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The Stage of Contamination: Performing Environmental Racism through Water in Erika Dickerson-Despenza's *cullud wattah*

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Abstract

The paper examines Erika Dickerson-Despenza's award-winning play cullud wattah *(2021) as a powerful dramatization of environmental injustice centering on the Flint Water Crisis as both a historical event and a symbol of systemic racism in the United States. Through the lens of environmental justice scholarship and the concept of "slow violence," this analysis explores how race, class, and gender intersect to shape unequal access to clean water. The play foregrounds the lived experiences of a working-class African American family grappling with the physical, psychological, and spiritual consequences of toxic water contamination. The Cooper women represent generational responses to oppression, ranging from resignation and complicity to spiritual resilience and political activism. The staging transforms contaminated water into a powerful symbol of both trauma and resistance, while the absence of theatrical closure emphasizes the unresolved nature of the crisis. Integrating legal, political, and cultural critiques,* cullud wattah *emerges as a compelling call to action advocating for truth-telling, reparations, and structural change.*

Keywords

Flint Water Crisis, cullud wattah, environmental (in)justice, systemic racism, water contamination

In 2014, the decision by Michigan state officials to divert Flint's municipal water supply from Lake Huron to the heavily polluted Flint River triggered one of the most devastating public health crises in recent U.S. history. Despite residents' immediate complaints about the foul-smelling, discolored water, officials dismissed concerns and failed to implement proper corrosion control, resulting in widespread lead poisoning, a spike in Legionnaires' disease, and long-term health effects—especially for children. The crisis exposed not only failures in public infrastructure and governance but also the enduring legacy of environmental racism, as Flint's predominantly African American and low-income population was disproportionately impacted by institutional neglect.

In response to this protracted disaster, playwright and activist Erika Dickerson-Despenza authored *cullud wattah* (2021), a dramatization of the crisis as lived by a working-class Black family in Flint which frames the public health emergency as merely a palpable manifestation of deeper systemic injustice.

The people of Flint were victims of what Rob Nixon terms "*slow violence*"—a form of harm that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[1] As part of such prolonged injustice, entire communities are not only deprived of basic necessities such as clean air or water, but also exposed to disproportionate environmental risks.

Rita Turner highlights the intersection of race and class, arguing that slow violence "slowly poisons people of color and poor individuals and deprives them of access to healthy

1 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

food and healthy living environments."[2] The correlation of racial and economic marginalization with increased exposure to environmental hazards has been extensively documented. Examples include foundational studies which laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarship in the field of environmental justice such as *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites* published in 1987 by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, and Robert D. Bullard's seminal 1990 work *Dumping in Dixie*.

As demonstrated by numerous studies, including those above, the lack of access to clean water and exposure to contaminated sources—due in large part to the disproportionate siting of waste disposal facilities—constitutes a striking manifestation of environmental neglect and systemic injustice. The fact that water contamination has become a central concern in many environmental justice movements further illustrates the urgency and widespread relevance of this issue.[3]

Despite international legislative advancements—most notably the 2010 United Nations resolution recognizing access to water as a fundamental human right—as of July 2021, approximately 2.5 billion people still lacked daily access to affordable, reliable, safe, and clean water.[4] In the United States, pursuant to the Clean Water Act, both industrial and municipal entities are legally obligated to treat wastewater prior to its discharge into surface water bodies. Additionally, state governments are tasked with monitoring and maintaining water quality standards for certain designated uses, including recreation, the potable water supply, and ecological preservation.[5]

The case of Flint, Michigan, serves as a paradigmatic example of the failure of both local and state authorities to uphold the basic human rights of communities of color—specifically, the right to safe and clean water. Compounding the damage from the controversial decision to change Flint's water supply to the heavily polluted Flint River was the subsequent reluctance of authorities to address the resulting public health crisis. The policies seem to have been driven not merely by fiscal considerations, but also by a broader disregard for marginalized communities, whose limited legal and political leverage rendered them especially vulnerable. Investigations conducted by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Flint Water Advisory Task Force supported the claim of the residents of Flint, explicitly attributing responsibility to governmental officials and identifying entrenched racial segregation as a central factor contributing to the crisis.[6]

In addition to socio-economic and racial factors that result in unequal access to clean water, Farhana Sultana highlights gender as a critical axis of environmental inequality:

2 Rita Turner, "The Slow Poisoning of Black Bodies: A Lesson in Environmental Racism and Hidden Violence," *Meridians* 15, no.1 (2016): 191.

3 Robert D. Bullard qtd. in Dorceta E. Taylor, "Environmental Justice Paradigm," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 4 (January 2000): 538.

4 Farhana Sultana, "Gendering the Human Right to Water in the Context of Sustainable Development," *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Environmental Politics* (July 2021): 538. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371697763_Gendering_the_Human_Right_to_Water_in_the_Context_of_Sustainable_Development>.

5 Claudia Copeland, "Clean Water Act: A Summary of the Law" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL30030.pdf>.

6 "Michigan Civil Rights Commission, *The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Civil Rights, 2017), 2; Flint Water Advisory Task Force, *Final Report* (2016).

> The right to water and gender equity are linked—the former can enable the latter, and the latter cannot be achieved without the former. Water justice requires attention to both the right to water and gendered power relations in local water governance and lived water realities. However, just providing water will not bring about all women's empowerment equally, as intersectionality analyses demonstrate that gender is co-constitutive of class, race, caste, etc.[7]

In Flint, a significant proportion of those affected by toxic contaminants in the tap water were African American women, whose reproductive health was compromised.

Addressing the impact of environmental injustice extends beyond academic scholarship, and should be equally undertaken by authors of non-fiction. Rob Nixon acknowledges the significant potential of writer-activists, who

> are enraged by injustices they wish to see redressed, injustices they believe they can help expose, silences they can help dismantle through testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories in the face of formidable odds. These writers are often restless and versatile, ready to challenge what Edward Said termed "the normalized quiet of unseen power."[8]

Theresa J. May emphasizes the significant role of theatre in advancing environmental justice, noting that, "like the environmental justice movement, theatre forces the question of human ecology, inviting examination, for example, of the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on the poor, the working class, and communities of color."[9] Despite its significant potential, environmental justice remains insufficiently addressed by American playwrights.

The Chicago-born playwright and activist Erika Dickerson-Despenza stands as a notable exception, as she seeks to "write about women living under siege—environmental racism, classism, and gender dynamics, and what this does to women and girls in the Black Midwest."[10] Dickerson-Despenza's work represents an example of what Lynn Jacobson calls: "a move toward blending ecological theatre—plays dealing with some aspect of our failing ecosystem—with environmental theatre or 'theatre of place'—productions grounded in a specific landscape or locale."[11]

Dickerson-Despenza identifies a longstanding void in American theatre: "There is something unexplored in theater about the relationship to water that Black people have in the United States from the Middle Passage onward."[12] In an effort to address this representational gap, the playwright has created a tetralogy that explores pivotal moments in Black American history, including the Middle Passage, the 1918 lynching of Mary Turner, Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans, and the Flint Water Crisis.

7 Sultana, "Gendering the Human Right," 550.

8 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 6.

9 Theresa J. May, "Greening the Theater: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage," 86, <https://theresajmay.com/files/Greening-the-Theatre-Theresa-J-May-IDLS.pdf>.

10 Arifa Akbar, "Drama about Flint water crisis takes major theatre award," The Guardian, April 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/apr/07/drama-about-flint-water-crisis-takes-major-theatre-award>.

11 Lynn Jacobson, "Green Theatre: Confessions of an Eco-Reporter." American Theatre, February 1, 1992, <https://www.americantheatre.org/1992/02/01/green-theatre-confessions-of-an-eco-reporter/>.

12 Charlene Adhiambo, "Interview with Erika Dickerson-Despenza: Write the Thing that Changes the World." PlayCo, August 14, 2020, < https://www.playco.org/community/interview-with-erika-dickerson-despenza >.

In Dickerson-Despenza's 2021 play *cullud wattah*, water is transformed into a weapon of environmental injustice, as the protagonists are denied access to clean drinking water and face severe health risks due to contamination of the local river. Rather than functioning as a source of life, water becomes an agent of death and destruction. As the playwright poignantly asserts: "This is the contention: water is a beautiful danger; a life-giving undertaker."[13]

Drama offers the playwright not only a means of documenting the causes and consequences of the tragic events that have shaped the lives of both the real-life residents of Flint and the fictional characters in Dickerson-Despenza's play, but also a powerful platform for advocating social change and environmental justice. She explicitly acknowledges the activist dimension of theatrical performance and its capacity to raise awareness, stating, "Because I'm a grassroots organiser and activist, I think of all my work as a vehicle. My goal is to radicalise people … I will explore an issue in a creative way to raise collective consciousness."[14] By breaking the fourth wall and actively engaging the audience in the dramatic action, the playwright effectively enhances awareness of the issues presented on stage and provokes a profound and persistent emotional reaction.

Clean wattah/durty wattah

The theme of environmental racism is immediately signaled by the play's title. Written in African American Vernacular English, the linguistic variety used by the main protagonists, the title *cullud wattah* carries both linguistic and cultural meaning, evoking not only the visibly polluted state of Flint's tap water, but also the historical term "colored" once used to classify African Americans during segregation. Environmental harm is thus linked to racism through language.

The play centers on three generations of women from a working-class African American family who share not only a home, but also the intergenerational trauma resulting from decades of systemic exploitation and discrimination. The Cooper women contend with health issues stemming from prolonged exposure to polluted drinking water, as well as with the financial precarity that hinders their ability to address these existential challenges.

The family matriarch Big Ma, along with her two daughters Marion and Ainee, each embody distinct generational responses to racial injustice. Deeply rooted in religious faith, Big Ma appears largely desensitized to the manifestations of (environmental) racism surrounding her, having placed her trust in a higher authority. Her pragmatic elder daughter, Marion, adopts a strategy of assimilation in an effort to secure the family's financial stability.

By disregarding evidence that the contaminated river water was corroding automotive parts and by failing to inform the community of the associated health risks, Marion has become complicit in the very injustice that ultimately afflicts her own family. In contrast, Ainee, the younger sister, assumes the role of the activist, "the family historian & rebel interested in building political

13 Charlene Adhiambo, "Interview with Erika Dickerson-Despenza: Write the Thing that Changes the World." PlayCo, August 14, 2020, < https://www.playco.org/community/interview-with-erika-dickerson-despenza>.

14 Arifa Akbar, "Drama about Flint water crisis takes major theatre award," *The Guardian*, April 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/apr/07/drama-about-flint-water-crisis-takes-major-theatre-award>.

power"[15] committed to pursuing racial justice and demanding accountability and reparations for the harm inflicted on her family and community.

The youngest generation is represented by Marion's daughters. Seventeen-year-old Reesee embraces her African heritage and places her faith in Yemoja, the Yoruba goddess of water as a source of spiritual and cultural empowerment. Nine-year-old Plum, whose name alludes both to the color of her skin and to *plumbum*—the Latin term for lead—serves as a symbolic embodiment of the crisis. Her diagnosis with leukemia caused by exposure to elevated levels of lead in the tap water renders her name a tragic *nomen omen***.** Given that lead contamination constitutes a recurring burden for communities of color, particularly affecting the young, it is unsurprising that Erika Dickerson-Despenza dedicates her play to "all the blk & undocumented children of Flint, Michigan."[16]

The narrative is structured around key dates that mark critical milestones in the Flint Water Crisis, including the declaration of a state of emergency by local and state officials, the onset of organized public protests, the highly anticipated visit of President Obama—which, for many Flint residents, resulted in heightened feelings of disillusionment—and a pivotal federal court ruling mandating that affected residents be provided with water filters and supplied with bottled water. The water filter emerges as a potent symbol of hope and potential restoration for the entire Cooper family.

The challenges faced by the Cooper family are deeply rooted in the historical development of the region, particularly in the rise of the automobile industry, which once served as the primary source of employment for many local families. At the same time, this very industry has contributed to the long-term environmental degradation that endangers the health of those living near its factories, which frequently dispose of toxic waste contaminating both air and water sources.

Several members of the family suffer from medical conditions directly linked to exposure to contaminated water. Marion and her eldest daughter experience severe dermatological reactions characterized by persistent rashes affecting extensive areas of their bodies; Ainee has endured multiple miscarriages; and the youngest, Plum, is undergoing recovery following chemotherapy for leukemia.

As a result of her illness, Plum experiences somnambulism and is tormented by recurring nightmares related to water contamination:

> Plum: i keep havin this dream where im in thuh bathtub
> Reesee: clean wattah or durty wattah?
> Plum: durty & im in a white dress tryna make everything clean again but i get tired so i lay back & close my eyes/ but thuh wattah keeps risin/& i slip under &/ &
> Reesee: die?...
> Plum: …i dont wanna die/in durty wattah.[17]

Given the well-documented health risks associated with proximity to industrial facilities, marginalized communities are frequently compelled to navigate a difficult trade-off between potential environmental and health hazards and the economic stability such industries may offer.

15 Erika Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud wattah* (Samuel French, 2022), vi.

16 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud wattah*, vii.

17 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 94.

As Big Ma recalls, "Back in my day General Motors dumped raw sewage in thuh river."[18] Yet, according to her, few dared to question the actions of major manufacturers: "We was so happy to escape Mississippi sharecropping we just kept quiet / aint ax no questions / a niggah with questions git fired / or git disappeared."[19] Furthermore, structural factors such as residential segregation significantly constrain their ability to relocate to safer, less polluted environments.

This passive stance aligns with findings in environmental justice scholarship which suggest that large polluting industries often choose to locate facilities in communities where resistance is expected to be minimal—typically economically marginalized areas predominantly inhabited by people of color.[20] In addition to the study *Toxic Wastes and Race*, this pattern has been substantiated by the work of researchers such as Mohai and Bryant, who have consistently demonstrated the central role of race in environmental decision-making and exposure.[21]

Water supply charges in Flint represent another blatant example of systemic discrimination, disproportionately affecting the city's ethnic minority residents. Unlike in other parts of the United States, small-scale consumers in Flint were systematically overcharged, while General Motors—whose annual water consumption accounted for nearly half of the city's total—was granted significantly reduced rates. This inequitable pricing structure particularly impacted African American communities residing in the city center who, unlike the financially secure, predominantly white suburban population, lacked the freedom to choose an alternative water supplier. As Ainee observes: "every month we overcharged for thuh poison running out thuh faucet."[22] Despite its substandard quality, the water provided to Flint's already economically challenged residents has remained among the most expensive in the country.[23]

Similarly to many Americans who face systemic deprivation on the basis of race, the members of the Cooper family are denied access to a basic necessity essential for survival: safe drinking water. Clean water has become a scarce resource, and bottled water—necessary for hygiene and cooking—lies beyond their financial reach. This scarcity is symbolically represented through recurring visual motifs, such as a vase of roses without water or the community's inability to perform baptisms. In this context, the act of the teenage character Reesee offering water as a sacrifice to the Yoruba goddess Yemoja powerfully underscores both her desperation and her determination to secure healing and salvation for her family and broader community.

The lack of safe drinking water constitutes the central concern for the Cooper women, occupying not only their daily conversations but also their subconscious thoughts and dreams. Although not religious in the conventional sense, the characters ascribe a near-sacred quality to water. This reverence is evident in an exchange among the women:

18 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 27.

19 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 27.

20 Dorceta E. Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution and Residential Mobility* (NewYork: New York University Press, 2014), 82.

21 Paul Mohai and Bunyan Bryant, "Environmental Racism: Reviewing the Evidence," in *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards,* ed. Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 167.

22 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 59.

23 In 2015, residents of Flint paid slightly over $864 for 60,000 gallons of water—an amount nearly three times higher than the national average. Martinez, Michael, "Flint paid highest water bills in 2015, survey finds," *CNN*, February 27, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/17/health/flint-water-highest-bills-rates-study/index.html>.

Big Ma: *thuh wattah will return*
Marion: *as all wattah does*
Reesee: *to where it come from*
Big Ma: *whut it usta be*
Plum: *good wattah or bad wattah?*
Marion, Reesee, Big Ma: *all wattah*
Marion: *got a temper*
Big Ma: *like gawd.*[24]

The protagonists of the play also believe that all water has memory.[25]

The necessity of water rationing in *cullud wattah* also directly impacts the protagonists' dietary practices. The characters have adapted to preparing meals that require minimal water, with each act of cooking preceded by careful calculation of the liquid required. As Thanksgiving, one of the most culturally significant national holidays, approaches—a time traditionally marked by communal meals and familial gatherings for people of all races or classes—the narrative accentuates the likelihood that many Flint residents will be unable to partake in the celebration.

Contaminating the stage

The urgent issue of environmental injustice embodied by members of the Cooper family is further emphasized through the play's staging. The minimalist set is dominated by vessels filled with liquid in various shades of brown, symbolizing each day without safe water. Upon entering the theatre, audience members are presented with bottles of dated, contaminated water, which they are invited to add to the set. Throughout the performance, the protagonists continue to fill plastic bottles with tap water, labeling each with the precise date. In addition to the omnipresent containers, the glowing tally marks drawn by the character Plum serve as a persistent visual reminder that it has been 936 days since Flint last had access to clean water.

As the lives of the main protagonists revolve around water, the play is predominantly set in a bathroom dominated by a sturdy clawfoot tub, which has become stained with rust after coming into contact with contaminated tap water. As a result of a faulty faucet, the audience is confronted with a powerful multisensory experience, both witnessing the drops falling and hearing their distinct sound.

In *cullud wattah*, the bathroom fails to function as a space of comfort, purification, or rejuvenation; rather, it serves as a silent witness to the protagonists' pain and struggles. The play both begins and ends in this setting, with the final scene mirroring the opening. The bathroom functions as a site of symbolic allure for Plum, whose episodes of somnambulism consistently draw her to this space. It is within this space that the youngest family member meets her death, drowning in the tub while sleepwalking. Plum's nightmares manifest in reality, and her helpless mother is unable to prevent the contaminated water from enveloping her motionless body: "Marion hears the gushing of water & darts to the bathroom. The tub overflows with contaminated water. Plum

24 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 4.

25 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 5.

is submerged & unconscious."[26] Although her death is not the immediate result of lead poisoning, it is nonetheless a direct consequence of the ongoing water contamination.

Plum's drowning may be interpreted as a symbolic release from the desperate circumstances she has endured. The poignancy of Plum's premature death is intensified by the arrival of the long-awaited water filter, which is discovered on the doorstep moments too late. As her older sister Reesee reaches for it, she abruptly halts mid-motion, a gesture that is immediately followed by the dimming of the stage lights—symbolically reinforcing the devastating consequences of delayed intervention. The physical and psychological damage inflicted by racial injustice is deeply entrenched and, as Erika Dickerson-Despenza observes, the family may never be able to "filter out the truth."[27] This metaphor stresses the enduring nature of trauma and the impossibility of fully erasing the lived consequences of systemic oppression.

The way the protagonists handle the limited supply of clean water is ritualized, highlighting its symbolic and material value. In the play's opening scene, the older women prepare a soothing and non-toxic bath for the youngest family member. Each woman carries a mug of clean water—except for Big Ma, who bears a bowl. Their slow movements resemble a funeral procession, with the vessels held like sacred offerings. This act is accompanied by the song *Lead in de Wattah: A Revisited Negro Spiritual for Flint* by Avery R. Young, which reinterprets the traditional gospel *Wade in the Water*.

While the original spiritual evokes the biblical narrative of the Israelites crossing the River Jordan—and may also reference the use of rivers by enslaved people escaping captivity, thereby symbolizing hope and deliverance—Young's version sharply contrasts this message. His lyrics reflect the deadly consequences of lead contamination and directly hold Governor Snyder accountable for the crisis affecting Flint's African American residents: "lead / in thuh wattah / lead / in thuh wattah cheeldrun / lead / in thuh wattah / snyder playing god / with wattah."[28]

Toward environmental justice

Despite the harm it inflicts on the protagonists, water contamination in *cullud wattah* also serves as a catalyst for collective action, symbolizing the potential for broader social change. The crisis unites the residents of Flint in their pursuit of justice, transforming individual suffering into communal resistance.

The right of affected communities to full compensation and reparation constitutes a fundamental principle of environmental justice. As Maxine Burkett contends, meaningful reparations encompass not only financial compensation, but also truth-telling, formal apologies, and systemic transformation.[29] In the case of Flint, the struggle for justice among residents of color culminates in a class action lawsuit that explicitly holds accountable the politicians and institutional actors responsible for the crisis, asserting that they:

26 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 100.

27 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, ii.

28 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 2.

29 Maxine Burkett qtd. in Janet Fiskio, *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice: Poetics of Dissent and Repair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 13.

> Deliberately deprived plaintiffs & the plaintiff class of the rights & guarantees secured by the 14th amendment of the united states constitution in that they deprived plaintiffs of life liberty & property without due process of law when they took from plaintiffs safe drinking water & replaced it with what they knew to be a highly toxic alternative solely for fiscal purposes/for more than eighteen months state & local government officials ignored irrefutable evidence that the water pumped from the flint river exposed the plaintiffs & plaintiff class to extreme toxicity/causing serious & dire injury & health hazards & property damage to the flint water users.[30]

This pursuit of legal justice is mirrored on stage through Erika Dickerson-Despenza's use of dramatic techniques that give voice to these demands. At one point, the full text of the class action lawsuit filed by affected Flint residents—including Ainee—is projected on stage, only to fade into a redacted version. Key terms summarizing the root causes and consequences of the Flint Water Crisis emerge from among the blacked-out passages.

The playwright's strong appeal to activism is most evident in the play's unconventional ending. If the Flint Water Crisis has remained unresolved at the time of performance, the production concludes without a curtain call. As the script states, "the play is over & simultaneously not a play at all; it is a now."[31] This refusal to offer closure points out the ongoing nature of the crisis and disrupts the audience's expectation of theatrical finality. The applause is intentionally interrupted as the protagonists deliver an account of the Flint Water Crisis and the prevailing socio-economic conditions,[32] thereby exhorting the audience to confront the urgency of the issues presented and recognize their own role within them.

These performative strategies are grounded in the lived experiences of the Cooper family, whose members represent varied responses to systemic environmental and racial injustice. Marion and Big Ma embody accommodation and quiet endurance—attitudes shaped by historical survival strategies in the face of racism and economic hardship. In contrast, Ainee embraces grassroots activism and legal resistance, while Reesee turns to ancestral spirituality, invoking the Yoruba water deity Yemoja as both a source of strength and a symbol of cultural continuity.

Staging plays a crucial role in *the play's* articulation of environmental (in)justice. The recurring presence of discolored water on stage functions not only as a visual and sensory marker of crisis, but also as a powerful metaphor for the environmental racism that permeates the play. Whereas clean water signifies healing and hope, its contaminated counterpart represents systemic neglect, displacement, and death. Through these layered symbols, the stage becomes both a site of memory and a space of protest.

In *cullud wattah*, Erika Dickerson-Despenza fuses theatre with political testimony, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. By transforming the Flint Water Crisis into a vehicle for collective remembrance and resistance, the play challenges audiences to bear witness, to reckon with the costs of environmental injustice, and to acknowledge their own complicity or agency within these systems.

30 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud wattah*, 71.

31 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 103.

32 Dickerson-Despenza, *cullud* wattah, 103.

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