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## **A Proposal to Research the Influences of Restorative Justice from Ed Bullins's Work**

### **Introduction**

The 1960's was a period of great turmoil for the United States of America. It was a time during which the Cold War was escalating, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and it was also a time during which the Civil Rights movement took place. At the time, blacks in the United States were heavily discriminated against in all forms. However, many fought back against injustice (Watson iii). Black writers and artists, such as Sonia Sanchez and Ed Bullins, fought to express African American culture and to help blacks find their identities (Smethurst 103). This proposal will take a deeper look at how Ed Bullins's work helped highlight much of the unfairness and inequality that blacks experienced at the time.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Racism against blacks was widespread in the U.S. during the 1960's (Schechner 26). White theater groups often avoided casting black actors and instead went with white actors wearing "blackface" or makeup used to make white actors appear black. In addition to the refusal of casting black actors, white performing groups also often used blackface to perpetuate stereotypes against African Americans or cast them in a negative light (Sanders 4). Ed Bullins, a black artist and playwright, helped highlight the unfairness in the depiction and casting of blacks in plays by turning the tables and

using “whiteface” on black actors and portraying whites in a sometimes-exaggerated negative light (Hill 35). His choices served to emphasize the racism and biased attitudes of whites against blacks, especially those in theater. Bullins’s use of restorative justice helped highlight the negative attitudes of whites regarding African Americans. While not everyone may agree on whether injustice is the best way to fight injustice, restorative justice is a quick and direct method to highlighting inequality or unfair treatment and pushing people to look at certain issues through multiple perspectives.

### **Objective**

Ed Bullins’s use of restorative justice highlighted the issues of racism and discrimination against blacks. Restorative justice is a form of action whereby those who receive discrimination retaliate by perpetrating discrimination against the discriminators. Today, many people are no longer certain about using restorative justice to combat racism and injustice as many don’t agree with the “eye for an eye” method. However, when people don’t have experience with or have never dealt with racism and discrimination, they will be unable to empathize with those who they discriminate against. One example of a group that lacks such experience is the All Lives Matter group. Since many of their members have never experienced real discrimination and have only felt perceived discrimination, they don’t see racism and discrimination with the same gravity as those who have experienced true injustice (Yancy 7).

### **Plan of Action**

Research question: Was Ed Bullins’s use of restorative justice (aka retributive justice) an effective tactic in combating discrimination?

*What types of resources will you use?*

Resources to use: Criticism, oral history, journalism, books, articles, literary works

Newspaper or oral interviews with Bullins, books or criticism discussing Bullins's views or actions, articles discussing the effectiveness of restorative (retributive) justice, journalism that depicts other people's use of retributive justice, Bullins's works that show his use of restorative justice in theater

Try to find resources that are related to the following ideas:

- Link historical evidence to works of Bullins that shows the effectiveness of restorative justice
- Find works that show Bullins's opinions on discrimination against blacks
- How did he try to combat it?
- Are there other instances of restorative justice that have worked?

*How do your resources help you achieve your goal?*

They will provide insight into Bullins's thoughts on discrimination, how he tried to deal with it, (his views on how to best deal with it, etc.)

The resources may contain evidence showing the effectiveness of retributive justice as an agent against discrimination

*What resources will you not consult?*

There are several resources that I will not consult (mostly because I don't think they were widespread or common during my subject's time and therefore may not contain any useful information)

Resources such as social media, blogs, or websites, were not common during Bullins's time when he fought to show the inequality and unfairness that existed in the U.S. They may not contain accurate information about him, or if they do, they may not contain historical information – such as information about Bullins's activities in mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century to combat discrimination.

*What resources have you already consulted?*

Bullins's play "The Gentleman Caller" is a great example of how he used retributive justice in theater

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Watson, Brenda Dianne. "Black drama of the sixties: A reflection of the Black experience in America." (1972): iii-8. *Google Scholar*. 01 Oct. 2016

This research article by Brenda Dianne Watson gives a detailed analysis of the lives of blacks in the U.S. in the 1960s. In the article, Watson also gives the reader a look at how black plays and other literature reflected the experiences of blacks during the time.

Watson details the struggles of African Americans in the U.S. during the 1960s and links that to how they expressed their hardships through theater and artwork. The paper takes an objective look at how the two topics are related and highlights many important problems that blacks faced at the time.

The paper gives a good look at how black playwrights transferred their experiences with discrimination and other forms of inequality into their plays. This is linked to my subject, August Wilson and his attempts to rectify wrongdoings that he felt were perpetrated against blacks.

Smethurst, James. *The Black arts movement: Literary nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, (2006).

In his book, James Smethurst provides a detailed account of the beginnings and progress of the Black arts movement in the United States. Smethurst describes the influences and beginnings of the movement and its path as it spread across the U.S.

Smethurst provides many details regarding the origins and proliferation of the Black arts movement in the United States, starting from the influences and ideas of Communism that appealed to many blacks to the ever-changing ideas in black theater on how to deal with discrimination. His book is a good source of information on the roots of the movement and certain people and ideas that greatly influenced the movement and helped shape it as it grew.

Smethurst's book describes how African Americans rose in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with an arts movement to protest their unequal treatment. As a member of the movement who agreed with certain Communist party ideas, August Wilson is a playwright who employed reparative justice to help highlight the inequality between whites and blacks.

Schechner, Richard. "White on Black." *The Drama Review: TDR* 12.4 (1968): 25-27. *JSTOR*. 01 Oct. 2016.

In his article in the scholarly journal, *The Drama Review*, Richard Schechner looks at how relations between whites and blacks in the United States have changed with time. His article gives a viewpoint of race relations from a white point of view.

Schechner, in his attempt to gain more black readership, writes an opinion article in the attempt to try and understand the plight of blacks in theater and in general in the United States. Through his "controversial opinion article," he hopes to persuade blacks that he understands the things that they are going through, as well as try to help white readers understand why he invited Ed Bullins, a controversial figure at the time, to edit for that edition of the journal.

This article is relevant to my topic because it provides insight on how whites saw blacks during the 1960s. Schechner believes and wants the racial situation in the U.S. to change and tries to explain his

point of view to the journal's readers. I want to introduce multiple perspectives into my exhibit and this piece seems to do a good job at providing another lens to look through.

Sanders, Leslie Catherine. *The Development of Black Theater in America: From Shadows to Selves*. Louisiana: LSU Press, (1989).

Leslie Catherine Sanders's book discusses racism and inequality in theater against blacks.

In her book, Sanders also talks about how racism and discrimination in the theater, in the U.S. and in Europe, evolved from outright, blatant racism to more nuanced, but still extremely unjust, unfair treatment of blacks.

Sanders, in her book, examines the discrimination and evolution of discrimination that black audiences, playwrights, and actors faced in theater, as well as how black theater appeared and developed during the late 1900s. The book provides an outlook at how black theater formed and grew, and eventually became a counterbalance to the inequality against blacks in theater.

This book is relevant to my exhibit about Ed Bullins as it discusses how black theater grew and about the discrimination and stereotyping that blacks faced in theater. Bullins's ideas, which were often direct acts to counter and highlight forms of discrimination against blacks, were very prominent and groundbreaking at the time in black theater and may have later influenced other playwrights to treat the problem of racism in theater in a different light.

Yancy, George, and Judith Butler. "What's Wrong With 'All Lives Matter'?" *New York Times* 12 (2015): 156. *Google Scholar*. 02 Oct. 2016

In his interview with UC Berkeley Professor, Judith Butler, George Yancy discusses the bias against African Americans in the United States. The interview touches on subjects such as implicit bias against blacks, outright racism, the lack of understanding of the struggle of African Americans, and the historical significance and longstanding ideas of discrimination against blacks.

This interview was placed in *New York Times's* "Opinions" section as it explores the issue of the disconnect that many black Americans feel with the rest of the country in a subjective tone. However, Professor Judith Butler gets some very interesting and important points across during the interview about many people's long-standing bias against African Americans.

This interview is relevant to my exhibit as it shows the effects of society's unwillingness to directly address the issue of discrimination against blacks. People may not agree with Ed Bullins's use of reparative justice against discrimination, but it directly challenged the issue and brought it to light, causing people to re-evaluate their beliefs and perceptions of African Americans.

Hill, Errol, ed. *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Hal Leonard Corp, (2000).

In his published collection of critical essays, Errol Hill touches on the bias many had against black theater while it was in its infancy. Hill also provides in-depth discussion of his view on many of the plays written by black playwrights.

Hill provides criticisms of plays written by black playwrights, including those of Ed Bullins. Hill tries to maintain an objective tone while analyzing the plays as well as while discussing the formation of black theater and its early detractors.

Parts of the essays in this collection provide very great, detailed insight into African American playwrights' works during the Black Arts Movement. The essays also touch on how Bullins portrayed certain characters in his plays, such as Mr. and Mrs. Mann in "The Gentleman Caller", to emphasize and fight discrimination against blacks in the United States.