

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2016-17 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE

September 7 - October 2, 2016



45 PLAYS FOR 45 PRESIDENTS

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHTS:

Andy and Genevra on packing
227 years of history into
120 minutes

FIVE PRESIDENTS YOU PROBABLY DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT (BUT SHOULD):

Quincy Adams, Pierce,
Garfield, Taft,
and Coolidge

By ANDY BAYIATES, SEAN BENJAMIN,
GENEVRA GALLO-BAYIATES, CHLOE
JOHNSTON, and KAREN WEINBERG

Directed by SEAN DANIELS

AMERICA:

People, places, and events
that shaped the nation
(and this play)

SEAN DANIELS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



ELIZABETH KEGLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

45 PLAYS FOR 45 PRESIDENTS

WRITTEN BY

ANDY BAIYATES, SEAN BENJAMIN, GENEVRA GALLO-BAIYATES,
CHLOE JOHNSTON, and KAREN WEINBERG

FEATURING

CELINA DEAN† VERONIKA DUERR† AARON MUÑOZ†
NAEL NACER† TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE

SCENIC DESIGNER
MICHAEL B. RAIFORD

COSTUME DESIGNER
A. LEE VILIESIS

LIGHTING DESIGNER
BRIAN J. LILIENTHAL†

SOUND DESIGNER
STOWE NELSON

PROJECTION DESIGNER
IDO LEVRAN

STAGE MANAGER
DANIELLE ZANDRI

PRODUCER
PETER CREWE

DIRECTED BY
SEAN DANIELS

SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 2, 2016

Founding Father: Andy Baiyates
Musical composition and arrangements by: Steve Goers, Laura McKenzie, and André Pleuss
Originally produced by the Neo-Futurists of Chicago (neofuturists.org)
Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc. (www.playscripts.com)



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1001, *The Aliens*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, *Company One*. **Education:** BA in Theatre, Suffolk University. **Other:** 2016 IRNE Award, Best Actor in *The Flick*, 2015 Elliot Norton Award, Best Actor in *Intimate Apparel*; 2013 IRNE Award, Best Supporting Actor in *Our Town*.



TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE

MRT: *The Realness*. **New York:** *Prospect*, Boundless Theatre Co.; *Dakota Atoll*, Lark Theatre; *Dunkfest '88*, P73; *And If You Lose Your Way...*, New Georges; *Find and Sign*, Naked Angels. **Regional:** *A Christmas Carol*, Hartford Stage; *FLY*, Cincinnati Play-

house, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis; *How We Got On*, B Street Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival; *By The Way*, *Meet Vera Stark*, Lyric Stage Co.; *Cardboard Piano*, *Imaginary Music Critic Who Doesn't Exist*, *The Solid Sand Below*, *Alligator*, The Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre; *Find and Sign*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Pioneer Theatre Co.; *Othello*, Commonwealth Shakespeare Co. **TV/Film:** *Elementary*; *How To Win*, New Millennium Studios; *Blues in The Night*, *Troop 491*. **Other Selected Credits:** *The Threepenny Opera*, *Vieux Carre*, *The Lady From Dubuque*, *Blood Knot*, *Sally's Rape* (Director), *Betrayal* (Director). **Education:** M.F.A Brown University/Trinity Rep. Yale University. Terrell thanks God and his loving family for their support and commitment. @thetdsledge



Nael Nacer, Celina Dean, Aaron Muñoz, Veronika Duerr, and Terrell Donnell Sledge. Photo by Meghan Moore.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Hey friends,

So, my family grew up in politics. I'm from Washington, DC, and still have several mugs that play "Hail To The Redskins" when you pick them up.

My uncle Gordy was the Deputy Whip of the Republican Party for a while, my Uncle Milan is a George Bush appointed federal judge, and I'm actually from what Wikipedia (which is never wrong – sorry Sinbad) would call a "US political family."

The only note to add to all this is that my personal politics land a little (or a lot) to the left of theirs – which adds for lovely or perhaps quiet family reunion dinner conversation.

BUT, what has always fascinated me being descended from Republicans and then coming over to the other side – is the lack of conversation that happens between the two ideologies. The lack of looking to see where the other is right.

There's the great Simpsons episode where they stumble upon the Republican convention with a banner, "We're Evil" and the Democratic convention with a banner, "We Can't Govern." Right?

So, my relationship to this piece – when we did it for Jimmy Carter and he laughed all through the Ronald Reagan piece, when we asked Louisville audiences to pick the 44th president and every night an almost fight and a true conversation broke out – what I loved about it, was that it was a brief moment where there was a piece of political theater that wasn't so on the nose with its politics, so that we could talk about our differences and our similarities in the long view. Both productions had stunningly honest post-show conversations outside the knee-jerk reactions of everyday political shouting.

Example: We all have baggage with George W. Bush or Obama – but could we put that aside and go back 40-50 years? What about Eisenhower? Can you be against war and pro-interstate highway system at the same time?

Which brings us to the MRT production – where we are partnering with Rock The Vote and Lowell Votes in an attempt to use this piece to let younger artists talk to younger voters – and create dialogue and conversation before our young friends get so settled into their ideology that anyone who disagrees must be unfriended stat.

I truly think this play is a chance to take the long view. To not talk with blood in our throats about politics, but to at least listen to the other side about issues.

I am a gambling man, so I can tell you that the odds that each of us is 100% right is pretty low....so what then might the other side be right about?

Only way to find out is to look back. So let's do that together.

—Sean Daniels, Director

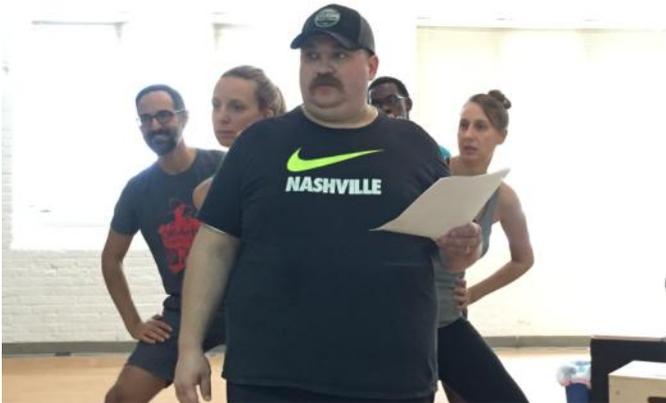
REHEARSAL SCRAPBOOK



Jackson's jug band: Duerr, Muñoz, Sledge, and Dean



The cast (Muñoz, Nacer, Duerr, Dean, and Sledge) give a master class with students from MRT's Young Company



Choreographing Nixon: Nacer, Dean, Muñoz, Sledge, and Duerr



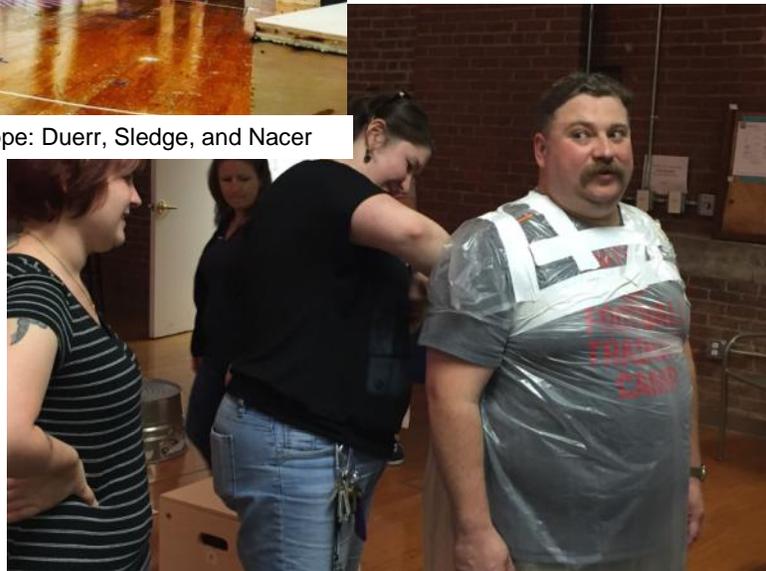
Jumping rope: Duerr, Sledge, and Nacer

THE CAST:

Celina Dean, Veronika Duerr, Aaron Muñoz, Nael Nacer, Terrell Donnell Sledge



Wilson's blackboard; Puppeteering Harding; Hoover's Rube Goldberg machine



Q&A: ANDY BAYIATES and GENEVRA GALLO-BAYIATES



Genevra, Andy, and daughter Ari

Andy and Genevra are both alumni of Chicago's Neo-Futurists, where they were among the writers and performers of the original 43 Plays for 43 Presidents. They live in the Chicago area with their "beautiful daughter and their two stupidly cute dogs."

literally killed each other—and then became whole again. We got this. I can do this. Gimme that ballot. I'm good."

GENEVRA: A lot of people leave this show with a greater sense of ownership over the American political process. There is great power inherent in the right to vote, and the show seeks to honor that.

And I think people feel inspired by the very genuine balance of greatness and the mundane in each of the president's lives. The show provides an opportunity for empathy in recognizing the humanity of each president, while realizing the power and impact of the electorate - the populace - on each of their lives.

Was it tricky to balance a President's portrayal as a human being with their political legacy?

GENEVRA: I found the plays about the lesser-known presidents much easier to write than those presidents for whom there is a collective cultural narrative. Understanding a president as a

fully complex and complicated human being becomes easier when there's no preconceived (or pre-learned) notion about that person's motivations, desire, or missteps.

What about this play makes people excited to see it and feel connected with the story?

ANDY: I think nearly everyone is interested in presidential history; they just can't conceive of having the time to learn it. So one appeal is like the impulse you have to read an article titled "5 things you absolutely must know before you refinish your basement." You think, "THANKS, Neo-Futurists! Now I know who Benjamin Harrison is and it only cost me \$20!"

But there's something deeper that people connect with, especially during an election that's so unprecedented. When you're in the midst of a historical change, perspective is very foggy. You have no ground under your feet. It feels like the country is losing its moorings. And then you see a show like this and you're reminded... "Oh yeah...we've been around for 240 years and we've been through 56 elections. We've survived so much change, so many contentious public debates, so many crises. We've fallen apart completely—

"We've fallen apart completely—literally killed each other—and then become whole again."

Any examples that were tougher?

GENEVRA: The one I struggled with the most, initially, was Kennedy. He is such a looming figure - both on a political and personal level - and one for whom most people have some sort of association, be it through personal experience, stories told by family members, or media portrayals. Thus, I felt the best thing to do was to turn the narrative over to the people. I also felt that he was such a large presence that Jackie got lost in his shadow quite a bit, as well as in our cultural memory; we see her as a foil for him, rather than as a distinct person. So my goal was also to physically make her the anchor of the play.

Have you found that some plays generate a lot of audience feedback after the show—either positive or negative?

ANDY: I've seen some negative feedback here and there, but honestly, it's rare—it's usually because the person has a comparative perspective that the production never set out to have. In other words: "Why is one president treated so well and another not-so-well?" The answer is easy, but I'm sure disappointing: They were written by two different people. Each writer had very personal reactions to those president's stories, and not enough time to have multiple perspectives. We never stepped back and did a "fairness" review or anything like that. And thank goodness. It was a very personal process. Much like voting is.

GENEVRA: Overall, positive feedback connects to how engaging and educational audience members consider the show. They leave feeling more knowledgeable about presidential history - and they had fun in the process!

Negative feedback tends to come from someone who feels their favorite president didn't get enough depth or who feels complexity was lacking; and to be fair, it often has to be... because we're trying to tell 45 stories in roughly two hours.

Are you facing any unprecedented challenges in writing about the current candidates?

GENEVRA: Yes. They are so fresh, so present, so a part of our cultural consciousness that it's hard to know where to focus the spotlight. In addition, this election cycle seems to be more highly personality-driven than any

other I can remember in my lifetime. In some ways, we have these larger-than-life personalities about whom everyone has already formed a strong opinion and a detailed narrative.

ANDY: Actually, trying to rewrite the Obama play and summarize his presidency in the midst of an election (and such intense social change) has been much harder for me. It feels like an impossible task...like, I dunno, doing double dutch without messing up every night in front of audience or something...

Andy, you grew up in the Lowell area—any favorite memories?

ANDY: Yep, I was born in St. Joseph's in Lowell, which I know doesn't exist anymore. And I was raised next door in Billerica.

I lived in the area for the first 25 years of my life so most of my best memories are the stuff a broke 20-year-old does with this time: hanging out with my friends in the Billerica Mall parking lot, for example... totally a warm

memory. I was a loyal paper boy for the Lowell Sun. I used to get lost in Lowell every time I drove there, which gave it a mix of power and mystique to me.

"It was a very personal process. Much like voting is."



Andy and Geneva in the original *43 Plays for 43 Presidents*

Q&A: SEAN DANIELS



MRT Artistic Director Sean Daniels has been directing 45 Plays for 45 Presidents since it was 43 Plays for 43 Presidents. He shares with us some of his favorite insights over the decades:

What grabbed you about this play the first time you encountered it?

I thought it was so smart, and so well-done. How often do you get to see a

full American civics lesson in less than two hours? To see the choices we've made as a country, over and over again?

I produced it and directed it in Atlanta, before the 2004 election. Not only was it a big hit, but Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter came to see it.

That must have been something!

We had only gotten notified like 36 hours in advance that he was coming—but if word got out and it had become too big a deal, he wouldn't have come. So we had to not tell anybody, and we had to set up a secret service area in the back. That entire audience had no idea he'd be there. He had just won the Nobel Peace Prize the week before, so we adjusted his costume to put a Nobel Prize on it.

Do audiences react differently to this than to other plays?

So often in theatre, we say we want to be a catalyst for conversation, and we want to be a community center, and we want to be a place where people can come and talk, but we don't succeed at that a lot of the time. The vast majority of the time, even.

But this was the type of show that every time we did it, people just stayed in their seats and discussed afterwards.

What are they staying to talk about?

You find that we all share the same opinions about the first 16 presidents. Everyone loves George Washington. There really aren't anti-George Washington people.

Then for presidents 17-32, no one really remembers exactly what happens in there. But everyone loves Teddy Roosevelt.

But when we get to the end of World War II, the audience wakes up in a certain way. Because suddenly everyone has opinions about these people, and the vast majority of the audience has lived through these experiences. Suddenly when we talk about Reagan, everyone feels very strongly, one way or the other, about what it all means.

You keep coming back to it over the years. What makes that exciting?

Eight years ago, when the audience got to vote on who was going to take over, Obama won all the night shows and McCain won all the matinees. In the audience, people just went crazy. One guy walked out and gave the bird to everybody.

Of course four years later we felt differently about Obama than we did at that time—and now eight years later, we definitely feel differently still. So one thing that's exciting for me is that the writers have to continually update it, because public ideas change.

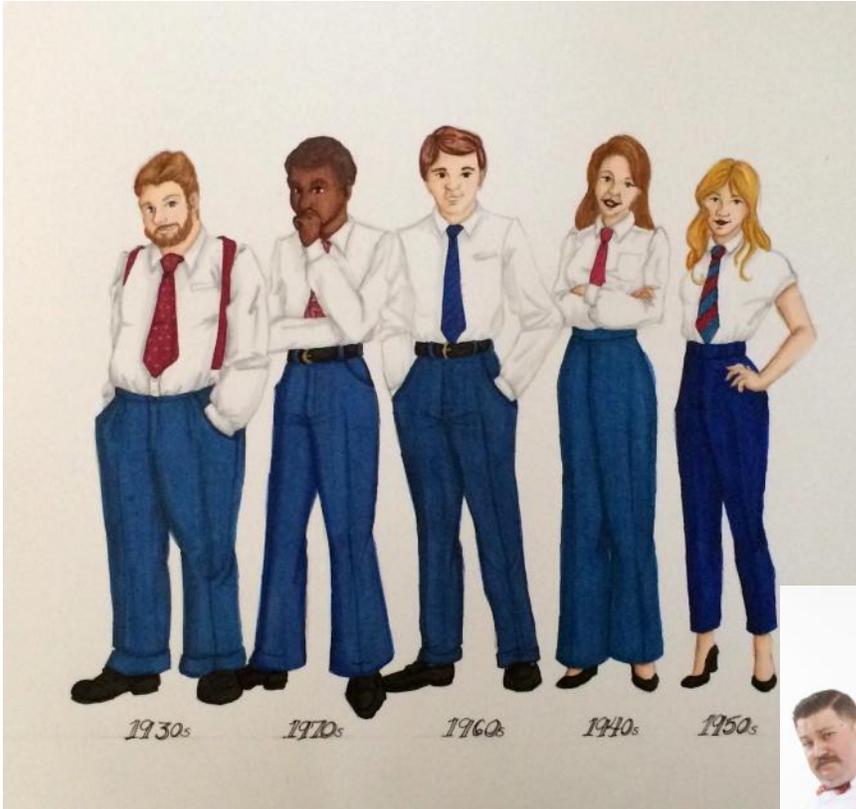
Do ideas change of older presidents, too?

This year we're rewriting George Hebert Walker Bush, who I think time has been kinder to. In his era, most liberals thought he was terrible. But a lot see him differently decades later. One of the themes of his campaign was a "kinder, gentler nation." You can't even imagine a nominee running on the idea of a gentler America now.

Also—you realize that some of the problems we have now are not just because one president or another is evil. It's because years or decades before, some policy got put in place—but it takes time to really play out. It's easy to get tiny and myopic on politics. But if you take a step back and say, "many of these things we've been through before—and in some cases we've made the same mistakes over and over again"—it's helpful, in terms of taking the long view.

PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

Costume Designer A. Lee Vilieisis wanted to create looks that reflected iconic American fashion eras. Check out the results:



The Vision

(Left to Right: 1930s, 1970s, 1960s, 1940s, 1950s). Design by A. Lee Vilieisis.

The Result

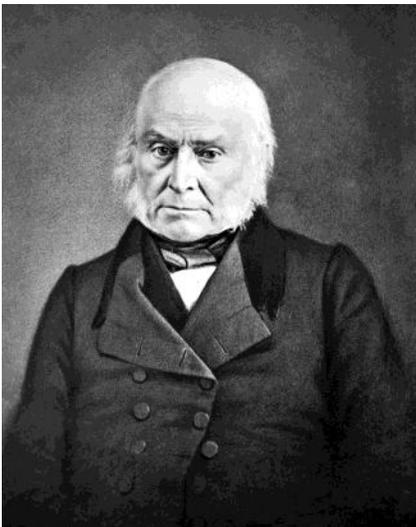
Aaron Muñoz, Terrell Donnell Sledge, Nael Nacer, Celina Dean, and Veronika Duerr. Photo by Meghan Moore.



FIVE PRESIDENTS YOU PROBABLY DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT (BUT SHOULD)

We all know at least something about Washington and Lincoln. But how about Garfield and Pierce?

Here's a quick introduction to some who don't often get the spotlight, but whose lives (or deaths) changed the course of history:



JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 1825-1829

Not nearly as talked about as his father, John Quincy was a true New Englander child of the revolution. By age seven he was reading the Patriot Press. At age nine he witnessed the Battle of Bunker Hill first-hand. And he hated the British even more than his dad did.

At the time he was elected, he might have been the most overqualified presidential candidate we've ever seen: he'd served in the Massachusetts legislature, was an expert diplomat, had been Secretary of State under Monroe, and is credited with—despite his anti-British bias—planting the seeds of lasting peace with America's arch-nemesis England.

But in office, he was blocked at every turn by the rip-roaring Jacksonian democrats, who beat him by a landslide after one unproductive term. What's remarkable, though, is what he envisioned for the young country, despite his inability to accomplish it: an interstate road system. A national astronomical program. Government aid to education. A naval academy. All of it would happen—just not during his presidency.

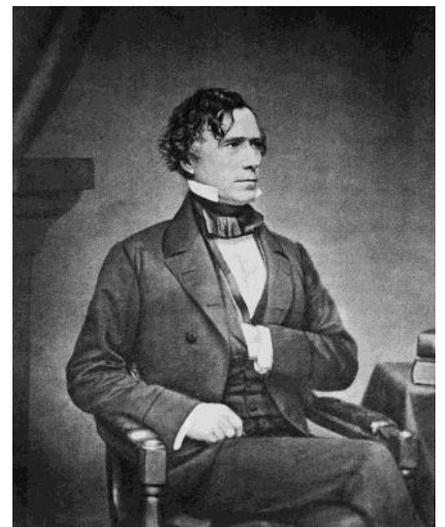
FRANKLIN PIERCE, 1853-1857

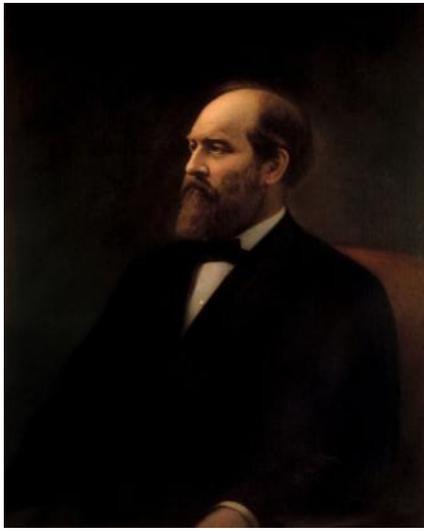
As Pierce took office, the issue of slavery was growing hotter by the minute. Five years after he left office, the country would be ripped apart by Civil War.

The central question of Pierce's presidency was of the Kansas-Nebraska territory: it had been a free territory; but the Kansas-Nebraska Act, proposed by Stephen A. Douglas, would have split the territory in two, and left the question of slavery up to individual states and territories to decide ("popular sovereignty").

Pierce enacted the bill into law, and Kansas became a literal battleground. Violence ravaged the border, as the North sent rifles to support the abolitionists, and the South pushed settlers into disputed areas.

Pierce's son Bennie was killed in a train crash just days before Pierce's inauguration. The tragedy would haunt his wife Jane for the rest of her days.





JAMES GARFIELD, 1881

Garfield was hounded through his short presidency by an endless stream of government job seekers. He was also one of a handful of presidents to be born into real poverty. As a boy he was a canal boat driver, as a young man he was a traveling preacher.

He was elected at a time of deep, deep division within his Republican party, between the moderate “Stalwarts,” and the conservative “Half-Breeds.” As the party was being ripped apart, Garfield emerged at the Republican National Convention as a dark horse candidate. He narrowly won by courting support from both factions.

But in office, he was tormented by choices on who to appoint to coveted government jobs, when countless whose help had won him the election came expecting favors in return.

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, 1909-1913

Taft had a lifelong fascination with courts, judges, and the judicial system. He longed to be Chief Justice of the United States, but under intense pressure from his buddy Teddy Roosevelt, he ran for the Presidency, and won. He was Roosevelt’s hand-picked successor.

In the oval office, he lowered tariff rates, enforced the Sherman Antitrust Act (which brought suits against monopolistic corporations), and streamlined conservation efforts in the government.

In a different era Roosevelt might have lauded Taft’s work, but a series of fallings-outs—ideological, political, and personal—had turned Roosevelt bitterly against him. Roosevelt formed a third party, the uber-progressive Bull Moose Party, for the express purpose of defeating Taft in the 1912 election. But both were easily trounced by democrat Woodrow Wilson.



(And yes, Taft would go on to become Chief Justice under Warren Harding.)



CALVIN COOLIDGE, 1923-1929

Coolidge was the reserved, socially awkward New Englander who took over when Warren Harding died in 1923. His reticence and dry wit were legendary. As head of the Massachusetts State Senate, he worked successfully to stop unfair landlord practices, raise workmen’s compensation, and limit the work week to 48 hours for women and children. He urged pay increases for factory workers, teachers, and policemen.

As President, he took a calm, collected, laissez-faire approach to governing through an era of tremendous prosperity. “If you see ten troubles coming down the road,” he would say, “you can be sure that nine will run into the ditch before they reach you and you have to battle with only one of them.”

The problem was, one of those “troubles” was the hyperactive stock speculation that led to the Great Depression—though he didn’t recognize it at the time. Herbert Hoover often takes flak for the Depression since the crash happened under his watch—but many economists blame Coolidge’s earlier failure to intervene.

The presidency was exhausting for the introverted and bereaved Coolidge, whose son died in 1924. He declined to run for a second full term.

GLOSSARY OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS IN *45 PLAYS*...

BRITISH EMPIRE: The huge collection of worldwide territories that came under England’s control, beginning in the 1500s—from India, to the Caribbean, to Africa, to Australia. Slave trade was essential to its operations in the Americas, but was abandoned by the empire in 1807.

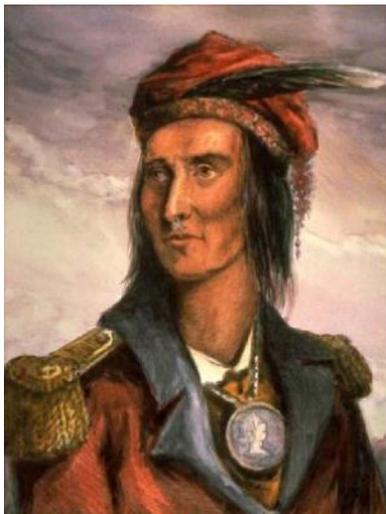
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Endlessly witty American printer, publisher, author, inventor, scientist, and diplomat, who helped draft both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.



Benjamin Franklin

BURNING OF WASHINGTON: In August of 1814, during the War of 1812, the British torched most of the public buildings in Washington, D.C.—the White House included. After less than a day, a torrential storm put out much of the fire and turned the British back.

TECUMSEH: Native American leader of the Shawnee in the late 1700’s and early 1800s, who confronted William Henry Harrison on unjust land treaties forced on his people. In the leadup to the War of 1812, Tecumseh swept across America trying to mobilize Native nations to side with the British against the United States. Harrison’s men killed Tecumseh’s brother in 1811 (the Battle of Tippecanoe—where Harrison earned his nickname), and Tecumseh was killed in battle two years later.



Shawnee leader Tecumseh

SECOND BANK OF THE UNITED STATES: The Second Bank was established in 1816 to stabilize currency and regulate public credit. The public generally supported the Bank, but it was despised by Andrew Jackson and his followers, on grounds that it was not only unconstitutional, but had failed in its mission. Jackson vetoed its recharter in 1832, which rallied his anti-bank political base and launched him to reelection.

MISSOURI COMPROMISE: An act that let Missouri be admitted as a slave state, by balancing it with the admission of Maine as a free state. It also banned slavery north of an arbitrary line drawn through the Louisiana territory.

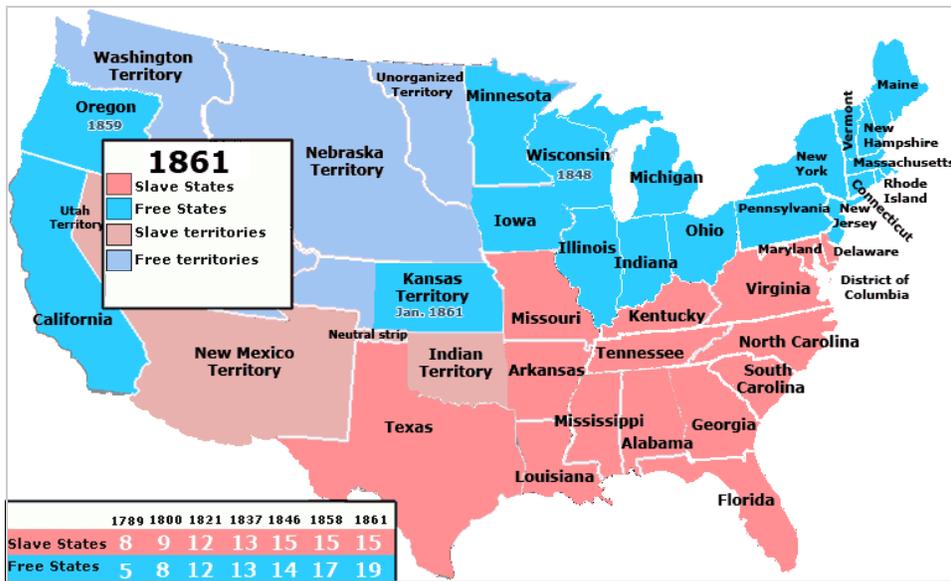
SARAH CHILDRESS POLK: First lady, married to James K. Polk. Legend holds that she refused to marry her husband until he won elected office. An orthodox Christian, Sarah refused to serve beer or whiskey, and did not allow business to be conducted on Sundays.



Sarah Childress Polk

KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT: The 1854 act which split the Kansas-Nebraska territory in two, and allowed each to decide whether or not to allow slavery (“popular sovereignty”). It also repealed the Missouri Compromise, making slavery legal in areas it hadn’t been in 35 years.

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: Near the end of Buchanan’s presidency, South Carolina seceded from the United States. By the time Lincoln took office, still more slaveholding states had seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. After the fall of Fort Sumter in 1861, Lincoln declared a state of insurrection and called for 75,000 soldiers to suppress the Southern rebellion. By the end of



Mapping slavery in the U.S., 1861

the War, roughly 620,000—2% of the American population—had been killed, the union had been restored, and slavery abolished by constitutional amendment.

SHERMAN ANTI-TRUST ACT: Landmark statute passed under Benjamin Harrison, intended to stop corporations from joining forces to create monopolies that swallow up their competition.

PULLMAN STRIKE: Huge 1894 nationwide railroad, amidst a depression that had brought the unemployment rate to 18%. President Grover Cleveland dispatched federal troops to restore order; two days of rioting and pillage followed.

PELICAN ISLAND: The first National Wildlife Refuge in the U.S., off the eastern coast of Florida. Signed into existence by executive order of President Theodore Roosevelt, it's just a small fraction of the 230 million acres of land he put under government protection—some with the



Pelican Island, Florida

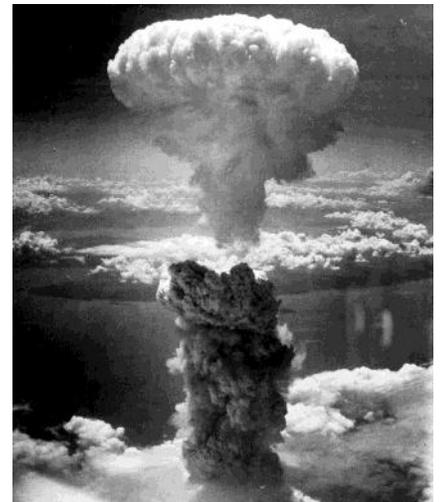
approval of congress, and some without.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS: The intergovernmental organization that emerged from the Paris Peace Conference that ended World War I. Precursor to the United Nations. Although proposed by Woodrow Wilson, the United States did not become a member of the League.

BONUS ARMY: Name given to the roughly 43,000 protest marchers—many of them World War I veterans—demanding cash redemption of their service certificates, amidst the throes of the Great Depression, which left millions homeless, broke, and hungry. When they refused to leave the

Capitol building, General Douglas MacArthur's army lit fire to their tents, fired tear gas into the crowd, and drove them out with tanks.

ATOMIC BOMB: In the summer of 1945, President Harry Truman made the call to drop two atomic bombs, one each on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. America was winning the war; the bombs hastened the war's end, ultimately sparing the lives of some hundred thousand American servicemen. As many as 246,000 Japanese died—mostly civilians—either from the blasts themselves or the gruesome after-effects of burns and radiation.



The destruction of Nagasaki, 1945

BROWN VS. BOARD OF EDUCATION: The 1954 landmark Supreme Court case that ended racial segregation in public schools, declaring that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The case began as a class action suit by a group of Topeka, Kansas parents on behalf of their 20 children. Although President Eisenhower was skeptical of civil rights, he still called for federal forces to enforce the ruling in the south.

MALCOLM X/RFK/MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.: Lyndon B. Johnson was president during three political assassinations that shook the nation in the 60s: Martin Luther King, Jr., the iconic reverend and Civil

Rights leader; Malcolm X, the black leader and Muslim minister who broke with the mainstream Civil Rights movement; and Robert F. Kennedy, JFK's brother who was running in the presidential primary.

IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR: In 1986 it was reported that government officials had illegally sold weapons to Iran; the funds had gone to Contras, an anticommunist group opposing the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, who in turn provided Iran with the weapons. The hope was to ultimately free American hostages in Lebanon; President Reagan denied his involvement at first, but was later discredited.

IRAQ WAR: In his 2002 State of the Union address, Presi-

dent George W. Bush announced his new focus on bringing stability to the Middle East, and accused Iraqi dictator Sadaam Hussein of harboring terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. On March 20, 2003, the bombing of Baghdad began with "Operation Shock and Awe." The U.S. officially withdrew in 2011, but resulting conflicts continue to this day.



Iraq War

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Are you surprised** by the way any of the presidents are portrayed? Do any of the portrayals conflict with ideas you had about them beforehand?
2. Do you think the show has a **political bias**? Do you think it should?
3. Director Sean Daniels has said that the show tells the story of "**the choices we've made as a country, over and over again.**" How would you summarize what that story is? Is there more than one way to summarize it?

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

American Presidents: Biographies of the Chief Executives from George Washington to Barack Obama by David C Whitney

The American Heritage History of the Presidents by Michael Beschloss

www.whitehouse.gov/1600/Presidents

Thank you to the following for their contribution to this playguide:

Andy Bayiates

Sean Daniels

Genevra Gallo-Bayiates

Gustave Rogers