



STUDY GUIDE

Cadillac Crew

By Tari Sampson

Directed by taneisha duggan

Study Guide by Natasha Hawkins & Talya Kingston

WWW.WAMTHEATRE.COM

Study Guide funded by the Brabson Library and Educational Foundation

Graphic design by T Square Design Studio

CADILLAC CREW STUDY GUIDE

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THE PLOT

In 1963, on the day of a much-anticipated speech by Rosa Parks, four female activists working in a Virginia civil rights office are sidelined by the male leadership. After they hear about an attack on fellow civil rights activists, the women decide to take their place on their “Cadillac Crew.” This was a dangerous mission: driving across Mississippi as an integrated group of women connecting to groups of white and Black women. Despite their best efforts at recording their journey, by the time we get to the present-day #BlackLivesMatter movement, the actions of the Cadillac Crews have been largely forgotten and erased from history.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Tori Sampson, a Native of Boston, MA, is proud to be from “The City of Champions” and even prouder to be a human rights activist and Black Woman storyteller. Tori focuses her imagination on creating comedies for the stage and screen.

“[Cadillac crews are] a magnificent thing that has happened in American history and it was led by women, Black women at that. That really excited me, and the fact that there’s no record of it saddens me, but at the same time falls in line with what I understand about how history is written, and who is written in, and who is written out of history. I hope that people walk away from this play thinking about how much they know about history and how much they understand. I hope that people feel like there’s a hole...like there’s a little bit of a misunderstanding.”

For more information about Tori Sampson visit:

www.torisampson.com



WHAT WAS GOING ON IN 1963?

BEFORE



Brown v. Board of Education establishes that the segregation of public schools is unconstitutional on May 17, 1954, although desegregation will not be achieved for some time.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott starts on December 5, 1955, after Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the bus to a white man.

The Civil Rights Act of 1960 penalizes anyone who tries to prevent voter registration.

DURING

The Vietnam War is in its 8th year. The United States is fighting on the side of South Vietnam in the name of stopping the spread of communism throughout Asia. Men ages 17 to 45 are drafted in a war that lasts until 1975.

George Wallace becomes governor of Alabama on January 14. In his inaugural speech, he defiantly proclaims "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!"

The publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* launches the reawakening of the Women's Movement in the United States as women's organizations and consciousness-raising groups spread.

The Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama is a march of over 5,000 school students on May 2-3. They intended to walk downtown to talk to the mayor about segregation in their city. The marches are stopped by the Head of Police, Bull Connor, who brought fire hoses to ward off the children and set police dogs after the children.



The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is held on August 28. It becomes known as the place where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. This iconic speech as written, however, does not include that hallmark line. It is only near the end of King's speech that the prominent gospel singer and activist Mahalia Jackson called out: "Tell them about the dream, Martin!" And in response to Jackson's summons, he did. Mahalia Jackson's words are monumental beyond the speech they inspired: hers was the only woman's voice on the stage that day.

The Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15 killing four young girls - Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair.

President John F Kennedy is assassinated on November 22 during a motorcade in Dallas, Texas. A few hours later, President Lyndon B Johnson is sworn in as the 36th President of the United States aboard Air Force One.

ACTIVITY SPEECHES

Take a look at a famous speech from around this time.

What rhetorical devices does the speaker use to make their point?

Does the speech still hold its power today?

Resource: Ten Major Civil Rights Speeches and Writings: www.thoughtco.com/major-civil-rights-speeches-and-writings-45362

[GRADE 9-10 READING STANDARDS FOR
INFORMATIONAL TEXTS, 4-9]



AFTER

Malcom X is assassinated on February 21, 1965.

The Loving v. Virginia decision makes interracial marriage legal on June 12, 1967.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated on April 4, 1968.

Women of the Movement

What names do you think of when you hear "Civil Rights Movement"? The answers are likely Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Perhaps you also think of Rosa Parks, but do you know her full story? Or that of Claudette Colvin, a 15 year old girl who refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, eight months before Rosa Parks?

The following are five of the real-life Civil Rights Activist women mentioned in the play.

Dr. Pauli Murray:
lawyer, women's right activist, and the first Black woman to become an Episcopal priest



Daisy Bates:
journalist and the force behind the Little Rock Nine, the first Black students to enter Little Rock Central High



Gloria Richardson:
leader of the Cambridge movement, fighting inequality on the Eastern Shore of Maryland



Septima Clark:
created the Civil Rights Movement's literacy and citizenship workshops to educate Black citizens and push them to vote



"Today is the day before tomorrow and tomorrow has got my name written all over it"

- Cadillac Crew

Lorraine Hansberry:
playwright and activist; the first Black woman to have a play on Broadway



Resource: *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* by Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon is a collection of essays/interviews written by some of these women, including Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, Pauli Murray and Fannie Lou Hamer.

ANCESTORS: people you are descended from, or from whose legacy you live your life. CADILLAC CREW introduces many female activist ancestors. It's also interesting to think of yourself as a future ancestor and to think about what responsibilities we have for future generations.

Resource: check out Layla Saad's Good Ancestor podcast for more of what it means to be an ancestor: <http://laylafsaad.com/good-ancestor-podcast>

ACTIVITY

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Interview someone in your life who was alive in 1963. What do they remember most about this time?

[GRADES 9-10 SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARDS FOR LITERACY IN THE CONTENT AREAS [SCLA], GRADES 9-10 READING STANDARDS FOR LITERACY IN THE CONTENT AREAS: HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE [RCA-H] 1-6]

From director taneisha duggan:



"The work of our ancestors who participated in the Cadillac Crews is inspiring, and knowing that through them there is an actual and figurative map to follow gives me hope. To think of the danger the dominant society felt each time women got together to work towards a better world makes me grounded in our collective power, and ready for my part in the greater plan."

For more information about taneisha duggan: www.taneishaduggan.work

THE REAL CADILLAC CREWS

Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS) was one of the many programs that the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) implemented to address issues of civil rights in the United States. The seeds for WIMS were planted after the March on Washington in 1963.

They initially gathered a group of 48 women of diverse backgrounds, including 16 Black women and 32 white women. These women volunteered to travel to Mississippi to meet with Southern women on Wednesday afternoons to establish lines of communication across racial and regional divides. According to NCNW President Dorothy Height, the Cadillac Crews were meant to “lend a ‘ministry of presence’ as witnesses to encourage compassion and reconciliation.”

They were nicknamed the Cadillac Crew because it implies a certain class. The WIMS women knew that their middle-age and class presentation as “proper Southern women” would give them an advantage that young radical students did not have; they would be able to stay under the radar. They wore dresses accessorized with long white gloves to solidify this image.

The program was later expanded beyond Mississippi to 11 states across the country.



Pictured: NCNW President Dorothy I. Height and other members of WIMS, namely: Billie Hetzel, Flaxie Pinkett, Peggy Roach, Justine Randers-Pehrson, and Marie Barksdale in the Boardroom at the Council House.

Resource: *Wednesdays in Mississippi: Proper Ladies working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964* by Debbie Z. Harwell is one of the only texts that includes information on the Cadillac Crew. You can also learn more about the WIMS women here: <https://www.nps.gov/mamc/learn/historyculture/wednesdays-in-mississippi.htm>

THE GREEN BOOK

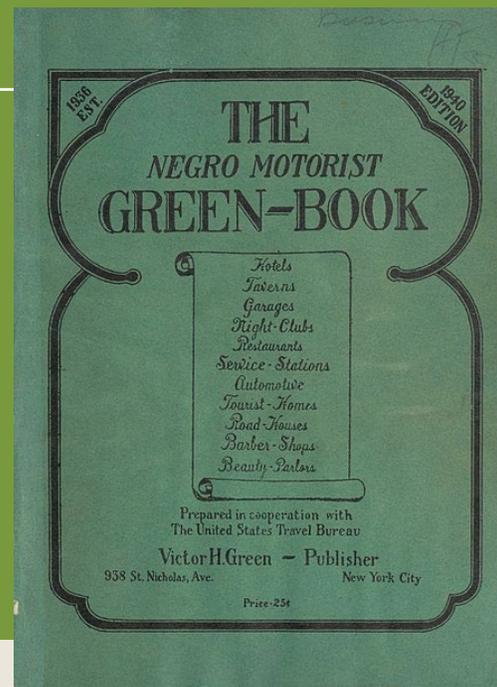
During the Jim Crow era, travel in the United States could be extremely dangerous for Black people. In addition to the blatant racism and hostility, many areas of the South were “sundown towns” (areas that Black people were banned from after dark). The Negro Motorist Green Book by Victor Hugo Green listed safe spaces for African-American travellers to stay, eat and hang out throughout the United States.

ACTIVITY

SAFE TRAVELS

Look at areas within your state. Where would it be safe for Black travelers to go? Do any sundown towns still exist in your area? Make a map detailing the areas travelers should and should not go to.

[GRADES 9-10 READING STANDARDS FOR LITERACY IN THE CONTENT AREAS: HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE [RCA-H], INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS, 7-9]



The actual 1963 Green Book can be viewed in the theatre lobby or online here: <https://on.nypl.org/3eBLz53>

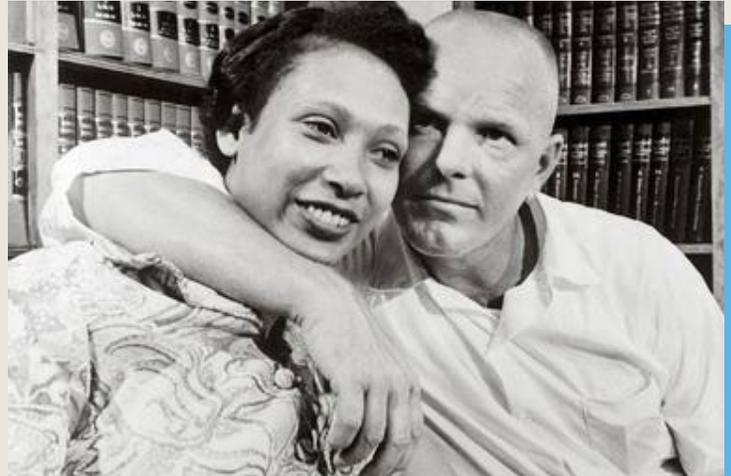
HIDDEN IDENTITIES & RELATIONSHIPS

LOVING V. VIRGINIA

In the Summer of 1958, high school sweethearts Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter went to a Virginia courthouse to be wed. After a few weeks of being married, the police came into the Loving home at 2 a.m. Their crime was miscegenation - the "interbreeding" of races. Richard was white and Mildred was perceived as Black (although she identifies as Native American).

After the Lovings were arrested, the court gave them two choices: 1 year in prison or banishment from Virginia for 25 years. The couple chose the latter and relocated to DC.

Five years later, the Lovings were arrested again when visiting family in Virginia. This time, the couple decided to fight. This case eventually went to the Supreme Court and in 1967, it was decided in *Loving v. Virginia* that the government could not stop different races from marrying.



Mildred and Richard Loving

QUEERNESS IN THE 60S

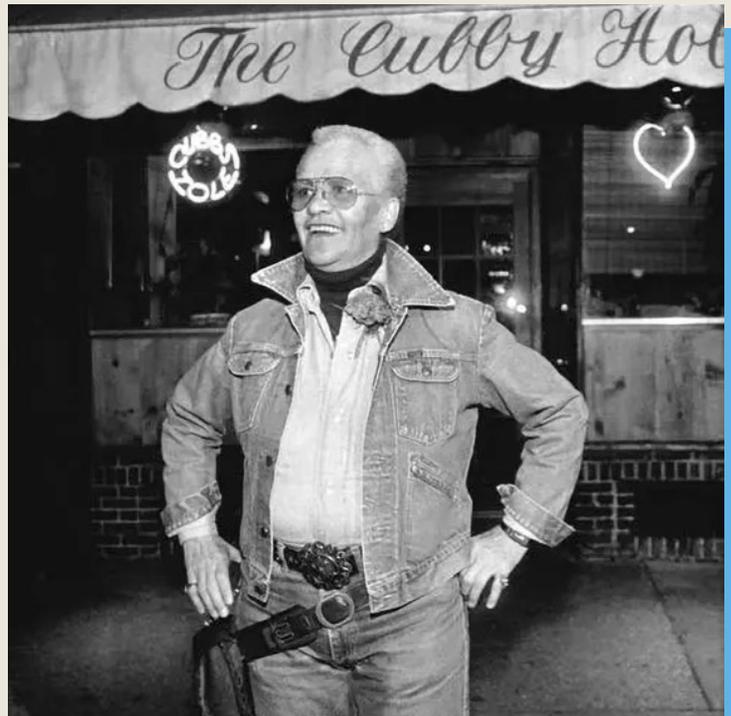
The Civil Rights movement led to some progress for LGBTQ+ rights. However, it was not until later in the decade, after the Stonewall Uprising in New York in 1969, that the gay rights movement became more visible.

The early 1960's was a time where being outed or coming out as homosexual could very likely be met with admission to a psychiatric hospital. It was not until 1973 that homosexuality was taken out of the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM). Many people remained closeted to prevent the societal rejection it could cause. Some consequences could include losing your job, being labeled as a pervert or pedophile, or psychiatric treatment.

WHAT IS "PASSING"?

Passing occurs when a person of one race is able to appear as another. The character of Sarah is described by playwright Tori Sampson as "white passing." She identifies as white and receives the societal privileges that come with that identification.

Resource: Check out the 2021 film *Passing* starring Tessa Thompson and Ruth Nega.



Stormé DeLarverie, gay rights activist in the 1960s

POST SHOW ACTIVITY

INTERNAL MONOLOGUE

How would the women in the play be restricted by these laws and social norms?

Write a monologue for one of the characters where they process living through one or more of these social restrictions and the effect it had on their life.

[FOUNDATIONS THEATRE COURSE STANDARDS, CREATING 1-3]

#BLACKLIVESMATTER FOUNDERS



PATRISSE CULLORS

Cullors' activism began in the Bus Riders Union of Los Angeles. After reading Alicia Garza's post on social media, she responded with the now iconic hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter." Cullors wrote a memoir detailing the start of the movement: "When they call you a terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir." Cullors' second book, "An Abolitionist's Handbook: 12 Steps to Change Yourself and the World," is a guide for activists on how to take care of each other and resolve internal conflicts while campaigning.

ALICIA GARZA

After George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of Trayvon Martin under the guise of self-defense, Garza took to Facebook. She created a love letter to the Black community in which she stated: "I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter," a statement that later stood for a movement. A self-proclaimed Marxist and anti-capitalist, Garza has written several books on anti-racism and revolutionizing. Check out Alicia Garza's podcast [Lady Don't Take No](#).

AYO TOMETI (FORMERLY KNOWN AS OPAL TOMETI)

A longtime organizer, Tometi was established before her work in Black Lives Matter. As a child of Nigerian immigrants, Tometi saw the racism and othering they had to endure. For eight years, Tometi was the director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (an organization that educates and unifies Black immigrant communities). After the start of the hashtag by Garza and Cullors, Tometi stepped in as an experienced organizer to help solidify the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

POST SHOW DISCUSSION

TIME SHIFT

Cadillac Crew takes place in both the 1960s and in a present day podcast with the #BlackLivesMatter Founders.

Why do you think the playwright does this?

Do you find the transition between these periods smooth or sudden? Why?

Why do you think the playwright chose to invent characters in the 1963 storyline but use the real life founders of #BlackLivesMatter in the last scene?

Have you ever felt like you have seen history repeat itself? When?

[FOUNDATIONS OF THEATRE COURSE STANDARDS, RESPONDING 7-8]

DESIGNING A WORLD

COSTUME DESIGNER CALYPSO MICHELET SHARES THESE RENDERINGS (EARLY DESIGNS) FOR RACHEL'S COSTUME:

Costume Design Activity: What does Rachel's costume tell you about her character? Are there elements of that character that carry through to the character of Alicia Garza (played by the same actor)? Create your own costume design for one actor playing two characters: one from the Cadillac Crew and one from founders of BLM. Use inspiration from women you have learned about in this guide or other icons you know from the '60s.



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE CADILLAC CREW SET MODEL FROM SCENIC DESIGNER JULIANA VON HAUBRICH:

Set Design Activity: What specific choices about the set design speak to you the most? What themes do you notice? Create a new set based on your understanding of the play. What would you change and what would you keep?



Sound Design Activity: Popular music of the '60s reflected political unrest. What music would you choose to place audience members in this moment and why?

[FOUNDATIONS OF THEATRE COURSE STANDARDS, CREATING & CONNECTING 1-3, 10-11
FOUNDATIONS OF VISUAL ARTS COURSE STANDARDS, CREATING & PRESENTING 1-6
FOUNDATIONS COURSE MEDIA ART STANDARDS, CREATING AND PRESENTING 1-6]

POST SHOW QUESTIONS: ERASED HISTORY

Which character in the Cadillac Crew do you relate to the most? Why?

Each character approaches social justice in a different way. Name what you believe these differences are and which you believe is the most effective. What do you think happened to this Cadillac Crew?

Why do you think their stories have been left out of history? What is the affect of this erasure?

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE? HERE ARE SOME RESOURCES:

Books

Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965 by Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon

When they call you a terrorist: a Black Lives Matter memoir by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele

Wednesdays in Mississippi: Proper Ladies working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964 by Debbie Z. Harwell

Websites

www.thoughtco.com/major-civil-rights-speeches-and-writings-45362

<https://www.blackpast.org/>

<https://www.nps.gov/mamc/learn/historyculture/wednesdays-in-mississippi.htm>

<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

Movies

Passing (2021)

Hidden Figures (2016)

I Am Not Your Negro (2016)

Podcasts

"Lady Don't Take No" by Alicia Garza

"Good Ancestor podcast" by Layla Saad

"Finding Our Way" with Prentis Hemphill

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THOUGHT OF THE PLAY:

EMAIL: info@wamtheatre.com

STAY IN TOUCH WITH WAM THEATRE ON INSTAGRAM: [@wamtheatre](https://www.instagram.com/wamtheatre)

