, like the characters we meet in *Immediate Family*, start to acknowledge our own biases, and work to change them? How can we do that within our own families? In our community? In our nation?

In a country with so much diversity, how do we talk about and accept our differences? How do we get to a place where no one has to hide any part of his or her identity? How can we make our differences into our greatest strengths?

"For all our blind spots and shortcomings, we are a people with the strength and generosity of spirit to bridge divides, to unite in common effort, and help our neighbors... I want future generations to know that we are a people who see our differences as a great gift, that we are a people who value the dignity and worth of every citizen..."

MY FELLOW AMERICANS, WE TOO ARE A STRONG, TIGHT-KNIT FAMILY."

— Excerpted from President Obama's 2013 State of the Union.





# G A M E S

“There is tradition in this game...”

— Evy, *Immediate Family*

IN *IMMEDIATE FAMILY*, emotions boil to a crisis point over a game of cards. The Bryants sit down to play Bid Whist as an alternative to arguing. At first, the trash-talking is done in good fun and with love. As the game progresses — although the words they use are about the game — it starts to get personal. They end up attacking and ganging up on each other, arguing over loyalties, criticizing each other's choices.

## ♣ Talking Trash

TALKING TRASH IS A BIG PART OF PLAYING BID WHIST. In fact, it's listed in many different instruction manuals — part of playing the game is finding creative ways to insult your opponent. Because the game requires a lot of concentration, trash-talking distracts your opponents, causing them to make mistakes. It's considered bad manners, though, if the put downs get into areas other than a player's Bid Whist skills (or lack of skills).

Do you play any games where trash-talking or put-downs are part of the game? What does the trash-talking add to the experience?

“Even if you don't get the rules, Bid Whist still promises a show. Cards get slammed, flicked, and thrown. Trash talking is king along with the occasional victory dance.”

— Christopher Johnson, NPR, “The Joy of Bragging: Rights at the Bid Whist Table”

“It's ours and it does bring us together.”

— Evy, *Immediate Family*

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## ♠ Bid Whist

Bid Whist is similar to Bridge and Spades. It involves strategy, card counting, and careful communication between partners.

THE GAME ORIGINATED IN TURKEY, and was brought to the United States by slave traders from Europe. At that time, slaves were forbidden to learn to read and write — activities thought to lead to independence and rebellion. But slave owners allowed card games like Bid Whist that taught and improved math skills, which were necessary to track cotton barrels and crops.

After slavery ended, Bid Whist continued to gain popularity, and became a favorite among porters and waiters working on train lines. As a result, many Bid Whist terms come from trains and cross-country travel. The phrase “running a Boston” is thought to come from the all night card games played on the longest routes. If you were the big winner, you could brag, “I won all the way from New Orleans to Boston!”

## ♦ Card Terms

**Bid:** The number of books a player thinks they can earn in a hand.  
**Book:** After each player has played one card, those four cards make up a book; also known as a trick.  
**Suit:** Spades, Hearts, Diamonds, or Clubs.  
**Boston:** When a team takes all of the books in a round, they've “run a Boston.”  
**Uptown:** Means high cards will win the book.  
**Downtown:** Low cards win the book.  
**Go Under:** When a team fails to earn the number of books they bid.

MANY FAMILIES BOND OVER GAMES; a favorite game can become an almost sacred tradition. Playing allows us to be active and engaged together, no matter what else is going on.

Is there a game that your family plays? Are there other activities you do as a family — cooking a meal, playing sports, making music? Are these a family tradition, passed down for generations or one that your immediate family started?

How do these games, activities or traditions help bring your family closer together?



A conversation with Playwright

# Paul Oakley Stovall

and Center Theatre Group  
Teaching Artist Marcos Nájera

**Marcos Najera:** Paul, what's your J-O-B?

**Paul Oakley Stovall:** You start with the toughest question! I call myself a self-employed contractor. I'm a writer, director, an actor, a producer, and I also work as an advance associate for the White House. Most people say [about themselves] “I work at a restaurant” or “I'm a firefighter,” but I've always thought that life was for touching as many different areas as I possibly could. So I have all those jobs and I love them all equally.

**What is your government work at the White House?**

What I do is called an advanced associate for the White House. It's basically a site and media logistics coordinator. It's almost as if I am a stage manager. When [the First Lady Michelle] Obama has an event that she is attending or speaking at, I am sent ahead with a team of six to eight people to plan out every movement she will make in that city.

**That's so cool! What do you learn as a theatre artist from your job working for Mrs. Obama and the White House?**

It's so funny, because a lot of my artist friends can't believe I do it. A lot of them go “How did you get THAT job?!” They sit they're looking at me like “I can do that!” and I say, “Yes, you can do that!” Because what I learn from it is teamwork. You can be told until you are blue in the face as an actor “It's not about you” or “I need you to move that chair in the blackout” — an actor's ego can get out of control. That never happens to me anymore. The pressure of a play is nothing compared to: “You better have that podium in place before [First Lady Michelle] Obama arrives!” That kind of pressure is real pressure! If something goes wrong, it is televised in front of millions of people! [Laughs] I now have a healthier respect for the crew when a theatre show happens.

**So, for kids who play sports they can probably understand being on a team is important — whether it's for the theatre or for the First Lady of the United States?**

Oh yeah! Every position is important. I'm definitely just on the crew, but I've watched from a distance [The First Lady] Obama handle pressure with grace and dignity and kindness. To see that! To see that firsthand, and to be witnessing history in that way and the dignity and grace in which [Mrs.] Obama carries herself is — every time I get in a situation where I want to lose my temper or shut down or not dig deeper, I just remember that. And it's helped me tremendously.

**You are almost like a bridge between the arts world and the political world. I love how you are bringing those two worlds together.**

I do have that secret wish in my heart. The bridge was always there. It's just in disrepair. The metaphor is we need to fix the bridge because it's broken!

**It sounds like you solve lots of problems in advance for the First Lady and the White House. What problems are you trying to solve as a playwright with your play *Immediate Family*?**

The play is set for “today.” But Marriage Equality is vastly different in 2015 than it was [when it was first performed] in 2012. We are addressing that.

My gay male friends want this story to be about Jesse and Kristian. But the story is not really about them. The story is about oldest sister Evy and the story is about Tony. And Tony is a modern, young, straight black man who is completely accepting of his gay brother.

## There's poetry in everyone.

I'm trying to be kind of subversive and sneakily revolutionary. I'm actually not saying to the Black community “You don't like gay people.” I'm actually saying, “In every family the situation is different and in every person, it's different.” Everyone walks away feeling challenged. We have bought into this white, straight, male storyline in America that we don't love our LGBT people.

Please, it was Puerto Rican drag queens that made Stonewall happen. We've always been at the front. I go home to my family reunion, and my family knows what's up. I was constructing all this fear [about being accepted by my family]. But my aunts and my cousins they're like “Bring home whoever you want. Do they eat barbecue? Well, then we're good!”

I know there are stories where it doesn't go right, but those are the only ones that get told. I wanted to tell one where the straight black brother is totally fine. But then the @#\$ goes wrong when it's a white person, and THERE is the comedy for me!

The straight brother is fine with [his brother] being gay, he doesn't care. But why is he bringing a white guy home?! [Laughs] Now I'm starting trouble. I want white people to be forced to listen to how the conversation goes when they are not in the room. That's what I'm interested in. I want to share that. I don't want to throw it in your face. I want to share it with you. This is how we talk when ya'll aren't around!

**That was one of the most exciting things for me when I read the script. Reading and hearing in my mind the language rhythms. I worked with Anna Deavere Smith for many years.**

Oh! I love Anna! I love Anna!

**So you know her whole thing is listening to the language and the mistakes and the rhythms when people talk — She just likes people's organic poetry. When I read *Immediate Family*, I realized this is the organic poetry of this family. There's no code-switching going on.**

Right! But then you get the code-switching a little bit when Kristian comes in. I like that too. Evy is an educated woman, okay? But then she sure will grab that dish rag and hit you with it, but then she'll turn around and speak a different way when she wants to... we can do that. And so I wanted to show that.

**That's a cool way to put it. What's a good way to explain what “code-switching” is to our students?** I'd say first of all, the beautiful thing about you all is that you already speak two languages. I think every black person in America in Bi-lingual, at least. I think everybody is capable of code-switching. Not everybody does. Not everybody chooses too. And so I was like, you know what, where's our kitchen-sink dramas? To me there was sort of a revolutionary thing to just have us talk-the-way-we-talk-in-our-home, deal-with-an-issue, and the curtain goes down. Everybody laughs. You take it home. That's kind of empowering in a way that we don't see.

There's poetry in everyone.

**CODE SWITCHING**  
“To customize style of speech to the audience or group being addressed.”

— Urban Dictionary





— Jesse, Immediate Family

Center Theatre Group Education and Community Partnerships

Michael Ritchie, Artistic Director	Camille Schenckan, Program Manager, Next Generation Initiatives	<p>Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.</p> <p><b>Education and Community Partnerships</b> Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.</p>	Center Theatre Group's education and community partnership programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:
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