

THE STORY AND THE TELLER

By Calley N. Anderson

Directed by Holly L. Derr

Dramaturgy by Tristin Hicks

Christine Bauer.....Haleigh Johnson

Raven HarrisRaina Williams

Corey Caldwell/Robert R. Church.....Jatavius Haynes

Daniel Keller/J.M. Keating.....Austin Cloyd

Eric Jacobs/Dr. Robert W. Mitchell.....Elijah Bienz

Hannah Martin/Annie Cook.....Aly Milan

Holly Lamb/Sister Thecla.....Lauren Mathews

Jayda Webster/Sarah Jackson.....Tiffany Bonds

Jess Pearson/Kezia DePelchin.....Felicia Kimbrell

Madison Walker/A Grave Digger.....Jada Farmer

Matt Lara/Jack Walsh or William Warren....Oscar Garcia

Meghan Garza/Kate Bionda.....Nikki Monson

Neisha Lloyd/House Servant.....Madisen White

Richard “Rich” Phillips/Irish Immigrant.....Justin Wills

Xavier Mcfadden/Mosses Plummer and

R.H. Tate.....Nicholas Davis

When I began my journey into *The Story and the Teller*, I found myself staring at daunting questions: How do I represent a history that I am unable to find in archival data, a “history” that is not often told by those who are like me—Black and a woman and alive? How do I reach back to the horrors of 1878 while being stuck in the horrors of now—COVID-19 and a social uprising merging, leaving Black folks sick, tired, or dead? At this precise moment, Saidiya Hartman’s guiding practice, called “critical fabulation”, entered my ether.

In her essay “Venus in Two Acts,” Saidiya Hartman describes critical fabulation like this: “*By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.*”

Critical fabulation is the heartbeat of this play. Figures both known and unknown from the 1878 Yellow Fever epidemic are given new voice by fifteen characters who are struggling to understand it all, just as I was. Originally, I thought I could use this commission to escape this moment. This play helped me understand that I had to go *through* the moment to get beyond it. Because the other side of it is not a changed world; the pandemic is still raging and the fight for Black lives is far from over. The other side of this moment is clarity. Seeing what I couldn’t see before, even though I had to imagine it myself.

I love this city. I am this city. I love writing about it, talking about it, carrying it with me everywhere I go. *The Story and the Teller* is now part of that carrying. I am grateful to Holly Derr, the sixteen students who committed to building this world with us, and the University of Memphis for bringing me back home (virtually) to tell it.

Thank you for being here. Wherever you are, I hope this fabulation gives you something new.

— Calley N. Anderson

The great city of Memphis is no stranger to hard times and world-shattering events. Through tragic assassinations, poverty, disease, and near absolute destitution, Memphis has survived and thrived. It has been more than 150 years since this city was put on the brink of utter collapse when the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878 almost wiped it from the map, and yet Memphis stands tall. However, a century-and-a-half of oppression by the people who ran from the city, leaving it to ruin, has made the true story of how Memphis survived the fever nearly impossible to tell. In the centuries following the outbreak of the fever, Memphis, along with the rest of the country, has continued to feel the bitter sting of systemic racism, the silencing of minority voices, and an establishment that has time and time again proved that Black lives do not matter to it.

The Story and The Teller tells the story of a theatre company in Memphis, TN, at the beginning of the world-changing effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and addresses the systemic problems that the theatre community has been complacent towards for far too long. The true stories of this nation's history are too often buried by the tellers.

— Tristin Hicks

For every 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States,

- 109 Black/African Americans die
- 76 Native Americans or Alaskan Natives die
- 73 Hispanic or Latino people die
- 59 Native Hawaiian and Pacific islanders die
- 51 Whites die
- 47 Asian Americans die

Black /African Americans are 2.1 times more likely to die of COVID than White Americans.

Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19. Social determinants of health such as discrimination; healthcare access and utilization; occupation; educational, income, and wealth gaps; and housing have historically prevented them from having fair opportunities for economic, physical, and emotional health.

These factors and others are associated with more COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in areas where racial and ethnic minority groups live, learn, work, play, and worship. They have also contributed to higher rates of some medical conditions that increase one's risk of severe illness from COVID-19. In addition, community strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 may cause unintentional harm, such as lost wages, reduced access to services, and increased stress, for some racial and ethnic minority groups.

[Learn more from the CDC](#)

