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Callie Thuma
Macalester College

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“The Pursuit of Something New”: Lessons from the Black Box Theatre of Central High School

Callie Thuma

*What if we were Life
Or Liberty
Or the Pursuit of something new?
Between the rocks below
and the stars above
What if we were composed by Love?*

*And what if we could show
that what we dream
is deeper than what we know?
Suppose if something does not live
in the world
that we long to see
then we make it ourselves
as we want it to be*

*What if we are Life
Or Liberty
and the Pursuit of something new?*

*And suppose the beautiful answer
asks the more beautiful question,
Why don't we get our hopes up too high?
Why don't we get our hopes up too high?
High!*

Excerpt from the *51st (Dream) State* by Sekou Sundiata

In 2006, the late writer, spoken-word artist, and educator, Sekou Sundiata, visited the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to present the *51st (Dream) State*, a theatrical piece exploring his personal connection to the United States and questioning the meaning of American national identity. In an interview, Sundiata explained to curator Philip Bither that he was “interested in a citizenship of conscience and in critical citizenship.” Instead of the “uncritical blindness” of patriotism, Sundiata advocated a look at America that “does not flinch or blink” away from the contradictions of American life.¹ Although Sundiata did not live to see Barack Obama’s election as president, his question, “Why don’t we get our hopes up too high?,” resonates with Obama’s constant refrain about the “audacity of hope.” For me and for many other members of my generation, Obama’s victory on November 4, 2008, was a moment of great possibility. Of my many vivid memories from that time, one in particular stands out. When I travel back, I find myself in the basement of Saint Paul’s Central High School, inside the Black Box Theatre that

serves as high school teacher Jan Mandell's classroom. It was in that space that I encountered truly audacious hope and some of the strongest examples of what Sundiata described as "critical citizenship."

Founded in 1866, Central High School is currently located at the intersection of Marshall and Lexington, where it serves roughly 2,100 students. I visited the Black Box often to observe Mandell's "Intermediate Acting" class during the fall 2008 semester while I was taking a course about American Studies critical research methods. Mandell has been teaching drama there for nearly three decades, giving students tools to write and perform original plays about the issues affecting their lives. The young people in her classes claim a diverse range of racial, national, class, religious, and gender identities. Their practice is collaborative and profoundly invested in questions of social justice. Whether they are dealing with racism, homophobia, or homelessness, Mandell "push[es] for students to be a voice in their community for change." In her words, "This process is able to bond kids, open them, create leaders, create artists, create good students, create good citizens, create activists, create kids who care about the world, who fight the apathy."² It is a method of educating that engages people collectively and challenges them to reflect and act in their world.

In the fall of 2008, Mandell's "Intermediate Acting" class was inspired by the participation of several of their peers in a Camp Wellstone political training program. They decided to create an original play about the upcoming elections. For me, the question, "Where were you when Obama was elected?," evokes the performance of their play, *Your One Vote*, to a full crowd on the evening of November 3. I hear them singing their chorus together: "I'll fight for you. You'll fight for me. We'll make a change. Equality." I feel the energy thickening in the room. I see a group of four young women—Krystene, Christina, Efraim and Sam—step to center stage, take a breath and begin to speak together.

I have an opinion that needs to be understood.

I may be young in years, but I am also wise in my young years.

I know what sacrifices were made, what lives were lost.

I know that my vote counts but I can't help but think it will be overlooked.

Whoever becomes president affects me too.³

The confidence and creativity expressed by the "Intermediate Acting" students in producing this play was both inspirational and instructive to me. In this essay, I argue that the Central High School students' production of *Your One Vote* in fall 2008 was a contemporary example of civic leadership. I will draw attention to key aspects of Mandell's pedagogy and the ongoing theatrical creation of her students, arguing that her method offers a small-scale intervention into one of the growing problems in our educational system: the "school-to-prison pipeline."

I will start by contextualizing the Black Box Theatre at Central High School both within my own personal educational trajectory and within the larger social and historical context of the United States educational system. After discussing the school-to-prison pipeline and the resegregation of public schools, I will explain specifically how Mandell and her students demonstrate alternative ways of teaching and learning that have the possibility to disrupt and interrupt these systemic social inequalities. I will conclude by connecting back to the significance of Obama's election in 2008, and arguing for the importance of the Black Box as a site of civic leadership and social change.

To begin, I would like to share a few thoughts about leadership. The word is commonly used, but with very different connotations. For instance, immediately following Obama's election, prominent Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano expressed his worry about the repetition of what he called the "dangerous, toxic word 'leadership.'" ⁴ Why describe leadership as dangerous and toxic? For Latin America, as in much of the rest of the world, the word "leadership" in the context of the United States is synonymous with a top-down, exploitative, and imperialist approach. The hope of Galeano and others was that the Obama administration might do things in a new way, with more humility and less self-righteousness. I, too, am interested in a different, "non-toxic" leadership model. The word leadership for me does not refer to the ability to order people around, impose one's will, or have everything under one's control. Rather, a leader is someone who listens, who respects and inspires others, who is strategic, and who envisions common goals and works persistently to realize them.

My understanding of leadership is intimately tied to my knowledge of community organizing. ⁵ In the language of organizing, *every* person is a potential leader with skills, interests, and key issues around which they are willing to act. The job of an organizer is to identify individuals' self-interests—those places where a person's passions meet with community needs—and to encourage people to take action together. The organizer is a collaborator and agitator, not a manager. In the words of Marshall Ganz, organizers "challenge feelings of fear, apathy, self-doubt, isolation, and inertia" by deepening "people's understanding of who they are, what they want, and why they want it." ⁶ This leadership style, manifested in very distinct ways by both Barack Obama and Jan Mandell, is powerful in its ability to build relationships between diverse constituents and mobilize people in coalitions. When I use the word leadership in this study, I evoke this way of being in the world—a model of leadership that aims to foster hope, confidence, solidarity, and action.

My connection to Central High School and Jan Mandell began several years ago. I first visited Ms. Mandell's classroom to observe and participate in a half-day workshop as a sophomore at Macalester College. Later in the fall of 2008, I approached Mandell and asked if I could observe the class and if she would be willing to participate in an oral history interviewing process with me. She agreed, and so I began making weekly visits to the Black Box. After the final performance of *Your One Vote*, she and I met to conduct an oral history interview.

Doing oral history research is different from doing many other kinds of historical or anthropological research. Alessandro Portelli, an Italian historian, writes that, "Documents of oral history are always the result of a relationship, of a shared project in which both the interviewer and the interviewee are involved together, if not necessarily in harmony." ⁷ As Portelli explains, the historian is no longer a detached observer or an impartial narrator; she or he becomes a character in the story being told. The audio file and transcript from my time with Jan Mandell is as much a record of me as it is of her. Oral sources are quite different from written documents, which are stable and do not alter as we engage with them. In contrast, oral sources are by nature variable and partial. To recognize that oral history is inherently subjective means that we, as oral historians, must use subjectivity to deepen our process of critical inquiry. As scholar Valerie Yow writes, "When we pretend there is nothing going on inside of us that is influencing the research and interpretation, we prevent ourselves from using an essential research tool." ⁸ Put simply, this means I must question myself before, during, and after I question my

interlocutor. In order to more fully grasp the meaning of my oral history interview with Mandell, I need to understand how my own identities and motivations shaped our dialogue.

Like Mandell, I am a young white woman from a middle-class background who grew up in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and attended the Pittsburgh public schools. The first time I entered Central High School, I was strongly reminded of my own high school, Schenley. Like Central, Schenley was a large, racially diverse urban high school where a majority of students qualified for free or reduced price lunch. I loved Schenley, but I was in tenth grade before I really started to see and feel the race- and class-based inequalities that fractured us. By the time I was an upperclasswoman, I was sitting in honors courses that were ninety-five percent white in a school that was nearly seventy percent African American. I realized that I was getting the better teachers, the classrooms with the most windows at the top of the building, and the most up-to-date materials. It was then that I first became aware of my own racial and class identity and privilege. I may not have known the phrase *institutional racism*, but I had certainly experienced its effects in my world. Today I can speak about the achievement gap and cite the research showing that while seventy-two percent of white students enrolled in 9th grade graduated on schedule in 2001, the same was true for barely fifty percent of the same cohort of black and Hispanic students.⁹ In those days, I could feel this unjust reality everyday as I walked down the hallways of my high school. I could feel it on my graduation day when I looked around at my graduating class and saw who was missing, when I saw how our numbers had shrunk over the past four years.

At Macalester College, I learned new language and theories to make sense of the deep-rooted injustices that persist in our country. Here, I learned to see the connections between the glaring disparities in the American educational system and the steadily growing prison population. Over the past two decades, racial segregation in our nation's schools has gradually risen to a level not seen after court-mandated desegregation began with *Brown v. Board of Education*. In his book *Shame of the Nation*, educator and author Jonathan Kozol illuminates the disturbing return of "apartheid education" in America. As a result of many factors, including waning federal support for desegregation, punitive high-stakes testing policies, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, and gross funding discrepancies, low-income students of color are increasingly concentrated in overcrowded, dilapidated schools where they are not receiving adequate skills to succeed in the job market or even achieve basic literacy. According to a study conducted by Gary Orfield and the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, more than two million Black and Latino students nationwide attend schools that are 99 to 100 percent nonwhite.¹⁰ Per-pupil spending and teachers' salaries in these hyper-segregated, inner-city school districts is strikingly less than in wealthy, predominantly white suburban districts.¹¹ Even in racially integrated high schools, such as my own, tracking policies and other informal practices can create radically different educational opportunities for white students and students of color *within the same institution*. Pedro Noguera describes this phenomenon as the creation of "two schools within one."¹² Clearly, this separate and unequal educational system takes a profound toll on the psyches of low-income students of color. Kozol quotes a student named Isabel from Harlem, New York, who observed that, "It's as if you have been put in a garage where, if they don't have room for something but aren't sure if they should throw it out, they put it there where they don't need to think of it again."¹³

Isabel's sense of being isolated, contained, and discarded is real. A growing number of students find themselves on a pathway directly into the criminal justice system; a phenomenon previously described as the school-to-prison pipeline. The American Civil Liberties Union defines the

pipeline as the “national trend of criminalizing, rather than educating our nation’s children.”¹⁴ Since the 1980s, spending on the criminal justice system has increased more than 600 percent and the prison population has tripled, while spending on public education has grown by only about 25 percent.¹⁵ David Theo Goldberg explains that “the funding of prisons” comes “at the cost of funding education,” creating a self-perpetuating cycle of social destruction. Dwindling support for education and other social services promotes crime, which in turn yields an increased prison population.¹⁶ Rather than addressing the root problems of racism and neo-liberal capitalism, we disengage by warehousing disproportionate numbers of the nonwhite, poor, unemployed, and uneducated members of our society behind bars.¹⁷ Goldberg writes that poor youth of color become seen as the “surplus value of this society,” “an unusable commodity” that is only profitable when traded as objects with the “new racially fashioned economy of the prison industrial complex.”¹⁸ Within this context, it is not difficult to understand the feelings of neglect and worthlessness expressed by Isabel to Jonathan Kozol.

When I came to Central High School, I brought this knowledge and experience with me, but I was also alive with the search for ways to interrupt these destructive cycles of re-segregation and incarceration. It is never enough to simply understand the problem; we must also engage in the struggle to envision, build, and support creative solutions. On this note, education happens quite differently inside the Black Box than in the high school classrooms I had experienced earlier. Mandell and her students demonstrate ways of learning and teaching that I argue have important implications for implementing educational justice.

In the following section, I highlight three specific characteristics of the Black Box educational model and the *Your One Vote* play that constitute a possible alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline at the level of the classroom. First, I draw attention to Mandell’s anti-racist, anti-oppression pedagogy that counteracts the prevailing ideology of a post-racial, “color-blind” meritocracy. Next, I focus on the strength of youth leadership inside the Black Box. *Your One Vote* was written, composed, and performed by the students about the issues that matter to them. Finally, I argue that the production of *Your One Vote* actively and inclusively engaged the multiple intelligences of Mandell’s students. In these ways, education within the Black Box loosens up ideas about how learning happens and who is knowledgeable.

One of the aspects of the Black Box that immediately stood out to me was the way young people of different races, class backgrounds, national origins, genders, and religions communicated and collaborated to create theatre. Through their art-making process, the young people in the Black Box conversed about the social injustices they lived everyday.

In many other classrooms, as in other places throughout our society, personal and collective experiences with racism, ageism, sexism, or homophobia are silenced. Within today’s prevalent ideology of colorblindness, all reference to the category of race is eliminated in an effort to “move beyond” racial divisions. The color-blind ideology holds that racism is a thing of the past, and claims to judge people according to their “individualized merit and ability” rather than as members of racialized groups.¹⁹ In actuality, by suppressing all mention of race, color-blindness serves to obscure racial inequalities and maintain the status quo of white supremacy.²⁰ Race and other related categories of difference cannot be ignored if we wish to dismantle systems of oppression. As Ian Haney López writes, “Only by explicitly contesting racial meanings can the pervasive social beliefs in race and their attendant characteristics be altered. There is no other

way.”²¹ This kind of explicit contestation of racial meaning is occurring daily in the Black Box Theatre.

Anti-oppression pedagogy must go deeper than discussing structural inequalities in the classroom. It also requires establishing community across categories of difference. Mandell uses a variety of theatre techniques to build an ensemble of students who can listen, support, and constructively criticize each other. An exercise as simple as meeting the eyes, holding the gaze, and mirroring the actions of another person involves a certain kind of risk-taking that can begin to bring two people together. Trust is built through movement, touch, and creative play so that students are comfortable sharing their histories and experiences with one another. Mandell also maintains a flexible curriculum, not shying away from discussing controversial current issues or exploring the questions that matter to her students. In her teaching philosophy, it is challenging but absolutely necessary to deal honestly with issues like racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism in the classroom.

Consider this excerpt from a monologue in *Your One Vote*, written and performed by Mia, a young African American woman:

My mom always told me I could be anything I wanted to be...but that ain't reality. You see, a black man in America only has a few options. I could hit the lotto and go to college, but I'll probably just sell drugs on the streets to eat and end up in prison or dead. Can't get a decent job with no education. Nobody wants to hire a convicted felon... You say the American Dream is all about freedom, justice, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Well, that's not my reality...so I ask you, where's the justice in that, America?²²

Pieces like Mia's, which directly confront race-based inequality in America, are a challenge to the flow of the school-to-prison pipeline. She rejects the pipeline she sees laid out before her, even as she describes its dimensions. In this particular scene, she and her classmates decry the illusion of the American Dream, concluding with the bold statement, "America, we won't be betrayed anymore!" Students of different racial and class backgrounds working together to identify and denounce instances of institutionalized racism—such as the disproportionate incarceration rates of African Americans—are actively challenging the racism that underlies educational injustice.

A second striking element of pedagogy inside the Black Box is how much of it is initiated and led by the students. The students played active roles in conceptualizing, writing, directing, composing, and performing *Your One Vote*. As a result, the final product was a showcase for student voices. On November 3, audience members (myself included) were impressed by the confidence, smart political analysis, and vocal opinions of the Central High performers. Speaking about the importance of youth in today's society, Ashley, a young black woman from the cast, explained:

They need us for more than just buying their iPods, buying their CDs, buying their clothes. America needs to know that that's not the only thing that we have going for us. Yes, we do enjoy the clothes, and the iPods, and the CDS, but we have voices. We have futures. We have places to go and if you're not helping us, where are we going to go?²³

Ashley expressed a critical consciousness that is common among students within the Black Box. Rather than being passive consumers, the students are actively creating culture.²⁴ Through Mandell's relationship-based teaching method, they come to realize their place, the power of their voices, and their ability to transform the world around them. Mandell reverses the typical teacher-student dynamic described by Paulo Freire as, "the teacher teaches and the students are taught" and "the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing."²⁵ As Mandell says, "we're both learners to each other."²⁶ For example, most of the decisions about *Your One Vote*, from scene transitions, to musical selections, to the initial choice to write a play, were made through a conversation between Mandell and the members of "Intermediate Acting." Freire argues that the resolution of this dichotomy and the existence of dialogue between teachers and students is a fundamental requirement for fostering critical consciousness. Mandell does this on the first day of class by introducing herself and sharing her own personal narrative.

The very first day I talk with them about who I am and why I came to this work. I came to it as a special education kid in school. I was failing school. I was a behavioral problem. The kids are already sitting up. Like, "You were in special ed?"...The first day kids usually hear about the curriculum and what they need to learn. To me, you want to know who you're learning from. Who is this adult in front of you?²⁷

With a personal introduction, Mandell brings her whole person into the classroom. Opening up in this way is a risk and a demonstration of trust in her students. By revealing her struggles with a learning disability, Mandell paves the way for her students to feel comfortable about sharing themselves. Professor and scholar bell hooks employs a similar strategy in her own classroom. According to hooks, when educators offer their stories before asking students to do the same, it "eliminates the possibility that [they] can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators." She explains:

Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks...In my classrooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share.²⁸

By taking risks, sharing, and being willing to grow in the classroom, Mandell enters into a collaborative learning project with the students. From day one, the classroom becomes a space where one is encouraged to speak from personal experience. During my time in the Black Box, I observed that students drew heavily on their personal histories to create the short scenes and monologues that eventually served as the basis for *Your One Vote*. As the play-making process continued, the students' ownership of the project grew.

In the week leading up to Election Day, one of the students came up with the idea to take their ideas into the streets of the surrounding community. With Mandell's help, "Intermediate Acting" organized a march on the afternoon of November 3 from Central High School down to the corner of University Avenue and Lexington Parkway. Together, they painted signs urging people to vote and when they arrived at the intersection, they used their bodies to create frozen human

sculptures expressing their hopes for the future of the country. During the rehearsal process students became involved in other ways, by signing up to serve as election judges, tuning in to watch the debates on TV, volunteering to increase vote turnout, and beginning to articulate their opinions about the importance of civic participation. As Mandell's students emerged as leaders, their enthusiasm and critical political consciousness spread outside of the Black Box. At the talk-back session following the final performance, several parents shared the transformations they had experienced with their children.

I just wanted to tell you that this election—personally, I didn't really think of it. My daughter has helped me so much to look at all of the news on both sides. She even has my eleven-year-old daughter talking about politics. In my household, I never watched the debates until I came home and *she* was watching them...It empowered me and I hope it empowered everybody in here.²⁹

In short, theatre in the Black Box has important implications for the lives of these young people, their families, and their neighborhoods. Many of the students in Mandell's classroom come from communities that historically have been marginalized in the political sphere. In the school-to-prison pipeline model, students who are differently abled or come from low-income families or immigrant backgrounds are often not receiving adequate educational instruction, let alone opportunities to share their opinions. Inside the Black Box, their voices are valued. Their emergence as leaders is an important first step in resisting marginalization, asserting their right to participate and lead, and beginning to shift the balance of power.

The third lesson I learned from the Black Box is an educational method that is based upon the inclusion of people who learn in different ways, rather than upon the separation and ranking of certain types of intelligence as superior to others.

Mandell describes theatre itself as a "way of knowing."³⁰ Mandell came to the arts, particularly theatre, as a way to learn and communicate with others. When she speaks about becoming the person that she is today, she generally talks about her experience growing up with dyslexia, struggling to learn through written text. While some students could absorb material from books and then take a test, Mandell realized that she learned best by creating. The handicap became her gift. Today, she makes a distinction between classical theatre arts and her personal brand of theatre, which comes out of her experience with a learning disability.

The way I use [theatre] it's very different than if you're going to try out for a play and audition for a part. That's one kind of theatre. But this other is a method of learning. It's a way of expressing yourself. It can be used for just about anything, whether it's a job interview, building your self-esteem, or writing a scene. It's a process of knowing.³¹

Many of the physical improvisational exercises and theatrical games that form the basis of theatre in the Black Box have limitless possible outcomes that are equally valid, rather than a single correct answer. This does not mean that any kind of behavior is accepted inside the Black Box. On the contrary, the work requires a great deal of concentration, discipline, co-operation, and continuous practice. Mandell stresses to her students that their focus should not be on impressing her or comparing themselves to others. They are there to discover their own way to express themselves. Rather than competing with their classmates, these young people must find

creative ways of working together. Their original performances demonstrate their skill at incorporating a variety of talents and modes of expression. In producing *Your One Vote*, some students wrote monologues while others composed music, choreographed steps, or designed the set. This method of learning is strikingly different from more traditional educational models, which tend to affirm students for individual performance on text-based assignments and evaluate progress through standardized testing results.

Mandell and the Central High students showed me a different and less hierarchical way to create a learning community. Being in the Black Box pushed me to consider what kinds of knowledge are valued in academic settings, such as linguistic and verbal intelligences, as opposed to those that are seen as somehow inferior or illegitimate, such as body and movement intelligences. By widening the definition of who knows things and what is considered knowledge, Mandell creates a space where new ideas can emerge and all can contribute. In my view, this method of learning and creating could be very valuable beyond the walls of Central High. If the goal is to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, I would argue that we need a problem-solving strategy that moves beyond a narrow conception of intelligence to incorporate ideas and perspectives from a wide variety of ways of knowing.

Through these approaches to the learning process, Mandell and her students offer an educational model that is valuable for its ability to interrupt systems of oppression, foster civic leadership, and embrace multiple ways of producing knowledge. While I argue that the Black Box educational model and plays like *Your One Vote* may have the potential to disrupt the flow of the school-to-prison pipeline, it is also important to note that it is a small-scale intervention. Mandell is very conscious of the limitations of her work at Central, calling it a “little pocket” within the “bigger systems.”³² The challenge for school administrators, educational policy makers, and the rest of us, is how to respond to pockets of change like the Black Box. The goal should not be to expand or replicate the Black Box as much as it should be to allow specific elements of Mandell and her students’ model to influence other work in the struggle for educational justice.

Mandell and I met for our oral history interview on the weekend following the Tuesday that Barack Obama was elected. During that afternoon, she spoke poignantly about the country’s need for her and her students’ work in the coming years.

I think this work is going to be really important. You know, the work of building community. They may really want us out there. I don’t how else they’re going to heal this place. It can’t just happen because Barack’s been elected. That’s the illusion. Just because he’s elected doesn’t mean the work is over. It means it’s just starting.³³

I agree with that assessment. Especially today, more than a year into Obama’s term, it has never been clearer that the hard work of making “change we can believe in” did not begin when Obama took office and will not end when he leaves.

Suppose if something does not live in the world that we long to see then we make it ourselves as we want it to be?

Obama's election was cause for celebration because it demonstrated the power of joint mobilization around a set of ideas to shift the course of history. The office of the U.S. Presidency was a seat of power reserved solely for white, European-American men for over two hundred years. Obama's campaign was so well organized and so effectively carried out that a majority of Americans took a leap of faith in a new direction. With our votes we affirmed that a black man, a man of African and European ancestry, could also serve as our leader. While racism is still alive in the U.S., Obama's presidency is a powerful confirmation that when we put our hearts and minds together, it is possible to shift the frameworks that structure our reality.

However, if we join the chorus of people today demanding, "Where is the change that Obama promised?" I think we are missing the point. The change I believe in cannot be realized by one man, one administration, or even one political party. Placing a vote is never enough. Power is shifted through collective, sustained reflection and action in our world. It requires the participation of many.

Between the rocks below and the stars above, what if we were composed by love?

In the many months since Obama's election, the young people at Central High School have continued to create original theatre. It is the investment that they make in each other that drives the artistic production. Artists like Mandell and the Central High students are expressing and articulating a compelling, progressive vision for change. Their agenda is quite possibly more radical than anything Obama will accomplish within the mainstream political sphere, and for precisely this reason, it is indispensable. Imagination, creativity, and a relentless sense of possibility in the pursuit of ideals are essential components of leadership because they sustain our struggle.

*Why don't we get our hopes up too high?
Why don't we get our hopes up too high?*

In the fall of 2008, most of the "Intermediate Acting" class students were not even old enough to vote in the presidential election, but they did not allow it to diminish their impact. They worked together to critique dominant narratives about U.S. democracy and to create a play that put forth the "change they can believe in." Theirs was not a blind patriotism; *Your One Vote* does not shy away from confronting the deep-seated social inequities that continue to divide us. Mandell and the students of Central High are the kind of citizen-leaders that Sekou Sundiata would have supported—they prompt themselves and their audiences to grapple with the complexities of American reality. Their performances permit us all to begin conceiving our visions for social change and push us forward in the bold "pursuit of something new."

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Notes

1. Paul Schmeizer, “Sekou Sundiata passes...” Posting to Performing Arts Walker Blog (19 July 2007), accessed online at blogs.walkerart.org/performingarts/2007/07/19/sekou-sundiata-passes/.
2. Jan Mandell, interview by Laura McCallum, *All Things Considered*, MPR (7 May 2007), accessed online at minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/05/04/centralplay/.
3. *Your One Vote*, by Central High “Intermediate Acting” class, directed by Jan Mandell, Black Box Theatre, Saint Paul, Minnesota (performance on 3 November, 2008).
4. Eduardo Galeano, interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now* (5 November 2008), accessed online at democracynow.org/2008/11/5/uruguayan_writer_eduardo_galeano_on_barack.
5. I owe a large of this part of this knowledge to Carlos Garcia Velasco and Monica Carbajal, two community organizers from the West Side of Saint Paul, who have been my mentors.
6. Marshall Ganz, “What is Organizing?,” unpublished paper, 2006.
7. Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 39.
8. Valerie Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” in *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 63.
9. Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, “Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States,” Education Working Paper, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (September 2003), accessed online at manhattan-institute.org/cgi-bin/apMI/print.cgi.
10. Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), p. 19.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
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