Stepping to the National Stage: Protesting Injustice, Producing Shakespeare, and Claiming Black Space at the Sylvan Theater

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Stepping to the National Stage:

Protesting Injustice, Producing Shakespeare, and Claiming Black Space at the Sylvan Theater

George Edward Clark

A Thesis in the Field of Dramatic Arts

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

This is an examination of Washington, D.C.’s Sylvan Theater at three scales. Getting and keeping access to this stage is a theme that resonates through each perspective. At the broadest scale, the Sylvan was a national venue for social protest including civil rights from its founding in 1917 until at least the early seventies. Making use of this government-controlled space, social movements made the Sylvan a national center in the search for justice. Many events known generically for having happened at the Washington Monument or on the Mall happened specifically at the Sylvan Theater.

At the middle scale, it was the place that Ellie Chamberlain produced the Summer Shakespeare Festival from 1961-1982. Her use of the government-owned space necessitated negotiating federal and local resources and reaching out to her potential audience in a time of great social change. Neither serving the Black citizens of Black-majority Washington, D.C. nor enriching the arts scene with Black perspectives was part of her rhetorical strategy when testifying before Congressional funding committees. However, Chamberlain eventually backed Black artists and did so with some success. She introduced nontraditional racial casting and sponsored Black-led dance and jazz with federal money under the banner of her festival. Even so, it is not clear to what extent, if any, Black audiences increased in general or in response to specific shows.

At the micro scale, the Sylvan was a place where Black actors including Janet League, Darryl Croxton, Henry Baker, and Robert Guillaume played prominent roles in this largely White theater company between 1967 and 1973. In particular, the Summer
Shakespeare Festival used nontraditional casting in a 1968 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, a 1970 *Tempest*, and a 1973 *Othello*. Nontraditional casting is the casting of actors of color in roles originally written to be played by Whites. In nontraditional casting, Black actors may shoulder extra burdens, including those due to the way that the color of their skin can shift the meaning of plays originally written for White actors.

The stories of Black actors in the Summer Shakespeare Festival show that such extra burdens occurred in Festival plays. These actors were caught in a paradox. They wanted to be known as skilled actors and not to be limited by external conceptions of Black actors. However, their skin was visible, and the productions used racial casting both for marketing and for meaning. Their work on stage echoed the social struggles contested by the Civil Rights Movement on that very stage. Meanwhile a White director sent conflicting messages about race. And at least two of the four Black actors examined here had very different backgrounds yet had common experiences and trauma due to navigating race in the transforming cities of the twentieth century.

Current as-yet-unfunded plans of the National Park Service aim to get rid of the Sylvan Theater in renovations of the Mall. Because of the theater’s significance in social protest including the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century and its significance in the diversifying of largely White regional theater, the Sylvan space deserves to be preserved or restored as a permanent performing arts and protest venue.

This thesis may be obtained by contacting the author, on bibliography sites such as Academia and ResearchGate, and through Harvard’s institutional repository, DASH.
Original “Plan of National Sylvan Theater” and its seating, 1917 (Evening Star).
Author’s Biographical Sketch

George E. Clark graduated from Earlham College with a bachelor’s degree in geology. He earned graduate degrees in geography from the University of Chicago and Clark University. He has a library degree from Simmons University. He worked for nearly five years at the Chicago office of the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Since 2001, George has been a research and reference librarian at Harvard University, specializing in environment and sustainability. He is the lead author of an often-cited article that was an early attempt to measure social vulnerability to sea-level rise, coastal flooding, and climate change, “Assessing the Vulnerability of Coastal Communities to Extreme Storms: The Case of Revere, MA., USA.”

While a columnist for Environment magazine, George wrote pieces on “Sustainability Theater” and how to find examples of “Environment on Film.” Recently, he has begun to focus more intensively on the arts as a component of sustainability. With a group of scholars led by Jude Parks, George coauthored an article on that topic titled “Transforming Embodied Experiences of Academic Conferences Through Creative Practice: Participating in an Instant Choir at the Nordic Geographers’ Meeting in 2019.”

Publications by the author may be available at <harvard.academia.edu/GeorgeClark> and <www.researchgate.net/profile/George-Clark-2>. This thesis may be posted there as well.

When he was not being a geology nerd in college, George also took courses in peace and global studies. That experience, as well as much of his graduate work in geography, informed the social justice bent of this thesis. George studied acting and
improv in college, too. At Earlham, he worked on *Once Upon a Mattress*, *Tartuffe*, and *Twelfth Night*, and he appeared in the improv group, “Off the Cuff.” George also co-chaired the Earlham Film Series board. In the master’s program in drama at the Harvard Extension School, George studied Shakespeare, acting, and writing for the stage and screen. He recently worked as an extra on the forthcoming movie *Boston Strangler*. He has appeared as an extra in the television series *Early Edition*, *Defending Jacob*, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. 
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the protesters who have worked for justice at the Sylvan Theater, and to the leaders, members, supporters, and critics of the Summer Shakespeare Festival company, especially those featured in this thesis.

Professor Derek Miller gracefully took on the supervision of my thesis, and I’m thankful for his kindness, guidance, and insight.

Thank you to my friends and fellow students in classes at the Harvard Extension School, especially: Writer Stephanie Bilberry; fellow gravedigger Ben Lewis; actors Karen Clesen, Joana de Sousa, and Patrick Barton; Ashley Davis from the qualifying seminar; and Ellen Adams for co-organizing outings to see Hamnet and Othello. Eric Rasmussen commiserated in thesis writing and shared his experience with audience interactions during his production of Othello.

Thanks to instructors, professors, and teaching assistants in the Harvard Extension School. I particularly enjoyed classes by these teachers, in alphabetical order: Remo Airaldi, Aly Corey, Bryan Delaney, Greta Pane, María Luisa Parra-Velasco, and Joyce Van Dyke. Remo also shared his memory of dining with Robert Guillaume. I’m grateful to Tad Davies for shepherding the development of my thesis proposal and to Richard Martin for ensuring the thesis’ adherence to acceptable format, as well as the many other duties of Research Advisor. Academic Advisor Lynn Larsen was faithful with updates about the Dramatic Arts program and the school. She did important work to start connecting students with one another in this far-flung program.
I am grateful as well to scholars whose work informed this thesis, in particular Ayanna Thompson and Sharon Aronson-Lehavi.

I am indebted to numerous librarians, archivists, keepers of knowledge, journalists, technicians, and related specialists at Harvard and beyond whose work allowed me to locate or to rule out sources. Many scholars unknown to me processed and cataloged materials long ago. Some helped me directly. Those not mentioned among my library friends below are in alphabetical order here by institution:

The *Afro-American*, now *Afro* newspaper: Savannah Wood and Mecca.

American University Library: Leslie Nellis.

The Austin *American-Statesman*: Nell Carroll.

Austin Public Library: Madeline Moya.

Catholic University of America: Brandi Marulli

D.C. Archives: Bill Branch, D.C. Archivist in the Office of Public Records, was especially prompt, generous, knowledgeable, and thorough.

D.C. Public Library: Librarians at the Chevy Chase branch issued me a nonresident library card during a pandemic so that I could get online access to D.C.-specific electronic resources. The nonresident library card is a blessing and a thing of beauty. Michele at the Washingtoniana collection of the central library also helped me with an inquiry.

Eisenhower Presidential Library: Michelle Kopfer.

George Washington University Library Special Collections: Leah Richardson.
Harvard University: Jennifer Fauxsmith of Schlesinger Library and Micah Hoggatt of Houghton Library.

LBJ Presidential Library: Sarah Cunningham and Alexis Percle.


National Park Service: Ranger John Reid of Greenbelt Park, Bradley Krueger of Rock Creek Park, Stephanie Gray of Antietam National Battlefield (along with her colleagues at the Hagerstown Free Public Library), Chris Alford of Prince William Forest Park, Ranger John Kirkpatrick and colleagues of the National Mall and Memorial Parks, and Dean Herrin, Chief Historian of the National Capitol Area.

Prince George’s County Public Library: John M. Krivak.

Stanford University: Meghan Weaver.

Thanks to:

The late John Peter Halford and his widower, Douglas Gowin, for access to J.P.’s papers. These included critical material including many Festival programs, news clippings, costume designs, photographs, and scrapbooks.

Janet Welsh Brown, for sharing her memories of Ellie Chamberlain and the Summer Shakespeare Festival, and for writing the interview-based manuscript history of Chamberlain’s Festival work.
Ariadne Henry, Ellie Chamberlain’s executor and friend, for the connections to John Peter (J.P.) Halford and Janet Welsh Brown, and for access to the relevant papers of Ellie Chamberlain’s estate.

Dwight R. B. Cook, playwright, production manager and adjunct professor at Morgan State University, and Clarinda Harriss, poet, professor, and publisher, kindly shared their memories of Darryl Croxton.

Perry Schwartz, production stage manager of the Summer Shakespeare Festival from 1978-1980, generously shared his insider’s perspective on Ellie Chamberlain and the Summer Shakespeare Festival.

Joanne Cabe graciously allowed me the use of her late husband Brig Cabe’s photograph of Coretta Scott King and colleagues in the dressing room at the Sylvan Theater.

My friends in the academic library and writing businesses have been a delight and comfort. Among these, Steve Kuehler, Harvard library specialist for the major in Theater, Dance, and Media, shared his knowledge of theater and was a willing sounding board. He also read my lists of casts and crew to help me identify the better-known company members of the Summer Shakespeare Festival. Sarah DeMott talked through some of the ideas with me and was a grateful human presence just over the cubicle wall. Anna Nikolayevna Rakityanskaya, one-time scene partner and ongoing partner in show business crime, also happens to be Harvard’s librarian for Russian and Belarusian collections. Hugh Truslow is a good boss and a man of many skills. Gifted anthropologist and writing instructor Ramyar Rossoukh listened to me talk about this project and
provided wise advice from the perspective of one who wields the business end of the red pencil.

Kirk Westphal and Anastasia Townshend, thanks for being there. You may share my pandemic any time.

William Benjamin Clark and Sophie B. Clark are always happy to talk about fiction, dramatic writing, and shows that we have seen. They have proofread and provided insight into my playwriting and screenwriting work. Will kindly read a draft of one of these chapters. Marion “Lucy” Clark is often a first reader of my work, and she is unfailingly generous. She offered writer’s retreats in November and December 2021. Elizabeth Ferguson Clark provided support in many, many ways. As always, love and thanks.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Three Scales of Analysis

This is an examination of Washington, D.C.’s Sylvan Theater on the grounds of the Washington Monument. It is a history in the sense that it examines the theater over the course of the twentieth century. It is a geography in the sense that it does so with particular attention to social context, and from the perspective of three scales. At its broadest scale, the Sylvan was a national venue for social protest including civil rights, labor, home rule, and antiwar protests from its founding in 1917 until at least the early seventies. At the middle scale, it was the place that Ellie Chamberlain\(^1\) produced the Summer Shakespeare Festival (Festival) from 1961-1982. At the micro scale, the Sylvan was a place where Black actors worked major roles in this largely White\(^2\) theater company between 1967 and 1973. Getting and keeping access to this stage is a theme that resonates through each perspective.

The Sylvan Theater hosted alternatively the racist lows of the nation and the just cause and hard work of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as other rallies for labor and home rule, the transition of power from the federal government to the District of Columbia, and rallies against the war in Vietnam.

---

\(^1\) Chamberlain was her professional name. Her legal name was Ellie Chamberlain Galidas.

\(^2\) I capitalize “White” following the NABJ Style Guide of the National Association of Black Journalists. See also Painter.
At first glance, the combination of noble artistic aspirations and funding difficulties make the Summer Shakespeare Festival’s story one that is very familiar. Ellie Chamberlain had a great idea to fill a niche, worked hard to create something from scratch, garnered some initial funding and support, and created a group of dedicated workers, affectionate followers, and casual attendees. The Festival was a success in the arts in that it functioned for over two decades, but it ultimately closed for lack of funds. Apart from the common story, one imagines that many if not all organizations have particular features that make them interesting. One prominent such feature, for the Festival, was its setting in Washington, D.C. at a time of marked social change. For the Summer Shakespeare Festival, and for Ellie Galidas, another was the particularly Washington-centered world of cultural politics: She sought funding from Congress, and she found support from the local recreation department. She got the endorsement of good wishes from some the brightest luminaries of theater scene yet had difficulty getting private funds.

Chamberlain ran the company as it responded to the Civil Rights Movement by integrating key productions in the late sixties and early seventies. In the period from 1967 to 1973, Black actors interpreted major roles in Festival productions of Hamlet (1967), Romeo and Juliet (1968), The Tempest (1970), Your Own Thing (1971), and Othello (1973). Actors Janet League, Darryl Croxton, Henry Baker, and Robert Guillaume were among those playing key roles in race-conscious productions. Records of their actions shed light on the impact of “nontraditional casting” on Black actors.
A Geography of Theater

In approaching this work, I was inspired by the essay, “Re-Location,” by Sharon Aronson-Lehavi. Her essay is study of a theater in a run-down bus station in Tel Aviv. She asks, simply, where exactly is “the location of a performance” (105), and she finds it to be pretty much everywhere. Aronson-Lehavi points out that the location of performance has been variously described as being in the text, the stage, a fictional world, a “real happening,” an image, and in the bodies of performers and spectators. She describes the significance of a “larger geographical, political and contextual space that surrounds the performance” (105). In her case study, this larger space is the diverse immigrant identity and culture in Israel that is active in the bus station shopping arcade. This examination of the theater “that surrounds the performance,” and what happens within it, is what I investigate about the Sylvan Theater. She uses the term “relocation” to describe location of performance as “an aesthetic and social experience that is in constant state of motion between creators, performers, spectators and environment” (106). This is a useful theoretical construct within which to view the Sylvan Theater. Performers, staff, audience, passers-by, the setting sun, airplanes taking off and landing, the location of the company within the city of Washington, the governing power of the federal government, a permeating culture of racism, and other factors all together created the location of the Sylvan.

In Aronson-Lehavi’s work, I found inspiration to examine the Sylvan Theater as a place of national protest; as a place where theater administrator Ellie Chamberlain sought funding from Congress and figured out how to renew her company in the context of the Civil Rights Movement; and as a place where Black actors claimed space in a
White-led theater in Washington, D.C. The venue of the Festival was in some ways a mixed blessing for Black actors during this time, adding to burdens that their White colleagues did not have to carry.

I examine the experience of Black actors in three Festival productions that conspicuously featured Black actors from 1967 to 1973. I make use of Ayanna Thompson’s reflections on the multicultural casting classification of The First National Symposium on Non-Traditional Casting (Thompson, *Passing Strange*; Davis and Newman). I use documentary evidence to shed light on the burdens of these actors making Shakespeare at a venue that also happened to be a national center of action in the Civil Rights Movement, other progressive movements, and reactionary counterprotest. In addition to getting parts and interpreting the text, Black actors had to work within the director’s vision of racial casting over which they had little control. They lived and performed in post-MLK assassination, pre-home rule Washington, D.C. amid both overt and systemic racism.
Chapter 2.
Protesting on the National Stage

The Sylvan Theater owes its beginnings to political ambition, if wanting to start a national theater for the United States can be said to be a political as well as an artistic ambition. It certainly owes its existence to political achievement since it was constructed with federal funds on federal land. From the beginning there was tension between art and politics at the Sylvan Theater. Performing arts events continued, but the theater also became a political stage with contested access.

Alice Pike Barney

The Sylvan Theater was conceived by Alice Pike Barney,3 artist, arts advocate, playwright, whiskey heiress, and beneficiary of her husband’s railroad car fortune. (Kling, *APB: Her Life... and “APB: Bringing Culture”). The theater was funded by Congress and opened in 1917.4 As one might expect from its full name, the National Sylvan Theater was envisioned by Alice Pike Barney and by Congress as a performing arts space of national stature. It was the United States’ first federally-funded outdoor theater (Smithsonian American Art Museum), and it was located in the midst of government buildings, memorial spaces, and centers of power such as the White House

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3 Barney was known later in life as Mrs. Christian Hemmick, after her scandalously young second husband. As a young woman, Barney had been engaged to Henry Morton Stanley, supposed originator of the phrase, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” but Barney and Stanley never married.
4 See original plan of theater and seating at frontispiece.
and the U.S. Capitol (Figure 1. Also see Appendix 1 for details on the Sylvan Theater facility). Barney wished to found and guide a preeminent performing arts institution and to achieve for the nation what her father had done by building an opera house for Cincinnati (Kling APB: Her Life..., 26ff). She wooed Congress and the colonel in charge of Washington parks with her plans, and the theater was built (259ff).

Her arts vision was immediately interrupted by World War I. For the opening of the Sylvan in 1917, it became incumbent on Barney to assemble a two-part show, half…
music and half unabashed propaganda. The first was a musical program with a few soloists, “community singing,” and the Marine Band. The second was a “Propaganda Pageant” entitled “The Call of the Allies,” written by Barney (269). This alternation on the stage between performing arts and political speech would continue throughout the life of the Sylvan, with drama, dance, and music changing places on the stage with groups advocating for their political vision.

Arts at the Sylvan

As a public space, the Sylvan Theater was a venue for multiple types of uses over the years. Band concerts were common throughout the 20th Century at the Sylvan Theater. Typically, these were brass bands and military bands, but they eventually veered to music of many genres and tastes, including, during the latter half of the century, rock and roll. The Sylvan Theater was also a regular venue for nonprofessional drama, including student, community, drama guild, and sometimes even government employee productions. These were sometimes organized under the name of a “festival” and often under the sponsorship of the D.C. Community Center Department and National Capital Parks. These should not be confused with the Summer Shakespeare Festival (e.g., “Sylvan Theater Festival Bills”).

While the remainder of this chapter emphasizes protest as evidence of the Sylvan Theater as a contested space, we can also see such evidence in the mundane. In the 1930s, brass band music continued to be a staple of performance at the Sylvan, but the varied conditions of its performance belied the racist politics of access. In the spring of 1931, for example, the Washington Post reported that the Marine Band would open the summer performing arts season (“Marine Band”). It might be tempting to see this musical
listing as innocuous, but the remainder of the concert listing for the Marine Band says that the following evening, “[t]he first band concert of the season for colored patrons will be held the following night,” featuring the Community Center Band,\(^5\) playing in Franklin Park. It is difficult to determine to what extent the audiences of the supposedly public space of the Sylvan Theater included Black people over the years. Even if the 1931 Marine Band audience included a section of Black listeners, which we do not know, the Franklin Park program was marketed exclusively to Black residents by the \textit{Post} side by side with the racially unclassified Marine Band concert. In this segregated city, Blacks did not have equal access, and this included the Sylvan Theater.

Yet it is apparent that some Black performers and audiences did successfully use the public status of the Sylvan to claim access in the 1930s. Later in the summer of 1931, the Mabel Jones Freeman Dancers, a Black dance troupe, performed at the Sylvan on the same bill as the Community Center Band that had been relegated to Franklin Park above (“Colored Dancers”). Honored guests at this performance were members of the Black-led National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools. So we can say that Black access to the Sylvan was contextual and contingent on competition for the venue with more dominant White acts and speakers.

Another example of artists who were Black performing at the Sylvan was a concert of spirituals in 1938 (“150 Colored Singers Present…””) by the Schubert-Shakespearian Society, a national Black arts organization (Leslie Brown 105). “Special musical settings by colored composers […] were presented,” and the audience displayed

\(^5\) Evidence points to the Community Center Band being a Black band. The Community Centers were run by a department of the D.C. Public Schools. The Community Center Band had performed in 1919 at Dunbar High School, which at the time was the elite, public, segregated Black high school in Washington, D.C. (Public School System…; “Dunbar High School Home Page”).
particular respect for the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” The audience “stood, in reverent silence, without applause, while the late James Weldon Johnson’s ‘National Negro Anthem’ was given by the choral group” (“150 Colored Singers Present…”). It is apparent that even in its use as a performing arts facility, the Sylvan Theater was a contested space. Black artists and community leaders exploited its legal standing as a public facility to create time-bound safer spaces for Black arts and Black society.

Contested Space

The remainder of this chapter examines the Sylvan as a contested protest space from its opening in 1917 through the 1960s. Progressive organizations related to labor, civil rights, D.C. home rule, and the movement against the Vietnam War sought change. Their presence at the Sylvan, along with their opponents and occasional government-led meetings, meant that the place became imbued with the political currents running through society over time.6 In Table 1, we see events with different types of political actors interspersed throughout the decades. Labor actions are frequent from 1930-1950. Civil rights rallies are concentrated in the post-WWII era. Peace rallies are concentrated in the late sixties. The federal government shifts between using the Sylvan for its own purposes and regulating its use by other organizations.

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6 Primarily religious rallies are not included though they sometimes veered toward the political. For example, a speaker at a 1938 Holy Name Society parade and rally argued against both irreligious progressives and religious-freedom-attacking dictators (“6,000 March in Holy Name…”).
Table 1. Timeline of Selected Events at the Sylvan Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Types of Political Actors</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>National Sylvan Theater Opens</td>
<td>Government Project</td>
<td>Pageant split arts and propaganda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Ku Klux Klan Rally</td>
<td>Racist/Anti-Catholic Terror Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Marine Band Concert</td>
<td>Segregation at the Sylvan</td>
<td>“Colored patrons” concert by Community Center Band held elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools honored at concert</td>
<td>Blacks Claim Access to Public Facility; Labor</td>
<td>Black artists, reverence for Black National Anthem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Labor Rally / WPA Job Cuts</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>August.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>May Day Production of The Cradle Will Rock</td>
<td>Labor, Civil Rights.</td>
<td>NAACP head Charles Hamilton Houston speaks against “the blindness and prejudice of the white worker who cannot see that ultimately he goes up or down tied to his negro brother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Sec. of Interior Ickes Bans National Gentile League</td>
<td>Racist, Anti-Semitic Organization, Government Decision</td>
<td>Government bans White racist organization. Precedent for exclusion of hate organizations. Ickes: “The Sylvan Theater belongs to all of the people of the United States regardless of race, color or creed and for that reason we should not permit its use by an organization that […] is designed to foster […] race prejudice…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>WAVES (Navy Women) Birthday Celebration</td>
<td>Military Rally, Labor, Women’s Rights</td>
<td>WAVES hope to be allowed to serve overseas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Types of Political Actors</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Combination Memorial to FDR and Celebration of UN Establishment</td>
<td>Integrated Stage. Mix of Government, Civil Rights</td>
<td>Marine Band and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas share stage with Rabbi Gerstenfeld, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Black soprano Dorothy Maynor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Buyer’s Strike Called</td>
<td>Labor, Women’s Rights</td>
<td>Food prices protested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Civil Rights Congress</td>
<td>Civil Rights, White Access to Power</td>
<td>Paul Robeson and Benjamin J. Davis, Jr. lead civil rights picket at the White House while Truman meets with White American Legion Boys Nation members inside the gates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>American Labor Party Rally</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Broad left-wing goals, including wages, benefits, civil rights, housing, education, and farm prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>D.C. Home Rule Parade to Sylvan</td>
<td>D.C. Home Rule</td>
<td>84-year-old Gilded Age socialite and D.C. resident Florence Jaffray “Daisy” Harriman led a parade to present her (unrepresented) income tax to the Secretary of the Treasury prior to parading to the Sylvan with “Miss Voteless” and her court of honor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Youth March for Integrated Schools</td>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>Included a symposium chaired by Bayard Rustin. Remarks by A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Integrated youth delegation meets with deputy assistant to President Eisenhower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>American Nazis Denied Permit for Sylvan. Told to March Elsewhere</td>
<td>Racist Terror Organization. Government denied permit</td>
<td>Marchers were told to march at a different location that did not require a permit. That march was rained on and “noticed by few passers-by.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Summer Shakespeare Festival Premiers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance of Twelfth Night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>March for Jobs and Freedom to Lincoln Memorial starts at Sylvan grounds and Ellipse</td>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>American Nazis Denied Permit for Sylvan Theater During March for Jobs and Freedom</td>
<td>Racist Terror Organization. Government denied permit</td>
<td>Permit denied to American Nazi Party, but police acknowledged that they could mix with civil rights marchers if they did not “incite to riot with speeches or placards.” American Nazis gathered in Sylvan area and were cordoned off by National Guard troops and police nearby. Deputy Nazi party head was arrested for attempting to make a speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Home Rule Demonstration</td>
<td>D.C. Home Rule, Civil Rights</td>
<td>July. Sterling Tucker leads group with religious, civil rights, and labor leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Types of Political Actors</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Joan Baez Plays Sylvan after DAR Denies Constitution Hall</td>
<td>Anti-War</td>
<td>The Daughters of the American Revolution deny Baez the use of Constitution Hall due to her anti-war views. Baez instead plays free concert at the Sylvan to “hippies, teeny-boppers, black power advocates, and big and little families.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Resurrection City camped near Sylvan Theater. Poor People’s Campaign uses it for speeches.</td>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>May, June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Summer Shakespeare Festival’s <em>Romeo and Juliet</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>July, August. Philip Burton-directed play has White Montagues and Black Capulets. Dr. King had been assassinated in April.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Local Student Anti-War Rally</td>
<td>Anti-War</td>
<td>October.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>War Moratorium</td>
<td>Anti-War</td>
<td>Coretta Scott King was keynote speaker, comparing knowledge of Vietnam War’s folly to having seen Hamlet’s ghost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the 1920s, before progressive causes began to take advantage of the Sylvan space, rallies tended toward the jingoistic, anti-progressive, the fearmongering, and the White supremacist. In 1922, Alabama Senator Thomas “Cotton Tom” Heflin spoke on Flag Day at the Sylvan. Heflin used an invitation to the Washington Elks lodge meeting at the Sylvan to articulate his fear of government overthrow. In between bouts of airplane noise, Heflin cried that “We have no room for the anarchist or the [B]olshevist” (“Heflin Condemns Radical Criticism”). For those who remembered, Heflin was a reminder of violence against Black people, even from supposed friends. Fourteen years before the rally, then-Rep. Heflin threw Louis Lundy, a Black man, off a D.C. streetcar and shot him and Thomas McCreary, a White bystander, through the streetcar window. Heflin had been on his way to deliver a temperance lecture at the Metropolitan AME Church, one of Washington’s most prominent Black churches (“Congressman Shot Negro in Street Car”).

The racist and anti-radical Heflin was followed at the Sylvan in 1925 with a massive Ku Klux Klan rally. A crowd of Klan marchers estimated between 30-35,000 (“White-Robed Klan Cheered”) and 50,000 (“50,000 Klan Host Parades”) marched through Washington to the Monument grounds, with people throwing money at them from buildings along the way (“Sidelights on Klan Parade”). A Klan leader in a purple-trimmed robe addressed the crowd from a microphone on the Sylvan stage (“White-Robed”), and that night, the Klan burned a cross across the Potomac River at the

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7 Prescient because jet noise would become a problem for the Summer Shakespeare Festival at the Sylvan in the 1960s and 70s. See Appendix 1.
8 During the administration of President Coolidge.
Arlington racetrack (“50,000”). Eight years after its founding, the Sylvan was hosting hate.

Government Sets Limits on Racist Demonstrations

Fourteen years later, in 1939, Franklin Roosevelt’s administration declared that the Sylvan would no longer be a venue for hate speech. As Europe was heading toward World War II, Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes prevented the National Gentile League from holding a three-day rally at the Sylvan Theater. In barring this antisemitic organization, Ickes outlined a policy for access: “The Sylvan Theater belongs to all of the people of the United States regardless of race, color or creed and for that reason we should not permit its use by an organization that […] is designed to foster […] race prejudice against another group of American citizens” (“Ickes Denies Use of Sylvan Theater…”). Segregation and systematic racism lived on in D.C., but in a small gain, the Sylvan Theater had been tenuously designated a place where organizations that were primarily racist were not allowed the stage.

Labor

As of the late thirties, labor protest had become a significant thread of protest at the Sylvan. In 1937, activists marched in protest of elimination of jobs from the Works Progress Administration rolls. (“Lasser Predicts WPA…,” “March on Washington”). In 1939, the May Day festivities included a production of the pro-labor musical The Cradle Will Rock at the Sylvan. Introducing the play, Charles Hamilton Houston, counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), former head of
Howard University Law School, and Chair of the Marian Anderson\textsuperscript{9} Citizens’ Committee (Jamar), spoke on behalf of Black workers, citing their treatment as the key test for American labor relations: Houston spoke against “the blindness and prejudice of the white worker who cannot see that ultimately he goes up or goes down tied to his negro brother” (Houston quoted in “War, Health, Labor Topics…”). Some interracial labor solidarity showed itself later in the year in a rally conducted as conditions worsened for WPA workers who still had their jobs. William Taylor, president of the National Negro Congress, appeared on the same Sylvan stage with Phillip Bonosky\textsuperscript{10} at a meagerly attended rally against cuts in real wages for WPA workers (“50 Attend Rally”).

News reports of labor activism at the Sylvan slowed during World War II. However, one particular event during that time conveyed a desire for even wider opportunities for women workers, despite the explosion of women’s employment during the war. In 1943, 10,000 Navy women (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES) or about one out of every seven women Navy officers and sailors, rallied in uniform in an official service event at the Sylvan to celebrate the second birthday of the women’s branch of the service. \textit{Washington Post} correspondent Peggy Preston speculated that the mustering at the Sylvan was going to be the largest gathering of military women ever in the world. The recognized hope of the WAVES at this rally was to be allowed to serve overseas; such a bill had already passed a House committee (Preston). The \textit{New York Times} quoted Secretary of the Navy Forrestal’s Sylvan speech, which included a tepid vision for WAVES assignments. They would serve “we hope

\textsuperscript{9} The prior month, mezzo-soprano Anderson gave a free concert at the Lincoln Memorial after being denied access to Constitution Hall because of her race by the Daughters of the American Revolution (Stamberg).

\textsuperscript{10} Mistakenly called Bonofski by the \textit{Post}. 
ultimately in shore establishments abroad” (“Hope Given WAVES…”). This gathering of WAVES also serves as an example of the Sylvan used for an official government function. FDR had delivered a speech there in 1937 on the 150th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution (Roosevelt). President Johnson would later speak there about the draft.

As the war in Europe was winding down, the Sylvan hosted an April 1945 gathering. It was an articulation of a vision for the future, not a protest. Washingtonians gathered to wish for a lasting peace in memory of FDR and to celebrate the formation of the United Nations. It was an integrated and interfaith celebration, taking place at the Sylvan stage (“Thousands Attend…” and “Roosevelt Peace Meeting…”). Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas spoke, Rabbi Norman Gerstenfeld offered a benediction, and soprano Dorothy Maynor, a Black musician, shared the stage with the U.S. Marine Band. Among the event’s sponsors was Mary McLeod Bethune, educator, advisor to multiple presidents, and former Director of Negro Affairs in FDR’s National Youth Administration (National Park Service, *Mary McLeod Bethune*).

In the years immediately after the end of World War II, labor demonstrations at the Sylvan picked up. In July 1946, labor leaders and homemakers rallied at the theater to fight inflation in food prices, with a one-day shopping strike called for the following week (“Buyers’ Strike”).

The following year, 3000 members of the American Labor Party, led by Congressman Vito Marcantonio, gathered in the city to lobby Congress, picket the White House, and rally at the Sylvan Theater for a similarly broad program of economic, social, and labor reforms: “repeal of the Taft-Hartley law, enactment of the civil rights program, increased minimum wages and social security benefits; health insurance, rent control,
housing, Federal aid to education and support of farm prices” (‘ALP Marches 3000 Here…’). The Sylvan was clearly an important space for labor politics, including some pan-racial unity, a sign of hope for a better future.

Civil Rights

Civil rights protests at the Sylvan grew from 1948 as activists sought systematic change. August 1948 saw 2,500-3,000 Civil Rights Congress activists visit D.C. to lobby their representatives, picket the White House, and rally at the Sylvan Theater. In addition to protesting against the poll tax and advocating for civil rights, the marchers also lobbied for labor issues such as price caps and better housing. Leaders included Paul Robeson, singer, thespian, and co-chair of the Progressive Party, and Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., New York city council member from Harlem (3000 ‘March’ on Capital…). In opposition, White teenagers at the American Legion national Boys Forum happened to be at the White House for a meeting with President Truman. They sang “God Bless America’ while from outside the gates some of the civil rights picketers chanted back “Jim Crow must go!” (Figures 2 and 3, “‘God Bless America’ Sung for Pickets”).
Figure 2. Civil Rights Congress Pickets the White House, 1948.

Paul Robeson (tall man holding hat) and other participants in the Civil Rights Congress. They held a rally afterwards at the Sylvan Theater. (“3000 ‘March’”) Washington Post. Associated Press photo, photographer unknown.

Figure 3. American Legion Boys Forum Meets Truman, 1948.

White teenagers from the American Legion Boys Forum met with the president at the White House while the Civil Rights Congress picketed outside the gates. Acme Telephoto from the author’s personal collection (“President Truman Addresses…”). Photographer unknown.
In the late fifties and early sixties, civil rights became the dominant object of political rallies held at the Sylvan Theater. The Civil Rights Movement had grown so large that organizers sometimes sought the larger venue of the Lincoln Memorial. The 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom was held on the third anniversary of *Brown v. Board* (“Prayer Pilgrimage…”). The Interior Department attempted to sell the organizers on the smaller venue of the Sylvan, but the protesters eventually succeeded in securing the Lincoln Memorial permit (“Segregation Rally Set Up…”). The Lincoln Memorial more easily accommodated the nearly 25,000 who eventually attended. The Pilgrimage was headlined by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who delivered his “Give Us the Ballot” speech (King, “Give Us the Ballot”).

Despite the need for more space, the Sylvan remained a place where the movement grew and sustained momentum. In fact, the first large Sylvan rally after the 1957 Lincoln Memorial Pilgrimage surpassed it in attendance. 26,000 attended the 1959 Youth March for Integrated Schools, according to a U.S. Park Police estimate (“Integration Rally Here Assured…”). Prior to the rally, an integrated delegation of students met at the White House with a deputy assistant to President Eisenhower.11

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11 This White House meeting of a few pro-integration students with Eisenhower’s aide in 1959 contrasted with the large group of White teenagers from the American Legion who met with Truman himself in 1948.
Then the entire body of civil rights pilgrims paraded from the Mall to the Sylvan Theater (Figure 4. Rally agenda at Appendix 4, Figure 25).

The rally was chaired by union and civil rights pioneer A. Philip Randolph and included a panel moderated by organizer Bayard Rustin and remarks by Roy Wilkins, head of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

Figure 4. Youth March for Integrated Schools, 1959.

Attendees of the Youth March for Integrated Schools marched to the Sylvan Theater. Washington Area SPARK, via Flickr (SPARK, “Youth March...”).

Closing remarks were by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (“Integration Rally Here Assured...,” MLK text at King “Address at the Youth March”). This event was
considered important enough by the FBI\textsuperscript{12} that they issued a report on it to the White House. They summarized the program and used confidential informants to detail the activities of Communist Party members’ plans to distribute literature and recruit members at the rally (Federal Bureau of Investigation, see Appendix 4, Figure 26).

1963 March on Washington and Nazi Counterprotests

The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is the best-known rally from the Civil Rights Movement, largely due to Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. What is less known is that one of the starting points of the march was the lawn of the Sylvan Theater (Figure 5). Buses would drop protesters at the Sylvan and the Ellipse, and from there they proceeded to the Lincoln Memorial. King and other male leaders would lead arrivals from the Ellipse and the north of the Washington Monument down Constitution Avenue to the Lincoln Memorial. Myrlie Evers, widow of Medgar Evers,\textsuperscript{13} and other women civil rights leaders led the branch heading from the Sylvan down Independence Avenue (Franklin).

Five years later, the Civil Rights Movement’s Poor People’s Campaign and its D.C. incarnation, Resurrection City, a camp south of the Reflecting Pool, used the Sylvan Theater for speeches. (See Chapter 4 below). The Sylvan was a low-cost, central platform in the space where protesters gathered from around the country to confront the federal

\textsuperscript{12}While in 1959, the FBI spied on Youth March for Integrated Schools, the FBI’s drama club had previously played the Sylvan. “The G-Men” presented a one-act called \textit{Pietre Patelin} in 1936. In 1937, they performed the Anatole France farce, \textit{The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife} (“Sylvan Theater Festival Bills;” Hart).

\textsuperscript{13}Medgar Evers had been murdered only two months previously.
Figure 5. Map of the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom.

Starting points for the march are marked by crosses at the Ellipse and the Sylvan Theater lawn south of the Washington Monument. (Rhodes). Newsday, AP Wirephoto.

government. It was a space for outsiders—available to those who did not have the funds for or the access to other stages.

As the Civil Rights Movement grew at the Sylvan, the Sylvan Theater also became a location of counterprotest by American Nazis. In April 1960, Nazi demonstrators were denied a permit to use the Sylvan for a gathering but instead were
directed to a different location that did not require a permit; that gathering was rained out and “noticed by few passers-by” (“Rain Soaks Rockwell’s Nazi Party”).

For the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom discussed above, American Nazis were again frustrated by the denial of a permit to use the Sylvan Theater. The police advised them not to gather. The police also acknowledged that Nazis would not be prevented from entering the gathering that they were protesting if they did not “incite to riot with speeches or placards.” (“Don’t March Plea Ignored By Rockwell”). Police reported that leader George Rockwell planned to “assemble his group of American Nazi Party members southeast of the Washington Monument, rallying point for the [civil rights] marchers coming in by train, bus, plane and cars from throughout the country” (Potter from the Baltimore Sun, emphasis added. Further details on preparations in Franklin). This puts the Nazis’ intended location at or near the Sylvan Theater, despite the denial of a permit for the facility.

During the 1963 March itself, 100-200 police and National Guard military police cordoned off between seventy and eighty Nazis gathered on the Monument grounds, though one source suggests that they were either encircled across the street or moved there. The deputy head of the American Nazis, Karl R. Allen, attempted to address his cohorts, was warned by police twice, and arrested. The rest of the group left in single file for their cars and headquarters across the Potomac River in Virginia (Doolittle; Toth). The Sylvan Theater was a key location for both the pro- and anti- civil rights protesters. It saw the best and worst of American aspirations.
Home Rule for Washington, D.C.

The Sylvan also was a venue for protest on local issues, such as representation for the District of Columbia. In 1955, 84-year-old District resident, wartime ambassador to Norway, Gilded-Age-era socialite, and social advocate Florence Jaffray "Daisy" Harriman, led a parade of Washingtonians to present her (unrepresented) income tax to the Secretary of the Treasury. She then led a parade to the Sylvan before a float. The float carried a “Miss Voteless” and a court of women in gowns from the 1700’s, suggesting that the wait for District suffrage had been far too long. (“Miss Voteless Will Parade on Tax Day” and “Florence Jaffray Harriman”).

The year 1966 brought 4000 District residents to demonstrate for home rule at the Sylvan (Figure 6), including D.C. Urban League head Sterling Tucker and “some 25 religious, civil right [sic] and labor leaders as they demanded self-government from Congress, pleaded for the President’s help in obtaining it, and indicated […] that District citizens will not wait any longer.” Post reporters observed that the crowd was mostly Black, but Walter Fauntroy acknowledged White supporters there and soothed rising White fears of Black Power by saying, “Give us the vote and we will give the world the much-needed example of how Negroes and white people can work together in cooperation and understanding in governing themselves” (Cronk and Blumenthal).” As with the labor movement, the home rule movement made the Sylvan a place where Black and White citizens encountered mutual interests.
Figure 6. Home Rule Demonstration at the Sylvan Theater, 1966.

*(Cronk and Blumenthal)* Washington Post, *Photo by Jim McNamara.*
The Antiwar Movement

Over the decades, the Sylvan Theater was a necessary venue of protest, centrally located and free. In the late 1960s, protests against the Vietnam War carried on this tradition at the Sylvan. On May 15, 1966, 7000 people gathered at the Sylvan to protest the war. Dr. Benjamin Spock and civil rights leader Julian Bond were there. Cartoonist Jules Pfeiffer spoke, and Pete Seeger sang and played (Conconi, “Thousands Due;” Von Hoffman). On the other side of the issue, three months later, President Lyndon Johnson spoke to a captive audience of government interns from the same stage, articulating draft reforms that he hoped would smooth his prosecution of the war (Horner).

The Sylvan served as a local as well as a national center for protest against the war, if local and national protests can be consistently distinguished. August 1967 saw Joan Baez giving a well-received free concert at the Sylvan Theater (Hickerson), performing to a “curious mixture of hippies, teeny-boppers, black power advocates and big and little families” (Delaney, A1). Banned from performing at the Daughters of the American Revolution’s Constitution Hall for her antiwar and anti-war-tax views, Baez emulated Marian Anderson by singing at a public venue on the Mall. Baez’ concert was another example of the Sylvan space being claimed as an outlet for those without access to other spaces.

In another local event, in October 1968, the year after the Baez concert, a local student committee sponsored an anti-war rally at the Sylvan with a parachute as a stage

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14 The surplus parachute, in addition to providing a cheap, portable backdrop, coopted material from the military and invoked a sense of play. By the mid-1970s, parachute play would be a common form of physical education in U.S. elementary schools. Seker and Jones published a parachute play how-to in 1969. (McCann; Seker and Jones).
backdrop (Figure 7, Frazier, “Alternate view…” See also Appendix 4, Figure 27 for a view of the crowd at this event).

Figure 7. A Local Antiwar Rally at the Sylvan Theater, Oct. 26, 1968.

Antiwar activists gathered at the Sylvan Theater in 1968. The stage was configured with a parachute backdrop. Note the jet in the upper right corner on a flight path from National Airport. (Frazier, "Alternate view....") Photograph by Patrick Frazier. Used with the permission of American University.

In 1969, Civil Rights Movement leader Coretta Scott King was the keynote speaker at the kickoff rally of an antiwar march around the White House called the Vietnam Moratorium (Figure 8, Appendix 4, Figure 37). She spoke from the Sylvan, linking political protest and Shakespeare. Mrs. King talked about the things that political movements and theater have in common. They both involve changing minds, inspiring hearts, and motivating action. Political movements seek to capture the imagination of
citizens just as actors do with audiences. Mrs. King compared the assembled crowd's realization of the folly of Vietnam to seeing Hamlet's father's ghost in Shakespeare’s play. She then compared the desire to

Figure 8. Coretta Scott King and Bernita Bennette Hold Candles at the Vietnam Moratorium, October 15, 1969.

*Mrs. King spoke at a rally at the Sylvan theater. She then joined a candlelit march from the Sylvan Theater to the White House. (“Coretta Scott King Candle.”) EBSCO Associated Press Images Collection. Photographer unknown.*

get that folly known by American leaders to Marcellus's speech in *Hamlet* hoping that Horatio "may approve our eyes and speak of it." As she brought the speech toward conclusion, Mrs. King said:

The ghost of the War in Viet Nam is upon us, yet there are some who would advise us to silence our lips. “Give the President time,” they say.
“Don’t give moral encouragement to Hanoi and the National Liberation Front. We are making some progress.” In essence, they don’t recognize the existence of Marcellus’ ghost. But tonight, we are saying that we, as the American people, have taken up the night watch, and we have moved to break the betrayal of our own silences. (Coretta Scott King quoted in “Wrap-Up”)

Certainly, the Sylvan Theater was a place which many people used to break the national silence on issues important to building a better nation. The work of the Summer Shakespeare Festival began during the Civil Rights Movement, and the company made changes in casting to include more actors of color. The moral authority of that movement and others was communicated at times on the very stage on which the Festival performed, amid the famous memorials of Washington, D.C. The stories of Festival actors resonated in the context of social movements and government control. With the Summer Shakespeare Festival, the original dramatic arts vision of the Sylvan Theater played out more fully than ever before, yet it was grounded in the search for government support and incremental attempts to realize the social justice that had been called for in protest.

Coincidentally, two years prior at the Sylvan theater, Hamlet’s father’s ghost (Robert Jackson) and Claudius (Harold Scott) were the first major characters in the Summer Shakespeare Festival documented as having been played by Black actors (Burton 210). The Festival was resident at the Sylvan from 1961 to 1980, decamping to other venues for 1976, 1981, and 1982.
Chapter 3.

Ellie Chamberlain and the Summer Shakespeare Festival:
Producing Shakespeare Locally in a National Park

Chamberlain and the Beginnings of the Summer Shakespeare Festival

In 1959, the same year that Martin Luther King appeared at the Sylvan for the Youth March for Integration, Ellie Chamberlain decided that Washington needed free Shakespeare. This was a move that, for a few weeks each summer, brought the Sylvan a little closer to Alice Pike Barney’s vision for the Sylvan as a national center for theater.16 For twenty-one years, from 1961 until 1982, the Summer Shakespeare Festival brought outdoor drama to the nation’s capital, all but three of those years resident at the Sylvan Theater. During its existence, the Summer Shakespeare Festival produced twenty-one Shakespeare plays, one production of The Importance of Being Earnest, and one of Your Own Thing. The latter was a successful Off-Broadway musical based on Twelfth Night (See Appendix 2 for a list of performances). Chamberlain’s use of the government-owned Sylvan Theater necessitated negotiating federal and local resources. To serve the Black citizens of Washington, D.C., and to enrich the arts scene with Black perspectives was not part of her rhetorical strategy when seeking support from Congress. However, the company would begin to cast Black actors in major roles by 1967 at the latest. In 1970 and 1971, the Festival used National Endowment of the Arts funding to bring Black dancers and jazz musicians to the Sylvan.

16 See Appendix 4, Figure 24 for an aerial photograph of the Sylvan Theater during a production.
Ellie Chamberlain (1921-2013)\textsuperscript{17} was a 1958 transplant from New York to Washington, D.C. She had studied science and math at Hunter College and became interested in drama while earning a master’s degree in speech (1955) from NYU. She attended the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford, England, in the summer of 1955. Chamberlain then studied with Sanford Meisner and Martha Graham at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. She was a member of Joseph Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival company in 1958, understudying and playing minor roles in \textit{Twelfth Night} and \textit{Othello}. She also taught at Hofstra and Columbia (Barnes; Young; Chamberlain; “Free Plays Given…”). Upon moving to Washington, Chamberlain acted in and sometimes directed “more than a dozen” community theater shows (“Free Plays Given...”). Venues included the Little Theater of Alexandria, the Theatre Lobby, the Capitol Hill Theater, and the D.C. Department of Recreation (“Gossip at Gadsby’s;” “Theatre Lobby;” Young; D.C. Recreation).

Janet Welsh Brown, Chamberlain’s friend, documented the early history of the Festival in a manuscript compiled from interviews with Chamberlain not long before her death (Janet Brown, \textit{Free Shakespeare…}). Chamberlain visited New York in 1959 for Papp’s summer production of \textit{King Lear} and “returned to DC determined to establish Washington’s own ‘Shakespeare in the Park.’” She began her decades-long quest for money, recognition, and publicity to support her artistic vision. In that fall of 1959, Chamberlain “quickly got to know all of the players” and, with their insight, settled on the Sylvan Theater for a venue. This choice would allow her the venue free of rent. It would also require her to negotiate a relationship with the national government. The

\textsuperscript{17} Chamberlain was born four and a half years after the opening of the Sylvan Theater and so was nearly contemporaneous with it.
importance of this relationship between government and the Festival would be unusual for any U.S. theater since the Works Progress Administration and especially for a small, summer-only regional company.

In 1960, Chamberlain began trying to find out how to book the space. The bureaucracy was not easy to penetrate. Making the rounds of the National Park Service, “she met lots of officials who didn't know, or seem to care, what she was talking about.” Eventually she found her way to the office of the director of the National Capital Region of the National Park Service. George Hartzog, who would go on to become the seventh Director of the National Park Service, granted the permit (Janet Brown, *Free Shakespeare* 2; National Park Service, 7th National…).

Chamberlain had a more robust welcome from the D.C. Department of Recreation and began long-term relationships with that department’s personnel. A recreation department carpenter, Bob Troll, became the set designer and builder. Mrs. Condon, the head of the department’s costume shop, “opened up her wardrobe closet to the Festival and made additional costumes herself” (Janet Brown, *Free Shakespeare*… 2).

Chamberlain also wrote to Papp for advice and began to raise funds. To meet her budget of $7500, she convinced the Park Service to purchase $2500 worth of lights for the Sylvan Theater which could be used by the Festival.¹⁸ The Park Service also provided use of a “large truck” for company dressing rooms and secure storage space behind the open-air stage. The “rooms” were separated by a sheet. She got a firm to donate fabric for costumes (“Free Plays Given;” Janet Brown, *Free Shakespeare*… 2). Chamberlain sought

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¹⁸ This is from “Free Plays Given.” Janet Brown (*Free Shakespeare*) has lights borrowed from Roosevelt High School the first year.
and received a $3,000 grant from the private Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation.\(^\text{19}\)
The rest she raised from individuals. Chamberlain’s friend, Janet Welsh Brown “gave modestly” and helped with sets and costumes. Her husband Norman was on the company’s board and was a sometime sound engineer. Janet Welsh Brown said in an interview, “We didn’t think she could do it!” And yet the Summer Shakespeare Festival opened with *Twelfth Night* on July 1, 1961 (“Janet Welsh Brown” interview; “Current Theater Notes;” Coe, “‘Twelfth Night’ Performance…”).

Ellie Chamberlain was right about the demand for more theater in Washington, and 24,500 people showed up that first summer (Appendix 3). Said the *Washington Post*:

> [T]he Washington Shakespeare Summer Festival operated in an age of theatrical scarcity in Washington. Arena Stage was the only resident professional theater company in town, and Catholic University had the city’s only degree-granting drama school. Broadway productions had short-lived tryouts at the National Theatre, and small companies of amateur thespians tried their hands at community theaters in the suburbs. (Barnes)

Chamberlain wanted to become more professional with each year. One might expect that fundraising would get easier after Chamberlain’s initial production showed that she could meet the pent-up demand for theater. However, because in the first year she was only asking for a shoestring budget, it may have been the easiest year for fundraising that the Festival ever had.

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\(^{19}\) The Meyer Foundation “is a private foundation engaged in making grants for charitable and educational purposes in response to the changing needs of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan community” (Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation *Financial Statements*).
Chamberlain Struggles for Funding

As with most theaters and nonprofits, funding was a constant problem. Over the years, the Festival obtained some funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and private foundations, including the Meyer Foundation, the April Fund, and the Old Dominion Fund (“Free Plays Given;” Coe, “Shakespeare Fete…,” “Theater Notes”). It also received a pittance from selling reserved seats, but government funding remained the bulk of the Festival’s income. As she was successfully building relationships with the Interior Department, the D.C. Department of Recreation, Congress, and even the White House, she was clearly frustrated at the difficulty of fundraising. Columnist Scottie Lanahan\(^20\) quoted Chamberlain about the 1966 production of *The Winter’s Tale*:

”I'm very discouraged. The problems seem to get more complicated each year, even though the productions get better. Most of our foundation grants have run out, and maybe because we've never had a heat wave like this to contend with before, our audiences are running much smaller than usual…. [I’m] frankly at my wits' end. Nobody in town seems to really care, except the people who come to see the show.” (Chamberlain quoted in Lanahan)

Chamberlain also raised a comparison with her mentor’s New York Shakespeare Festival.

She bemoaned that O. Roy Chalk, the owner of D.C. Transit,\(^21\) gave money to Papp’s company and not to hers. Again, from Lanahan:

By contrast, the New York City Shakespeare festival in Central Park receives half-a-million dollars from the city budget and nearly as much again in grants and subscriptions. "Even O. Roy Chalk gives to the New York festival," Elly (sic) Chamberlain says wistfully. "I've tried to see him three times, and he won't even talk to me about ours.” (Lanahan)

Chamberlain did have better success with Congress, for a time.

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\(^{20}\) Daughter of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald.
\(^{21}\) The city’s private streetcar and bus system. Streetcars were phased out in 1962. Chalk sold the buses to the Metro system in 1973 (Estrada and Weil). See Appendix 4, Figure 35 for a photo of the Sylvan Theater on a 1938 D.C. Transit pass.
Chamberlain in Congress

As mentioned above, Chamberlain arranged in-kind funding of the Sylvan Theater in 1960, and she encouraged the Park Service to purchase lights that the company could use. Early on, the D.C. Recreation Department contributed funds and in-kind help, though all D.C. funds were controlled by Congress, too. Because of this, wooing Congress became an ongoing project.

The earliest mention of the Summer Shakespeare Festival in Congressional committee minutes was on May 15, 1961. Carroll D. Kearns (R-PA), a music educator and arts supporter on the Appropriations committee, submitted two articles, one from the *New York Times* (Calta) and one from Washington’s *Evening Star* (Young) into the record of a Congressional hearing (*Aid to Fine Arts*). Articles read into the record did not necessarily mean funding, but they did signal some early support for Chamberlain’s work on Capitol Hill. Reading into the record republished the festival’s association with important people in the arts: Chamberlain, the Calta article mentioned, had recruited Robert Frost, Laurence Olivier, Joseph Papp, and *Washington Post* drama critic Richard Coe to be honorary supporters of the theater’s first season.

In the decades following, Ellie Chamberlain testified three times before subcommittees of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee: twice before the District of Columbia subcommittee and once before the Interior and Related Agencies subcommittee, growing more sophisticated in her appeal with each appearance. These appearances provide an unusual public window into the appeals of a theater company’s artistic director before major funders.

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22 See Appendix 4, Figure 31 for Frost’s endorsement of the Festival.
On February 13, 1964, Chamberlain appeared before the all-male Subcommittee on District of Columbia Appropriations, chaired by William Natcher, a Democrat from Kentucky. (“Shakespeare Summer Festival,” 1965.23). In her page and a half of testimony in 1964, Chamberlain made an enthusiastic and substantive if somewhat rambling argument for funding. She gave attendance statistics for and mentioned by title only *Much Ado About Nothing* from the prior (1963) season. Over 58,000 people attended that show, averaging about 2300 people for each of 25 performances. She laid out the range of donor types: private funders, local foundations, the D.C. Recreation Department,24 and the local region of the Department of Interior, as well crew members who volunteered their time. Chamberlain then pointed to increasing excellence with the hiring of professional actors in the leads.

At this point, Chamberlain painted a picture of broad audience response and audience reach by sharing from notes sent from all parts of the country and abroad, likely from addressed envelopes included in the program. Then came short superlatives from critics. Chamberlain then circled back to funding, laying out her budget and pointing to the frugality of her $5000 request for critically urgent items compared to the much larger true need of the company. She finished her economic argument by reminding the subcommittee that 2000 people coming to Shakespeare at night make for a more vibrant city and increase the downtown’s economic potential. The conclusion of her testimony was an appeal to the highbrow—a reminder of the “400th anniversary of the birth of the greatest poet of the English-speaking world [Shakespeare]” (1064).

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23 Note that while the hearing is dated 1965 after the planned budget year, it took place in 1964.
24 Funding for the Festival from the Recreation Department continued in later years. See Appendix 4, Figure 32 for a department payment voucher to the Festival.
Frugality, wide appeal, quality, and edification were her watchwords. It is interesting that, though she mentioned funding from the D.C. Recreation Department, she did not talk about the need to serve D.C. residents, except for beneficiaries of two charities that she invited.

Ellie Chamberlain’s second testimony to Congress (“Summer Shakespeare Festival,” 1967) was more concise and ordered, showing advancement in her tactics to convince Congress to part with funding, though the arguments were similar. In this testimony, on April 29, 1966, she made four points—four ideas that she hoped would cause Congress to open its purse strings further. First, she argued that the numbers are compelling. In the company’s first five years, they played to over a quarter of a million people in over 100 performances. She said that her requested appropriation was “less than eight cents per person based on […] seasonal attendance.” Second, Chamberlain argued that the Festival created jobs, and that those jobs were becoming more professional with each year. Third, federal funds would be a seed for the “much larger share” of production costs covered by private contributions.

Fourth, Chamberlain again laid out the national impact of the productions using letters received from audience members. The Festival included contribution envelopes with the play’s programs. Some theatergoers mailed these in at a later date with remarks on the show. She mentioned contributions from Percyville, Virginia; North Carolina;

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25 Again, a hearing in 1966 planning for the following budget year. This hearing identifies Chamberlain as Mrs. Galidas, her married name, rather than her professional name.
26 Hearings that took place over a number of days and featured many speakers are rather difficult to date from the record because the hearing title typically includes only the first and last date of the hearing, while naming of the individual dates in the text of the record is haphazard and often hundreds of pages prior to any given speaker. In this case, the date is mentioned on p. 842, about eighty pages prior, and there is a typographic error of 1965 for the actual data of 1966.
27 This is probably a transcription error for the D.C. exurb of Purcellville, VA.
Pennsylvania; and Montana. The quotes that Chamberlain used also pointed to the elevating and scholarly qualities of Shakespeare in live performance: “[My contribution was a] good way to spend prize money won for an essay.” “I never understood Shakespeare…. The play brought me a true appreciation of fine literature in action.” With the quotes, she also mentioned that children and less-well-off people especially valued the performances because they contributed small amounts that meant a great deal to them: “…I can, being practical, send what I can ill afford to spend.” These were arguments for Congress to support the Festival because, with its free admission, it brought more people to Shakespeare, people who would not otherwise have been exposed to the playwright. Again there were references to good attendance, financial efficiency, and the educational nature of the productions. Again, despite the subcommittee’s charge to address District of Columbia appropriations, Chamberlain thought it is more effective to mention a wide geographical audience interest, catering to the Congressmen from around the country more than the citizens of Washington, D.C., home of the theater.

Ellie Chamberlain appeared before an Appropriations subcommittee for the third and final time in May of 1973, probably the ninth of that month (“Summer Shakespeare Festival,” 197328). This time, her testimony was before the Subcommittee on Department of Interior and Related Agencies, the subcommittee which funded the National Park Service, which owns the Sylvan Theater. The changing venue for Chamberlain’s testimony reflects changing times. That year, Congress was considering the D.C. home rule bill that it would soon pass and which would be signed into law by

28 See pp. 215, 305, and 358 for date or time references during the hearings.
President Nixon on Christmas Eve. Perhaps the D.C. appropriations subcommittee’s attention was turning away from arts and recreation to emerging Home Rule exigencies. Perhaps the Interior budget subcommittee’s increased attention to this theater company on its land presaged the coming budget squeeze and stricter funding process. In the coming decade, that stricter process would introduce competition to present summer theater at the Sylvan.

In her 1973 appearance, Chamberlain trimmed her planned oral testimony to a single page, but she now knew to submit a longer written testimony to be incorporated into the record, gaining an extra page of argument. She cited some victories and losses in funding over the years. On the one hand, the company received National Park Service money starting in 1969 in addition to the free use of the facility that the company had always enjoyed. Chamberlain also noted that “over the years” the Park Service made sure that the Sylvan was “improved with dressing rooms, new lighting and sound systems and a new stage floor.” On the other hand, she mentioned having received some National Endowment of the Arts funding in the past, but that further such funding would not be forthcoming unless the company acquired a winter home that would allow it to operate year-round.

A new argument for the theater appeared in the 1973 testimony. She expressed her goal “to reach the standard of excellence of companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company.” This can be read as an argument for the establishment of the Sylvan as a nationally subsidized theater in the capital city akin to the RSC and in tune with the early vision of Alice Pike Barney. While headquartered in Stratford, the RSC had a London base at the Aldwych Theatre since 1960 (“Aldwych Sold…;” “Peter Hall”).
What is most revealing about her 1973 Congressional testimony, as with the earlier ones, may be what Chamberlain did not say. She did not bring up an interest in serving potential Black audiences who made up the majority of the population of Washington, D.C. during the Shakespeare Summer Festival’s existence. Chamberlain may have decided tactically that due to White Southern power in Congress, bringing up this goal would not help her Festival get funding. The chair of the D.C. appropriations subcommittee when Chamberlain testified the first two times, William H. Natcher (D-KY), a supposed racial moderate, was no civil rights advocate. He voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And while he was a staunch advocate of libraries, he voted contrary to the interests of Washington’s poor and working people in transportation funding. He was a shrewd and steely opponent of the planned Washington, D.C. subway system (“William Natcher”). Despite Chamberlain’s silence on service to potential Black audiences before Congress, it does appear to have been a goal and a point of modest success, as discussed in the following section.

Moving Towards Service to the Black Community

As she was operating the Summer Shakespeare Festival, Ellie Chamberlain was also operating within the changing dynamics of race in her city and country. There is slim evidence of her thoughts about race and justice. However, the documentary evidence suggests that she opened up to the pressure and moral suasion of the Civil Rights Movement as shown in incremental decisions and actions. There are signs of cumulative decisions to cast more fairly, to be a community resource, to seek more

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29 Washington, D.C. changed from a Black-majority city to a Black-plurality city in 2011 (Tavernise).
inclusive leadership, and to examine race more explicitly in productions. Whether these gains continued or regressed after certain examples, as may be expected, is hard to say without a detailed accounting of the racial makeup of cast, crew, audience, and management, a record that has yet to be discovered.

Chamberlain’s association with Joseph Papp suggests an openness to service to the Black community. Papp was well-known for race-blind casting, and he toured historically Black colleges with an integrated production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1963 (“On the Road”). Chamberlain had worked in Papp’s Shakespeare in the Park and modelled the Festival after it. In 1975, she used vehicles loaned by Papp’s company to reach performances booked for National Parks in D.C., Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (Fehr).

The Festival was used early on as a resource for students in the community. In 1964, Georgetown University hosted a National Science Foundation-supported summer enrichment program for high-achieving students of color in D.C.’s “slum area.” In addition to classes, counseling, and other activities, the program brought them to see *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Festival (Slakey and Porreco 23).

As mentioned above, and discussed in more detail in the following chapter, Chamberlain’s company was a source of employment for Black actors in the late sixties and early seventies. In 1964, we find the first record that some actors cast in the Festival were Black. Nokomis Lee Jefferson and teenage dancer Virginia Johnson were supernumeraries in that year’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Halford; “Nokomis Lee Jefferson;” “Virginia Johnson;” Program for AMSND). Black actors were cast in major roles by 1967. Chamberlain’s mentor, Joseph Papp, had used race-blind casting since the fifties (Thompson, *Passing Strange* 71). Chamberlain’s Festival may have done so earlier.
in its existence, but if it did, it did not garner coverage in the written record.\textsuperscript{30} In 1967, Chamberlain produced Philip Burton’s \textit{Hamlet}. In his autobiography, \textit{Early Doors}, Burton (210) notes that he cast Black actors in the roles of Claudius (Harold Scott) and Hamlet’s father’s ghost (Robert Jackson). Burton followed this by casting White Montagues and Black Capulets in his 1967 \textit{Romeo and Juliet}. In the 1970 \textit{Tempest}, director Nagle Jackson cast Black actors in the roles of Ariel (Darryl Croxton) and Caliban (Henry Baker).\textsuperscript{31} In 1971, Emily Yancy played Olivia in the Festival’s \textit{Your Own Thing} (Coe, “How Not…”). When Chamberlain testified in 1973, she had already announced her choice to direct \textit{Othello} that summer with Robert Guillaume in the lead. The prominence of these casting decisions reflected the social change brought about by the Civil Rights Movement.

In addition to theater, and more in tune with the Summer Festival than the Shakespeare part of its name, the Festival supported Black artists in dance and music. In 1970, at a point when the Black-led Alvin Ailey dance company was on the verge of going under, the Festival sponsored it in an engagement at the Sylvan. This, along with a federally funded international tour, allowed Ailey to recall dancers who had departed with its near-dissolution (J.B. Lewis). Also that year, the Festival sponsored jazz groups at the Sylvan, including Black musicians Joe Lee Wilson, Woody Shaw, George Cables, Reggie Johnson, Lennie White, and Nathan Page (Scott).

Besides sponsoring Black artists, Chamberlain also cultivated the support and leadership of Black elites. The 1969 program for \textit{As You Like It} included a list of board

\textsuperscript{30} More detailed analysis of cast lists such as cross-referencing them with high school and college yearbooks in genealogical databases might answer this question but were beyond the scope of this work.

\textsuperscript{31} Errol Hill briefly discussed these productions of \textit{Romeo and Juliet} and \textit{The Tempest} in his groundbreaking work \textit{Shakespeare in Sable} (156-158).
members and honorary sponsors. Black sponsors included Mayor Walter Washington, Washington Urban League director Sterling Tucker, and Massachusetts Senator Edward Brooke. Civil engineer Granville W. Woodson served as vice president of the Festival board between at least 1967 and 1969, as indicated on a Hamlet fundraising flier (“Summer Shakespeare Festival … Presents ‘Hamlet’”) and the As You Like It program.

On the other end of the social scale from Washington’s elites, Chamberlain displayed a combined desire to fill seats and to reach out to marginalized members of the community. During at least the first three years of production, the Festival invited groups from the Soldiers’ Home, the Northwest Settlement House, and St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. (Shakespeare Summer Festival, 1965). 32 Janet Brown described the attendance of kids from marginalized neighborhoods during the 1961 opening run of the Festival:

> At every performance there was a group of young children from Foggy Bottom (then a predominantly African-American neighborhood) and from the poorer SW neighborhoods, then being demolished in the big 1950s-'60s federal housing program known as “slum clearance” and later as “Negro removal.” They sat on the ground right in front of the stage, fascinated by the plays and the actors. (Janet Brown. Parenthetical note in the original.)

Unfortunately, we are not able to track from attendance statistics to what extent Chamberlain’s casting and outreach efforts were successful in attracting audience members of color.

There is some indication that the company’s outreach efforts were well-received by the Black community. Chamberlain and leads Janet League and Neil Hunt were awarded the key to the city by Mayor Washington for their work on Romeo and Juliet

32 The Northwest Settlement House in the Shaw neighborhood “has provided social and day care services since 1934” (Jones). St. Elizabeth’s is a psychiatric hospital.
(“Keys to the City”). In addition, in 1982, Chamberlain was invited to lecture on producing Shakespeare at the historically Black Howard University (Rosenfeld, “Backstage”). Although she did not position herself as a player in the great social transformations of the Civil Rights Movement, her theater company, the Summer Shakespeare Festival, and its stage, the Sylvan Theater provided one of the places, a literal venue, in which moments small and large were both imbedded in and reflective of the transformations happening in broader society. Chamberlain renewed Alice Pike Barney’s vision of a theater for Washington, and, like Barney, she lobbied the powers that be for support. As she built the Festival, she began to think in more sophisticated ways about how to serve the city that was the company’s host, and she began to bring more people to the Sylvan who could make that happen.
Chapter 4.

Black Actors at the Festival: The Weight of Claiming Access

Earlier chapters here examined the space of the Sylvan Theater in different ways. First, the physical theater envisioned as a national arts space immediately became a national space of contested access in major social and policy actions of the twentieth century. It was used by government, protesters, and counter-protesters on issues such as war, labor, D.C. home rule, and civil rights. Second, at a smaller scale, Ellie Chamberlain and her Summer Shakespeare Festival company used the space to bring Shakespeare to the people, reinvigorating the original arts concept with a resident summer theater company. And we saw that Chamberlain had to interact with the federal government to an extent that is unusual for most theaters, and particularly for one on a shoestring budget. As an arts space, it continued to be a contested space, with Chamberlain working with Congress, the White House, the Interior Department, the National Park Service, and the District of Columbia Recreation Department to maintain access and to get enough funding to carry on. In this chapter, the focus is on the Sylvan Theater as a more intimate space, at the scale of individual actors working with the company to perform theater. We see how actors of color had to interact with the same racial constraints contested politically on that very stage.

Ayanna Thompson (Passing Strange, Colorblind Shakespeare) shows how “nontraditional casting”\(^3^3\)—the casting of actors of color in roles previously played by

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\(^3^3\) Of course, Black-led theaters traditionally cast Black actors. The novelty of casting Black actors, the nontraditionalness, is for White-led theaters, which have offered the most opportunities for professional employment for theater actors and crew in the United States. In his history of theater in Washington, D.C., Robert Michael Oliver names some local Black theaters on pages 23, 28, 34, 157, and 168.
Whites—generates additional layers of meaning in a play, such as seeing racial conflict in a production when an entirely different sort of conflict was originally written. In *Passing Strange*, she describes the four types of nontraditional casting originally outlined by the Non-Traditional Casting Project.\(^34\) “Colorblind casting” puts “the best actor [in] the best role” (Davis and Newman 76), regardless of race. “Societal casting” is where actors of color are chosen for roles that people of color are stereotypically thought to occupy in real life (such as occupations of lower status), even if they were originally written for White actors. “Conceptual casting” uses actors of color to heighten “the play’s social resonance” (76), and “cross-cultural casting” shifts “the entire world of the play” to gain meaning from “a different culture and location.”

In nontraditional casting, as Thompson describes, the social history of race in America interacts with the conversation between the director, actors, other creative personnel, audience, and context. She describes how rationales for nontraditional casting, especially societal casting, can end up reinforcing racial stereotypes rather than eroding them. In addition, she demonstrates that nontraditional casting often creates burdens on Black actors that their White colleagues in a production do not have to shoulder. She shows that simply including actors of color in a White-run company, though important and valuable, does not magically do away with the injustices of racism in theater. This chapter of the thesis discusses how casting of Black actors in a predominantly White theater played out at Ellie Chamberlain’s Summer Shakespeare Festival in the late sixties and early seventies.\(^35\)

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\(^34\) Now the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts.
\(^35\) Figure 7 shows the scale and configuration of the Sylvan stage with a frame for lights around this time.
Philip Burton Directs *Hamlet*

Prominent casting of Black actors in the Festival began with the two-year residency of expatriate Welsh director Philip Burton, who helmed *Hamlet* in 1967 and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1968. In his autobiography, Burton discussed his two years with the company, which had a certain level of notoriety. He was convinced to direct the Festival following a fortuitous event where he and Chamberlain together supplied a link between Hollywood royalty and Washington power. How this came to be is instructive as another one of Chamberlain’s successes in wooing the federal government for the Festival. In the late fifties, Burton related in his autobiography, “Ellie [Chamberlain] had been one of the most loyal members of the audience in New York… when [Burton gave his] twenty lectures on ‘The Actor’s Shakespeare.’” A decade later, in 1967, a publicist whom Chamberlain had hired booked the premier of the Richard Burton/Elizabeth Taylor film version of *The Taming of the Shrew* for fundraising purposes for the Summer Shakespeare Festival.

Richard Burton was director Philip Burton’s beloved foster son. This publicist, Dickie Moore, 36 who knew Philip, recruited him to be photographed meeting Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall as part of this publicity venture. (The National Park Service, the agency that owns the Sylvan Theater, is a unit of the Department of Interior.) The senior Burton not only went to the meeting, but also was impressed with Udall’s attention:

“[Udall] surprised me by becoming genuinely interested in our conversation, which lengthened into a very pleasant half-hour. I myself became so enthusiastic about the [Summer Shakespeare] festival that

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36 Dickie Moore was also a prolific child actor and actor from the late twenties through the 1950s (“Dickie Moore”).
when Dickie Moore suggested … that I could help them still further [by directing], I readily agreed, provided I could choose the play. I wanted to do Hamlet…. [Burton 204]

Philip Burton did direct that 1967 production of Hamlet, the Festival’s first tragedy. Burton cast actors of color as Claudius and Hamlet’s father’s ghost, an example of colorblind casting. Critic Richard Coe “admired Harold Scott’s Claudius” and praised Robert Jackson’s Ghost as “a substantial touch” that was presented “so well” (Coe, “‘Hamlet’ is Splendid…”). The Festival issued a flier (“Summer Shakespeare Festival … Presents ‘Hamlet’”) featuring Scott’s photo and biography along with those of Burton and his Hamlet and Gertrude, 37 but I found no other records about Scott or Jackson’s time at the Festival.

Burton Directs Romeo and Juliet

The Festival’s Hamlet was successful enough that it established Burton as a director valued by Chamberlain and her board. It also led to the nontraditional casting of Romeo and Juliet. The board of the Festival “warmly welcomed” Burton’s bold vision for his production of Romeo and Juliet the following year. Burton changed the setting from Verona in Italy to the Louisiana port of “New Verona” in the United States, an example of cross-cultural casting. And he cast Black actors in all of the Capulet roles (Burton 209-210).

In his autobiography, Burton revealed some of his thinking about race at the Sylvan Theater. Burton noted that the audiences for Hamlet had been overwhelmingly White. As he recognized that D.C. was “a predominantly Negro city,” he hoped that

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37 Robert Drivas and Diana Webster, mother of actor Michael Douglas.
Romeo and Juliet would bring Black audiences “in great numbers.” And he hoped that the racially balanced cast would help in that regard. Meanwhile, during the spring 1968 planning for the production, the assassination of Dr. King shook the country. Once the initial shock began to subside, Burton and the Festival team “wondered if his murder would cause the abandonment of [their] project,” but the production did continue (210-211).

Of all Summer Shakespeare Festival productions, Romeo and Juliet had the most direct interaction with the progressive political protests at the Sylvan. From May 15 to June 24, the Civil Rights Movement’s tent encampment, Resurrection City, occupied the Mall south of the Reflecting Pool. Director Burton reported that Resurrection City and its concluding rally, the Poor People’s March, pre-empted the Festival’s use of the Sylvan “for a few days.” The police advised the Festival not to use the Sylvan that year, fearing disruption from the protest, but the show went on. From Burton’s perspective, the production overall went smoothly and “very beautiful[ly]” (211).

Janet League as Juliet

Ayanna Thompson’s work on nontraditional casting suggests that all was not likely to have been so smooth and beautiful for Black members of the company. While a company-wide assessment is difficult nearly fifty-four years later, there are a number of articles from the press about Janet League (Figure 9), the production’s Juliet, that offer
some clues about the extra burdens that she may have borne as a Black company member during the production.\footnote{I was not able to reach Ms. League, now Janet League-Katzin, for an interview.}

The most bluntly obvious burden that League carried that her White colleagues did not was race-based trauma. In a \textit{Washington Post} profile, League, a Chicago native, mentioned that she moved to a White neighborhood as a child, and “a Molotov cocktail was thrown on our porch one night” (Sewell). League reflected only that it terrified her brother. Much later, Dr. King’s murder just months prior to the production embodied the horror of White violence against Black people. Later that year, as \textit{Romeo and Juliet} was in rehearsal, Resurrection City was a concrete reminder of King’s life and death.
only a short walk from the Sylvan. Resurrection City used the theater for speeches, noted later in production coverage in the African-American paper the *New York Amsterdam News*: “It was [at the Sylvan Theater] that many speeches were made in connection with the recent Poor People’s March” (“Juliet’s Family Black…”). The residents of Resurrection City who remained after the protest’s permit expired were driven out with batons and tear gas on June 24th. *Romeo and Juliet* opened thirteen days later on July seventh (Massimo).

Police violence was another threat that League and the other Black actors likely feared. On July 26, a small listing for *Romeo and Juliet* appeared on page six of the radical *Washington Free Press* (“Show Time”). On the front page, the paper reported a lawsuit against the D.C. police chief, three officers, and other parties in the July 14 police killing of Theodore Lawson in a moving vehicle on a crowded street (“Police Suit”). Lawson was accused of stealing from a Safeway grocery store. The theater listing shared page six with a column responding to the Lawson shooting. The column by Tom Fields suggested that he and like-minded people “will burn, riot, and kill until [the White Establishment] is off our backs” (Fields). So with violence against Blacks, and threats of violence against Whites, the production played in a charged atmosphere.

The Post’s reviewer noted that the resolution at the end of *Romeo and Juliet* calling for harmony had “both a happy and a hollow note a few blocks from Resurrection City” (Coe, “‘Romeo and Juliet,’ Louisiana Style”). Another critic, evoking perhaps more Elsinore than New Verona, said that “[t]here on the Monument

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39 The column misnamed the victim as *Kenneth* Lawson.
Grounds, the Ghost of Resurrection City brooded like a spirit summoned…” (Horobetz). The quest for economic and racial justice in the history of the Sylvan stage echoed there for those who listened, despite the rosiness of the director’s assessment.

The burdens of Black players were added to by the pen as well as by physical violence and intimidation. On July 24, the Washington Post published a letter by Sylvia Manolatos calling the Sylvan production of Romeo and Juliet the “ultimate in racial absurdity.” The Blackness of the actors, she said, made her read the play as a “parody” despite the “excellent acting.” In opposition, the Post published three letters from readers supporting the casting and the quality of the play (Boothby and others). One mentioned that female characters were played by men and boys in Shakespeare’s time; another quoted some lines decrying hate in the play. A third pointed out the contradiction inherent in claiming lack of prejudice if the acting was “excellent” but it was the casting of Black actors that made the play unwatchable.

Frederick O’Neal, president of Actor’s Equity and co-founder of the American Negro Theater and the British Negro Theater (Rule), responded in the Post to Manolatos’ letter after production was over. He made a series of arguments for nontraditional casting. One point was that theater is make-believe, so we should not expect an actor to be or even necessarily be like a character in real life. Another was that Black actors have been playing classical characters for a long time. He mentioned Black actor Ira Aldridge playing Shakespeare to great approval in Shakespeare’s home country and in continental Europe in the 1800’s. O’Neal also explained that American Negro Theater veteran Earle Hyman, (best known today as the voice of Panthro in ThunderCats and as Russell Huxtable in The Cosby Show) went to Norway in the
twentieth century and found acclaim in a wider range of roles than those initially available to him in the United States.

Finally, O’Neal pointed out the absurdity of audiences accepting Whites playing other races, but not accepting Blacks playing Shakespeare:

[T]here are people, like Miss Manolatos, who despair when Negroes play roles that have by past custom and prejudice been adjudged roles for whites only. This, despite the fact that these very same people accept the casting of such an actor as Jeff Chandler as an American Indian or Jeanne Crain as a Negro girl in the movie, "Pinky," or Lenore Ulric as the Negro woman in "Lulu Belle," or Laurence Olivier as Othello. (O’Neal)

O’Neal also mentioned the broad acceptance at the time of yellowface roles: “David Wayne as Sakini in ‘Teahouse of the August Moon’ or Warner Oland, J. Carrol Naish, and Sidney Toler as Charlie Chan…” (O’Neal). One of the earlier letter writers had offered the case of Whites playing Madame Butterfly. As a union head, O’Neal was a key advocate for the opportunities that colorblind casting created for Black performers. He was less overtly interested in this letter about the stereotypes generated by Whites playing other races.

Another burden was mixed messages from a White director. Romeo and Juliet

Director Philip Burton made an offensive or at least poorly expressed remark in the press that “[H]e was glad he could ‘put the current racial conflict to good use’” (“Juliet’s Family Black”) in the production, as if the Civil Rights Movement was about his work as a director rather than about justice for people of color. Burton, as mentioned above, made the choice to cast the play with families split by race. I wonder if he involved the cast in discussing this choice, and if he was more facile and sensitive in those discussions than he was in the above article.
As an actor of color, Janet League also had double duty working with both the dominant press and the Black press. The press was beneficial for League, of course, but would have included both extra time and the extra mental effort of interviewing for the different audiences. In a *Washington Post* profile (Seawell), she was asked whether Burton’s nontraditional casting of the play was a gimmick. Such a question implies that maybe her own casting as Juliet was a gimmick. In the same *Post* profile, she was asked her experience with racial trauma. This was used in the article as something to be consumed to inform the meaning of and add poignancy to the play: “She has experienced in her life the strife and bitterness that the Montagues and Capulets act out on the stage.” The *Post* also added lines on her marital backstory that were not relevant to the production: that her husband originally did not want her to act. Both the *Post* and *Jet* magazine (Lantz) did devote some lines to her qualifications—her work at Lincoln Center and the Stratford, Connecticut festival. *Jet* added more details on League’s career success, mentioning that she “declined more lucrative offers in New York for the chance to play Juliet under Philip Burton on a shoe-string budget (Lantz 60).” At the same time, Lantz devoted some space to League’s advocacy for Black actors. League was glad that the wide range of roles in *Romeo and Juliet* allowed for many “secondary learning roles” that would allow less experienced Black actors to develop beyond the background roles “as spear-carriers” that they were normally offered (60-61).

In Lantz’s article, League mentioned a further point of annoyance: “reviews that gave more space to the racial conflict than to her interpretation of Juliet” (60). As a Black actor, she was in a catch-22 of nontraditional casting: people saw her skin, attributed meaning to it, and used it for purposes over which she had little control, such
as Burton’s decision to use race as a marker for the Capulet/Montague conflict. In order to get the role, she had to act well, but in order to play the role, she had to act in a play racially cast by and under the vision of a White director. She understandably resented having her talents as an actor overshadowed by the marketing and emphasis in the press of the racial construct of the casting.

In *Passing Strange*, Thompson problematizes cases where there is a dissociation regarding race in different phases of a production. A play may be cast mixing Black and White actors, but then it might seem to ignore race in the play itself. At the same time, the company’s marketing department might use race to sell the play. Thompson describes these contradictions as characteristic of the “colorblind” as opposed to the “cross-cultural” type of nontraditional casting that was used in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, I find the discord between casting, performance, and marketing that Thompson describes *does* apply to the Festival’s cross-cultural 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*. The dissociation that Thompson describes sheds light on the situation in which League found herself:

Colorblind casting … assumes that an actor’s color has no semiotic value onstage unless it invested with one by the director. For example, in 1997 La Mama Experimental Theatre in New York advertised itself as having an interracially cast production of *Macbeth*, starring [the White] Tom Kompache as Macbeth and [the Black] Barbara Montgomery as Lady Macbeth. (Thompson, *Passing Strange* 77)

While “Montgomery’s race was never discussed within the production itself,” the marketing of this *Macbeth*

emphasized the “sensuality, lust, and greed of the main characters,” and [that] Montgomery played Lady Macbeth using “an embodiment of sexuality and passion with a sense of evil that makes even the witches cower…. ” [T]he publicity’s insistence on the ‘interracial’ quality of the
production was disturbing to some. Ellen Forman, for example, asked, “Was it intentional to link sexuality and evil with blackness? For what other purpose is the interracial aspect stressed?” Foreman wanted to read the play as cast without attention to race…, but the publicity materials made her wonder if in fact the production was extremely, and offensively, color conscious. (Thompson, Passing Strange 77, quoting Ellen Foreman in Hill 162-163)

With this sort of conflict between casting, performance, and publicity, audiences and critics may be confused about the intent of a play and unsure how to interpret it.

This was the case in the Festival’s Romeo and Juliet. The play was racially cast; however, critics reported that the play was performed without emphasis on race: Coe “watched from several spots and was amused to find that from further back, the racial aspect was quite invisible and the old tale of the youngest loves moved in its customary style. It is simply a story of most unfortunate coincidences” (Coe, ‘Romeo and Juliet’: Louisiana Style). Beauchamp in the Evening Star agreed:

The updating and the racial casting certainly do not enhance “Romeo and Juliet,” but neither do they hurt it. They leave it, truth to tell, pretty much as it was. That is to say, once we get used to white Montagues feuding with black Capulets, we accept it and think no more about it; it’s as good an explanation as any for their refusal to be friends, in Verona or in New Orleans. (Beauchamp, “Guess Who’s Coming…”)

A third critic put it this way: “The production could have developed into little more than a blank verse Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. That it did not was the result of a sort of artless compromise in which the director established the racial issue on the stage through his casting and then proceeded to carefully avoid any exploitation of it” (Horobetz).

However, as with Thompson’s Macbeth case study, the casting of Blacks and Whites as the opposing families was used in marketing, which is clear when you look at
announcements from different papers side-by-side. The Defender and Newsday used several lines of nearly identical text in announcements of the play (“Janet League Will Star…;” “Mutual Radio…. Interracial Twist”), including the hyphenated phrase “racial-conflict production,” which suggests that they based their brief stories on a single press release by Chamberlain or her publicist. Emphasis on the racial construct of the casting raised the profile of the Summer Shakespeare Festival, this production, and Janet League. This happened in both in the White press and the Black press.40

Additional national coverage in the White-owned press included the Los Angeles Times (Coe, “Romeo and Juliet’ as Racial Conflict”), which picked up Robert Coe’s Washington Post review (Coe, “…Louisiana Style”). The New York Times featured the show and a photo of League in its listing of summer shows for those fleeing Manhattan, called “The Straw Hat Trail.” (Although one doubts that New Yorkers found much heat relief in the even swampier Washington, D.C.) Besides the Defender, other national Black publications to cover the show were Jet magazine and the New York Amsterdam News (Lantz, “Juliet’s Family Black”). The show got great press, but marketing based on racial conflict skewed coverage away from the acting work by Black performers.

The focus on race was a mixture of Burton’s casting decision approved by the Festival, press releases written by the Festival, and the zeitgeist, with the Civil Rights Movement’s activity combined with the tragedy of Dr. King’s assassination. Anxious to work with Burton on Shakespeare (Lantz 60), League found herself in a production which emphasized race when she would rather have emphasized her acting skills.

40 The Defender was the Black newspaper of record.
Horobetz in *Shakespeare Quarterly* raved about League and wrote kudos to both Montagues and Capulets. “There was so much to commend in this production.” But she came down viciously on nontraditional casting in this context, calling the decision worse “than ill-advised gimmickry” because “in the summer of 1968, the racial issue deserves far more than a token theatrical gesture.” I would defer to League here, who acknowledged the need for both action in the streets and understanding in the heart: She said in the *Post* feature that “[i]n order to get anything done [as on race], you must have radicals…. [But] I think that in its small way this play can contribute to a sense of understanding and harmony” (Seawell).

In the main, commentary on the play was neutral to positive. Beauchamp of the *Evening Star* said the show “work[ed] fine,” a “serviceable” Shakespeare (“Guess Who’s…”). Coe of the *Post* called the play, of the Festival’s eight seasons, “surely the handsomest of the lot.” With the benefit of a year’s reflection, an anonymous *Post* blurb on the Summer Shakespeare Festival went as far as to call the 1968 show “novel” and “insightful” (“Shakespeare on the Potomac”). In the end, League may have gotten her wish to be rewarded for her interpretation rather than have her work overshadowed by race. Coe pointed out that the production hewed closely and clearly to the text, and that, after an initial jump of his mind to *Porgy and Bess*, the “familiar lines” and the “effectiveness of setting and costumes” combined so that a largely “new audience, mostly in free seats, [discovered] a storied play. Such is the purpose of the Shakespeare Summer Festival and with the white Monument towering in the background, there is a sense of continuity for young minds to discover” (Coe, “…Louisiana Style”).

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There were other markers of success, be they racial or generic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, League, Hunt, and Chamberlain received a key to the city of Washington from the mayor, suggesting that it was a production that helped to build bridges in the wake of Dr. King’s assassination (Figure 10, “Keys to the City”). At that ceremony in the D.C. City Council chambers, Hunt and League performed the balcony scene (Figure 11, “Shakespeare Up-to-Date”). Burton wrote his autobiography, “It is thrilling to think that, weather willing, more people are likely to see [the Festival

Figure 10. Janet League, Neil Hunt, and Ellie Chamberlain receive the keys to Washington, D.C. from Mayor Walter Washington.

1968 photograph from the Baltimore Afro-American. Used with permission, courtesy of the AFRO American Newspapers Archive (“Keys to the City”). Photographer unknown.
Figure 11. Janet League and Neil Hunt Perform the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet* for the D.C. City Council, 1968.

Washington Post photo by Margaret Thomas ("Shakespeare Up-to-Date").

production of *Romeo and Juliet* than will see any other summer production of Shakespeare anywhere in the world, for it will be the sole production of the festival" (Burton 211). In the end, 58,000 people saw the play ("Shakespeare on the Potomac"). The Festival spread Shakespeare to the people, and Burton’s nontraditional casting and Chamberlain’s racial-conflict marketing helped accomplish this.

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41 Because of his future-oriented phrasing, Burton apparently wrote his autobiography before the run closed.
Darryl Croxton and Henry Baker in *The Tempest*

As with Burton’s 1967 *Hamlet* and 1971’s *Your Own Thing*, the documentation of the Black players in the Summer Shakespeare Festival’s 1970 production of *The Tempest* is less than that for Janet League in *Romeo and Juliet*. Ariel was played by Darryl Croxton, a Baltimore native (Figure 12). Croxton attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, played Broadway and off-Broadway theaters, and later founded a Baltimore company called the Theater of the Rising Sun (“Croxton Stars in ‘Othello’”; S. Fisher). His *Baltimore Sun* obituary says that he had a “passion for Shakespeare” and was “a vivid presence in his community” (S. Fisher). In an interview, his friend and colleague, Dwight R.B. Cook said that Croxton’s spellbinding persona

![Darryl Croxton as Ariel in the 1970 Summer Shakespeare Festival production of *The Tempest*.](image-url)

*Clipping from the estate of John Peter Halford. Detail from Washington Post photograph (‘Tempest in Washington’). Photographer unknown.*

Figure 12. Darryl Croxton as Ariel in the 1970 Summer Shakespeare Festival production of *The Tempest*. 
accompanied him offstage. Despite his charm, it could be difficult to get to know him.

Mr. Cook suggested that the flamboyance and charisma that made him a successful actor also allowed him to mix in White circles that he would not otherwise have had access to (Cook). The story of neighborhood change in Baltimore and other American cities (as with Janet League’s experience in Chicago, above) sheds some light on this as well, and in turn on the social geographic context of the Sylvan Theater.

Born circa 1948, Croxton attended high school in neighborhoods that were radically and rapidly changing due to White flight. White flight was a combination of White people’s anxiety and animus, blockbusting real estate agents’ greed and fearmongering, Black neighborhoods’ destruction in “urban renewal” and highway construction, and Black people’s quest for access to better housing. I interviewed Clarinda Harriss, who became Croxton’s lifelong friend when she was an English teacher at Forest Park High School and he was a student. At the time, the neighborhood was transitioning from a Jewish neighborhood to a Black neighborhood (“Clarinda Harriss;” Goldstein and Weiner 257). Croxton graduated in 1966 from a different school, Edmondson High School, in a neighborhood that also underwent dramatic White flight (“Croxton Stars in ‘Othello’”; Simon and Burns 94).

The upheaval of Baltimore’s neighborhoods was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Forest Park High School had a strong drama program that nurtured Croxton (Clarinda Harriss). Croxton became lifelong friends not only with Harriss, a White woman, but with her parents, Baltimore Sun columnist Robert Preston “R.P.” Harriss, and Margery Harriss. Margery was an English teacher, a brilliant public school Shakespeare teacher, and a “fire-breathing feminist” who entertained a wide circle of
friends, both interesting and powerful (“Clarinda Harriss;” Kelly and Rasmussen). On the other hand, it can be alienating to attend a new school. Even without the racial tensions that Baltimore’s neighborhoods were experiencing, the work necessary to “fit in” is formidable.

From the relatively little press about Croxton in the 1970 Summer Shakespeare Festival production of *The Tempest*, it is hard to tell what working in that particular play meant to Croxton, but his experience shows something about the landscape in which the Sylvan Theater worked. It drew some actors (such as Croxton and League) from cities that were being churned due to a combination of racial discrimination, blockbusting, and Black people’s search for better housing.

Meanwhile, *Tempest* director Nagel Jackson chose Henry Baker, also a Black man, to be Croxton’s colleague in the role of Caliban (Figure 13). Baker, a native of Louisiana, was an actor and aspiring opera singer, as was Robert Guillaume, the Summer Shakespeare Festival’s 1973 Othello (Fuller; Guillaume 69). Baker had an off-Broadway career from 1968 to 1977 (“Henry Baker” in IBDB and IOBDB). As Henry Judd Baker, he had a film career from 1974 to 1991, including as one of the villains in Oliver Stone’s first feature, a horror flick called *Seizure* (“Henry Judd Baker;” Paszylk 131-132).

Reviews of the Festival *Tempest* overall were excellent. Beauchamp of the *Star* deemed it “decidedly one of the festival’s better productions” and “colorful and lively,”...
with a “nifty” set that changes from a ship into Prospero’s cell and Caliban’s cave
(Beauchamp, “Festival Offers Lively ‘Tempest’”). Coe of the Post called it “the best
work the Shakespeare Summer Festival has given us … in many summers” (Coe,
“‘Tempest’ at Sylvan.”). Coe expressed relief that he was not challenged by a “black-
white” production, and Jeanne Roberts of Shakespeare Quarterly was pleased that [in
contrast to Romeo and Juliet] the production had no particular “relevance” beyond what
she thought exuded naturally from the text. But, of course, there was a racial element to
casting. Nagle’s casting of both Ariel and Caliban with Black actors in an apparently
otherwise White company was an example of societal casting, where actors of color are cast in a position reflective of societal stereotypes, in this case, subservient and slave relationships.

Jeanne Roberts, an esteemed feminist Shakespeare scholar (Langer), addressed the nontraditional casting in considerable detail, some insight, and considerable association with racial stereotype. “Caliban has always had some aura of the American Indian, and guilt stirs uneasily in a modern [White] American audience when he speaks of being dispossessed of his land.” As Roberts implies, the indigenous Americanness of Caliban has long been an object of debate in the literature,42 and something to be considered in parsing interpretation of the play by White audiences. Roberts also noted that Baker’s Blackness evokes slavery in the mind of White American audiences, something that agrees with Thompson’s framework (Roberts).

At points, it is difficult to read whether Roberts was criticizing or employing White racial stereotypes of Blacks. She described Baker’s Caliban as having “somewhat flawed enunciation” and characterized it as a trait that would remind Whites of “the American Negro.” If his enunciation was different, could not have been part of a “monster” character? Roberts also wrote that “Baker was ‘rather darkly beautiful in … his great natural dignity.’” Why was that dignity “natural” rather than a product of Baker’s insight and technique? Roberts employed or examined stereotype again when she referred to “a minstrel-show mouth painted grotesquely in a greenish face.” In any case, the point was made that many members of the audience were drawing on skin color and other racial stereotypes to interpret the play. In a sensitive observation

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42 See, for example, Vaughan and Vaughan 137 and following.
regarding societal casting, Roberts pointed out that Croxton’s Ariel, whom she called graceful and gently authoritative, was light-skinned compared to Baker’s Caliban. As Roberts said, it may “reinforce the vulgar prejudice that lighter is better…. One is tempted to conclude facetiously that Caliban was a black militant and Ariel an Uncle Tom” (Roberts).

The 1970 production of the *The Tempest* has one distinction. It is the only Summer Shakespeare Festival production that has been cited in the scholarly literature for innovative interpretation, in Vaughan and Vaughan’s *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History*. In harmony with Robert’s reference to Caliban as “black militant” above, Henry Baker is credited with a performance that is the apex of the powerful Caliban, a trend to make Caliban be more human, have more agency, and be less stereotypically servile (Vaughan and Vaughan 191). Interestingly, Vaughan and Vaughan’s mention of the Festival *Tempest* is based entirely on Robert’s earlier review. They repeat Roberts’ characterization of Baker’s Caliban as a “black militant” who does not bow down to Prospero, even at the end. This characterization of Baker’s Caliban is positive in the sense that Baker endowed him with agency, and it smartly acknowledges the societal casting set-up of the play. Even so, Roberts and the Vaughans may have been too quick to adopt racial shorthand, taking attention away from the craft of Baker’s work as an actor.

Coe’s review raved about Baker’s performance, that “Henry Baker’s Caliban is exceptionally well done, vividly enough the savage at first sight but, through effective use of … words, clearly the product of Prospero’s early tutoring. Baker makes it clear [though] that Caliban didn’t get all of Prospero’s message …” of servitude (Coe,
“‘Tempest’ at Sylvan’). While I am not aware of any documentary evidence of Baker’s thoughts of the production, it is clear that he gave an impressive performance at the Sylvan in a role that had potential pitfalls from audience perceptions of race due to societal casting.

Robert Guillaume as Othello

This section examines Robert Guillaume’s remembrance of his performance as Othello in the 1973 Summer Shakespeare Festival production (Figures 14 and 15). Strictly speaking, the casting of Guillaume, a Black man, was not “nontraditional,” as Black actors had been playing the role for some time in a number of White-led companies. But due to centuries of racism and the complexity of changing cultural conceptions of Blackness and Moorishness, the history of playing Othello has been complex (Thompson, “Introduction” to the Arden Shakespeare Othello). The role has been fraught with issues that Black actors must negotiate (Thompson, “Two Actors;” Tricoles). For Guillaume, the Sylvan Theater became a space where he as an actor had to negotiate race and class in his mind. He felt caught. This was, as he characterized it, a fancy production of Othello with a sophisticated crowd. At the same time, it was in an outdoor, public theater space where anyone could walk by and chime in.

In his autobiography, Guillaume: A Life, Robert Guillaume described an encounter in the final dress rehearsal and opening night 1973 performance of Othello (Guillaume 138-139). A group of boys came to the final dress rehearsal on their bikes. They were African-American kids, and Guillaume noticed them watching the rehearsal. Guillaume felt as if they were wondering, “Why is this black dude in this white play
The feeling that Guillaume writes about is somewhat like actor Dion Johnstone’s reflections on nontraditional casting, quoted in Thompson:

[It] can mean that “we’re going to dress you up in Elizabethan costumes, and your color doesn’t matter.” … But the fact is I’m black…. I am the only black member of this company, and when I go up on the stage, people are going to see that, and especially when young kids who are black come to see it, I don’t want them to see the paradox where it hasn’t even been thought about, where I’m by default playing a white person. (Thompson, Passing Strange 85 quoting Dion Johnstone in Parolin)

The idea of Black kids thinking of him as a phony in a “white play” made Guillaume “uncomfortable,” and he “hoped they would not return for the performance (139).”

That night, opening night, the kids on bikes did return. It’s unclear at what point they arrived, but Guillaume reports hearing their bike bells in Act V and being “rattled” by their presence.

“After killing Desdemona, I should have said, ‘My wife! My wife! What wife? I have no wife,’ but instead said, ‘What wife? I ain’t got no wife.’ Minutes later, when, in impassioned confusion, I asked myself, ‘O, where should Othello go?’ one of the boys yelled out, in a voice louder than mine, ‘Back to Ethiopia, motherfucker (139)!”

Guillaume framed the incident as puncturing his view of himself as getting so far in his career that he was a serious actor in this elite play with fancy costumes. The crowd was a “sophisticated gathering” with picnics of “wine and cheese.” But from the boy’s reference to Ethiopia, a word which does not appear in the play’s text, it is clear that the little heckler recognized Othello’s outsideness in the context of the play. The boy made sense of Othello’s otherness by connecting it to Guillaume’s Blackness. The kid [if not Guillaume himself (138)] believed that Othello was set up because he was Black, and he saw that Othello’s life was in danger. He was a murderer wanted by the state and by Desdemona’s friends and relations. “Go back to Ethiopia, motherfucker!” may have
been the best possible advice to the character of Othello at that dramatic moment before he killed himself.

The word “motherfucker” can be read in different ways, too. Is the kid heckling an actor and trying to throw him off his game? Is he adding “motherfucker” because he is nervous at speaking out in this setting and wants to seem tough to his peers and the actors and the audience? Or, since the youngster is following the play and seeing Othello as a character in danger and set up by Whites, it may mean “you poor motherfucker.” It could be a combination of all three, with the young man being uncomfortable because of the dramatic tension, acting out by shouting at the actor and using an obscenity to seem tougher than he really felt, but also feeling compelled to shout something to save the character of Othello.

That sort of reaching out to a character can be a great affirmation to an actor, or it can throw one off, and it is not uncommon, especially in Othello. Thompson describes a couple of audience interruptions in her essay about the play in the latest Arden edition (“Introduction,” 42-43). Actor Eric Rasmussen told me about a production of Othello in Harlem at the City College of New York (Spector and Urkowitz). Rasmussen played Cassio. Actors would wait for their entrances between raised sections of the audience. In matinee performances for junior high and high school kids, students would lean over and speak to Rasmussen as Cassio. They would say “something like: ‘Yo, Cassio, they setting you up with the handkerchief. Look out man!’” (Rasmussen). This indicates that the kids had been playing close attention to props, action, and dialog in order to keep up with the plot. And, as with the Guillaume case above, students’ comments came tinged with humor. The actors were wearing period costumes including period bling around
their necks. Rasmussen’s costume included “a fake gold chain with a big fake gold medallion on it.” Referring to the local subway line, one kid teased him with “something like ‘Yo, where you got that chain at? The 1 Train?’” (Rasmussen). Students were energetically engaged with the play despite the work that can come with following Shakespeare’s old-fashioned language. I think it is fair to say that Guillaume’s heckler was taken up with the play as well, due not only to the power of Shakespeare’s words, but also the power of Guillaume’s acting.

What did Guillaume’s particular interruption mean? It was important to him, because he remembered it in his autobiography published twenty-nine years after the incident. At least for two or three moments, it shook this highly experienced actor and opera singer. He assessed that the kids were wondering about what he was doing in a “white play”; he hoped that they would not come back for the performance; he heard their bicycle bells; and then he got heckled. Something rooted in Guillaume’s identity as an actor who was Black seems to have shaken him and made him slip from the text into the vernacular “ain’t.” And I would argue that this is evidence of the burden that Thompson describes that Black actors may carry when cast in White-led productions, and when playing Othello in particular.

Despite this instant of psychological challenge during his time at the Sylvan that Guillaume self-reveals, he valued his time there and had a strong appreciation for regional theater. Actor and teacher Remo Airaldi described a lunch with Guillaume and a mutual colleague in 1991.

“[Guillaume] was doing Phantom of the Opera in Los Angeles at the time…. I had graduated from Harvard and was working at ART and other regional theaters which is why that Othello in Washington, D.C. came up.
I remember him saying it was such a relief to be taken seriously as an actor rather than having to do ‘another Porgy and Bess’” (Airaldi).

Guillaume had played in *Porgy and Bess* in the early sixties and was featured as Sportin’ Life in a Vienna production ninety days a year from 1965-72 (Guillaume 85). Airaldi said

![Image](image_url)

Figure 14. Robert Guillaume as Othello and Cara Duff-MacCormick as Desdemona in the 1973 Festival *Othello*.

*Clipping from the estate of John Peter Halford (Coe, “It’s Iago’s...”). Washington Post photograph by Margaret Thomas.*
that “[I]t sounded like he wished he had been able to do more classical work rather than relegated to musicals.” Guillaume, like League, seems to have resented emphasis on his race rather than his talent. With the role in *Porgy and Bess* of Sportin’ Life that some played in stereotype, Guillaume took special pains to add depth and “never play him according to someone else’s idea of a black man (Guillaume 84).”

From 1967 to 1973, when the Summer Shakespeare Festival conspicuously cast Black actors, we have seen that Black actors bore burdens suggested by Thompson’s
examination of nontraditional casting in Shakespeare. These included burdens of stereotyping; of audience interpretation made complicated by discrepancies between casting, performance, and marketing; and of complicated identity. This complicated identity included a sometimes-frustrated desire to be acknowledged for acting accomplishments rather than race. At the same time, these actors wished for logical recognition of their skin color and of racial realities in society. And they acted under White direction, which could mean being asked to perform in accordance with potentially stereotypical racial interpretations of their directors. In the *Romeo and Juliet* case, director Philip Burton made insensitive remarks about racial violence in the media. We have also seen that at least two of the four Black actors featured in this analysis bore the weight of living in racially churned neighborhoods in the wake of housing discrimination and related violence and distrust. Police violence was also an issue, and we can assume that the proximity in time and space of the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* to a police killing was not unique to that production. In addition to the job-related burdens described by Thompson, Black actors of course also tend to carry the widespread burdens common among Black people in American society at large.
In this concluding chapter, I want to begin by relating Ellie Chamberlain’s successes with the Summer Shakespeare Festival. The Festival is what drew me in to write about the Sylvan Theater. Unfortunately, the logic of this thesis required that I give space to the challenges of the company at the expense of the company’s general success. I also want to share briefly what happened in the Festival’s final years, when Chamberlain lost government funding and turned to other projects. The largely happy story of the Summer Shakespeare Festival at the Sylvan Theater needs to be balanced, however, however, with the National Park Service’s 2010 plans to tear it down. Given the history and geography that this thesis relates, there is a strong case for retaining it as a designated performing arts space.

The Success of the Summer Shakespeare Festival

Despite the loss of federal funding that led Chamberlain to wrap up the Summer Shakespeare Festival after 1982, it is hard not to call the Festival a success. For the years for which records exist, 1961-1980 (Appendix 3), Festival events attracted over 900,000 attendees. Of these 889,550 attended 587 play performances with an average attendance of 1,515 people per show. Music and dance performances including the Alvin Ailey company during the 1970 and 1971 seasons added 28,500 people attending 21 concerts with an average attendance of 1,357 each. Shakespeare and the arts were shared with a lot of people.
Chamberlain built the Festival starting with only a $2,000 federal funding request for 1962 (McKelway), Chamberlain’s work to secure Federal funds provided a high enough percentage of the Festival’s budget to allow it to produce plays in relative security and apparently growing until almost its final years. Evidence suggests that Chamberlain worked hard to maximize the impact and reach of the Festival with outreach, publicity, and cooperation, sometimes reaching into the national press. Her New York connections brought coverage from the *Times* as the Festival began in 1961 (“Free Plays Given…;” Calta). In other national and out-of-town press, the *Boston Globe* featured the Festival in a 1963 travel piece on Washington (“Ceremonial Capital”). In 1964, *Time* magazine wrote about the Festival in a feature on regional Shakespeare (“Show Business: The Shakescene”): “Begun three years ago, the Shakespeare Summer Festival is staged on the sloping lawns that lead up to the Washington Monument, and is in itself something of a monument to the determination of ... Ellie Chamberlain Galidas.... She decided that the capital should have free, outdoor, summer Shakespeare, and she brought it off.” In 1980, toward the end of the Festival’s two-decade run, *Women’s Day* included it in an article about things for families to do in Washington (Frome). A guidebook, *Fodor’s Mid-Atlantic*, listed the Festival among cultural activities in D.C. (Fodor). Listings in guides convey a certain level of quality and stability of the institutions featured. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* was covered in several national publications. On the scholarly side, productions were covered regularly by *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *World Shakespeare Bibliography*.  

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Chamberlain recruited stellar names to endorse the Festival over the years. First lady Lady Bird Johnson served as an honorary patron (Figure 16; Appendix 4, Figures 29 and 30). Her daughter Luci was photographed receiving a ticket to the 1965 *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Routt, Appendix 4, Figure 36. See also Johnson “Audio Diary Entry” minute 5:15, Shelton, and Smith). Robert Frost, Laurence Olivier, and Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts benefactor Jouett Shouse were named in the program for the 1961 premier (Figure 17). The program for 1962 added Olivia de Havilland, Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, and Nancy Joy, the wife of Kennedy Press Secretary Pierre Salinger. In 1963, the roster added John Gielgud\(^{43}\) and Helen Hayes. The list of supporters in 1969 included the new Secretary of the Interior, Walter J. Hickel; eight senators, four congressmen and the D.C. congressional delegate; D.C. Mayor Walter Washington, the chairman of the D.C. City Council Gilbert Hahn, Jr., *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham, and the British ambassador (Summer Shakespeare Festival programs).

**Notable Personnel at the Sylvan**

Chamberlain also recruited notable members for her creative teams and casts. Philip Burton, though he was already a director and lecturer on Shakespeare, first directed Shakespeare in America at the Sylvan Theater (Burton 204). Don Driver directed the Festival from 1963 to 1966 and earned a Tony Award nomination for his direction of a revival of *Marat/Sade* in 1967 (“Donald Driver…”). Driver returned in 1971 to direct

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\(^{43}\) See Appendix 4, Figure 28 for a photo of Chamberlain, Gielgud, and Udall.
Your Own Thing at the Sylvan, for which he had written the book. The play was a rock musical adaptation of Twelfth Night. Under Driver’s direction, Your Own Thing had run

Figure 16. Lady Bird Johnson and Ellie Chamberlain at White House, 1964.

(“White House Photo of Lady Bird Johnson and Ellie Chamberlain”.)
Figure 17. Detail from 1961 Summer Shakespeare Festival Program for Twelfth Night.

Patrons and Donors.

*Annotations by John Peter Halford, costume designer. Estate of John Peter Halford.*

for over 900 performances off-Broadway and won the 1968 Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical (“Your Own Thing,” Wikipedia and IOBDB). Tony Tanner directed the Shakespeare Summer Festival productions in 1974 and 1976, and he played Iago opposite
Robert Guillaume in 1973. Tanner would be nominated for a Tony Award for directing

Festival Costume Designer John Peter Halford’s work on the 1968 Romeo and
Juliet was featured in was featured in Contemporary Stage Design U.S.A., an
international touring exhibit (1974-76) and accompanying book. The work was shown at
Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, in Prague, and in the United Kingdom. It returned to
the United States for a countrywide showing into the Bicentennial through the
Smithsonian’s mobile exhibit service (Burdick). Halford also recruited important talent
for the costume shop, attracting two future stars the first year. Ms. Vanilla Beane made
the hats for 1961’s Twelfth Night. She would go on to open her own hat boutique, Bené
Millinery, and she has been Washington’s doyenne of ladies’ hats for many decades. Six
of her hats reside in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American
History and Culture (Halford; Program for Twelfth Night; Beane; Beane entry in
Centenarians 2020). Marjorie Slaiman made Halford’s Festival costume designs from
1961-1963 and 1965. She went on to be the costumer for Arena Stage for 26 years,
returning to design costumes for the Festival in 1975, 1977, and 1980. Among many
others, she designed the costumes for the Arena run of The Great White Hope with James
Earl Jones and Jane Alexander. This production moved to Broadway and would win
Tony Awards for Jones, Alexander, and best play (Halford; Festival programs; Bernstein,
Great White Hope).

Chamberlain’s company also featured some outstanding actors. Marian Mercer
played Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing (1963), Helena in A Midsummer Night’s
Dream (1964) and Mistress Ford in Merry Wives of Windsor (1965). She would go on in
1968 to win a Tony Award as Marge MacDougall in *Promises, Promises* (Hevesi). Janet League, after *Romeo and Juliet*, would go on to star in classics of theater, originating her role in the Lorraine Hansberry adaptation *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*. She was also in the first off-Broadway company of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (Lerman, Lewis and Harris).

After *Othello* at the Sylvan, Robert Guillaume was nominated for a Tony Award as Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls*. He earned Emmy Awards as Benson DuBois in *Soap* and *Benson*. He voiced Rafiki in the animated film *The Lion King*, and he would win a Grammy for narrating an audiobook of that title as well (“Robert Guillaume, Awards,” “Robert Guillaume, Artist”). Glenn Close starred as Kate in the 1975 *Taming of the Shrew* at the Summer Shakespeare Festival. Close has won three Tony Awards and been nominated for eight Oscars (“Glenn Close, Awards”). Virginia Johnson, a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old fairie or attendant in the Festival’s 1964 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, would go on to become a founding member, principal ballerina, and eventually the artistic director of Dance Theatre of Harlem (“Virginia Johnson;” “Virginia Johnson, Dancer”). Emily Yancy came to the Festival in the 1971 *Your Own Thing* after having taken over the role of Irene Molloy in the original Broadway run of *Hello, Dolly!* She would have a long TV career, including roles in *Sanford and Son, Frasier*, and most recently, a recurring role in *Sharp Objects* (“Emily Yancy”). Harold Scott, Claudius in the 1967 Festival *Hamlet*, would be the first Black person to head a major regional theater, at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park (Campbell).

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44George Guidall, Leontes in the Festival’s 1966 *A Winter’s Tale*, would win an Obie Award for his 1984 Off-Broadway performance in *Cinders*. He found a niche as an audiobook narrator. The New York Times called him the undisputed king of audiobooks, with over 1300 titles to his credit (Ball).
Shutting Down the Summer Shakespeare Festival

Ellie Chamberlain and her Summer Shakespeare Festival would have two decades of success. Ultimately, though, the Sylvan Theater would not be secured in the way that her mentor, Joseph Papp, made Shakespeare a permanent fixture in the Delacorte Theater in New York’s Central Park. Budget woes finally came to a head during the Carter administration when the 1979 budget from the Park Service was supposed to be $100,000 (“Limited Shakespeare Festival Set;” Tuck; Shirley) or even $150,000 (Hodge), but that amount was never delivered, resulting in a stunted season produced for between $15,000 and $20,000. 1980 was the last year the Festival played at the Sylvan Theater.

Competitive applications for summer theater at the Sylvan were instituted in advance of the 1981 season. The Festival’s competitor the Folger Theatre Group won the bid while the Summer Shakespeare Festival was forced to decamp to the chapel at Mt. Vernon College (Rosenfeld, “Wherefore;” “Technical Proposal;” White). Chamberlain took pains to get training in grant applications (Appendix 4, Figure 34): “Certificate of Completion”), but she failed again in 1982 to secure the Sylvan. The Festival’s production that year was held at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Rockville, Maryland. She produced a musical revue at the JCC the following year (Richards, “Hardly…”; Program for A Gershwin Rhapsody; “Theatre”).

However, without being able to use the Festival’s long-term home, Chamberlain decided a few years later to move her talents officially to the suburbs, where she thought she would find more money. She started another theater company, The Phoenix Theatre.

45 Chamberlain’s proposal for the 1981 season is in the papers of her estate. See Appendix 4, Figure 33 for the cover letter and title page.
in Potomac, Maryland, with the business name Theater Associates, Inc. She aimed to have a supportive board and partners who would shoulder the weight of a local theater, branching out into more popular plays in order to support her love of Shakespeare (Benincasa). Her friend and costumer John Peter Halford put it this way:

[Chamberlain] turned to nearby [Maryland neighborhood of] Potomac Village where the community claimed to have a strong interest in theatre; So, going to the mountain instead of waiting for it to come to her, she went to the affluent residents with an ambitious proposal for them to have their own acting company called the Phoenix Theatre that would produce entertainments in close and intimate surroundings that would recall salon productions of small scale dramas of the fin de siècle a century earlier. (Halford)

In 1986, Chamberlain clipped a New York Times theater article and added it to her files. It was titled, “How to Succeed in Suburbia: Act II” (Gruson). Reflecting on her Sylvan career, she said, “I could do without any money in those [Summer Shakespeare Festival] days and that particular project. It cannot be done that way now…” (Benincasa).

Unfortunately for Chamberlain, the suburban experiment could not be done as she envisioned it, either. As Halford later wrote, “It became increasingly clear that what these sub-urbane audiences wanted most was a diet of endless revivals of the familiar—Barefoot in the Park, Arsenic and Old Lace, Mr. Roberts, and the like” (Halford).

After the Festival, regular free Shakespeare in Washington, D.C. took a hiatus until 1991. Following in Chamberlain’s footsteps, the Shakespeare Theatre Company (with roots at the Festival’s one-time competitor the Folger Theatre) made it work by including a two week “Free for All” performance each year alongside a number of paid productions (“Shakespeare Theatre Company Free for All”). The Shakespeare Theatre Company would go on to win the regional theater Tony Award in 2012 (“Shakespeare Theatre Company, Washington, D.C.”)
Ellie Chamberlain died in May of 2013, and it is in retrospect that her community and her theater peers began more fully to recognize her achievement. Her obituary in the *Washington Post* (Barnes) filled two thirds of a Sunday page and applauded her career as producer of the Festival. Later that year, the Shakespeare Theatre Company dedicated its Free for All production to Chamberlain. The dedication (Figure 18) read in part:

Through ingenuity and gumption, Ellie built the Festival from the ground up as the Artistic Director, Chief Executive and Fundraiser. From 1961 to 1982, she produced Shakespeare plays at the Sylvan Theater on the National Mall, stopping only when National Park Service cuts made it impossible to continue. We salute Ellie for her extraordinary leadership and her formidable efforts to bring free Shakespeare to the nation's capital—a legacy she has left for generations to enjoy—and that we have been proud to continue for the past 23 years. (Program for Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare Theatre Company 2013)

Chamberlain did succeed in bringing Shakespeare to the people in Washington for over two decades. Her project came closer to the original vision for the Sylvan Theater than did any other. Her work, and that of her company, produced key performances of integrated Shakespeare as the city and country were hurting from racial strife and as theaters in the United States increasingly opened their casts to all, a feat that echoes the storied moments of protest that took place at the theater.

**Getting Rid of the Sylvan Theater**

Today, the instability of federal support that lost Galidas the Sylvan for the Summer Shakespeare Festival may now lose the Sylvan itself. A 2010 plan, not yet implemented, eliminates the Sylvan Theater. The plan is recorded in the details of a series of environmental impact documents prepared by the National Park Service. The *Record of Decision*, the concluding document, does not mention the Sylvan Theater, but it does
The late Ms. Chamberlain brought free Shakespeare to D.C. as early as 1961 when she founded the Washington Shakespeare Summer Festival. As a novice actress, Ellie saw Joseph Papp’s 1959 production of King Lear in Central Park and returned to the Capitol determined to bring free “Shakespeare in the Park” to Washington. Through ingenuity and gumption, Ellie built the Festival from the ground up as the Artistic Director, Chief Executive and Fundraiser. From 1961 to 1982, she produced Shakespeare plays at the Sylvan Theater on the National Mall, stopping only when National Park Service cuts made it impossible to continue. We salute Ellie for her extraordinary leadership and her formidable efforts to bring free Shakespeare to the nation’s capital—a legacy she has left for generations to enjoy—and that we have been proud to continue for the past 23 years.

Figure 18. Posthumous dedication of a Shakespeare Theatre Company Play to Ellie Chamberlain, 2013

Dedication of a Shakespeare Theatre Company “Free for All” production to Ellie Chamberlain. Red border added by John Peter Halford, Chamberlain’s friend and oftentimes costume designer. (Program for Shakespeare’s Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare Theatre Company 2013.)

approve the “Preferred Alternative” (85-100) outlined in the “Alternatives” section of the Final National Mall Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (216). It calls for replacement of the Sylvan Theater with a “multipurpose facility” that includes, among many other things, “flexible performance space better oriented to the hillside seating.”
But the illustration in the *National Mall Plan Summary* shows no theater at the current location of the Sylvan, and the replacement mixed-use facility appears to be blocked from the hill with trees and food service tables (Figure 19; *National Mall Plan Summary* 17).

Figure 19. Watercolor Sketch of Monument Grounds Without the Sylvan Theater.

*This view of the southeast portion of the Washington Monument grounds pictures the as-yet unfunded mixed-use building (bottom center) approved to replace the Sylvan Theater (National Mall Plan Summary, p. 17).*
The space that the plan envisions would be more appropriate for jugglers, wandering violinists, hucksters, and con men than the current theater’s use for large musical events, drama, and protest.

The Case for the Sylvan Theater

With the Sylvan Theater stage in jeopardy, the arguments in this thesis serve not only as an intellectual history, but also as evidence that the theater itself should retain its actual space as a theater, a venue for continued development of arts for the people, and a place where people can claim space to protest wrongs that they and others endure.

The Sylvan Theater is important in the history of governance, protest, and counterprotest in the twentieth century, in particular Black history. Many if not most important events of social movements that are said to have happened at the Washington Monument in the twentieth century actually happened at the Sylvan Theater. This social and cultural history46 was ignored by the National Park Service’s *National Mall Plan*, which is a tragedy. The Sylvan Theater deserves to be restored, renovated, or replaced with a stage and ancillary facilities with a capacity that matches the Sylvan Theater in its prime.

This assertion is not a starry-eyed dream. The Sylvan is a simple outdoor stage that satisfies demand for performing arts space on the National Mall. A more recent example than the Summer Shakespeare Festival was a 1995 concert by the Cranberries. The show was cut short after a song and a half by the unsafe behavior of 10,000 school-

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46 The Sylvan Theater has been such an important D.C. institution that it was featured on a 1938 transit pass (Appendix 4, Figure 35).
skipping teenage fans, 7,000 more than sponsor radio station WHFS expected (Figures 20 and 21; Augenstein). Rather than showing any insufficiency of the Sylvan’s simple open-air stage as a modern venue, it demonstrates its viability and demand. It was improper planning for crowd management by the sponsor and the Park Service that failed to accommodate the show, not anything inherent to the Sylvan stage or the Monument grounds.

Figure 20. Dolores O'Riordan of the Cranberries Plays the Sylvan Theater in 1995.

*Note ranger with hat performing crowd control in near background (“Dolores O’Riordan...”). Photo by Brian Liu/ToolboxDC. Used with permission.*
Even without a planned event at the Sylvan Theater, the stage shows its power as a venue. Its dramatic setting compels people to want to interact with it. A 35-second time lapse video of the Sylvan taken by the author at sunset on July 2, 2021 recorded adults and children sitting facing the stage, sitting on the stage looking at the monument, playing on the stage, and walking, jogging, and scootering by the stage (screenshot at Figure 22; video at https://www.flickr.com/photos/sylvan-theater/51884976617/ or https://tinyurl.com/sylvan-theater).
At one point, a young woman of color and her friend parked their scooters with only their headlights illuminating the evening dusk. She stepped up unbidden to the stage and declaimed, “Four score and seven years ago!” from the Gettysburg Address. Her words tell us that the Sylvan Theater space inspires people to the ideals of a better country, ideals honed in protest and in theater on that very stage.
Appendix 1.

Details on the Sylvan Theater Facility and Jet Noise

The theater and Monument lawn are the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS), which administers the National Mall and surrounding monuments and memorials (National Mall and Memorial Parks). The theater has been used since its inception in for drama, music, and politics, with other performing arts, rallies, and protests (called “First Amendment demonstrations” by the theater’s brief NPS website) added to the mix in time (Sylvan Theater). Seating is on the Monument’s gently sloping lawn, and the stage is framed by a grove of trees. Sometimes chairs have been provided for performing arts audiences, sometimes people sit on the grass, and sometimes there is a combination of the two. The center of the lip of the existing stage is one hundred and thirty-three yards south-southwest of the Washington Monument’s southwest corner (Figure 23). The average lawn slope is five percent; or, for every five feet down the hill, the ground drops three inches, providing a bit of sightline relief to patrons separated by blankets (Calculated from Google Earth elevation model for DC GIS image, Figure 23). The slope is less by the Monument and steeper in the half of the lawn closest to the stage.

The stage has a paved walkway in front of it. The walkway is separated from the main lawn by a three foot wall that is flush with the lawn rising to the monument. This is a post-9/11 renovation. At this location, there are no steps to the lawn. But people sit on the wall and go up and down it to take pictures. They also navigate the wall going back
and forth to parking and other amenities. Mobile steps, ramps, and lifts would be easy to install for performances.

Figure 23. Sylvan Theater and Grounds, 2020.

The distance from the Washington Monument to the Sylvan Theater stage is 133 yards. DC GIS base image courtesy of Google Earth.

The theater has gone through various modifications since its founding in 1917 (See Frontispiece). Electric wiring for stage lights was apparently begun in 1917 (Harts) and completed in 1918 (Ridley). The old stage was replaced with a new and sturdier one in 1944. Between the first Festival production in 1961 and the second in 1962, Ellie Chamberlain convinced George Hartzog to add a light bridge in the front seating area. He funded it out of the Park Service budget (Brown 3).
For the American Revolution bicentennial in 1976, modifications were made to include an expanded stage, dressing rooms, bathrooms, and sheds (*Washington Monument Grounds*, p. ES-11). Currently the stage extends toward the audience beyond a proscenium arch, possibly also added in in 1976. It likely that this is the expanded stage mentioned above.

During the 1961-1980 span of the Summer Shakespeare Festival’s residence at the Sylvan Theater, jet noise during performances was an unrelenting problem. (See a jet flying by the Sylvan in the upper right corner of Figure 7.) The flight path to nearby National Airport, now officially known as Reagan National Airport, runs along the Potomac River. Critic Richard Coe recorded that thirty-eight aircraft flew over 1973’s *Othello* between 8:41 p.m. and 10:28 p.m., thus averaging one noise bomb every two minutes and 48 seconds (Coe, Annotations on program for *Othello*). The noise of a particular aircraft was essentially unregulated before 1973; in 1977, the 1973 limit (which varies by weight class of aircraft) was dropped by approximately 18 decibels. After reductions in 2001 and 2013, the limit dropped approximately another 18 decibels, or more for lighter aircraft (See Figure 2 in International Civil Aviation Organization).

Since decibels measure sound intensity on a logarithmic scale (United States Environmental Protection Agency), if you happen to stand at the Sylvan Theater today and hear a jet go over, you should imagine jet noise as having been much, much louder during the time of the Summer Shakespeare Festival. On a July 2021 visit to the Sylvan, each aircraft could be heard “over” the theater for 30-45 seconds as it flew by. There was a certain point at which the noise reflected back from the Washington Monument, making the sound come from two directions at once. But today, jet noise is well regulated, and
the noise heard on that visit, even doubled from the reflection, would not interfere with a Sylvan performance.
Appendix 2.

Plays Produced by the Summer Shakespeare Festival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Selected Actors</th>
<th>Location(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Twelfth Night</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Malvolio: Jim Bostain</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962a</td>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
<td>George Detmold</td>
<td>Kate: Iris Luce</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962b</td>
<td>As You Like It</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Rosalind: Brydon Fitzgerald</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Much Ado About Nothing</td>
<td>Donald Driver (as Don)</td>
<td>Beatrice: Marian Mercer</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</td>
<td>Donald Driver (as Don)</td>
<td>Helena: Marian Mercer Company: Virginia Johnson, N. Jefferson</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Merry Wives of Windsor</td>
<td>Donald Driver (as Don)</td>
<td>Mistress Ford: Marian Mercer</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>A Winter’s Tale</td>
<td>Donald Driver (as Don)</td>
<td>Leontes: George Guidall</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Philip Burton</td>
<td>Hamlet: Robert Drivas</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claudius: Harold Scott</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ghost: Robert Jackson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>Philip Burton</td>
<td>Juliet: Janet League</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>As You Like It</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Orlando: Robert Shattuck</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>The Tempest</td>
<td>Nagle Jackson</td>
<td>Ariel: Darryl Croxton</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caliban: Henry Baker</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971*</td>
<td>Your Own Thing</td>
<td>Donald Driver (also book)</td>
<td>Olivia: Emily Yancy</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Troilus and Cressida</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Troilus: Dalton Cathey</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Othello: Robert Guillaume</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Iago: Tony Tanner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974b*</td>
<td>The Importance of Being Earnest</td>
<td>Tony Tanner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Selected Actors</td>
<td>Location(s)</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
<td>Michael Flanagan</td>
<td>Kate: Glenn Close</td>
<td>Great Falls Park, McLean VA&lt;br&gt;Greenbelt Park&lt;br&gt;Antietam National Battlefield&lt;br&gt;Harper’s Ferry National Historical Park&lt;br&gt;Prince William Forest Park&lt;br&gt;Fort Dupont National Park, D.C.&lt;br&gt;Carter Barron Amphitheater, D.C.&lt;br&gt;Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>The Tempest (WSB)</td>
<td>Tony Tanner</td>
<td>Prospero: Tony Tanner</td>
<td>Montrose Park&lt;br&gt;Carter Barron Amphitheater&lt;br&gt;Greenbelt Park&lt;br&gt;Antietam National Battlefield Park&lt;br&gt;Harper’s Ferry National Historical Park&lt;br&gt;Glen Echo Park, MD&lt;br&gt;Prince William Forest Park&lt;br&gt;Fort Hunt Park, McLean, VA&lt;br&gt;Fort Washington Park, MD&lt;br&gt;The Ellipse, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>Roger Meersman</td>
<td>Romeo: Lanny Thomas</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>The Comedy of Errors</td>
<td>Roger Meersman</td>
<td>The Antipholuses: Lanny Thomas</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The Taming of the Shrew</td>
<td>Roger Meersman</td>
<td>Petruochio: Tim O’Hare</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Snout: John Peter Halford (also headdresses)</td>
<td>Sylvan Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981*</td>
<td>Much Ado About Nothing§</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>Benedick: Tim O’Hare</td>
<td>Mt. Vernon College Chapel, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982*</td>
<td>As You Like It£</td>
<td>Ellie Chamberlain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Jewish Community Center, Rockville MD</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Information from Festival programs unless otherwise noted.
*Program of this production not located.
+Coe Review in WaPo.
~WaPo “Festival Takes” and E. Fisher review.
#Richards “Outdoors…” review in Star-News.
WSB: World Shakespeare Bibliography entry cx194.
§White review in WaPo.
£Richards “Hardly…” review in WaPo.
Appendix 3.

Performance Attendance to 1980

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Production(s)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Performances</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>TWELFTH NIGHT</td>
<td>24,500</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>TAMING OF THE SHREW</td>
<td>54,500</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>AS YOU LIKE IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING</td>
<td>58,250</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM</td>
<td>71,000</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR</td>
<td>58,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>THE WINTER'S TALE</td>
<td>56,000</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>66,000</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>ROMEO AND JULIET</td>
<td>64,000</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>AS YOU LIKE IT (Musical)</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>THE TEMPEST</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alvin Alley Dance Company</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<td>The National Symphony</td>
<td>2,500</td>
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<td>Jazz on the Mall</td>
<td>4,500</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Niagara Frontier Ballet</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>YOUR OWN THING *</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The National Symphony</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paul Taylor Dance Company</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eric Hawkins Dance Company</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<td>Murray Lewis Dance Company</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>TROILUS AND CRESSIDA</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>OTHELLO</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>34</td>
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* A modern musical based on Shakespeare's TWELFTH NIGHT.
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* Except for performances at the Sylvan and Carter Barron, all performances in the years 1974 through 1980 were on outdoor mobile stage units.

(Source: "Technical Proposal.")
Appendix 4.

Additional Images

This appendix contains photographs and images of documents. They inform the argument and document the history of events in the thesis but would not fit in the limited image space in the text. For six of the crispest published photos of the Summer Shakespeare Festival, see Glen Loney and Patricia MacKay’s 1975 book, *The Shakespeare Complex: A Guide to Summer Festivals and Year-round Repertory in North America*. The National Park Service aerial photo from that volume appears below.
Figure 24. Aerial Photo of the Sylvan During a Theater Performance.

YOUTH MARCH FOR INTEGRATED SCHOOLS
April 16, 1959

Program at the Sylvan Theater

Invocation Father Richard Cary, St. Mary's Episcopal Church, New York City

The National Anthem Camille Williams

Opening Remarks The Chairmen of the Youth March, Mr. A. Philip Randolph

Reading of Telegrams from: Senator Paul Douglas
Mr. Walter Reuther
Mr. George Meany

Remarks Mr. Charles Zimmerman, Chairman of the Civil Rights Committee, A.F.L-CIO

Remarks Mr. Roy Wilkins, National Secretary of the NAACP

Introduction of Mr. Tom Mboya, Chairman, All Africa People's Conference

Introduction of the Youth Delegation to the White House Report by Mr. Reginald Green

Introduction of the Youth Delegation to Congress Report by Miss Martha Layfield

Interlude The Chorus of the Jamaica NAACP

Symposium "Needs and Opportunities for Continued Action on Civil Rights."

Moderator Dr. Raynor Hustis, Coordinator of the Youth March

Speakers Henry Curtis Hane, Laverne Jones, John Adams and Earlton Joye

Resolutions Herbert Wright, Youth Secretary, NAACP
Reginald Green

Introduction of Kinzic Jean Green and Suzanne Wright

Presentation of Citations

Remarks Rev. Martin Luther King

 Benediction Rev. Shelby Rocke, Lincoln Congregational Church, Washington, D.C.

Figure 25. Program at the Sylvan, Youth March for Integrated Schools, 1959

Youth March for Integrated Schools
CONFIDENTIAL

April 16, 1959

YOUTH MARCH ON WASHINGTON
APRIL 18, 1959

Reference is made to the summary memorandum dated April 1, 1959, which set forth information concerning this demonstration.

Program.

Representatives of captioned activity in the Washington, D.C., area have advised officials of the Metropolitan Police Department that it is anticipated some 15,000 persons will participate in this function. Participants in this activity will assemble on the Mall between Seventh and Ninth Streets, W. N., at noon on April 18, 1959, where they will form to march via either Madison Drive or Washington Drive to the Sylvan Theatre located on the grounds of the Washington Monument. The program at the Sylvan Theatre will last from approximately 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and will feature speeches by United States Senators Paul H. Douglas from Illinois and Jacob K. Javits from New York; Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Walter Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers, American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations; and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which sponsored the boycott of busses by Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama. At the conclusion of the activities at the Sylvan Theatre, about 100 busses will transport participants to the National Guard Armory for dinner before departing the Washington area.

During the above-described activities a delegation of two Negro students and two white students will present a petition to the President or his representative calling for orderly and speedy integration of schools throughout the United States and another delegation consisting of two Negro students and two white students will attempt to see Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn at the Capitol Building to highlight the need for integration in schools.

Action of the Communist Party
In Connection with this Demonstration.

The following information was made available by confidential informants who have furnished reliable information in the past.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority MK-93-862 ^1
By 3Am NIE Date 14/1961

101
CONFIDENTIAL

On March 19, 1959, a leaflet was issued under the letterhead of the Chicago Youth March for Integrated Schools, which indicates that the Chicago area executive committee of this group includes Robert Hymer, who is identical with John Henry, a Chicago Communist Party (CP) member.

On March 19, 1959, a five-page document entitled "Build the Youth March for Integrated Schools" was passed out at a CP meeting in Brooklyn. This document in essence relates that the CP could convert the Youth March on Washington to its own purposes in the future inasmuch as this demonstration has unity of purpose and represents a mass movement of liberals on behalf of the underprivileged Negro population of the United States.

On March 27, 1959, a member of the national committee, CP, USA, stated that money would have to be raised to pay for the printing of pamphlets to publicize the Youth March on Washington. This national committee member explained that these pamphlets were to be distributed to those attending the Washington, D.C., activity by CP members participating.

On March 31, 1959, Sam Schmerler, chairman of the Baltimore CP Trade Union Commission, volunteered to work for the publicity committee of the Baltimore youth march group. His offer was accepted by the March committee.

On April 7, 1959, George Meyers, a member of the national executive committee, CP, USA, advised at a CP meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, that he had information that officials of "The Worker," an east coast communist weekly newspaper, would do a progress report on the Youth March on Washington in the April 12, 1959, issue of this publication.

The April 12, 1959, issue of "The Worker" prominently highlighted the Youth March on Washington in a front-page article entitled "Integrate Now." This article identifies various labor, fraternal and civic groups which are supporting this demonstration as well as activities in the New York area to stimulate interest.
On April 10, 1959, Hunter Pitts O’Dell, assistant to James E. Jackson in Negro and southern affairs for the CP, USA, stated he has in the past traveled to Florida, Tennessee, South Carolina and Virginia in an effort to stimulate interest and collect funds for the Youth March on Washington. O’Dell, who is scheduled to be in the Washington, D.C., area from April 16 through April 18, 1959, on behalf of captioned demonstration, indicated this activity will result in the recruitment of young people into the Marxist-Leninist movement and that this activity is important to him because of the possibility that he will make important contacts for his work in the CP.

This memorandum is loaned to you by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and neither it nor its contents are to be distributed outside the agency to which loaned.
Figure 27. Attendees at a Local Antiwar Rally at the Sylvan Theater, Oct. 26, 1968.

*(Frazier, "Alternate detailed view....") Photograph by Patrick Frazier. Used with the permission of American University.*
Figure 28. Ellie Chamberlain, John Gielgud, and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, April 1963.

Washington Post ("Three Mull Shakespeare on the Mall"). Photographer unknown.
January 15, 1964

Dear Miss Chamberlain:

Mrs. Johnson asked me to tell you how much she appreciates the invitation to serve as Honorary Patroness for the Shakespeare Summer Festival and she is delighted to accept.

The Shakespeare Summer Festival will most certainly provide many pleasant and rewarding evenings again this summer for Washington audiences -- a very befitting offering for the 400th Anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. The cultural climate of our city is indeed advanced and enriched by programs such as yours.

Please convey Mrs. Johnson's gratitude to those working with you and her very best wishes for a successful season.

Sincerely,

Bess Abell
Social Secretary

Miss Ellie Chamberlain
Artistic Director
Shakespeare Summer Festival
613 South Lee Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Four hundredth Anniversary of Shakespeare's birth

Miss Trilla Walker
Figure 30. Lady Bird Johnson’s Endorsement of the Festival, 1965.

(Johnson, “The Establishment...”). A signed copy of this endorsement appeared in the program for the 1965 Festival production of Merry Wives of Windsor.
It seems to all of us that Shakespeare is one of the greatest things that ever happened in the world’s history. Four hundred years of art and science have given us nothing more important. It is as necessary for libraries and theatres to keep him going—read and acted—as it is for armies and navies to keep the language he wrote in alive, so he won’t have to be translated into Esperanto and Volapük.

There is nothing to compare with his position with us, but the King James’ version is us and the whole world apparently. He should be staged often and well. We need him more than his reputation needs us. I am especially urging support for this enterprise in the Capital of the country.

Robert Frost

To Ellie Chamberlain
May 6 1961
Washington

He is such a marvel some can’t believe
he existed they think he must be someone else

Figure 31. Letter from Robert Frost to Ellie Chamberlain Printed in the Program for


Handwritten portion transcribed: “For Ellie Chamberlain, May 6 1961, Washington / He [Shakespeare] is such a marvel some can’t believe / he existed: they think he must be someone else” (Frost). Estate of John Peter Halford.
Figure 32. D.C. Government Payment Voucher for 1979 Festival Production.

*Payment to the Summer Shakespeare Festival ("Voucher for...").*
Contracting Division
Room 140
National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, D.C. 20242

Gentlemen:
Enclosed is the Shakespeare Summer Festival Proposal in response to the
Government's RFP 3-1-22, dated 9 February, 1981, (but not received
until 11, March, 1981) for presentation of a comedic Shakespeare
play during the 1981 season.

It describes 20 years of experience and interest in producing precisely
the type of production being solicited by the government. It is this
experience and interest which leads us to believe that we are eminently
qualified to be awarded the contract.

We are responding to the RFP with the enclosed proposal. This proposal
is based on trend line data derived from our actual Shakespeare Summer
Festival cost for the most recent five year period (1975-1980). Also,
we are confident that quality has not been compromised in arriving at
this austere budget.

We are also submitting an alternative proposal which shows what can be
done with the monies indicated to be available in the cover letter of
the RFP.

In recent years, the Festival productions have received unanimously
good reviews, we are enclosing those from last year.

The Shakespeare Summer Festival is a non-profit, tax-exempt theatre
organization incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia.

We are looking forward to our 21st year of association with the National
Park Service, without whose cooperation and invaluable support, we could
not have reached and served so many Washington families. We hope to build
on the continuity which is so essential to the development of quality,
and the growth of any arts organization. Only with this continuity
can we provide for excellence of product and service to the public. And
that is what it's really all about, after all.

Sincerely yours,

Ellie Chamberlain
Producer

Ellie Chamberlain, Producer • 1000 6th Street, S.W. • Washington, D.C. 20024 • (202) 554-9444

March 27, 1981
TECHNICAL PROPOSAL
for a
1981 SUMMER SEASON
COMEDIC SHAKESPEARE THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

to

National Capital Region
US Dept. of the Interior
Washington, DC 20242

March 27, 1981
RFP No. 3-1-22

Submitted by:
Shakespeare Summer Festival
1000 6th Street, SW #215
Washington, DC 20024

This data shall not be disclosed outside the Government and shall not be duplicated, used, or disclosed in whole or in part for any purpose other than to evaluate the proposal; provided, that if a contract is awarded to this offeror as a result of, or in connection with the submission of this data, the Government shall have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the contract. This restriction does not limit the Government's right to use information contained in the data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction is contained in sheets 1 through 10.
Figure 34. Chamberlain Obtained Training in Applying for Grants, 1981.

In 1938, the Sylvan Theater was considered such an important Washington, D.C. institution that a photograph of it was included on a city transit pass. Transit pass (top, 88 by 50.5mm) and Sylvan Theater detail (bottom). The bottom image has been transformed using Gaussian blur to eliminate the dots in the original halftone image. This makes it more legible, especially when enlarged. The transit pass is from the author’s personal collection. Photograph by the author.
Figure 36. Luci Baines Johnson Receives Tickets to *Merry Wives of Windsor*, July 1965.

Donna Dembling (Company) and Doug Dembling (William Page) presented tickets to the President’s daughter, Luci Baines Johnson, with Ellie Chamberlain looking on (Routt. See also Shelton and Smith). This is an example of Chamberlain reaching out to the personages of Washington for Festival support. Lady Bird Johnson narrated these events in her audio journal at https://discoverlbj.org/item/ctjd-19650720, at minute 5:15. Clipping from John Peter Halford’s papers. Evening Star photograph by Francis Routt.
Figure 37. Coretta Scott King and Colleagues in the Sylvan Theater Dressing Room, 1969.

Bernita Bennette, Coretta King, and Stoney Cooks relaxed in the Sylvan Theater dressing room, October 15, 1969. King spoke from the Sylvan Theater stage at the Vietnam Moratorium and led a candlelit march around the White House. Photograph by Brig Cabe, from the author’s personal collection. Used with kind permission of Joanne Cabe.
Works Cited

Summer Shakespeare Festival programs were obtained from a number of sources. The estate of John Peter Halford provided programs 1961-1968, 1970, 1972, and 1980. The Richard L. Coe Theater Programs Collection at the Library of Congress holds 1969 and 1973, plus several that the author obtained from other sources mentioned here. The author purchased an image of the 1975 program through eBay. The estate of Ellie Chamberlain provided programs from 1977-1979. The 1977 program in that collection has been marked up for the printer with corrections for the next year’s play. Programs from 1971, 1974, 1976, 1981, and 1982 were not located.


American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, 1977.


Clarinda Harriss. Personal Interview. 4 Jan. 2022.


D. C. Recreation Department. Thirty-Second Annual One-Act Play Tournament  [Program]. 8 Mar. 1960. [Chamberlain was in the Little Theater of Alexandria’s entry, Ionesco’s The Lesson.]


“Heflin Condemns Radical Criticism.” Washington Post, 12 June 1922, p. 3.


---. “The establishment of…” [Endorsement of Shakespeare Summer Festival]. Filed 19 July 1965. LBJ Library, White House Social Files, Alpha Files, Box 1847.


Liu, Brian. [Dolores O’Riordan of the Cranberries Plays the Sylvan Theater]. Photograph. 1995. Toolbox/DC.


“Mutual Radio…: Interracial Twist” Newsday (1940-), 28 June 1968, p. 3A.


“On the Road.” *Newsweek*, vol. 61, no. 16, Apr. 1963, p. 90.


“President Truman Addresses 90 Teenage Youths....” 1948. ACME Telephoto. Author’s personal collection.


Program for *A Gershwin Rhapsody*. Jewish Community Center, Rockville, MD. Estate of John Peter Halford.


Program for Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, 1962, see double program for *The Taming of the Shrew* and this play.

Program for Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* at the Sylvan Theater, Washington, D.C. Summer Shakespeare Festival, 1969. Richard L. Coe Theater Programs Collection at the Library of Congress. https://lccn.loc.gov/2009656641 [As of this writing, the Library of Congress has misdated this as being "between 1970 and 1979.”]


Program for Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It* at the Sylvan Theater, Washington, D.C. Summer Shakespeare Festival, 1962. Estate of John Peter Halford.


Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. *Address by the President of the United States on the 150th Anniversary of the Signing of the Constitution of the United States*. United States

“Roosevelt Peace Meeting Set Today.” Washington Post, 22 Apr. 1945, p. 4M.


Shirley, Don. “‘As You Like It’ Or Not; Shakespeare Summer Festival; Shakespeare Festival Loses U.S. Funds.” *Washington Post*, 6 June 1973, p. E1.


“Summer Shakespeare Festival ... Presents ‘Hamlet’” [Fundraising Flier]. 1967. Summer Shakespeare Festival.


Works Consulted

Federally-Funded Theater


Race: Theater History, Dramatic Criticism, and Theory


Regional Theater


Space, Place, and Location


Theater Administration, Nonprofit Foundations, Government, and Policy


http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011701276.
Sylvan Theater and Related D.C. Topics


