

FROM THE EDITOR

## The Work

La Donna L. Forsgren

University of Notre Dame  
Associate Editor

As I write my first editorial note, I find my mind circling back to the homicide trial of Kyle Rittenhouse. On 25 August 2020, a seventeen-year-old Rittenhouse armed himself with an AR-15-style rifle and traveled from his Antioch, Illinois home to Kenosha, Wisconsin, presumably to protect business owners and provide medical assistance to residents. At the time, Kenosha was a hotbed of social unrest, as Black residents and their allies took to the streets to protest the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a twenty-nine-year-old Black man. While on his armed crusade, Rittenhouse engaged in two heated confrontations. His decision to fire his weapon resulted in one injury and the death of two men. During his emotional testimony on the witness stand, Rittenhouse justified his decision to shoot, claiming, “I didn’t do anything wrong. I defended myself.”

From this information, I surmise that:

A white teenage boy arms himself.  
Hunts Black people.  
Shoots and kills this “threat.”  
Stands trial.  
Claims self-defense.  
Is acquitted of all charges.

The racist ideologies that galvanize anti-Black violence are embedded within the very fabric of US society. The global health crisis, coupled with the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, has exposed many of these contradictions. The call to value the sanctity of Black lives and eradicate systemic racism has never been greater. The movement to foster freedom, liberation, and justice has penetrated every institution, from our theatres to our universities to academic presses. *Theatre Survey* is not exempt from this call.

• • •

*Theatre Survey*, in its sixty-year history, has excelled at disseminating performance-centered and historiographic studies. However, *Theatre Survey* has also served as a gatekeeping mechanism that has, at times, contributed to the marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The editorial team has initiated reparative actions, noting that “we strive to enact antiracist principles in our stewardship of the journal by, among other things, increasing our efforts to spotlight Black lives, voices, and perspectives.” This statement of solidarity, coupled

© The Authors, 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Society for Theatre Research, Inc.

with the action of “ungating,” or making articles written by Black scholars on Black theatre and performance freely available, is an important first step in what I hope will be a powerful cultural shift within our profession.

The articles within this issue engage with more critical conversations about intersectionality, spectatorship, neoliberalism, and citizenship. Michael D’Alessandro’s essay considers the nineteenth-century private parlor museum as an important site to advance white middle-class agendas and power structures. Amy B. Huang’s “Alongside Slavery’s Asides: Reverberations of Edward Young’s *The Revenge*” traces the racial and gendered meaning generated from the aside and soliloquy across the Atlantic during the eighteenth century. Lindsay Livingston’s “Shooting from Windows: Performing Tactical Lawfulness during Jim Crow” examines the performance of lawfulness and protective masculinity in the early twentieth-century United States. In distinguishing the “law-as-text” and the “law-as-performed,” Livingston raises timely concerns about the nature of citizenship itself and anti-Black violence. In the final essay, Judith Hamera uses archival materials, interviews with Highways founders and founding artists, and performance texts to examine the context from which Highways Performance Space (1989–93) emerged, its transitional character, and the counterpublic goods offered to spectators. Collectively, these articles ask readers to consider how performance generates meaning for spectators who witness and participate in enactments. In other words, while performance reflects and generates the ills within our society, performance can also empower the most marginalized within society.

I want to close this essay by amplifying one of the most powerful and timely statements within this issue. Livingston writes that “individual victories in the courts don’t necessarily translate into systemic change, particularly in a country in which the residue of chattel slavery ensures that legality *still* is not the determining metric of safety for Black Americans and that Blackness is often identified by white people as lawless and inherently threatening.” Sadly, the Rittenhouse case (and so many others) suggests that Black Americans have yet to claim citizenship in law and in practice. Even Rittenhouse’s once theoretically possible conviction, now denied, would have been only a single (if singular) legal victory. It would not, however, produce large-scale systemic change. We must actively do THE WORK of social change.

## Cite Black Women.