Tracey Scott Wilson's *Buzzer* and the Myth of Post-racial America

Ivan Lacko

Abstract

Tracey Scott Wilson's theater play Buzzer *premiered in February 2012, well into the final year of Barack Obama's first term as President of the United States. The play deals with one fragile concept that stood at the beginning of Obama's victory in 2008, the notion of a "post-racial" America, that is, an America whose citizens have gone beyond the frames of thought defined by race. A significant part of Obama's campaign was based on the idea that race could be transcended not only in politics, but also in people's everyday lives. This paper attempts to examine how Tracey Scott Wilson's play tackles the intersection of political slogans, policies and strategies with the world of emotions, personal and familial history, and racial identity. My analysis will focus on racial and post-racial theories, the frailty of race transcendence, and the far-reaching consequences of social schemes, such as neighborhood gentrification and revitalization, or class and race segregation. Underneath the structures that constrain them, Wilson's characters desire to engage in a post-racial utopia, but are unable to transcend their racially and socially ingrained identities.*

Keywords

Post-racial; Tracey Scott Wilson; gentrification; race; politics; Barack Obama; racial identity

> *The young characters in* Buzzer *think they are beyond race. They were raised on ethnic food, multi-cultural TV and hip-hop. They don't discuss race because they don't see race. They know slavery was an abomination and all men are created equal. What's to discuss?*
>
> Tracey Scott Wilson (program note to *Buzzer*)

The 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States became a milestone in the lengthy struggle for racial and social equality. However, the race-transcending basis of Obama's campaign rhetoric as well as a great deal of his subsequent policy, revealed that the concept of a post-racial America had not yet transformed into an experience which could change the personal, psychological, and social patterns of Americans. Even though races interact within what is often a radically different social structure, the shared history of racial division and tension is hard to overcome. Contemporary American theater contributes to the discussion with an inquiry into the heart of the issue – examining how people's lives can often remain rooted in America's racial past despite the fact that their personalities are shaped explicitly by the country's post-racial present.

One such play is Tracey Scott Wilson's *Buzzer*, commissioned and premiered by the Pillsbury House Theater in Minneapolis in March 2012. In this paper I endeavor to show how the interplay among the play's three characters demonstrates the desire to engage in what is perceived by many as a post-racial utopia. And yet, Wilson's characters, who represent 21st century social groups, are unable to transcend their racially and socially rooted identities. Post-racialism thus becomes both an incentive to be more involved in social and political matters, and a double-edged sword threatening to destroy the past and the future at the same time.

Post-racialism and Utopia

In many respects, a post-racial society is in itself a mythical, even utopian notion. H. Roy Kaplan argues that for all the visible (and invisible) progress in racial issues in the United States, the differences are still so vast that they form an "insurmountable chasm" between large groups of the society.[1] The gap takes on new forms, as concepts of so--called color blindness have become a substitute for political correctness. H. Samy Alim and Angela Reyes present the difference between colorblindness and post-raciality as the dichotomy between not seeing race (being colorblind) and viewing race as irrelevant (being post-racial).[2] Kaplan extends this argument to an exploration of how the very idea of disregarding color (race) leaves out issues of distinctiveness and ethnically relevant particularities. He posits that the ensuing development in social, political and racial discourse has altered its very essence because "the features and achievements of blacks were redefined as insufficient when compared with whites and so the debate has shifted."[3] Following a biological line of reasoning, David Skinner catalogs recent attempts to use genetics and biology to outline future possibilities of either re-introducing racialized, if not eugenic models of racial discourse, or arriving at a post-racial point in science and social studies which might completely do away with views and beliefs based on race.[4] Skinner recognizes that this is a complex issue both in the research results that both above-mentioned approaches have produced as well as in the recognition of these results in academic discourse, and thus it is necessary to take into account positive as well as negative implications of the genetic and biological research in racial diversity: "That there are both utopian and dystopian visions, each suggesting that the growing ascendancy of biological accounts of human life will transform the ways in which 'race' is understood and acted upon, is significant."[5] An understanding of this significance can fuel a comprehensive study of the process by which diverse groups in the society seek their identities and of the way in which race enters (or leaves) this process.

In his 1962 text "A Letter to My Nephew" James Baldwin recognized that the acceptance and assimilation of African Americans was an intricate issue, one appropriated by the white majority and managed under slogans which took political and social shortcuts:

> There is no reason for you [dear James] to try to become like white men and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them, and I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love, for these innocent people have no other hope. They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men.[6]

---

1 H. Roy Kaplan, *The Myth of Post-racial America: Searching for equality in the age of materialism* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011), 110.

2 H. Samy Alim and Angela Reyes, "Complicating Race: Articulating Race Across Multiple Social Dimensions," *Discourse & Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 379.

3 Kaplan, *The Myth of Post-racial America*, 131.

4 David Skinner, "Racialized Futures: Biologism and the Changing Politics of Identity," *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 3 (2006): 469-471.

5 Skinner, "Racialized Futures," 471.

6 James Baldwin, "A Letter to My Nephew," in *The Fire Next Time*, (New York: Random House, 1993), 8-9.

Fifty years after Baldwin's essay, the debate has acquired new contours: it is no longer about acceptance, but rather about the transcendence of a necessity for acceptance because integration is presented as no longer crucial. Concepts such as colorblindness and post-racialism have attempted to simplify the discourse. What Wilson's play shows is how much of both the colorblind and post-racial approaches are based on a number of isolated examples, Obama's first election being the most prominent one. Yet these ways of looking at the issue only marginally reflects the multitudinous strata of American society and the complexity of the issue on a personal and social level (as recognized by Baldwin). Alim and Reyes confirm this view by referring to the above-mentioned approaches as "ideologies" which, regardless of the visible progress in desegregation, "conveniently ignore the facts that some segments of the American society have become more and more segregated since integration."[7]

In the theater such complex and contradictory social developments nurture an environment in which playwrights and theatre ensembles can create thought-provoking characters which represent both universal human themes and specific socially relevant issues. In other words, post-racialism as a concept or even an "ideology" can provide for the stage exciting and politically charged storytelling and character development. The idea of a post-racial America thus becomes a foundation for what Jill Dolan calls utopian performances, i.e. performances constructed around a utopian perspective of an experience or history. Dolan claims that such performances can "[call] the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense."[8] This is to say that just as stage characters often need a kind of utopia or myth to drive them forward, audiences also enjoy exploring spaces where the weight of their country's racial history is suspended, albeit for a short moment. In *Buzzer,* this momentary suspension (of the racial past rather than disbelief) brings the three characters together in an instant of hope, with the strong conviction that they have evolved socially in a manner reminiscent of Barack Obama's campaign, which made use of anticipation, promise and capability ("Yes we can!").

In Wilson's play, the young and successful black lawyer Jackson moves into a new apartment with his white girlfriend Suzy. After some time, they agree to accommodate Jackson's old school friend Don, a recovering drug addict from a privileged and rich white family. It was Don's father who provided Jackson financial support for university studies and thus helped Jackson bridge the racial gap in education and opportunity. Suzy and Jackson allow Don to stay in their apartment and congratulate themselves on their expression of goodwill, seemingly unburdened by any matters related to race, class and social standing. But the seemingly colorblind attitude of all three characters turns out to be provisional, as they begin to show that their apparent race transcendence is a misconception. Or, as Jasmine Nichole Cobb suggests, that "[t]here is never a culturally neutral ground for racial depiction—no place where our representational contexts have taken a reprieve from old ways of knowing race that create enough distance for the post--racial to occur."[9] Jackson's apartment is no different and soon the post-racial safety of the territory on which Jackson, Suzy, and Don operate loses its guarantees. There are

7 Alim and Reyes, "Complicating Race," 379.

8 Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.

9 Jasmine N. Cobb, "No We Can't! Postracialism and the Popular Appearance of a Rhetorical Fiction," *Communication Studies, 62:4*, 62, no. 4 (2011): 418.

three main reasons for this: the idealism behind Jackson's decision to move to a gentrified neighborhood, Suzy's low self-esteem and inadequacy to perform in her job, and Don's latent resentment of race-transcendence.

Gentrified Commitment

The apartment where Jackson and Suzy live is located in what used to be a rough neighborhood, but which is now being gentrified and revitalized. Jackson, now a well-off and successful lawyer, both remembers the rowdy neighborhood and sees the apartment as an investment which will only rise in value in the future as the area is further developed. For now, he and Suzy just have to endure the last throes of crime, exploitation and bullying as the neighborhood changes for the better. Jackson clings to the belief that gentrification is designed to transform underprivileged and crime-stricken neighborhoods into areas nurtured by middle-class prosperity.[10]

But this is an illusion – while Jackson wants to be part of a middle-class social structure, a transition by which he would detach himself from his African American economic and social past, he continues to employ means of social communication he learned in his African American family. At the same time, he owes much of his assertive behavior to Don's father. Jackson acts as a dominant male towards both Suzy and Don, and believes that displaying power is a way to intimidate the black locals who are harassing Suzy. He demands commitment and praises others solely on the basis of merit. Jackson believes that when people need help they ought to be helped – but they have to earn the rest. If he could get ahead – although with Don's father's financial and tutoring help – anyone else can as well, including Don himself.

In other words, Jackson is both strengthening the ties to his roots and trying to disengage himself from them at the same time. This contradiction inherent in Wilson's post-racial dramatic setup is reflected in the work of scholars like Tommie Shelby and Lionel K. McPherson, who extend the discourse of African American identity with the notion of a new type of "modes of blackness" which are much less "stigmatized by their association with a low status, racialized group."[11] This is manifested in Jackson's decision to live in a neighborhood currently undergoing the painful process of gentrification instead of moving to a suburban area – despite Suzy's discontent.

This perpetuates a myth visible both in 21st century American urban and social development as well as in the microcosm of Wilson's play: while each of the three characters harbors features of their social and racial past, their recent experience and social awareness steer them to ignore it. Consequently, they try to do both, exemplifying a larger social circumstance. They become a case in which Wilson dramatically demonstrates how, as Rachel E. Dwyer puts it "[g]rowing racial diversity may also have led to a more fragmented form of class segregation."[12] This segregation is rather implicit, but becomes visible in each of the characters' inability to give their "received" belief in post-raciality any substantial meaning.

---

10 David S. Kirk and John H. Laub, "Neighborhood Change and Crime in the Modern Metropolis," *Crime and Justice* 39, no. 1 (2010): 444.

11 Lionel K. McPherson and Tommie Shelby, "Blackness and Blood: Interpreting African American Identity," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2004): 185.

12 Rachel E. Dwyer, "Poverty, Prosperity and Place: The Shape of Class Segregation in the Age of Extremes," *Social Problems* 57, no. 1 (2010): 119.

Part of the awareness and image of the new, post-racial American has its source in the media presentation and representation of the issue. Cobb argues that "[p]ostracial images/imageries/imaginaries confront viewers with visual concepts about Black life in the United States and use these notions to make new meanings about the changing nation."[13] Wilson's play puts these images, notions and meanings on the edge of the audience's perception of the characters and their behavior. Jackson, at first confident and in control of everything with his omnipresent smartphone and imperturbable attitude, gradually strips off his post-racial layers and reveals the thick core of a shared, race-defined past:

> JACKSON: If any of these corner dudes out here wrote down this stuff, all the stuff they been through, nobody would give a crap. But you boy, you rich white boy – folks would be fascinated. 'He said what? He did that? He survived life with those filthy, nasty negroes in the projects?'[14]

This excerpt presents the idea of a reverse achievement – the misconception of success through the prism of a shifted scale or set of criteria. What Jackson says out loud as the conflict with Don (and Suzy) escalates is what until then has been withheld, or at least suppressed from the conversation. Melanie Bush refers to these latent notions as "the embedded structural realities of the racial order" and claims that these are often rather vague, "particularly to whites who have less personal exposure to the ways that racial discrimination operates both institutionally and interpersonally, and often without the language of race."[15] Jackson's outburst confirms his controlling attitude towards both Suzy and Don by exposing the racial base of their reality.

Out There Living It

Jackson openly declares his willingness to support and protect Suzy – in the traditional patriarchal sense – and does it in a manner that is succinct, decisive, often even sinister, for example in a scene in which he suspects that Suzy and Don are hiding a secret. In an attempt to hide the renewed feelings between them, Suzy and Don talk their way out of the suspicion by making Jackson believe that Don has started using drugs again. In another scene, when Suzy tells Jackson about the men who harass her on their street, she is merely implying that she is frightened and feels that incidents like this undermine her self-confidence and might result in her giving up her job as a school teacher in the neighborhood. But instead of talking it over with Suzy, Jackson springs into action and wants to confront the harassers (who are African American). In what appears to be a strategic power struggle, Don acts faster than Jackson and directly approaches the gangsters – to the utter shock and horror of both Jackson and Suzy. Evidently, Don, who like Jackson also has had first-hand experience with living in a rough neighborhood, imagines that his personal failure and addiction make him somewhat more compatible with the criminal elements on the streets.

---

13 Cobb, "No We Can't!," 407.

14 Chris Roberts, "'Buzzer' Challenges the Idea of 'Post-racial' America," Minnesota Public Radio, accessed January 11, 2012, http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2012/02/28/buzzer-post-racial.

15 Melanie E. L. Bush, *Everyday Forms of Whiteness: Understanding Race in a "Post-racial" World*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 250.

Both Don and Jackson (and to some degree Suzy) represent what Paul C. Taylor, explaining the process of racial identification, refers to as "[a] thin racial identity" to which "thicker meanings" are ascribed setting up conditions to organize "social life around those thicker meanings."[16] Regardless of the post-racial basis of their relationships, the three characters still behave within the limits of a racially defined framework because most of what motivates their conduct is emotional, subconscious, or completely unconscious. If racial deliberations are based on "[a] set of unconscious beliefs, anxieties, or motivations that can be triggered or manipulated by certain code of words or primed with racial images," then Wilson's characters present a contradiction – they are behaviorally accustomed to post-racial sophistication while their intrinsic identities set them apart on the basis of their race.[17] The central issue of Wilson's dramatic discourse is to further catalyze the longing of Americans to engage in a discussion about race and the nation's history, politics, economics, and psychological underpinnings of the culture. Wilson never loses sight of the greatest challenge in this process: to recognize "how much uncertainty we have about race and how much ambiguity it often entails."[18]

Buzzer presents a social world where the characters feel they are past racial and other stereotypes, yet their behavior confirms that this is not the case. Jackson might have risen above the clichéd status of an underachieving and uneducated young man from the slums, but he has replaced this image with the stereotype of a successful and ever-busy lawyer. Similarly, Suzy transcends the conventions of a white, middle-class woman, yet remains an insecure, low-status partner to Jackson. Don's character epitomizes the disenchantment of a rich boy for whom achievement and education represent the domineering behavior of his father. Melanie Bush comments on a similar issue when she claims that "[w]hile young whites feel increasingly insecure about their futures, high levels of continuing segregation (along racial and class lines) mean that most have little close interaction or exposure to experiences different than their own so they are unaware of the privileges they do have."[19] In Don's case, however, he ends up on the street, an addict who feels closer to the underprivileged and ethnically dissimilar denizens of the ghetto than to his own privileged and racially homogenous community. This creates an ironic effect in the play, particularly in the scenes in which Jackson and Don argue about who has had a more authentic social experience:

> DON: Cause I was out there living it, you were inside reading a book.
> JACKSON: So I should have been out there getting high with you?[20]

Specific personal experience thus acquires a larger, and perhaps more universal, cultural dimension. Don rejects the neoliberal notion that one only has to work hard to succeed, thus directly opposes Jackson's denunciation of Don's socially inherent privileges. Between the two men is Suzy, who desires achievement, independence and self-direction. She finds these qualities in Jackson, but also feels drawn to Don's ambivalence towards them. This inconsistency explicitly mirrors the attitude of a good portion of the general public and the media towards racial issues during Barack Obama's 2008 presidential

16 Paul C. Taylor, "Post-Black, Old Black," *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (2007): 634.

17 John Hartigan, *What Can You Say? America's National Conversation on Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 183.

18 Hartigan, *What Can You Say?* 191.

19 Bush, *Everyday Forms of Whiteness*, 250.

20 Roberts, " 'Buzzer' Challenges the Idea of 'Post-racial' America."

campaign. The similarity between this media-saturated public event and the psychology of Wilson's characters deserves further attention.

Yes We Can?

The historic moment in which an African American became President of the United States unleashed a whole series of commentaries in which journalists and academics alike heralded the coming of a new, post-racial age. There were two main reasons for this. First, although an African American was running for the highest public office in the country, racial issues were either completely omitted from the election discourse, or they were only hinted at without allowing a more penetrating discussion. Commentators quickly recognized this as a characteristic feature of the campaign. John B. Judis, for example, noted that "race [had] assumed a subtle, often unspoken form during campaign season."[21] Jany Scott claimed that Barack Obama displayed an inclination towards "[speaking] about race indirectly or implicitly, when he speaks about it at all."[22] Second, in spite of the avoidance of mentioning racial issues directly in the election campaign, the media popularized the simple notion that the fact that an African American was running was clear evidence that racism was no longer an issue in American society, a generalization which resulted in more ease in the public discussion about race. On the other hand, as Melanie Bush notes, the 2008 election brought not only "more intergroup familiarity, greater visibility of persons of color in the public sphere (whether representative or not)," but also "an overall greater sense of vulnerability, and concerns about the future. During the election of 2008, 'race' [but not specific racial and economic issues] became ubiquitous in popular discourse leading to an increased comfort with talking about the subject matter though not significant cross-experience dialogue."[23]

This absence of a penetrating discussion and open public debate about the particularities of the individual experience is exactly what Tracey Scott Wilson attempts to make up for within the political and psychological micro-triangle of her play. What each of the characters vainly attempts is post-raciality in outward expression and opinion, while at heart they keep struggling with their racial history. Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price assign a similar attribute to Barack Obama's racial rhetoric (or lack thereof) when they assert that it seems impossible for (black) candidates to "simultaneously de-emphasize race and also engage in racial advocacy."[24] *Buzzer* demonstrates that the problem lies much deeper than the readiness of the white majority to engage in political correctness. "The intricacies of identity are clearly reflected in this election and the powerful influence of identity on all aspects of political processes suggests that race transcendence for any candidate may be impossible," say Sinclair-Chapman and Price, suggesting that post-raciality, in particular as far as political discourse is concerned, may present a contradiction in terms.[25]

---

21 John B. Judis, "The Big Race: Obama and the psychology of the color barrier," *The New Republic*, May 28 (2008), accessed August 3, 2012, http://www.tnr.com/article/the-big-race.

22 Jany Scott, "A Biracial Candidate Walks His Own Fine Line," *New York Times*, December 29, 2007, accessed May 14, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/29/us/politics/29obama.html?pagewanted=all.

23 Bush, *Everyday Forms of Whiteness*, 249.

24 Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price, "Black Politics, the 2008 Election, and the (Im)possibility of Race Transcendence," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 4 (2008): 744.

25 Sinclair-Chapman and Price, "Black Politics," 744.

Wilson's characters become emblems of this contradiction – their political and public selves collide with their personal character. In the ensuing turmoil, they often forget about their asserted post-raciality and act purely on the basis of their personal and emotional frame of mind. Melanie Bush's contention that our post-raciality is measured primarily by our individual history becomes significant here because it becomes part of the argument that in the process of becoming post-racial we have disregarded "facts, structural realities, historical patterns, etc." and that frequently "[i]ndividual incidences of offensive language and bias crimes are used as a proxy for dealing with 'race' rather than the pervasive policies and practices that discriminate with racially devastating consequences."[26] In a theatrical sense, this makes the characters in *Buzzer* subjects who escape a linear definition of themselves, or in other words, they become both the agents and means of dramatic and social action. Theater theorist Mark Fortier has put this succinctly: "To be a subject […] is to be something other than free or autonomous, something other than self-created or independent of others. But subject also implies, in grammar or liberal political theory, a doer, capable of independent action and self-direction."[27] For Don, Suzy and Jackson, the interaction of dependence and independence climaxes during a scene when the emotional triangle falls apart and in the final scene, when Don and Suzy decide to ignore the sound of the house buzzer.

The Buzzer

The 2012 Pillsbury House Theater production of Wilson's *Buzzer*, directed by Marion McClinton, makes use of rapid and fluent transitions between scenes in which the characters undergo significant transformations and changes. As a result, scenes blend into one another and so do the characters' identities, only to return later with a more charged resolution but a less obvious purpose. The set is mundane and props are ordinary but both serve as the backdrop to the mostly social, political and racial consequences of the characters' actions. For example, Jackson's ever-ringing cell phone, an instrument of daily use, not only symbolizes his power as a successful lawyer, but also functions as a device which controls Suzy and Don because they fall silent every time it rings.

Silence is what hangs heavy over the relationship of the three protagonists, as well as over the entire issue of the politically induced notion of post-raciality. Writing about race, whiteness and citizenship, Liliana Herakova and her research team have aptly concluded that "[o]ur silences, in the contexts of dialogues about race, perform our learning to belong."[28] It is the same for the characters in Wilson's *Buzzer*: they desire to be vociferous about their post-racial attitude, including all of the related issues, but they go silent at the most crucial moments. For Jackson, it is the moment when the love affair between Suzy and Don would undermine his position of control. Consequently, he refuses to talk and discuss the situation – he just orders Don to leave. For Don and Suzy, who bitterly but without a word of protest bend under Jackson's will, the pinnacle moment comes at the very end of the play when they refuse to let a black boy in the apartment house. After they buzz in a young white man dressed in a suit, Don and Suzy silently endure the black boy's repeated ringing and banging on the front door. He

26 Bush, *Everyday Forms of Whiteness*, 250.

27 Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London;, New York: Routledge, 2002), 83.

28 Liliana L. Herakova et al., "Voicing Silence and Imagining Citizenship: Dialogues about Race and Whiteness in a ''Postracial'' Era," *Communication Studies, 62:4*, 62, no. 4 (2011): 384.

can see them and they can see him. But they turn away, ignore the sound of the buzzer, and sit through his futile attempts to get inside the house in what soon becomes heavy and sinister silence. This silence concludes the play which started with incessant and excited talk about understanding and racial tolerance.

If the collective post-racial or colorblind attitudes and behavior of the three characters in *Buzzer* is what Herakova considers to be "part of the contemporary U.S. performances of citizenship,"[29] then Wilson's play might rather point at a different phenomenon – a concept termed by Alim and Reyes who suggest that "rather than *post--racial*, American society is in fact *hyperracial*" because "we are constantly discussing race while seeking ways to avoid having to do so, constantly divided by race while staking claims that it 'doesn't matter', and constantly orienting to race while at the same time denying the overwhelming evidence which demonstrates the myriad ways that American society is fundamentally structured by it."[30] And so, though the metaphorical buzzer might be easy to press and let *some* people in, it is still rather hard to let *everybody* in.

Bibliography

Alim, H. Samy, and Reyes, Angela. "Complicating Race: Articulating Race Across Multiple Social Dimensions." *Discourse & Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 379–384.

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time.* New York: Random House, 1993

Bush, Melanie E. L. *Everyday Forms of Whiteness: Understanding Race in a "Post-racial" World*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011.

Cobb, Jasmine N. "No We Can't! Postracialism and the Popular Appearance of a Rhetorical Fiction." *Communication Studies*, 62, no. 4 (2011): 406–421.

Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Dwyer, Rachel E. "Poverty, Prosperity and Place: The Shape of Class Segregation in the Age of Extremes." *Social Problems* 57, no. 1 (2010): 114–137.

Fortier, Mark. *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. London;, New York: Routledge, 2002.

Hartigan, John. *What Can You Say? America's National Conversation on Race*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Herakova, Liliana L., Dijana Jelaca, Razvan Sibii, and Le Cooks. "Voicing Silence and Imagining Citizenship: Dialogues about Race and Whiteness in a ''Postracial'' Era." *Communication Studies, 62:4,* 62, no. 4 (2011): 372–388.

Judis, John B. "The Big Race: Obama and the psychology of the color barrier." *The New Republic*, May 28 (2008). Accessed August 3, 2012. http://www.tnr.com/article/the-big-race.

Kaplan, H. R. *The Myth of Post-racial America: Searching for Equality in the Age of Materialism*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011.

Kirk, David S., and John H. Laub. "Neighborhood Change and Crime in the Modern Metropolis." *Crime and Justice* 39, no. 1 (2010): 441–502.

McPherson, Lionel K., and Tommie Shelby. "Blackness and Blood: Interpreting African American Identity." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2004): 171–192.

29 Herakova et al., "Voicing Silence and Imagining Citizenship," 374.

30 Alim and Reyes, "Complicating Race," 380.

Roberts, Chris. "'Buzzer' Challenges the Idea of 'Post-racial' America." Accessed January 11, 2012. http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2012/02/28/buzzer-post-racial.
Scott, Jany. "A Biracial Candidate Walks His Own Fine Line." *New York Times*, December 29, 2007. Accessed May 14, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/29/us/politics/29obama.html?pagewanted=all.
Sinclair-Chapman, Valeria, and Melanye Price. "Black Politics, the 2008 Election, and the (Im)possibility of Race Transcendence." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 4 (2008): 739–745.
Skinner, David. "Racialized Futures: Biologism and the Changing Politics of Identity." *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 3 (2006): 459–488.
Taylor, Paul C. "Post-Black, Old Black." *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (2007): 625–640.

Ivan Lacko is an assistant professor at the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, where he teaches courses in American studies and literature. His recent research is focused on political aspects of 21st century American and (Central) European theatre, in particular as regards the issue of the social vs. the aesthetic function of theatre. In 2012 he was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Minnesota, where he studied local community-based and socially engaged theatre.