

Junebug Productions

Color Line Project

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WITH JOHN O'NEAL AND THERESA HOLDEN

This case study documents the pilot phase of Junebug Productions' Color Line Project, a long-term national endeavor that combines performance and community story-collecting to revitalize Civil Rights Movement history as a valued and illuminating context for current issues of race. Using story circles methodology as a dialogue form, artist John O'Neal and a national organizing team worked over several months with local scholars, activists, and partner organizations to collect stories of local people about their involvement in and understanding of the Movement. Local artists moved the community's stories to public presentation. These performances, along with Junebug Productions' Jabbo Jones plays and scholar panels, provided varied opportunities for public dialogues. The case study illuminates Junebug's evolution of a new type of "artist residency model" whose aim is to engage, educate, and organize. It analyzes challenges encountered by both presenters and Junebug Productions including balancing local and national goals and raises valuable questions about who best at the local level to lead short-term and sustained efforts—cultural organizations or other civic or activist organizations. The Color Line Project case study was written by Animating Democracy project liaison Cheryl Yuen in close collaboration with John O'Neal and Theresa Holden and drawing upon project documentation by Stacie Walker. Cheryl and Animating Democracy thank John, Theresa, and Stacie for their valuable and significant contributions.

PREFACE

A new artist residency model

Concerned with the persistent issues of civil rights and racial inequality in America today, Junebug Productions' *Color Line Project (CLP)* aims to use the arts in local communities to build structures devoted to social change. *CLP* is led by performing artist and civil rights activist John O'Neal, founder and artistic director of Junebug Productions, and project director Theresa Holden. Using Junebug's story-circle process as its dialogue methodology and its *Junebug Jabbo Jones* trilogy of plays—performed by O'Neal—as an artistic model for the work, the organization engaged the Glassboro Center for the Arts at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, and the Duncan Theatre at Palm Beach Community College in Lake Worth, Florida, as its initial partners. For Junebug, the project represents a new programmatic initiative intended to be the primary vehicle for advancing its long-term mission. Joining these two pilot sites is a third site sponsored by the Cincinnati Art Association, the first to benefit from what was learned through the initial activity supported by the Animating Democracy Initiative. This case study illuminates Junebug's evolution of a new type of "artist residency model" whose aim is to engage, educate, and organize. Distinct from previous efforts, it unites Junebug's unique resources—the story-circle methodology and O'Neal's *Junebug Jabbo Jones* play cycle—with the creation of new

artwork highlighting local experiences and interests, and establishing structures for dialogue and education devoted to catalyzing action for social justice.

NOT LOST OR FORGOTTEN: STORIES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois asserts: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races . . . in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.” Almost a century later, inequities between the lighter and darker races continue to grow, despite appearances to the contrary. From 1954 to 1975, the civil rights movement in America served as a vortex for raising awareness about this widening color gap. Despite these efforts, racism still exerts definitive influence on economic, social, and political policies and practices at all levels of society. An inability to sustain dialogue around issues of color and racism persists in American society, creating obstacles to much-needed changes that will ensure fair treatment for all.

John O’Neal and Junebug Productions framed a response to this dilemma by recognizing the powerful role of history in predicting and shaping the future. The civil rights movement of the sixties catalyzed civic dialogue on issues of racism and justice in America. Yet little is known about the movement by the general public, or even by those who actively participated in it. While it has become clear that the experiences of recognized movement leaders have been poorly documented, those on the front lines—ordinary people without whom there would have been no movement—have barely been acknowledged. Without deepening collective understanding of the movement, thereby strengthening the bonds of healthy relationships and exposing what threatens to diminish the quality of life in our communities, little progress can be made.

Since 1980, Junebug Productions, Inc., a professional African American arts organization based in New Orleans, has sought to inspire and support people who work for justice in the African American community and in the wider world by creating, producing, and presenting theatre, dance, music, and other art forms that share a similar vision. Essential to its work is artistic director John O’Neal, who first co-founded the Free Southern Theatre (FST) in 1963 as a cultural support arm to southern civil rights movement efforts, using “theatre as an instrument to stimulate the development of critical and reflective thought among black people in the South.” In the post-segregation era, Junebug Productions remains conscious of the difficult—and bloody—integration struggles that have created a new set of equally challenging conditions. Continuing the work started by FST, Junebug often collaborates with other creative artists, managers, and community organizations that share a commitment to complementary goals.

Over the course of the present study, Junebug has had ten plays in its repertoire, three of which are intercultural collaborations that have toured both nationally and internationally in venues and communities of diverse size and racial makeup. The storyteller in this series of plays is Junebug Jabbo Jones—a folk character who represents oppressed people whenever and wherever they have taken stock of their situation and begun to wonder what to do about it. Junebug, who is played by O’Neal, comes from a long line of African storytellers who, through the oral tradition, have carried forward the records of events and the memories of families of African peoples from time immemorial. Presented as a trilogy—*Don’t Start Me to Talking or I’ll Tell Everything I Know*; *You Can’t Judge a Book by Looking at the Cover*; and *’Til the Midnight Hour*—the plays examine the human condition through the lens of the movement and provide a vehicle for “truth-telling” through story to diverse audiences.

In a 1991 interview with Kate Hammer, John O’Neal said, “Knowledge is the product of what we do together. Until we take action together, to understand, to deal with the given problem that we share in common, none of us has the knowledge that’s required to solve that problem.” It is out of this belief as well as the conviction that his creative work is about “the struggle to affirm human dignity” that the *Color Line Project* was born in 1998.

PROJECT EVOLUTION

The idea of the *Color Line Project* is that in telling our stories, we identify what is important to us. By listening to the stories of others, we find out what is important to them; and by listening and telling together, we have the possibility of creating a clearer sense of what our community is and what our collective priorities are so that we can work more effectively toward our mutual benefit. By taping the stories, we amplify them, play them back, and have the collective experience of understanding and seeing what our stories say to us. And as academics, we can clarify and make the relationships between our stories and our future an educational opportunity to develop a richer, keener, and more effective experience. As organizers and artists, we can take those stories and help craft our way to the future.

—John O’Neal,
Palm Beach Community College, 2001

The *Color Line Project* originated prior to the forming of the Animating Democracy Initiative (ADI). The project aimed to continue the pioneering work of the Free Southern Theatre and Junebug Productions in using the arts and dialogue as tools for motivating individuals to work on a community level for social change. In each community, the core of the project was the collection and documentation of stories from the civil rights movement using the Junebug story-circle process. The storytelling process provides a safe place for dialogue to occur around issues of collective importance that come from personal experience. Stories were gathered from individuals of all races and professions, with particular attention to movement participants at the grassroots level. Artists, educators, and activists were encouraged to integrate the stories and the story-circle process into their work as a stimulus for dialogue. Working with select communities, Junebug served as an artistic resource and partner in presenting the *Junebug Jabbo Jones* plays, offering training in the story-circle dialogue methodology, and creating artistic expressions and other forums for exploring Dubois’s metaphor. It was hoped that the communities impacted by this project would form a national network to challenge injustice and improve the quality of community life. In addition, part of Junebug’s intent was to establish a comprehensive yet flexible and evolutionary framework that could be the primary vehicle for advancing this work.

Arts-presenting partners

The *Color Line Project* was first introduced at the January 1999 Association of Performing Arts Presenters conference in New York. By early 2000, three potential partners had emerged—Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey; Palm Beach Community College in Lake Worth, Florida; and the Langston Hughes Cultural Center in Seattle, Washington. These groups’ primary motivation for participating in the project was not to make social change but to find ways to engage and develop new and more diverse audiences. In the case of both educational institutions, there were strong ties to institutional long-range-planning interests to “understand and celebrate

diversity” and to create stronger connections with their surrounding communities that might inform future programming decisions. Initial planning was conducted on-site in Glassboro and Lake Worth in the spring of 2000. What emerged was a rough framework for the work that both institutions and Junebug Productions would be engaged in during the coming academic year. Planning for Seattle was to have started during the summer of 2000, but due to staff leadership changes and financial issues, the Langston Hughes Cultural Center decided to drop out of the project until a later time. In early 2001, this site was replaced with the Cincinnati Arts Association.

The national team

Critical for Junebug was the development of a national team that could provide the necessary resources to the local community sites. It was hoped that the team’s composition could serve as a model for the type of leadership required to implement the project on a local level. John O’Neal provided the artistic vision for the project and played a critical role as both artist and dialogue trainer. At all sites, his performances of the *Junebug Jabbo Jones* plays provided powerful examples of the use of story in creating theatrical work, and stimulated local interest and participation in the story-circle dialogues. Theresa Holden, as project director, was the central organizer for Junebug’s work with the sites. She served as liaison between each site and Junebug, handling contracting, project planning, logistics, fund-raising, and other responsibilities critical to the project. Theresa also trained local participants in the story-circle process, facilitated story circles in each stage of the projects, and worked with local artists on the use of story in their work. Curtis Muhammad, a self-described “organizer, freedom fighter, and hell-raiser,” was the team’s community organizer, and worked with O’Neal both to identify specific areas of concern for a particular community and to help find and recruit potential leaders and participants whose involvement might serve the needs of the community as a whole. In addition, Muhammad served as a dialogue facilitator in post-performance discussions.

Dr. Joyce King, then associate provost at Medgar Evers College in New York City and later associate provost at Spelman College, furthered the educational component of the project by contributing not only her scholarship but also her facilitation and dialogue skills. Beatrice Owsley, with the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans, provided guidance to the sites through archiving techniques. Her work would ensure that a written record of previously unrecorded movement stories would be collected, kept, and used, not only locally but also at the Amistad center. The final member of the national team—Stacie Walker, a doctoral candidate at the University of California at Santa Barbara—served as documenter, providing necessary information and feedback for use by Junebug in evaluating the project as a whole.

Story-circle methodology

The essence of this project is the story-circle methodology, a key tool for focusing communication and creating opportunities for dialogue. The methodology is based on a philosophy explained well by fellow arts activist C. Bernard “Jack” Jackson, a trained scientist who founded the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Jackson relates: “When we tell stories, we are sharing with each other how we put things together. When we share stories, we share whole parts of ourselves. Stories come charged with the spirit of the teller but have lives of their own.” O’Neal amplifies Jackson’s story: “Science has a way of breaking things apart into smaller and smaller pieces so that we can analyze them. I’m interested in how things fit

together.” Bob Moses of the Algebra Project—a national project growing out of civil rights work in Mississippi that features people’s stories and life experiences as texts for teaching algebra and science—comments on the usefulness of stories: “Anyone can learn better if you find the lessons you’re trying to teach in stories that people in the group tell. Anybody can learn anything better when the subject matter is based on stories that come from or affirm your own experience and purposes.” The premise of the story-circle process is that by allowing individuals to share their experiences in the form of stories, an empathetic understanding can be gained without unnecessary confrontation and without anyone being made to feel that their ideas are being threatened or rejected. John O’Neal describes the process this way:

The process, like the stories that people use it to share, is essentially oral in nature. When things are written down, we have a tendency to treat them as more final than they need to be. On the other hand, when people sit down to actually talk together, [you] have the chance to look at the body language, to listen to the tone of the voice, to question if you’re not clear about something, or to challenge if you think that’s in order. . . . Most people already know most of what they need to know to do what they have to do. What they don’t know, they have to create out of reflection and the critical evaluation of their own experience.

The use of a circle where everyone can see each other is critical, as it implies an equal, active, and democratic role for each participant. An important dynamic of the story-circle process is trusting that everyone has a story to tell and allowing stories to emerge organically, so that listening and learning is maximized, and dialogue results from the process of sharing personal stories and experiences. This dialogue occurs after the stories are shared during what Junebug productions has labeled “cross-talk”—a designated time for digestion of the stories as well as reflection.

Enter the Animating Democracy Initiative

The *Color Line Project* differs from many of the other ADI projects in two ways. First, it is seen as an ongoing aspect of Junebug Productions’ central program. As such, the lessons learned through the ADI-supported phase are critical to the future overall success of the organization as well as to future *Color Line Project* partnerships. The second difference is that Junebug Productions is focused on stimulating dialogue not just in one but in many communities. Therefore, rather than being the direct and primary motivator for dialogue or a creator of art, Junebug was more interested in creating local structures that would encourage and expand dialogue over the long term, and incorporating these participating communities into a national network. Thus, ADI funds became critical research and development money for Junebug, enabling it to refine its approach and its working relationships with potential local partners before expanding into other communities. ADI support was used to implement planned activities in Glassboro and Lake Worth, to provide reflection time for the Junebug team to evaluate pilot-site activities, to revise activities, and to begin planning with the Cincinnati Arts Association.

Linking to local issues of race

Both of the early pilot sites shared similar organizational goals for the *Color Line Project*, although each presenter and its community presented different histories, challenges, and approaches during the development and implementation of their projects. In Lake Worth, the project was centered at Palm Beach Community College (PBC). The West Palm Beach community had experienced a great deal of race-relations problems over the years, and had just begun the

process of healing. In fact, Palm Beach Community College had been the focus of turmoil regarding segregation in the late 1950s, when as many as five years after the Supreme Court ruling to abolish segregation, it continued as an all-white college. One story-circle participant, Malissa Tyson, talked about when she applied to Palm Beach Community College in 1959 and was denied admission. When she called the college to ask why, she was told that her people had a school, Roosevelt College. At the time, Roosevelt was considered by many to be an afterthought, set up to divert blacks from enrolling at the all-white PBCC. She talked about the legal suit, filed in 1961, that opened the doors to PBCC, but when she finally did attend, she said it felt like she wasn't there. "It was like I didn't exist. I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't like it." Stories about this union of the black and white colleges continually emerged, and eventually became the primary focus of the project.

Due in part to the unique development of black and white relations in this community and the college's central role in the shaping of these relations, the project's perspective stayed narrowly defined within the confines of the college. Driving the project forward was a project-leadership team consisting of Dawn Gibson-Brehon, Duncan Theatre director; Cheryl Dunn-Bychek, project director; and Tony Tassa, a theatre professor. Tassa's students were primary beneficiaries of the project, as they had active roles in leading story circles, transcribing the stories, conducting research, and developing and performing the resultant theatre piece. Because the group of participating students was multicultural, including a number of white students, the project provided powerful opportunities for dialogue, as well as a way to learn about living history. College-facilitated story circles were held with community groups, including the Rivera Beach Housing Authority, St. John's Church, El Centro Cultural Latinoamericano, and the National Council of Black American Affairs. In all, over six hundred people participated in twenty-two story-circle opportunities.

In New Jersey, the *Color Line Project* was also centered at an educational institution, Rowan University. Because the university wished to cultivate the participation of individuals from the community on a long-term basis, there was greater focus on involvement outside of the university. The initial steering committee for the project, which consisted of African American faculty and staff, insisted that the project include not just Glassboro but Camden, located fifteen miles away. Perceived as the traditional home of African American activities in the area, Camden was a community in economic crisis, greatly in need of what the project had to offer. However, joining the two communities under the banner of a single project was easier said than done. Two advisory committees were formed, one in Glassboro and one in Camden, but the two did not become fully functional and were unable to collaborate. Despite efforts to unite activities during event week, the project remained split between the two communities.

Like Palm Beach Community College, key players in the project were primarily university personnel: Jerry Harris, from the Institute of Urban and Public Policy; Mark Fields, director of the Glassboro Center for the Arts; and Eileen O'Brien, project director and outreach coordinator with the Glassboro Center. However, there was a concerted effort to extend activity beyond the school. Story circles were held at the First Presbyterian Church and Mt. Olive Baptist Church (Glassboro); the Juvenile Resource Center, La Unique Bookstore, and Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies (Camden); and Municipal Hall (Lawnside). In all, twenty story-circle opportunities engaged about six hundred fifty people.

The key issues that emerged were not centered on the university's history in the area's civil rights movement but on the current fear of community destruction through pending redevelopment and displacement of residents by middle- and upper-class people. Coincidentally, it was uncovered that many who had been key players in the area's civil rights activities had a

STORY-CIRCLE TRAINING

John O’Neal offers insight to the story-circle training process. More on story-circle methodology can be found on Junebug Productions’ web site, <http://www.gnofn.org/~junebug/>.

It takes participation as a storyteller in at least two story circles before a person is ready for “final training.” However, the final training is as simple as a good discussion—questions and answers—with any of Junebug Productions staff. Then that person takes on the role of leading a story circle along with another trained story-circle facilitator. We maintain that a good story-circle process uses a team approach. Therefore, we always suggest that two facilitators lead the circles.

In most of the *Color Line* pilot projects, there were many story-circle leaders trained and ready to lead early on in our visits to the community, as soon as they had participated in a couple of circles with Junebug. This was sometimes within a couple of days, and other times within a few weeks. Junebug also trains community members who want to be story-circle leaders in a more intense setting so that they can become trainers themselves and reach more people when Junebug is not on-site.

At the same time, the story-circle process rests on the assumption that learning is a continual, lifelong task. It is a technique for democratic group participation that helps people help each other become clearer and stronger, if they wish to. Theresa and I have been working with the process for several years, and every time we do a story circle, we learn something new about it.

strong relationship to the university. In fact, a university professor had been in the process of writing a local history of the civil rights movement in the county, placing it in a national context. Unlike the Florida project, the performance was developed by local artists with stories from the circles and was even complemented with a photography exhibition by a local artist.

Story-circle training and convening

Between September and November 2000, John O’Neal and other national team members visited Lake Worth and Glassboro twice. During these visits, planning for the spring event week in each location continued, and training in the story-circle methodology, use of stories in performance, and archival work was conducted. (See sidebar for details on story-circle training.) In the months following these visits, local activities continued with story circles, interviews of movement participants for the archives, and local performance development. Some story-circle groups met multiple times before event week—the *Color Line Project’s* main thrust—and some even continued meeting after the conclusion of event week. Other groups met once and recorded their stories, but did not meet again.

The goal of the *Color Line Project* is indeed to collect stories from the people—or their families—who had experiences of and/or memories from the civil rights movement to ensure that those stories are not lost or forgotten. However, in every case, the act of remembering, telling, and collecting those stories could not be isolated from the present. Theresa Holden points out, “Our understanding of the past is not separated from the present; we are looking back through the lens of our current situations. In the very act of holding up a story from the past, we are examining . . . how things are different or, in many cases, the same today. So while the story circles produced many incredible and courageous stories of a period of time now forty years past, the circles also produced a platform for understanding and dealing with the reality of race and racism today.”

In Lake Worth, college students convened their own story circles to retell the stories they collected from older people about the civil rights movement. Those stories spontaneously brought out the students’ own current life stories. One student told the story of a 65-year-old woman who, because of racial tensions, was unable to complete her nursing degree at the school. Another student was prompted by this to recall her own experience of far more subtle forms of prejudice on her campus today. The dialogue that occurred as the students related both the “old” stories and their own, present-day ones in order to create a play was profound. Said cast member and student Michelle Fossati, “It makes you more aware. I didn’t think racial bias was still out there, but obviously it is.”

During a story circle in Glassboro, New Jersey, Lucile Pfleeger recalled “integrating” the town’s “whites only” Brookside pool in the

1960s with a black friend who wore her wet bathing suit home to prove to her husband that she had swum in the pool. Hearing that tale from the sixties reminded Susan Stewart of her own story. In 1973 she and her husband applied for membership at the Brookside pool's club. The explanation for why there weren't any black members was "they just aren't very buoyant." The recognition of the work still to be done was made palpable, and the dialogue generated by these stories moved people to tears and disclosed a basis for action.

Theresa Holden observes, "By holding up the stories from the past in a new form, an artistic form, a magical synaptic connection can occur—that's something that art alone does for us. The audience members, regardless of their age and experience in the civil rights movement, are able to see the connections between the struggles of the past, losses and gains, and their present, personal lives. . . . This occurs whether we prompt the connection or not."

Event week

Planning for the spring event week in each location continued. The idea of event week was to concentrate presentation of the year's efforts in a short time span in order to maximize the project's impact and visibility. Although event week was structured differently in each place, each included an educational component with Dr. King, performance of a theatrical piece developed from locally collected stories, performances of one or more of the *Junebug Jabbo Jones* plays, and opportunities for dialogue at each public event. The components at each site were determined jointly by Junebug and the site. Since the Florida project focused on Palm Beach Community College, its event week was also centered on the college, although the performances attracted a broad audience. In Florida, the week included:

- Classroom visits by the national *Color Line Project* team and final rehearsals for *Colorblind*, the student production of the movement stories
- Workshop with theatre students; luncheon and meeting with the Black Student Union; "In Consideration of the Movement, Memory, Scholarship and Community Involvement," a seminar with Dr. Joyce King followed by a dialogue lead by John O'Neal and Curtis Muhammad
- Performance of *Colorblind*, followed by dialogue
- Performance of *Don't Start Me to Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones, Volume 1*, performed by John O'Neal with post-performance dialogue

In New Jersey, the design of event week was quite ambitious. It was split between the two communities and occurred in multiple locations, both on and off the university's campus. Panel discussions were planned, featuring individuals from the area in addition to Junebug resource team members in an attempt to increase local community involvement in the project and augment dialogue opportunities.

- "What Did/Does the Movement Mean in South Jersey?": a panel discussion with Herb Douglas (Department of Law and Justice Studies, Rowan University; movement organizer), Gary Hunter (History Department, Rowan University), Irene Hill-Smith (Rowan University professor emeritus), and Curtis Muhammad (*CLP* national team), moderated by John O'Neal (location: Rowan University)

- “What Did/Does the Movement Mean in Camden?”: a panel discussion with Ruth Gonzalas, Alma Peterson, Phyllis Fonville, and Randy Primas (former mayor of Camden), moderated by John O’Neal (location: South Jersey Performing Arts Center, Camden)
- *Don’t Start Me to Talking or I’ll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones, Volume 1*, performance by John O’Neal with post-performance dialogue (location: Rutgers University, Camden)
- “The Use of Stories in Teaching,” academic dialogue with Corann Okorududu (African American Studies program, Rowan University) and William Carrigan (History Department, Rowan University), facilitated by Dr. Joyce King (location: Rowan University); and *You Can’t Judge a Book by Looking at the Cover: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones, Volume 2*, performance by John O’Neal with post-performance dialogue (location: Rowan University)
- Local Artists Presentation with post-performance dialogue and organizing workshop (location: South Jersey Performing Arts Center)
- *’Til the Midnight Hour: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones, Volume 3*, performance by John O’Neal with post-performance dialogue and summation of the project (location: Rowan University)

REFLECTING ON RESULTS

Palm Beach Community College

Each of the sites achieved varied levels of impact. For Palm Beach Community College, a more diverse audience was attracted because activities offered multiple points of entry and involved students. Although the college had hoped for greater audience crossover for key events (*Colorblind*, the King seminar, and the O’Neal plays) so that greater future momentum could be built, there were different and newer audiences for each event. People in the community were impressed that the college had supported a program that was exploring a negative aspect of its own history, showcasing it in a theatrical work and then openly engaging in discussion about it in a public setting. In fact, for some individuals, wounds of segregation inflicted many years ago were addressed in this project. A woman who had contributed her story of denied admission to the college because of her race returned to the college for the first time in almost forty years to attend a special preview performance of *Colorblind*, which included her story.

Artistically, four students from the *Colorblind* cast were asked to participate in the regional theatre competition (a first for the academic theatre program). The students’ play went on to win state and national awards in several theatre competitions, and was submitted to the national competition at the Kennedy Center based on both the distinctive nature of the work and the unique process of collecting information. In effect, because of the *CLP*, the theatre department has committed itself to continuing to pursue work that is politically thought provoking and that engages audiences in discussion for the purpose of bettering society. In so doing, Tassa continues to use the story-circle methodology to collect stories and create theatre.

Glassboro Center

For the Glassboro Center, the greatest discovery was the rewarding nature of community collaboration. A relatively young presenting organization with little history in this type of residency programming, its outreach efforts were significantly jump-started by the *Color Line*

Project. The story circles in particular established deeper connections among project collaborators, and through this project, the center was able to enter communities and encounter groups it would not otherwise have been able to. Unfortunately, these new relationships did not produce the desired audience for event-week activities. Despite its efforts, attendance was lower than the center had hoped it would be, and there was limited crossover for events in the two communities. Although still a work in progress when performed in Camden, the presentation of eight local musicians, poets, and actors successfully drew on the stories collected to present a moving and powerful piece, both demonstrating the potential that further development of the work might have and educating those who had not lived through the civil rights movement.

Story circle and dialogue

Both sites reinforced the power of the story circle as an effective method for dialogue. In Lake Worth, the technique was used in two important ways with the students. The students who participated in story circles with the movement veterans were able to connect with the issue on a very immediate and visceral level, benefiting from firsthand experience with an era that up to that point had merely been paragraphs in their history books.

An 18-year-old white theatre major—the youngest cast member—said it was important “to actually find out the truth, to find out that it [the stories of oppression] really did happen . . . a lot more than what we’re learning in textbooks . . . because they only devote maybe a few pages to it.” A 21-year-old African American education major contended:

It’s always the same problem. . . . Last term in history class, we had a paragraph on it, and if the teacher didn’t go to a historically black college or if she didn’t take up that [movement history] as a history major, you wouldn’t know. . . . If I had lived during that time, would I be in jail, dead, poor . . . hung? It’s real, it’s still going on today in some parts. . . . You have to learn from the past in order to go on to the future, because if you don’t know, [you’re] very ignorant. Just moving forward is going to be hard if you don’t know.

Coupling the personal experiences of students with movement participants, director Tony Tassa used the story-circle technique as part of the student’s creation and rehearsal process. He described the impact on the creative process this way:

Following our first story circle, the students were able to speak freely about their feelings with each other. They discussed highly sensitive issues of racial inequality and were extremely open about their feelings. A bond was formed between the cast members during our very first meeting, and we were able to use this bond in creating an ensemble piece. The story circle was the primary factor in creating this bond. We were also able to use the story circle when the creative process became bogged down. This helped free the actors up again, and opened us up to greater creative development and discussion of the issues.

Mark Fields commented on the effectiveness of story circles as a dialogue technique:

The process is one that continues to surprise and move us with the depth of connection and communication that it makes possible. It is amazing how personal and intimate a group of strangers can become in a short time, given the proper atmosphere and ground rules. Those connections appear to have some lasting effect, as well. I have found that I relate to the collaborators on this project in a different . . . way because of

the sharing that has occurred in story circles. I have found an . . . admiration for many of these people, knowing some of their personal history.

Project colleague Jerry Harris encapsulated his experiences with the story circle by emphasizing its capacity to build connections and empower individuals. Harris commented on how quickly the technique could be transferred to other areas, including the high motivation of groups to use it as a tool for civic engagement. He called story circles “magical” in making the connections between generations, in that young people found it attractive and empowering, and older people saw it as a vehicle for passing on their histories to younger generations.

Balancing local and national goals

Although both of the original pilot sites experienced success in their involvement with the *Color Line Project*, they also experienced the discomfort that comes with developing a new project. These growing pains affected both the presenters and Junebug Productions as it launched this new initiative. The most significant challenge was achieving a clear understanding of and workable balance between the presenters’ specific needs and desired outcomes and the desired overall outcomes of the national project. It was not so much that the two sets of outcomes conflicted but that they demanded a great deal more from both the sites and Junebug than was initially anticipated.

Each presenter had clearly set audience diversification and connecting with the greater community as goals. But neither was aware of the practical implications that came with this, the complexity of the dynamics that would be encountered, or the vocabulary differences among participating groups that made collaboration challenging. For the New Jersey site in particular, the project took on a life of its own, expanding far beyond the original scope, overwhelming human resources, and stretching available financial resources. Mark Fields talked about the struggle to give the project adequate attention. He observed that organizing and activism are “like an octopus,” and that it takes a lot of time, concentrated and consistent effort, and the building of two-way trust and interdependence between community participants and the university to create a structure that could sustain such activity over the long term. Project organizers were disappointed that community participants did not take greater ownership of the project and reciprocate the center’s effort with a similar commitment and sense of responsibility for its success.

Sustaining the work

Both sites realized that to be successful in the long run, the project demanded support significantly beyond what they as institutions were prepared to offer. The next phase of the project would really need to be guided by another organization, or set of organizations, whose primary focus was more closely aligned with the national project goals. Reflecting on this, Dawn Gibson-Brehon sized up the challenges in looking forward.

I think in the coming months our college’s role in supporting programs like the *Color Line Project* will be put to the test. Everyone that participated in the project wants the presentations and discussions to continue, and to expand and grow. We have been approached by our local cultural council, members of church groups, the county sheriff’s department, and the human resource department on campus about continuing this program . . . through more theatre presentations; taking the show on the road to local

community centers, churches, and schools; or as part of diversity training programs. The resources of the Duncan Theatre are limited and strained, and the challenge will be the continuation of the *Color Line Project* and the public dialogue.

In my opinion, I think the project has the potential to engage even more communities and groups to have a deeper impact by being aligned with diversity and race human-resource training programs. (Our institution has departments and infrastructure in place that could support collaboration between our academic theatre department in the training about diversity and race relations combined with a presentation of *Colorblind*.)

However, I also believe that development and implementation in this area is out of the scope and experience of the Duncan Theatre and academic theatre programs, and I don't know if our institution would support taking a leadership role in supporting efforts to make such a collaboration a reality.

Project ownership

Through the Glassboro and Lake Worth projects, Junebug was able to test its assumptions about how best to support organized, sustained activity at the local level. It realized that to establish a foundation for accomplishing *Color Line's* goals, it needed to alter its original approach and program design to shift ownership of the project as well as creative focus away from itself and toward that of the local community. This would necessitate rethinking the traditional artist residency model, in which the presenter brings O'Neal and the Junebug plays into a community, and partners are cast in the roles of recipients of services and, later, the audience at performances. Through the pilot, Junebug Productions realized that the *Color Line Project*, instead, needs to recast Junebug as a "supporting actor" in a much larger endeavor. The artist residency is merely one tool. Junebug can offer its story-circle process, educational and archival resources, and infrastructure model to communities as organizing aids, but ultimately the local community has to embrace these in order to take control of its own destiny. In John O'Neal's words, *CLP* and Junebug's resources need to be used more intentionally to "spot the yeasty places" within a community and to "root people who are ready to act with each other."

Expanding planning time

The initial project design was based on a two-year time frame for planning and implementation. Junebug discovered that far more front-end planning time was needed to ensure that all necessary elements for project implementation were in place. In response, Junebug has extended the project timeline to three full years and consciously separated the project into three specific phases—planning and training, implementation, and evaluation and follow-up. During the planning and training phase, Junebug is more clearly articulating its roles and responsibilities to the sponsoring community. It is emphasizing the importance of each partner or collaborator to the whole project's success and cultivating a shared vision among all potential partners that is focused on benefiting the community, not just a single organization. Equally important is defining the scope of activity in light of what might be realistically accomplished with available resources and community support.

Rethinking event week

The program's original design culminated in an event week that heavily featured John O'Neal's *Junebug Jabbo Jones* plays. O'Neal wanted to feature the three plays together and assess how they worked artistically as a unit. However, it became clear that the plays had more value if they were presented prior to event week and used to "prime the pump" for local community involvement

and creation of new locally generated artwork. With new sites, the designated event week will highlight local stories and artists, strengthening the credibility and community ownership of the project. No longer will the Junebug plays be capstone activities but rather stepping stones for participating local artists and others engaged in presenting the stories artistically to the public.

Clarifying the community-organizer role

Junebug's assumption that the national project team could serve as an effective model for a local implementation team was validated. In particular, having a community organizer in place at the onset of the project, separate from the project director, was reinforced as essential for a project's success. The organizer should be hired by, and working for, all of the community partners joined together to undertake the *Color Line Project*. Ideally, the organizer is not an employee of the host or partner organizations. Instead, the organizer should be working for the full partnership and the project's mission and goals. This enables the project to take on a life force of its own, separate from the direct oversight or interests of any one of the organizations involved, and to grow and continue past the interests of any one of the partners.

Experiences at the pilot sites suggest that without this community-organizer role, project implementation and community willingness to continue the effort beyond the project are dramatically diminished. The critical role an organizer plays—as the “glue” for the project—was underemphasized in these initial efforts. The organizer plays the essential role in identifying potential partners and participants and inviting them into the project. The organizer serves as the pivotal communication point linking all participants. The organizer builds credibility for the project and a foundation for its continuation in the future. Experience also suggests that this role should not automatically go to an outreach or educational coordinator in a presenting organization, since that position often focuses on audience development and not necessarily on building participant engagement in community life.

The story circle was affirmed as an effective methodology for use in a variety of settings to create a safe space for dialogue, as well as to achieve specific project ends. It served as the primary vehicle for retrieving and documenting each community's history and also as a catalyst for exchange among community members and leadership. It helped each pilot site identify which issues were most important to its constituencies and learn how to constructively address these issues. In addition, following John O'Neal's play-development model, the story-circle technique offered a new type of source material, and process, for developing politically engaged artwork. The ease with which the story-circle technology could be learned and used also proved appealing to the pilot sites.

These initial experiences suggest that in working with a community, Junebug needs to proactively identify and establish a long-term infrastructure for continuing efforts after the project's conclusion. Although the *CLP* furthered specific goals for Glassboro Center and the Duncan Theatre, they both realized that they were not equipped to coordinate the project over the long run. Support for the larger agenda was simply beyond their available resources and the core of their institutions' missions. O'Neal acknowledged the enormity of the aim in noting what was needed to follow up on initial *CLP* efforts.

If the dialogue begun by the project is to pay off in terms of any effort to follow . . . logical extensions into the future, then a coalition which is independent of the sponsor who might initially host the venture is essential. The problems of oppression and exploitation based on racism, which gave rise to the civil rights movement and which persist in even more pernicious forms today, are too deadly to be taken so lightly. Art

in this context should not be satisfied simply to amuse and delight and to move on. The dialogue, once begun, should lead to the identification and mobilization of the people who recognize the gravity of the situation and wish to collaborate in their efforts to do something about it.

APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED

Junebug Productions is now centering its project around socially conscious unions and civil rights, and social justice organizations for whom organizing and activism are core. Such organizations can help to shoulder the financial as well as programmatic burden of the work. This potential community-wide coalition model, currently in embryonic form, is being designed to host forums for discussion that might lead to action plans addressing key community issues. However, if arts organizations continue to be Junebug Productions' entry into a community, it will try to invite these other types of organizations to participate as coequals to the arts agencies early in the process. In addition, Junebug intends to ask educational institutions to do the same, so that the collaboration, ownership, and support of the effort is more balanced, and can result in a stronger outcome and a more sustainable effort.

Junebug changed its approach with the third supported site, the Cincinnati Arts Association (CAA), to reflect what was learned in Lake Worth and Glassboro about shifting the project focus and building community-based infrastructure and ownership from the outset. Motivated by ongoing racial tensions that erupted in riots in April 2001 over a white policeman's shooting of an unarmed black man (the fifteenth in less than five years), the Cincinnati Arts Association—a major downtown-venue arts presenter—committed to support the planning phase of a Cincinnati *Color Line Project*. However, dissimilar from the pilot sites, CAA saw its role in the project as a facilitator of a process of change necessary for Cincinnati to heal and thrive as a community.

Initial meetings in October 2001 focused on bringing potential partners and community leadership together to formulate a collective vision. Using the story-circle methodology, representatives from the CAA, the Freedom Center (formerly the Underground Railroad Museum), business and religious communities, and other organizations started their work by sharing their civil-rights-related stories, establishing the central role of Junebug's dialogue methodology. Junebug took time at these meetings to articulate what it could contribute to the Cincinnati project and what would be needed to make such an effort successful. Although progress has been slow, due in part to the white community's reaction to the African American economic boycott of downtown Cincinnati, several local organizations remain in conversation with Junebug about continuing the work. Formation of a working steering/advisory committee continues, and there is a firm commitment to hire an organizer. John O'Neal's brother, Wendell, lives in the Cincinnati area and has agreed to take a leadership role. He provides an example of the type of leadership needed—loyalty and commitment to the project's purpose, as well as visibility and credibility within the broader community.

As Junebug moves ahead in Cincinnati and begins new *Color Line projects* with the Flint Cultural Center Organization in Michigan and the Reston Community Center in Virginia, it continues to draw on what it has learned from the pilot sites to refine program design and clarify its role and responsibilities in working with these communities. With the initial phase concluding in these new communities, Junebug faces difficult questions.

- Are arts organizations the most appropriate entry into the local community for this type of work? If not, who is, and how does Junebug establish those contacts?

- How can Junebug raise the core financial support necessary to continue this project, particularly support for administrative infrastructure? ADI supported Junebug’s infrastructure development, as well as part of local site project implementation. Although Junebug will require local sites to support a greater part of their costs, the challenge of raising sufficient dollars for infrastructure support remains.
- What degree of commitment and responsibility should Junebug assume in order to ensure that local projects are able to continue after the initial work is completed? This is an ongoing question for Junebug, as it responds to the unique needs and circumstances of each community.
- What relationship should Junebug maintain with the sites that have completed their initial work? How can it network these communities with new ones to communicate about their collective work?

For over twenty years, Junebug Productions has been based in storytelling and civil rights, and remains fervently committed to this work. The *Color Line Project* has opened a new chapter. Animating Democracy Initiative’s support for testing this new model has better prepared Junebug Productions to share its artistic and dialogue resources with others as a catalyst for social change.

CODA

In October 2002, John O’Neal and Theresa Holden were recognized by the Ford Foundation’s Leadership for a Changing World awards program. The twenty awardees, selected from thirty-four finalists in a pool of more than fourteen hundred nominations, represent individuals and leadership teams that are getting results tackling tough social problems in communities across the United States. Each received \$100,000 to advance their work and an additional \$30,000 to support activities over the next two years.

Leadership for a Changing World, launched in September 2000, is a program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute in Washington, D.C., and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University. The program seeks to raise awareness that leadership comes in many forms and from diverse communities by recognizing the achievements of outstanding leaders who are not broadly known beyond their immediate communities or fields. It provides financial and other support for their work and brings them together periodically over two years; conducts research with awardees about how leadership is perceived, created, and sustained; and contributes to a broader public conversation about community leadership.

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A 25-year veteran in arts management, **Cheryl Yuen** shares her diverse experience in planning, organizational assessment and development, and meeting facilitation with nonprofit and governmental arts agencies and foundations across the country. An independent cultural development and arts management consultant for 15 years, projects have included long range planning with The Renaissance Society, The Guild Complex, Folklore Village, and The Three Arts Club; community cultural planning in Oklahoma City and Champaign-Urbana (IL); assessment studies for the Chicago Cultural Facilities Fund and the Ohio Arts Council; diagnostic assessments of small and mid-sized Houston arts organizations for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County; and meeting facilitation for Columbia College, Chicago Public Art Group and Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education. For over five years she has managed the cultural giving program at the Sara Lee Foundation. She directed local arts agency, arts education and presenting programs at the Illinois Arts Council for five years and has served as a program director with two local arts agencies. In addition, she has been a NEA field evaluator, planning consultant, facilitator, researcher and panelist. She is author of *Community Vision: A Policy Guide to Local Arts Agency Development* and co-author of *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*. She has served on the Illinois Arts Alliance/ Foundation board for over 12 years, currently chairing the Arts Leadership for the 21st Century initiative, and formerly on the board of the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (now Americans for the Arts).