

INHERITANCE

Denver Faces Our KKK History Together

STUDY GUIDE

INHERITANCE TEAM

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Words, People & Places in INHERITANCE

Prohibition: the prevention by law of the manufacture and sale of alcohol, especially in the US between 1920 and 1933.

Bootlegging: the illegal manufacture, distribution, or sale of goods, especially alcohol or recordings.

Lakeside Park: Opened in 1908, the oldest amusement park still running in Colorado and still features the landmark Tower of Jewels. In June of 1925 the Colorado Klan held a rally and picnic at Lakeside Park in Denver. It is estimated that between 50,000 to 100,000 Klan members attended the rally.



Ladies' Auxiliary: An association whose members are usually the wives of members of an association with which it is affiliated.

Reverend Fred Arnold: (1886 – 1926) Moved from Nebraska to Canon City in 1920 to accept the pastorate at the First Baptist Church. He was the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, Colorado Realm in 1925. He was also chaplain of the Colorado State Penitentiary.

Clarence Morley: (1869 –1948) Governor of Colorado from 1925 to 1927. He was a member of the Ku Klux Klan and largely responsible for the division of the Republican and Democratic votes that enabled him to take office. Severely anti-Catholic, Morley was one of the most extreme governors in Colorado history. In 1935, he was convicted for 21 counts of mail fraud and using political influences to defraud customers.

Countenance: a person's face or facial expression.

Benjamin Stapleton: (1869 –1950) Born in Kentucky and earned his law degree in Ohio. He moved to Denver in the 1890s and served as Mayor of Denver, Colorado from 1923 – 1931 and 1935 – 1947. A member of the Ku Klux Klan, he appointed Klansmen to several top posts including manager of safety, clerk and recorder, city attorney, parks manager and city accountant. The municipal airport was renamed Stapleton International Airport in his honor. Today, the airport no longer exists, replaced by a neighborhood, also named Stapleton that still bears his name.



Alma Bridwell White (1862 –1946) was the founder and a bishop of the Pillar of Fire Church. In 1918, she became the first woman to become a bishop in the United States. She associated with the Ku Klux Klan and was involved in anti-Catholicism, feminism, antisemitism, racism, and hostility to immigrants. By the time of her death, she had expanded her sect to 61 churches, seven schools, ten periodicals and two broadcasting stations.



Time Line: The Klan & Hate Groups in Colorado

1865: The original Ku Klux Klan took root in the American South shortly after the Civil War in retaliation to the ending of slavery. The KKK's membership upheld white supremacy and practiced intimidation and violence against the former enslaved Black populations and anyone else who threatened their cause.

1920's: The KKK re-emerged with as many as six million members nationwide. It is estimated that at least 40,000 Klan members were in the state of Colorado with a very minimum of 17,000 in the Denver area.

1921: A black post office clerk's rental on Gilpin Street in Denver was bombed twice.

1924: Black students from Morey Jr. High were barred from swimming classes. Students from Manual Training High School tried to attend a dance for white students. In response, The Denver School Board ordered that school social functions be separated.

1925: Klan members and sponsored candidates controlled the Colorado State House and Senate, the office of Secretary of State, a state Supreme Court judgeship, seven benches on Denver District Court, and city councils in some Colorado towns.

June, 1925: the Colorado Klan held a rally and picnic at Lakeside Park in Denver. It is estimated that between 50,000 to 100,000 Klan members attended the rally.

1927: The Park Hill Improvement Association advocated for racially separated schools. The Colorado Supreme Court ruled the board's action unconstitutional.

1932: Blacks tried to integrate Washington Park's swimming beach, and were beaten up in front of white onlookers.

1948: U.S. Supreme Court struck down restrictive racial covenants, neighborhood associations, including the Capitol Hill Improvement Association, which urged owners to restrict sales of their homes to whites only.

1967: The court struck down the restrictions in Clayton will that had prohibited non-white boys from admission to Clayton College for Boys.

1973: The U. S. Supreme Court, "compelled by a mountain of evidence," ordered Denver schools to desegregate. This required busing students due to Denver's historical practices of "racial steering".



April 27, 1926 – Canyon City, CO

1979: Ron Stallworth infiltrated the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan. He was the first African-American police officer and detective in the Colorado Springs Police Department. The 2018 film *BlacKkKlansman* is based on his experience.

1984: Neo-Nazis shot to death Denver radio talk show host Alan Berg.

January, 1992: A Klan rally sparked violence at the Denver Parade.

1995: The court ended supervision of Denver public school desegregation, and busing stopped.

1997-98: Skinheads killed a Denver police officer, and an African refugee and they paralyzed a white woman who tried to help the refugee.

1998: Eight black workers at Denver area companies discovered nooses planted in their work areas.

2018: The Southern Poverty Law Center tracked 22 hate groups in Colorado. There were 57 anti-Semitic incidents in Colorado – the 5th highest in the nation.

August, 2019: The residents of Stapleton voted to retain the neighborhood's name despite an energetic campaign arguing that the area be rebranded because of the moniker's association with past Denver mayor Benjamin Stapleton, member of the Ku Klux Klan.

What's In Your Bones? By Norma Johnson, playwright of *Inheritance*



*There comes a time when silence is betrayal
~ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

This quote by Dr. King caught more than my eye, it ferociously caught my heart. And then it proceeded to navigate a complex journey to someplace deep down within my very bones. I felt a shudder that forbade me to turn away. At least... not without consequences.

I had a deep intrinsic knowing that the path to liberation comes through the journey of what lies buried and silent within our bones. And when no voice is given, it continues a silence in our bones and in our children's bones and their children's bones.

It has no agenda of its own. We create those. Its timing is eternal. It's merely a holding place for our fears. Silence is the gatekeeper. Dis-ease and Un-rest are the rumblings signaling a shifting of the buried contents.

It's a crossroads, a place where past, present and future meet. It's a place where ancestors and descendants recognize their value for each other, where what was and what is, when merged, can transform what is becoming.

Our silence. It's a dare and a threat and buried within it is a garden of unimaginable beauty and power and strength. What do we tell ourselves to maintain the silence? What do we yearn for that propels our breaking it?

Silence is not quiet, ya'll. It screams and hollers and pushes back and denies and changes the subject, it buries and alters truths and de-values our humanity and relationships with each other.

"There comes a time when silence is betrayal." In this quote, I wanted a reminder that there are consequences to my silence. And those consequences live... in my bones.

Norma Johnson is a spiritual healer, writer, poet, playwright, performance artist, speaker and facilitator that brings creative background into her distinctive presentation form of racial justice activism. Her writing and poetry about race is used enthusiastically by educators across the country.

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Women and the Klan:

- As many as one-in-six Klan members were women.
- The Klan's alleged defense of morality, law and order and safeguarding of home and family were incentive factors.
- Recruiting enrollment for the Klan was also a part of the Women's activities, where they often benefitted monetarily from a percentage of the dues.
- Women's networking skills through family and social engagement enabled the Klan to exponentially grow their membership.

Let's talk about the play!

At Curious, we're here to engage you in important issues. We use theatre as a catalyst for thinking about big, often uncomfortable topics and a way to connect you to vital steps forward to improving the world for everyone. Here is a curated collection of resources about the play *Inheritance* by Norma Johnson.

Our History

History helps us understand change and how the society we live in came to be.

Resources

- Thomas J. Noel, "When The KKK Ruled Colorado: Not So Long Ago." *Denver Public Library*, 19 June 2013, history.denverlibrary.org/news/when-kkk-ruled-colorado-not-so-long-ago.
- Cara Degette, "When Colorado Was Klan Country." *Colorado Independent*, 9 Jan. 2009, www.coloradoindependent.com/2009/01/09/when-colorado-was-klan-country/.
- Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan In Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).
- Ron Stallworth, *Black Klansman* (N.P.: Police and Fire Publishing, 2014).

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to study the history of the KKK in Colorado?
- What does "inheritance" mean and why do you think the play is called *Inheritance*?
- Ron Stallworth said: "The Ku Klux Klan never ends. They go dormant." What does that mean to you?
- What is the significance in naming places for historical figures? Does their past matter?
- Betsy quotes the Bible many times in the play. Why do you think that is? Do you agree with how she uses the Bible?



Women Ku Klux Klan members in Colorado, 1920's

Denver Today

Multiple outlets say that white supremacy and hate crimes are on the rise. Let's talk about current events and how it compares to the world of the play.

Resources:

- Erick Meltzer, "Pushed By Students, DSST's Founding School Drops Name Of Denver's Former Klan Mayor." *Chalkbeat*, 16 May 2019, www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2019/05/16/pushed-by-students-dssts-founding-school-drops-name-of-denvers-former-klan-mayor/.
- Scott, McLean, "Property Owners In Denver Neighborhood Vote To Keep Its Controversial Name." *CNN*, 21 Aug. 2019, cnn.com/2019/08/20/us/-colorado-neighborhood-name/index.html.
- Noelle Phillips, "Number Of Hate Groups In Colorado Ticks Up After Holding Steady Since 2011." *The Denver Post*, 22 Feb. 2018, denverpost.com/2018/02/22/colorado-hate-groups-increase.
- Renameforall.com

Discussion Questions:

- How is Denver different today than in 1925? How is it the same?
- Last year, Denver School of Science and Technology in Stapleton was renamed to Montview, thanks in large part to concerns raised by students. The school is located in and was named after the Stapleton neighborhood, itself named for Benjamin Stapleton, the controversial Denver mayor and KKK member. Do you think the meaning of the word "Stapleton" has changed?
- Do you think the Stapleton neighborhood should be renamed? Why or why not?
- Why do you think number of hate groups in Colorado is rising? What can be done to stop the increase?

Belonging

A feeling of belonging describes this sense of truly fitting or meshing, especially with friends, family members, or other sympathetic folks.

Resources:

- Marianna Pogoyan Ph.D., "What Is Behind Our Psychological Need To Belong?" *Psychology Today* 11 Apr. 2017, psychologytoday.com/us/blog/betweencultures/201704/belonging.
- Anderman, L. H., & Freeman, T. M. (2004) "Students' sense of belonging in school." *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*, 13, 27-63.
- "The Invisible Empire: The History Of The KKK And Why People Joined." *Smithsonian*, 14 June 2018, museumcenter.org/the-curious-curator/2018/6/13/the-invisible-empire-the-history-of-the-kkk-and-why-people-joined.

Discussion Questions:

- In social psychology, the need to belong is an intrinsic motivation to affiliate with others and be socially accepted. The need to belong plays an important role in shaping the characters' belief system. Where do you see the characters' need to belong in *Inheritance*?
- People often present themselves in a particular way in order to belong to a specific social group. Have you ever been willing to do something or sacrifice something to belong to a group?
- In the poem "What's in Your Bones," what does Norma Johnson mean by "silence is not quiet"?
- Do you think Mary is going to join the Ku Klux Klan? Why or why not?

Curious Theatre Company is a non-profit organization whose mission is to engage the community in important contemporary issues through provocative modern theatre. For more information: curioustheatre.org

This study guide is prepared for Curious Theatre Company by Christy Montour-Larson. Special thanks to Norma Johnson.