

studio180theatre

STUDY GUIDE
2019/20

Sweat

by Lynn Nottage

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A. Guidelines for Brave Classroom Discussion

Thank you for bringing your class to *Sweat*. We hope your students will have the most positive and engaging theatre experience possible. To that end, we have created this **Study Guide** to support your pre-show preparation and post-show follow-up in the classroom.

For the most robust exploration of the characters and themes of *Sweat*, we recommend booking a [Studio 180 IN CLASS](#) workshop led by our experienced Artist Educators. We use drama-based activities to promote empathy and inspire critical thinking in three immersive sessions, delving into the big questions of the play. Please contact [Jessica Greenberg](#) to learn more or book a workshop.

Studio 180 is known for provocative shows that tackle potentially sensitive, personal and controversial topics and *Sweat* is no exception as it examines race, class, power, politics, poverty, xenophobia and violence, among other topics. As educators we know that we can never guarantee that all participants will feel 100% comfortable; however, we have developed the following guidelines to promote a safer space and help you lead brave and productive pre- and post-show sessions aimed at empowering **all students to feel valued, respected and able to contribute openly and honestly to the discussion.**

- Class members should make a commitment to respecting one another. Invite suggestions from students as to what **“respect”** means to them. Some of these guidelines may include commitments to confidentiality, avoiding side chatter, and never ridiculing or putting down participants or their ideas.
- Your class may include students from a wide variety of cultural, racial, and class backgrounds. **Teachers and students must resist the urge to place individuals in the spotlight based on their perceived identity, history or point of view.** Students will engage in the conversation as they feel comfortable.
- Family relationships, parent-child conflict and divorce are key themes in *Sweat*. It is important to be mindful of family diversity and **avoid generalizations and assumptions** that could isolate or alienate individuals. Frequent reminders that there will often be as many different perspectives as there are people in the room and that there are many ways to make a family, are useful and help reinforce the value of a multiplicity of ideas and points of view.
- It is the moderator’s role to establish a space of respect and inclusion, and they must take special care to **ensure that students holding a majority opinion do not vilify those “on the other side” who hold a minority view.** The moderator should also pose questions to the class to help keep the conversation on track.
- The point of a classroom discussion about *Sweat* should not be to reach a class consensus. The goal should be to **establish a forum for a free and respectful exchange of ideas.**

2. *Student Response Form*

Thank you for taking the time to respond to Studio 180 Theatre's survey about your recent experience at Sweat. Your feedback is important and we appreciate your help!

NAME (optional)

SCHOOL

YOUR GRADE LEVEL

YOUR SUBJECT OF STUDY (e.g., Drama, World Issues, etc.)

1. What did you think of the play?
2. Did you feel prepared for the play? What activities helped you feel prepared for its themes and content? What would have made your experience better?
3. If you participated in a Studio 180 IN CLASS workshop, tell us about that experience. What were your favourite parts? Was there anything you would have changed?
4. Tell us about the Artist Educators who led the workshop sessions. How did they do?
5. Please share any additional feedback on the other side of this page.

C. Introduction to Studio 180 Theatre

Inspired by the belief that people can engage more fully in the world through the experience of live performance, Studio 180 Theatre produces socially relevant theatre that provokes public discourse and promotes community engagement. In 2017/18 we celebrated 15 years of bringing Toronto audiences compelling, high-quality theatre that inspires us to ask big questions about our world and ourselves. 2019/20 is our seventeenth season.

Our inaugural production of *The Laramie Project* played to sold-out houses at Artword Theatre in Toronto in 2003. Its success led to a 2004 remount at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, which earned two Dora Award nominations. Since then, Studio 180 has continued to stage acclaimed productions of plays that tackle difficult issues and generate powerful audience and community responses.

As an independent theatre company, we are a nomadic group of artists. We create and produce our work in various spaces and venues across Toronto and we frequently partner with other companies in order to stage our plays. Our partnerships have included collaborations with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Mirvish Productions, Coal Mine Theatre, The Musical Stage Company, The Theatre Centre, Tarragon Theatre and The Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company. *Sweat* marks our fifth collaboration with Canadian Stage and our seventh play at the Berkeley Street Theatre.

In addition to our producing partners, we have a proud history of collaborating with community and advocacy organizations to raise funds and awareness around issues, causes and communities. Through special events, art exhibits in our theatre lobbies, pre- and post-show conversations, and panel discussions, we work together with artists, community leaders and subject matter experts to bring conversations ignited by our plays [Beyond the Stage](#). Community partners have included Supporting Our Youth, The Triangle Program, Givat Haviva, Palestine House, Democrats Abroad, The 519, AIDS ACTION NOW!, AIDS Committee of Toronto, Toronto People With AIDS Foundation, Positive Youth Outreach, HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, Peace Now, The Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada, Women in Capital Markets, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention, CATIE, Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, the Cities Centre at U of T, Feminist Art Collective, Shameless Magazine and the Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy.

Outreach to high school audiences has always been a crucial component of our work. In 2010 we launched [Studio 180 IN CLASS](#), an innovative workshop model that fosters productive dialogue, encourages critical thinking, and promotes empathy by exploring the uniquely humanizing capacity of live theatre. Over the years, our Studio 180 IN CLASS program has grown to reach hundreds of high school students across the GTA each year. We are proud education partners of the Toronto District School Board.

We love plays that ask big questions about our communities and our world, and we have introduced Toronto audiences to a significant number of socially relevant plays from international stages. In 2015, inspired by our eagerness to investigate more locally rooted questions, we launched [Studio 180 IN DEVELOPMENT](#). Working with both established and emerging playwrights and creators, we provide financial and artistic resources to a broad range of issue-based works at various stages of development. We then invite student and public audiences to hear the work and contribute to the development process. In 2019/20 our IN DEVELOPMENT playwrights include Jenna Harris, Sam Kalilieh, Emil Sher, Kate Cayley and Jonathan Wilson.

Studio 180 Theatre's Production History

2003	<i>The Laramie Project</i> , Artword Theatre
2004	<i>The Laramie Project</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>The Passion of the Chris</i> , Toronto Fringe Festival
2006	<i>The Arab-Israeli Cookbook</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Upstairs
2007	<i>Offensive Shadows</i> , SummerWorks Festival
2008	<i>Stuff Happens</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs
2008/09	<i>Offensive Shadows</i> , Tarragon Theatre Extra Space <i>Blackbird</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2009/10	<i>Stuff Happens</i> , Royal Alexandra Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>The Overwhelming</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2010/11	<i>Parade</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Upstairs, in association with Acting Up Stage <i>Our Class</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2011/12	<i>The Normal Heart</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>Clybourne Park</i> , Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs, in association with Canadian Stage
2012/13	<i>The Normal Heart</i> , at and in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre <i>Clybourne Park</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>The Laramie Project 10th Anniversary Reading</i> (featuring 50-member ensemble), Panasonic Theatre
2013/14	<i>God of Carnage</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish <i>Cock</i> , The Theatre Centre
2014/15	<i>NSFW</i> , The Theatre Centre <i>Love, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish</i> , Fleck Dance Theatre, co-presented with PANAMANIA presented by CIBC ; in association with IFOA
2015/16	<i>You Will Remember Me</i> , at and in co-production with Tarragon Theatre
2016/17	<i>My Night With Reg</i> , Panasonic Theatre, presented by David Mirvish
2017/18	<i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> , Greenwin Theatre at Toronto Centre for the Arts, in co-production with the Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company <i>King Charles III</i> , CAA Theatre (formerly the Panasonic), presented by David Mirvish
2018/19	<i>The Nether</i> , at and in co-production with Coal Mine Theatre <i>Oslo</i> , CAA Theatre, presented by David Mirvish
2019/20	<i>Sweat</i> , at and in co-production with Canadian Stage <i>Indecent</i> , CAA Theatre, presented by David Mirvish

D. Introduction to the Playwright and the Play

The Playwright – Lynn Nottage

Lynn Nottage is a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and a screenwriter. Her plays have been produced widely in the United States and throughout the world. Her most recent play, *Floyd's*, premiered at the Guthrie Theater in July 2019. She also recently wrote the book (script) for the world premiere musical adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, with music by Duncan Sheik and lyrics by Susan Birkenhead, which premiered at the Atlantic Theatre Company in May 2019, directed by Sam Gold.

In the spring of 2017, *Sweat* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Tony Nomination, Drama Desk Nomination) moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater. It premiered and was commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival American Revolutions History Cycle/Arena Stage.

Other plays include *Mlima's Tale*, *By The Way*, *Meet Vera Stark* (Lilly Award, Drama Desk Nomination), *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, OBIE, Lucille Lortel, New York Drama Critics' Circle, Audelco, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award), *Intimate Apparel* (American Theatre Critics and New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Play), *Fabulation*, or *The Re-Education of Undine* (OBIE Award), *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, *Las Meninas*, *Mud*, *River*, *Stone*, *Por'knockers* and *POOF!*. She developed *This is Reading*, a performance installation based on two years of interviews, at the Franklin Street, Reading Railroad Station in Reading, PA in July 2017. Currently, Nottage is collaborating with composer Ricky Ian Gordon on adapting her play *Intimate Apparel* into an opera, commissioned by The Met/LCT. She is an artist-in-residence at the Park Avenue Armory.

Nottage is the co-founder of the production company Market Road Films. Over the years, she has developed original projects for HBO, Sidney Kimmel Entertainment, Showtime, This is That and Harpo. She is writer/producer on the Netflix series *She's Gotta Have It*, directed by Spike Lee.

Nottage is the recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, Steinberg "Mimi" Distinguished Playwright Award, PEN/Laura Pels Master Playwright Award, Merit and Literature Award from The Academy of Arts and Letters, Columbia University Provost Grant, Doris Duke Artist Award, The Joyce Foundation Commission Project & Grant, Madge Evans-Sidney Kingsley Award, Nelson A. Rockefeller Award for Creativity, The Dramatists Guild Hull-Warriner Award, the inaugural Horton Foote Prize, Helen Hayes Award, the Lee Reynolds Award, and the Jewish World Watch iWitness Award. Her other honours include the National Black Theatre Fest's August Wilson Playwriting Award, a Guggenheim Grant, Lucille Lortel Fellowship and Visiting Research Fellowship at Princeton University. She is a graduate of Brown University and the Yale School of Drama. She is also an Associate Professor in the Theatre Department at Columbia School of the Arts.

To learn more about Lynn Nottage's biography, body of work, and process writing *Sweat*, check out the articles recommended in **Section G1** and **Section I** of this Study Guide.

The Play – Sweat

In one of the poorest cities in America – Reading, Pennsylvania – a group of factory workers struggle to keep their present lives in balance, unaware of the financial devastation looming in their near future. Based on Nottage’s extensive research and interviews with residents of Reading, *Sweat* is a topical reflection of the present and poignant outcome of America’s deindustrialization.

The inspiration for this, one of Nottage’s most celebrated works, came in 2011 when she received an email from a close friend and neighbor – a single mother – confessing that she was facing dire financial straits. Nottage was shocked and saddened by this revelation and began asking herself questions about economic instability and vulnerability. At the same time the Occupy Wall Street movement erupted in lower Manhattan and Nottage and her friend joined the protesters in Zuccotti Park in New York’s Financial District. Something had ignited for Nottage and she needed to learn more about the economic uncertainty and growing income inequality plaguing America.

At the same time, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival was commissioning a number of playwrights to create works about different American revolutions. Nottage selected the de-industrial revolution and set out to encounter communities experiencing factory closures, mass unemployment, and depopulation. To conduct her research, she chose post-industrial Reading, Pennsylvania – one of the poorest towns in the country – and spent the next two-and-a-half years interviewing residents and learning about their experiences.

The result was *Sweat* – winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and three Tony nominations including Best Play. In addition to receiving numerous celebrated productions in major theatres across the US, in London and Canada, New York’s Public Theatre toured its production of *Sweat* to communities throughout America’s “Rust Belt” – areas hit hard by deindustrialization, where the circumstances faced by *Sweat*’s characters would likely be familiar. You can watch a video of the extraordinary journey of the Public Theatre’s Mobile Unit here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsgR4SG58EQ&feature=emb_title.

CONTENT WARNING: This play includes mature themes of poverty, addiction, racism and xenophobia. It contains lots of **very strong language** including swearing, race and gender-based slurs and some sexual references. **Extreme physical violence** is acted out onstage.

We are very happy to discuss the play’s content and suitability for your students. Please contact Director of Youth and Community Engagement, Jessica Greenberg at jessica@studio180theatre.com or 416-962-1800 with your questions or to request a reading copy of the script.

E. Attending the Play

Prior to the performance, please ensure that your students are well prepared. The better prepared they are, the more they will gain from the experience. The following guidelines should help you and your students get the most out of attending *Sweat*:

- **Please arrive early.** When travelling in the city, whether by school bus or TTC, it is always best to leave extra time in case of traffic or transit delays. **Weekday matinées begin promptly at 1:00PM.** To avoid disruption, **LATECOMERS may not be admitted.**
- **All photography and recording of the performance is strictly prohibited.**
- Please impress upon your students the importance of **turning off all cell phones** and electronic devices. If students understand *why* it is important to refrain from using electronics, they will be more likely to adhere to this etiquette. **Remind students that they will be seeing people performing live** and, as a rule, if you can see and hear the actors, the actors can see and hear you. Even text messaging – with its distracting, glowing light – is extremely disruptive in the theatre. **Please be courteous.**
- **Outside food and beverages are not permitted in the theatre.** Spills are messy and noisy snacks and bottles can be disruptive for performers and patrons alike. Please ensure that students have the opportunity to eat lunch prior to attending the performance. There are many affordable food options in the immediate vicinity if students wish to arrive early and purchase lunch before the show.
- **We encourage student responses and feedback.** After all weekday matinées of *Sweat*, there is a talkback session with cast members. We are interested in hearing what our audiences have to say and engaging in a dialogue inspired by the play. If students are aware of the post-show talkback, they will be better prepared to formulate questions during the performance – and they will remember to remain in their seats following curtain call! After the show, kindly take the time to complete our online [Teacher/Student Response Form \(studio180theatre.com/education-feedback\)](http://studio180theatre.com/education-feedback), or use the forms included in this guide in **Section B**, and ask your students to do the same. Your feedback is extremely valuable to us!

F. Background Information – Economic Concepts in *Sweat*

*The following explanations of economic concepts, events and trends will contextualize the social, political and economic circumstances of *Sweat*. Provided by Professor Harry Krashinsky, Associate Professor of Management at the University of Toronto.*

1. Economic Definitions relevant to the play

a) Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

This is the dollar value of all the goods and services produced in a country. The U.S. currently has a GDP of approximately \$19 trillion; Canada's GDP is about \$1.7 trillion. GDP is the primary measure used to determine the "health" of an economy: when GDP is increasing, it *typically* means that people are getting wealthier, more people are able to find jobs, and companies are earning higher profits. When GDP decreases, the opposite (typically) occurs.

b) Recession

GDP fluctuates over time; usually, it increases (this happens during "good" economic times), but sometimes it decreases (which happens during "bad" economic times). Economists examine the value of GDP four times each year to calculate "quarterly" growth of GDP. If GDP decreases for three consecutive quarters, then we say that the economy is in a "recession," and people tend to suffer economically during recessions because: job loss is much higher, incomes don't tend to increase (and may decrease), and people without work find it much harder to obtain new jobs. The last two recessions in the U.S. took place in 2001 (shortly after George W. Bush became president) and in 2008, which has been called the "Great Recession" due to its severity – it took years for the U.S. to fully recover from it.

One of the things that governments do to end recessions is to enact certain policies to stimulate GDP and protect the economy. The U.S. government attempted to do both of these things in the wake of the 2008 recession by providing tax cuts (to provide more money to individuals), increases in government spending (to assist companies by purchasing more of their products), and by providing direct money to major companies who might have gone bankrupt. This last type of assistance was known as a "bailout," and it was provided to companies in different industries. Most notably for *Sweat*, money was provided to major financial firms, whose continued operation was essential to the economy. Known as the "Wall Street Bailout," these funds helped sustain firms like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. Although this was necessary to keep these companies from going bankrupt, the bailout funds later sparked outrage when these same companies paid large bonuses to their CEOs in 2009.

c) Unemployment rate

This is the fraction of people who would like to be employed at a job but don't have one. When the economy is doing well, the unemployment rate is a relatively low number – companies really want to hire people during good times – but it will increase as the economy slows down or enters a recession. Prior to the 2008 recession, the U.S. unemployment rate was about 4%, but it rose to 9% when the recession was at its worst; nearly one in ten people who didn't have a job and wanted one were unable to find work. Starting in 2010, the unemployment rate began to gradually fall, but it did not reach 4% (its pre-recession level) until 2017. While people are without jobs, they can get some financial support from government programs like employment insurance or welfare, but this type of financial support is often much less than they would have at a job; this type of financial hardship can create stress for individuals and families.

d) Dow Jones Index

There are some fairly complicated calculations that underlie the derivation of the Dow Jones Index, but simply, the Index represents the collective value of companies on the stock market. The Index can also represent an aspect of overall economic health: when the economy is doing well, companies' profits increase, and their stock prices go up, too – this will increase the Index. When the economy slows down, profits decrease, and this pushes the Index down. When it falls precipitously, then the economy may be on the verge of a serious crisis. The recession of 2008 was preceded by a massive drop in the Dow Jones Index, and the Index continued to fall for months afterwards.

2. Economic Trends relevant to the play**a) The decline of manufacturing jobs in the U.S.**

In the early 1950s, about one-third of all U.S. workers were employed in manufacturing jobs – that is, jobs that involved the creation of things that people buy, like cars, steel, and electronics. Today, less than one-tenth of all U.S. workers are employed in manufacturing jobs. Similarly, Canada has seen a large drop in the percentage of its workers employed in manufacturing: almost one-fifth of Canadian workers were employed in manufacturing in the mid-1970s, while less than one-tenth of Canadian workers are employed in this sector today. These types of decreases in employment are mainly due to automation in this sector – we use more robots and computers to make things today than we did in the 1950s, and as companies have used more robots and computers, they've also employed fewer people to manufacture things.

Companies have also manufactured an increasing percentage of their goods in foreign countries, where it's cheaper to hire workers. During the play, the characters mention the impact of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) on their livelihoods, and it is certainly true that expanded trade has accelerated the movement of manufacturing jobs outside of the U.S. and Canada. But it's important to recognize that it's not Mexico that has received manufacturing jobs from Canada and the U.S.; other countries like China have been gradually developing over the last thirty years, and as this has occurred, their

productive capacity (especially in manufacturing) has increased, too. So, overall, less-expensive workers made more available to companies by expanded trade agreements of all kinds have hastened the drop in manufacturing jobs in Canada and the U.S.

The decline in the manufacturing industry has been difficult for its workers for several reasons, but there are two major issues to recognize in this case. The first is that the manufacturing sector employed fewer people by actively laying them off or firing them (it wasn't just retirements that shrank employment), and after a job loss, workers are usually paid less money at their subsequent jobs. This was particularly prevalent for manufacturing workers who lost their jobs, because they typically found re-employment in jobs that didn't involve manufacturing tasks, so skills they had acquired while working in the manufacturing sector were not valued at their new, non-manufacturing jobs. The second major issue to understand is that there was a decline in incomes paid manufacturing workers who kept their jobs during the industry's decline. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, but a matching decline in labor unions in both the manufacturing sector and the economy as a whole is one of the major causes of the decrease in income earned by workers in manufacturing.

b) Increasing income inequality

Sweat makes reference to the Occupy Wall Street movement (delve deeper in **Section G3** of this Study Guide), which was largely a protest against income disparities in the U.S. To understand the origins of this protest, it's important to understand that income inequality in the United States has been increasing in two key ways over the last 40 years. In the 1980s, people with moderate to low incomes saw their wages fall relative to the rest of the population. A fall in the inflation-adjusted value of the minimum wage and the decline in labor unions (who bargain for higher wages) were the two prime reasons for increasing inequality over this time period. By comparison, Canada did not exhibit the same increase in inequality during this time period, likely because the decline in labor unions was not as large during this period, and the inflation-adjusted value of minimum wage remained relatively stable.

In the 1990s and beyond, though, inequality changed in a different way: individuals with higher incomes saw their wages increase while the rest of the population exhibited stagnating wages. This change was caused by a different set of factors: there was an increase in the demand for skills of more-educated workers, and a fall in the demand for skills of less-educated workers. And this was particularly true for managers and CEOs – those at the very top of the income distribution – whose pay increased drastically in comparison with other workers. These changes in inequality were evident in both Canada and the United States, though the changes were relatively larger in the U.S. Overall, these developments in inequality have given rise to a significant increase in the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” in the United States. Against this backdrop, it's not hard to understand why the bailouts given to Wall Street firms were greeted with anger by some: the government was providing taxpayer money to firms that gave massive bonuses to CEOs who already earned significantly more than most Americans.

G. Suggested Reading for Pre-Show Preparation

1. *How Lynn Nottage, Inveterate Wanderer, Found Her Way to Reading and 'Sweat' (Excerpt)*

By Rob Weinert-Kendt, July 10, 2015, *American Theatre*

Full article available here: <https://www.americantheatre.org/2015/07/10/how-lynn-nottage-inveterate-wanderer-found-her-way-to-reading-and-sweat/>

Lynn Nottage isn't on a mission to save the world. But as a sensitive and engaged citizen and human being, occasionally she feels one of the world's myriad problems crying out for action—and, since she's a playwright, that usually means a play.

In the fall of 2011, she had just returned to her Brooklyn home from Africa, where *Ruined*—her Pulitzer Prize-winning play about rape as a weapon of war in the Congo, which she'd written after first visiting Africa in 2007—had just been staged in various countries for the first time. In her inbox was a heartbreaking email from a close friend in New York who was broke—and then Occupy Wall Street happened. Nottage says she started to feel “something more needed to be done. I didn't fully understand how we had gotten to that situation. I could read all the books, but I'm someone who likes to be in the sandbox.”

Her urge to get to the bottom of what she now sees as America's “de-industrial revolution” coincided with a commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival's American Revolutions program. The play that emerged, *Sweat*, will be staged at the festival in Ashland July 29-Oct. 31, prior to a run at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage next spring and a subsequent bow in New York. Like *Ruined*, *Sweat* will be directed by longtime colleague Kate Whoriskey; and like that play, it is the result of extensive on-the-ground interviews, conducted with the help of a team. But instead of war-torn Africa, the research for *Sweat* was conducted just a few hours' drive away, in Reading, Pa., which was ranked the nation's poorest city in 2012.

“I found it really fascinating that one of the poorest cities was in the Northeast, because we usually think of the Rust Belt, we think of the South, but this poverty is so close to us,” Nottage says. The people of this depressed former steel and textile town at first felt quite far from her: Reading (pronounced “redding”) is home to a lot of white supremacists, if swastika and Iron Cross tattoos are any guide. But sitting in a room with these unemployed men, Nottage says, “What surprised me was my ability to empathize with people who I always thought were on the other side of the divide. When you interview black and Latino folks, there is a narrative that has existed for the last 50 years of being sort of disaffected from the culture. But I sat in rooms with middle-aged white men and heard them speaking like young black men in America—they feel disenfranchised, disaffected.”

Sweat follows two generations of employees at Olstead's, a local plant that begins to lay off workers in 2000, in the wake of NAFTA, and by 2008 has all but shut down. The downturn frays friendships along generational and racial lines and irrevocable violence erupts. But the play isn't the only outgrowth of what Nottage calls her “Reading Project”: She's just as excited to

tout a Beuys-like “social sculpture” she’s been developing with New York’s Labyrinth Theater Company, slated to go up in Reading next spring.

“I felt like a carpetbagger going in, taking the stories and then leaving,” confesses Nottage. “So we decided to build an interactive installation. It really came out of what I felt was a need for the community to be in dialogue—for their real desperation to have some sort of artistic home for ideas.”

In a recent conversation near her longtime home in Brooklyn, Nottage spoke about her work, her process, and the permission to write what she wants.

Sweat is set fairly recently... In 2000 and 2008. But it’s part of Oregon Shakes’s “American Revolutions” commissioning project, which is about significant points in American history. What you’re writing about is just barely history. When Oregon Shakes first came around, they said, “Figure out what are the pivotal moments you want to address.” They wanted us to write big plays about American history. The revolution I’m looking at is the “de-industrial” revolution, which is one of the great revolutions in American history, and I was thinking: By the time I write this play it will be history. I think it’s one of the more pivotal moments; I do think it’s going to be a moment that will impact the next 100 years.

How did that lead you to Reading?

Some time in October 2011, I returned from traveling around Africa where they were doing productions of *Ruined*; I arrived very late at night, and I’d gotten an email from a very close friend of mine who happened to be a neighbor and a mother of two. She had sent a confidential email to about six of us saying, “You guys probably don’t realize this, but I’m completely broke, I’ve been broke for the last six months and really living on the edge, from hand to mouth, and it’s not that I’m asking for anything other than that I feel my close friends should know what state I’m in. It would just be helpful to finally share this with someone.” I read it and it completely broke my heart; it devastated me. This was during the time when there was this tremendous economic downturn. It also happened to be the same week that Occupy Wall Street was just beginning.

I said to her, “I’m sorry, I don’t know what to offer you, but Occupy Wall Street is beginning this week. Why don’t we just go down there and figure out what it is? Because you’re dealing with a lot of the same issues they’re raising.” So we went and sat in Zuccotti Park before it became this massive tent city; we sort of marched in a circle for a while and banged on drums and chanted. At the end of the day, she was like, “You know, I don’t know what I’ve accomplished, but I actually feel a little better. I don’t feel so alone in my circumstances.” We continued to sort of engage with Occupy Wall Street, but I quickly realized that something more needed to be done. I didn’t fully understand how we had gotten to that situation. I could read all the books, but I’m someone who likes to be in the sandbox—I like to know what it is that’s happening.

So I set about in December to find a city that I felt was a microcosm of what was happening in America. And because I live in New York, I thought, Let me find a city that’s within driving distance. The New York Times had written an article about Reading, which was then

designated as the poorest city in all of America. I found it really fascinating that one of the poorest cities was in the Northeast, because we usually think of the Rust Belt, we think of the South. But the poverty is so close to us. In fact, six of the poorest cities in America were in the Northeast, in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. I thought: We have a warped perception of what poverty is.

In January 2012, began traveling to Reading with a small team of people, just to figure out, what is the demographic of this city, what is the narrative of this city? It also coincided with the first election of an African-American mayor in the town, which I thought was kind of interesting. It's like Obama: When things are really bad, everyone feels like, "Finally! You can inherit the mess."

Like that Onion piece about Obama's election, "Black Man Given Nation's Worst Job." That's what it felt like. So we began trying to interview everyone, from legislators to the police force to social services to people on the street. It's what we did with *Ruined*; we sort of went and immersed ourselves, and we ended up going back and forth and establishing some very close ties with the people in the town, with some of the people in social services, with some of the homeless people, with some of the people in the arts community.

Was Reading a steel town?

It was a steel town and a textile town. And it was a town that invented the outlet mall, because they had all these textile companies and they built these outlets around them to cater to consumers who wanted to buy discounted clothing. As late as the late '80s, early '90s, you could take a bus from Port Authority that would take you directly to the outlet malls in Reading, shop all day. It was a tourist economy, and really robust.

And it's not there anymore?

No. They still have a big mall in Wyomissing, but the Reading malls are all gone.

So what does poverty look like there?

I think there have been two tiers of poverty. There were massive layoffs right after NAFTA, which is the period I'm looking at, which is around 2000. And 2008 was another big wave of layoffs, where a lot of the steel and textile industry moved out of the state. Some of the factories moved further south—to North Carolina, to some right-to-work states. Some of them moved down to Mexico. But there were massive layoffs. And you had this huge swath of working-class white folks who for two or three generations made really good livings—they were solidly middle-class, in union jobs—who suddenly found themselves out of work.

And then Reading had always been a town that attracted labor, so you had waves of immigrants: Dutch, Italian, Polish. In the '50s and '60s, Puerto Ricans began coming. Most recently it's Dominicans, who came with the assumption that there would be employment and cheap housing stock, but they got there just as the economy crashed. So that's what the other side of the poverty looks like: You have a very large Latino population that has no place to go and no place to work.

So how did you get from that research to the play?

I call it my Reading Project, and there are two distinct branches of it. One is this play I became really interested in writing, which was just looking at a group of friends who find themselves laid off, and how it affects their lives over the course of two generations. That's what *Sweat* is. And then the other side of this, because we became so attached to Reading and I felt like I was a carpetbagger sort of going in, poaching, taking the stories and then leaving, we began working with the city to figure out what kind of art could we create that could stay here and could put the community in dialogue. We really wanted there to be sort of a social mission. We began to talk a lot about sort of Joseph Beuys-like social sculpture putting community and art and activism together into one space. I think we've narrowed it down to this huge supermarket that we're going to build it in, and we decided to build an interactive installation.

When will that be?

Probably in spring of 2016. Pennsylvania is a swing state, and we wanted to put out *Sweat* just before the election. These are the conversations we should be having, and I feel like as artists we should be socially engaged, and that at times we can be strategic in the ways we engage audiences. We're going to Washington next year, to Arena Stage. We discussed, What is a good time for it to go? Next year.

When you do source interviews, as you've done for two plays now, how do you process what you take in? Do you immerse yourself in the research, then walk away and write the play?

That's usually my process: Sit down, experience it in the moment, then push it aside. Just feel the energy in the space in the moment, and then interpret that and make it into a piece of art. I'm not as interested in absolute verisimilitude, in replicating those moments and those interviews, as sort of capturing the essence of what I experienced in the room, and the essence of those individuals.

How would you describe that essence in Reading?

Reading has been through an incredibly hard time. There was a level in some rooms of desperation, of profound sadness. In some rooms you could feel the nostalgia for what was and the longing for that to return. I think in some cases, there was genuine confusion: like, we signed with a contract with America, these were the things we were supposed to be received, and somehow we were lied to. So I think that people felt betrayed.

What surprised you the most in Reading?

It's part of the reason I wrote *Sweat*. What surprised me was my ability to empathize with people who I always thought were on the "other side" of the divide. So often when you sit in a room and interview black and Latino folks, there is a narrative that has existed for the last 50 years of being sort of disaffected from the culture. But I sat in rooms with middle-aged white men and heard them speaking like young black men in America—they feel disenfranchised, disaffected.

Did you emerge feeling hopeful or despairing about the situation there?

I always told people when I first went to Reading that I went with the desire of finding stories of resilience and resurrection, because that's really important to me—I don't want to just sort of show poverty porn. I'm turned off by that; it's not the kind of art I wanna engage with. But when I arrived, those stories [of resilience] were few and far between. There's one guy in particular, a really dynamic African-American leader who'd been to prison, gotten out, got his Ph.D., was teaching at the university, had organized green markets, organized a group of young entrepreneurs and thinkers to be the next generation of leaders in Reading. For two years he really was one of our spiritual guides there. And then at some point, we had lunch and he said, "I have to tell you, I'm leaving Reading." And I said, "What do you mean you're leaving Reading? You're my story, you're my happy ending!" He was like, "You know, I've worked really hard, but I met a woman and this is not the way we want to raise our children. We're gonna move to Philadelphia. We just want a better life." And I thought, if someone like him is leaving, it makes me feel very sad for the future of the town, because he was one of the shining stars.

What's Reading like just to visit?

One of our first times there, we had gotten lost and had stopped at a gas station, and this car pulled up, and the guy says, "You guys don't look like you're from around here. Can I give you a piece of advice? Get out before sundown." It made us laugh so hard. He was so dramatic. The next time we went, our car was broken into.

Did it make you laugh because you'd been to wartorn Africa, and how bad could Reading be?

Well, Reading is a little scary. We went into this local bar; we decided, "Let's go at night, let's just see what he's talking about, just visit a couple of spots." We walked into this bar and we literally stopped, like there was a force field, because we were so scared. There was rough trade in there. Someone was snorting cocaine on the table. It was six o'clock at night and people were already completely shit-faced. We immediately backed out and laughed about it; we went and had a drink somewhere else.

One of the problems that Reading faces is that, because for so long it was this industrial giant, a lot of the social services offices in Pennsylvania are based there; when a guy comes out of prison, he could go to the corner and get a job the next day. The problem is, the jobs dried up, but all of those services are still right there in Reading. So when guys get released from prison, they go there. It's like a dumping ground for people coming out of prison. Which seems very wrong; you're putting people in a position to fail immediately.

2. *Reading, Pa., Knew It Was Poor. Now It Knows Just How Poor.*

By Sabrina Tavernise, Sept. 26, 2011, *New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/27/us/reading-pa-tops-list-poverty-list-census-shows.html>

READING, Pa. — The exhausted mothers who come to the Second Street Learning Center here — a day care provider for mostly low-income families — speak of low wages, hard jobs and an economy gone bad.

Ashley Kelleher supports her family on the \$900 a month she earns as a waitress at an International House of Pancakes. Louri Williams packs cakes and pies all night for \$8 an hour, takes morning classes, and picks up her children in the afternoon. Teresa Santiago takes complaints from building supply customers for \$10 an hour, not enough to cover her \$1,900 in monthly bills.

These are common stories in Reading, a struggling city of 88,000 that has earned the unwelcome distinction of having the largest share of its residents living in poverty, barely edging out Flint, Mich., according to new Census Bureau data. The count includes only cities with populations of 65,000 or more, and has a margin of error that makes it difficult to declare a winner — or, perhaps more to the point, a loser.

Reading began the last decade at No. 32. But it broke into the top 10 in 2007, joining other places known for their high rates of poverty like Flint, Camden, N.J., and Brownsville, Tex., according to an analysis of the data for *The New York Times* by Andrew A. Beveridge, a demographer at Queens College.

Now it is No. 1, a ranking that the mothers at the day care center here say does not surprise them, given their first-hand knowledge of poverty-line wages, which for a parent and two children is now \$18,530.

The city had been limping for most of the past decade, since the plants that sustained it — including Lucent Technologies and the Dana Corporation, a car parts manufacturer — withered. But the past few years delivered more closings and layoffs, sending the city's poverty rate up to 41.3 percent.

Jon Scott, president of the Berks Economic Partnership, which helps businesses looking to stay in the area or move here, said that some of the city's job losses were in fact furloughs, and that many businesses were considering opening in Reading, including an industrial laundry company at the former Dana site.

According to Mr. Beveridge, employment in the city dropped by about 10 percent between 2000 and 2010.

One of Reading's more entrenched problems is education. Just 8 percent of its residents have a bachelor's degree, far below the national average of 28 percent.

“Without a bachelor’s degree, forget it,” said Ms. Williams, 28, who is taking classes to earn her G.E.D.. Only about 63 percent of Reading’s residents have a high school diploma, compared with more than 85 percent nationally.

Lower education generally means higher poverty. About a fifth of people ages 25 to 34 with only a high school diploma in the United States were poor last year, compared with just 5 percent of college graduates, said Yiyoon Chung, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. For those without a high school diploma, the rate was 40 percent.

Ms. Santiago, 36, has an associate’s degree from a local community college, but said that employers wanted to see more from job candidates. She lost her last full-time job in 2007, and has worked in low wage jobs without benefits through a temporary agency ever since.

“They even want a degree to be a secretary,” said Ms. Santiago, picking up her 8-year-old son at the center.

This city has had a large influx of Hispanics over the past decade. They moved from New York and other large cities, drawn by cheaper rent and the promise of a better life. That raised the flagging population, but also reinforced the city’s already acute problems with education: Just 18 percent of Hispanics in Reading had some college education last year, compared with 30 percent of the city’s whites. Only 44 percent of Hispanics had a high school diploma.

Young men have been particularly hard hit. Because they are having trouble competing for jobs, they are dropping out of the labor force, leaving women to support the children.

Ms. Kelleher, 23, said she had been supporting her three children as well as the father of two of them. She would not be able to survive, she said, without the \$636 a month she gets in food stamps.

“For the past five years, it has been me paying the bills,” she said at the day care center, still in her waitress uniform. She wants to get married someday, she said, but only to a partner who is financially stable.

Sixty-two percent of young fathers in the United States earned less than \$20,000 in 2002, according to Timothy Smeeding, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, citing the most recent data available from the National Survey of Family Growth.

Even for young people with a bachelor’s degree, the economy is making life difficult. Vickie Moll, who runs the day care center, said the number of applications from teachers who have lost their jobs had grown as the waves of budget cuts washed over the state. “We have people in here with bachelor’s degrees making \$8 an hour,” she said.

Social services feel the effects, too. The Greater Berks Food Bank — Reading is the Berks County seat — is on track to distribute six million pounds of food this year, up from three and a half million pounds in 2007, said Doug Long, manager of marketing.

Pat Giles, a senior vice president at the United Way of Berks County, said: "It has really started to snowball. We have a growing population of younger, less educated, less skilled people. On top of that you have the economy going upside down."

Modesto Fiume, president of Opportunity House, the organization that runs the day care center, as well as a homeless shelter and a transitional living facility, said the number of first-time families in the shelter was up sharply: of 23 new entries in June and July, 18 were homeless for the first time.

"People are here because they honestly and truly can't find work," said Delia McLendon, who runs the shelters. "It didn't used to be that way."

In the mid-1990s, welfare reform resulted in more women joining the work force. At the time, jobs were plentiful, but now work is scarce and low-income families' lives have become hectic balancing acts to keep the few benefits they have.

Ms. Santiago loses her subsidized day care if she is out of work for more than 13 days, she said. The loss would take months to reinstate, so she hurries to find any work, whatever it pays, every time her temp job ends. Earning more than \$10 an hour means losing health insurance, she said, though her children remain covered through Medicaid.

And jobs just seem to pay less. Ms. Santiago recently took a temporary job at a candy factory where she had worked more than eight years ago, when she was still in her 20s, before she had completed her associate's degree. At the time she was making \$10.50 an hour. In her most recent stint, her hourly wage was \$9.25.

"Eight years ago I said, 'I don't want to do this, I have to further my education,' " she said. "And now here I am, still packing candy, and making less."

3. *The call to occupy Wall Street resonates around the world*

We need deeper changes to our financial system, or tent cities of people angry at corporate greed will keep appearing

By Micah White and Kalle Lasn, September 19, 2011, *The Guardian*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/sep/19/occupy-wall-street-financial-system>

On Saturday 17 September, many of us watched in awe as 5,000 descended on to the financial district of lower Manhattan, waved signs, unfurled banners, beat drums, chanted slogans and proceeded to walk towards the "financial Gomorrah" of the nation. They vowed to "occupy Wall Street" and to "bring justice to the bankers", but the New York police thwarted their efforts temporarily, locking down the symbolic street with barricades and checkpoints.

Undeterred, protesters walked laps around the area before holding a people's assembly and setting up a semi-permanent protest encampment in a park on Liberty Street, a stone's throw from Wall Street and a block from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Three hundred spent the night, several hundred reinforcements arrived the next day and as we write this article, the encampment is rolling out sleeping bags once again. When they tweeted to the world that they were hungry, a nearby pizzeria received \$2,800 in orders for delivery in a single hour. Emboldened by an outpouring of international solidarity, these American indignados said they'd be there to greet the bankers when the stock market opened on Monday. It looks like, for now, the police don't think they can stop them. ABC News reports that "even though the demonstrators don't have a permit for the protest, [the New York police department says that] they have no plans to remove those protesters who seem determined to stay on the streets." Organisers on the ground say, "we're digging in for a long-term occupation."

#OCCUPYWALLSTREET was inspired by the people's assemblies of and floated as a concept by a double-page poster in the 97th issue of *Adbusters* magazine, but it was spearheaded, orchestrated and accomplished by independent activists. It all started when *Adbusters* asked its network of culture jammers to flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens and peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. The idea caught on immediately on social networks and unaffiliated activists seized the meme and built an open-source organising site. A few days later, a general assembly was held in New York City and 150 people showed up. These activists became the core organisers of the occupation. The mystique of Anonymous pushed the meme into the mainstream media. Their video communique endorsing the action garnered 100,000 views and a warning from the Department of Homeland addressed to the nation's bankers. When, in August, the indignados of Spain sent word that they would be holding a solidarity event in Madrid's financial district, activists in Milan, Valencia, London, Lisbon, Athens, San Francisco, Madison, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Israel and beyond vowed to do the same.

There is a shared feeling on the streets around the world that the global economy is a Ponzi scheme run by and for Big Finance. People everywhere are waking up to the realisation that

there is something fundamentally wrong with a system in which speculative financial transactions add up, each day, to \$1.3tn (50 times more than the sum of all the commercial transactions). Meanwhile, according to a United Nations report, "in the 35 countries for which data exist, nearly 40% of jobseekers have been without work for more than one year".

"CEOs, the biggest corporations, and the wealthy are taking too much from our country and I think it's time for us to take back," said one activist who joined the protests last Saturday. Jason Ahmadi, who travelled in from Oakland, California explained that "a lot of us feel there is a large crisis in our economy and a lot of it is caused by the folks who do business here". Bill Steyerd, a Vietnam veteran from Queens, said "it's a worthy cause because people on Wall Street are blood-sucking warmongers".

There is not just anger. There is also a sense that the standard solutions to the economic crisis proposed by our politicians and mainstream economists – stimulus, cuts, debt, low interest rates, encouraging consumption – are false options that will not work. Deeper changes are needed, such as a "Robin Hood" tax on financial transactions; reinstating the Glass-Steagall Act in the US; implementing a ban on high-frequency "flash" trading. The "too big to fail" banks must be broken up, downsized and made to serve the people, the economy and society again. The financial fraudsters responsible for the 2008 meltdown must be brought to justice. Then there is the long-term mother of all solutions: a total rethinking of western consumerism that throws into question how we measure progress.

If the current economic woes in Europe and the US spiral into a prolonged global recession, people's encampments will become a permanent fixtures at financial districts and outside stock markets around the world. Until our demands are met and the global economic regime is fundamentally reformed, our tent cities will keep popping up.

Bravo to those courageous souls in the encampment on New York's Liberty Street. Every night that #OCCUPYWALLSTREET continues will escalate the possibility of a full-fledged global uprising against business as usual.

H. Major Themes & Discussion Questions

1. *Theatrical Presentation*

a) ISSUE-BASED THEATRE

Studio 180 Theatre produces plays that speak to socially and politically relevant issues. We gravitate to works that ask questions rather than provide answers.

What are the social or political issues in *Sweat* and how effective are the play and the production in illuminating them? Reflect on what was **new, surprising** or **revelatory** to you. Reflect on what was **familiar, affirming** or **empowering**. Reflect on what was **confusing** or **challenging**.

Why live theatre? Playwright Lynn Nottage drew inspiration studying current events and interviewing the people of Reading, Pennsylvania. Why not examine issues like race, poverty, labour and addiction by reading news articles or essays? What makes theatre an effective art form through which to explore themes, issues and human behaviour? Consider **what is specific about your intellectual, emotional and communal responses to attending live theatre** compared to engaging in other forms of art, such as reading a novel, watching a movie or looking at a painting.

HINT: How does live theatre HUMANIZE issues and why is the humanization of social and political issues important?

Brainstorm issues that you would like to see turned into a piece of theatre. **If you were going to see another play, or write a play yourself, what would you want it to be about?** This question may serve as a jumping off point for drama students to begin their own issue-based theatre projects around stories and topics of particular relevance to them.

b) POINTS OF VIEW – CHARACTERS

How effective is *Sweat* at exploring multiple perspectives or points of view? Which points of view came into direct conflict with one another? Did that conflict propel compelling drama? Was the play even-handed? Did you feel that a multitude of opinions and points of view were expressed? Were the characters portrayed fairly? Do you believe an even-handed or fair portrayal is important when it comes to seeing a play? Which characters and stories were the most memorable? Which voices remained with you the longest and why? Which moments had the greatest impact? Which characters surprised you? Did the play create questions for you regarding the characters or their circumstances? Did you form an emotional attachment to any of the characters? Who were you rooting for? Who did you want to see more of? Did you disagree with what some of the characters were saying or doing? What would you ask those characters, given the opportunity?

c) POINTS OF VIEW – PLAYWRIGHT

What is the playwright's point of view regarding the characters and their circumstances? Do you think Lynn Nottage is on the same "side" as any of the characters? After seeing the play, generate a list of open-ended "Big Questions" that might have inspired the writing of this play. What do you think Nottage was trying to uncover when she commenced her research in Reading?

d) DESIGN

How did the design of the production affect the presentation of the piece? How effective was the **set** in defining the time period and location? What mood or ambience was created? How did colour, texture and space add to the theatrical experience? How was **lighting** used to create mood or ambience? How did lighting work to define space and setting? How did the set and lights work in combination with one another? How were **costumes** used to define characters? How did the costume designer make use of colour, texture and style? How did the **sound** designer utilize sound and music to create ambience, mood, time period and location? How were **projections** used in this production and what impact did they have?

e) TIME & STRUCTURE

How does Nottage play with time in *Sweat* and what is the dramatic impact? How did the director, designers and actors indicate time period in the production? How did you know when it was 2000 and when it was 2008? Why do you think Nottage chose these precise historical time periods?

HINT: Students may need to do some independent research to find out what was happening in Reading, Pennsylvania and the United States in 2000 and 2008. Section F of this Study Guide can provide you with some economic context.

f) BEYOND THE STAGE

At Studio 180 we like plays that provoke big questions about our selves, our communities and our world: plays that we hope will inspire conversations that continue long after you leave the theatre. **After seeing *Sweat* and participating in the IN CLASS workshop sessions, what are you curious about? What do you want to learn more about?** Students are encouraged to select a topic or theme, inspired by the play and conduct their own research using articles, books, documentaries, or other resources. Findings can be presented in written, or oral reports, or through various artistic mediums such as video, a performed scene, poetry or fictional prose, or a painting, drawing or sculpture together with an artist statement.

If your students generate creative responses to *Sweat*, please share them with us by contacting Director of Youth and Community Engagement, [Jessica Greenberg](#).

2. *Us v. Them*

Throughout the play, we encounter characters divided by an “us” v. “them” mentality. This opposition plays out in communities and political arenas worldwide. Consider the **Occupy Wall Street** movement (See Study Guide **Section G3**) – which partly inspired the writing of *Sweat* – with the distinction between the 1% and the 99%. Consider the “us” v. “them” rhetoric so prominent during the 2016 US Presidential election that ushered **Trump** into power, and the consistent language around “division” that characterizes our current political discourse.

*HINT: The following are examples of “us” v. “them” thinking in *Sweat*. See how many examples from the play students can come up with and use these as prompts when necessary.*

- bosses v. workers

“Management is for them. Not us.” – Tracey

“I don’t know him, but I can tell you that Olstead’s grandson is the same brand of asshole as all of ‘em.” – Stan

“That’s when I understood. That’s when I knew, I was nobody to them. Nobody!” – Stan

“Twenty-four years, and I can’t remember talking to anyone in the office, except to do paperwork. I mean some of these folks have been working there as long as us, but they’re as unfamiliar as a stranger sitting next to you on a bus.” – Cynthia

- educated v. uneducated

“You haven’t even gone to college and you’re already an asshole.” – Jason

- politicians v. populace

“Don’t matter. They’ll all shit on us in the end.” – Brucie

- race:

“Last week, I was at the union office signing up for some bullshit training and this old white cat, whatever, gets in my face, talking about how we took his job. We? I asked him who he was talking about, and he pointed at me. ME?” – Brucie

“If they don’t see me, I don’t need to see them.” – Oscar

- native-born v. immigrant:

“My family’s been here a long time... Olstead’s isn’t for you.” – Tracey

“Nah, it aint’ the same. We got history here. Us! Me, you, him, her! What the fuck does he have, huh? A green card that gives him the right to shit on everything we worked for?” – Jason

- union v. non-union:

“They ain’t my friends. They don’t come into my house and water my plants.”
– Oscar

- a) Refer to **Section F** of this Study Guide for some economic context – what connections can you make between the **economic circumstances** in *Sweat* and the characters’ “us” v. “them” attitudes?
- b) **Consider how much this “us” v. “them” thinking resonates in our own country and our own communities.** After seeing the play and discussing the numerous incidents of characters setting themselves in opposition to one another, reflect on times when you have experienced this in your own life: in your school, your family, your community, province or country.
- c) **When have you felt like an “us” and when have you treated others like a “them”?** Why do you think we relate to one another this way? When is it **destructive and damaging**? Is it ever **productive or beneficial**? Students are encouraged to be brave and share examples from their own lives.

*HINT: If you facilitate this conversation, remember to establish class parameters for a brave space. Invite suggestions from students and draw upon **Section A** of this Study Guide to establish guidelines that encourage judgment-free participation.*

- d) Consider the ending of the play. Respond to the question: **How do we take care of each other?** Reflecting on your class conversations about us v. them conflict in the play and in your world, why do you think it is important for us to take care of one another in our communities? How do you think the play suggests we do that? How do you think we can do that on a personal, community and global scale?
- e) Use the play as an opportunity to talk about **scarcity and abundance**. What do these words mean to you? Which characters experience scarcity and which characters enjoy abundance (*Hint: You might have to think of characters we hear about but never actually meet*)? As a society do you think we are living in a time of scarcity or abundance? **Do you think there is enough to go around?** Why or why not? If there is enough, how can we better **share** our resources with one another?

3. *Hopes, Dreams & Aspirations*

- a) Which characters in the play express their hopes, dreams and aspirations? Try to identify an aspiration or goal for each of the characters – whether they express it in the present or reflect on a time in the past when they had a hope or dream.
- b) When are the characters hopeful and when are they hopeless? What do you think contributes to their state of mind? Consider internal and external factors. Consider personal, familial, political and economic factors. **What do you think most impacts a person's hopefulness?**
- c) How do the characters' relationships impact their ability to fulfill their dreams and reach their goals? When do the characters support one another and when do they obstruct one another? When friends and family members become barriers to achieving goals, why do you think this happens?
- d) How can the characters' personal aspirations be understood as a **metaphor** for the **American Dream**? Is Nottage's portrayal of Reading and America hopeful or hopeless and what can we learn about the state of hope in this community?
- e) **Do we all have equal opportunity to pursue our dreams?** Why or why not? How do you think the characters in *Sweat* would respond to this question? How do you think playwright Lynn Nottage would respond to this question?
- f) In addition to looking to the future, characters in *Sweat* frequently long for the past. Discuss how **nostalgia** is a theme in the play – come up with examples of characters who describe an idyllic past or long for "the way things used to be."

Recall the period during which Nottage was writing *Sweat* and Donald Trump's campaign slogan: "Make America Great Again." Are there connections to be made between Trump's campaign and victory and the **nostalgic** sentiments of characters in *Sweat*?

Have you experienced nostalgia as a powerful force in your own province, country, or local community?

4. Visibility

- a) The New Yorker describes Lynn Nottage as having “**built a career on making invisible people visible.**” How does *Sweat* accomplish this and do you think enabling visibility is important? Why or why not?
- b) Which characters in *Sweat* are invisible and why? Why do you think the other characters don’t see them, and what impact does this have on them?
- c) **Why is visibility or representation in art important?** What does it mean to see yourself represented on stage, in books, in movies, etc? Have you experienced feeling invisible in art and media? What does this feel like and what are the implications and ramifications?

*HINT: If you facilitate this conversation, remember to establish class parameters for a brave space. Invite suggestions from students and draw upon **Section A** of this Study Guide to establish guidelines that encourage participation from those outside of the dominant groups and invite active listening from students belonging to dominant groups.*

- d) *The New Yorker* describes *Sweat* as, “**the first theatrical landmark of the Trump era.**” (See link to full article in **Section J** of this Study Guide). The play is set in 2000 and 2008, but it opened off-Broadway only days before Trump’s electoral victory in 2016. Speaking to the *New Yorker* about her research in Reading, Lynn Nottage says, “One of the mantras I heard the steelworkers repeat over and over again was ‘**We invested so many years in this factory, and they don’t see us. We’re invisible,**’ I think it profoundly hurt their feelings.”

What is the relationship between visibility and voting? How can a play set decades in the past speak to the current political situation? How do these issues resonate for us in Ontario? In Canada?

5. Identity

a) RACE

For *Sweat*, Lynn Nottage created Black, White and Latinx characters to reflect the key racial identities of Reading, Pennsylvania residents. How do the characters' racial backgrounds and identities impact their points of view, opportunities, relationships and outcomes? After seeing the play, what discoveries, realizations, or questions do you have about race in America? How do the play's questions and observations about race translate to a Canadian context? After an establishing conversation about immediate responses, consider the following Nottage quotation from an interview in *American Theatre Magazine* (Section **G1** of this Study Guide):

“What surprised me was my ability to empathize with people who I always thought were on the other side of the divide. When you interview black and Latino folks, there is a narrative that has existed for the last 50 years of being sort of disaffected from the culture. But I sat in rooms with middle-aged white men and heard them speaking like young black men in America—they feel disenfranchised, disaffected.”

- *How does Sweat capture Nottage's experience in Reading with regard to racial identity?*
- *What are some of the ways the play encourages us to think about race, power and privilege?*

Sweat takes place nearly twenty years ago but premiered during the lead up to the 2016 US Presidential election in which 58% of white Americans and only 8% of black Americans voted for Trump.

- *What connections can you make between Sweat and the eventual election of Donald Trump in 2016? What are the connections to be made to Canada's electoral politics?*

b) GENDER

What do you think Lynn Nottage is observing and analyzing with regard to gender in *Sweat*? How are the characters' journeys and relationships impacted by their gender? Some themes to consider include: parenting, violence, addiction, unemployment, toxic masculinity and sexual harassment. Here is a suggested prompt to get you started:

- *What do you think Chris and Jason think it means to “be a man?” How might their learned versions of masculinity be toxic and damaging to themselves and others?*

This is an excerpt from the *New York Times* article that inspired Lynn Nottage to select Reading as her research site (article in Section **G2** of this Study Guide):

Because [young men] are having trouble competing for jobs, they are dropping out of the labor force, leaving women to support the children.

Ms. Kelleher, 23, said she had been supporting her three children as well as the father of two of them. She would not be able to survive, she said, without the \$636 a month she gets in food stamps.

- *How did Nottage weave her findings about women's experiences in Reading into Sweat? In what ways are Cynthia, Tracey and Jessie's lives and relationships impacted by their gender?*

c) INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a legal term originally coined in the late 1980s, by African American lawyer and professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Since then, the term has been embraced more broadly to recognize that people do not identify as only one thing – our identities according to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc, intersect with one another.

Intersectionality expands our thinking and helps us understand that there is no universal experience of “sexism” or “racism” or “homophobia,” to name but a few examples of discrimination. And here's why:

Intersectionality recognizes that a white woman and a black woman will experience the world differently, even though they both identify as “women.” To assume that both of these individuals, with their uniquely intersecting identities of race and gender, experience identical forms of gender-based discrimination erases a crucial component of the black woman's identity and her lived experience. Similarly, a heterosexual black woman and a queer black woman will experience the world differently and will experience sexism differently – even if they both identify as black women. Gender-based discrimination will look and feel different for them. And so on...

When we say we are looking at something through an **intersectional lens**, we mean we are keeping intersectionality in mind when we conduct our observations and analysis.

- **How can we view *Sweat* through an intersectional lens?** How do you think playwright Lynn Nottage (a CIS-gender heterosexual black woman) approaches her work through an intersectional lens? Continue reading **Section 5d** about privilege and respond to the suggested prompts to begin your conversation.

d) PRIVILEGE

Privilege refers to unearned social advantages we are born into. Privilege also includes freedom from discrimination enjoyed simply because of how we are born. We frequently encounter the term with regard to race as in “white privilege” – the constellation of advantages that white people in our society have over people who are black, indigenous and people of colour. These advantages are not a result of work, talent, or effort; nor can they be attributed to good luck. Rather, they are automatically granted to white people on a *systemic* level, because we live in a society in which white people have more power *systemically* than people who are black, indigenous or people of colour.

By acknowledging white privilege we are not saying that all white people are exempt from challenges and struggle. Individual white people may experience any number of disadvantages and barriers (i.e. poverty, abuse); however, we recognize that these struggles will not be faced because someone is white. Conversely, many racialized people are successful, accomplished, wealthy, fulfilled, lucky, etc. But we recognize that there are systemic forces that implement real barriers to success, wealth, safety, etc, for those who are not members of the dominant race. The same follows when we speak of things like male privilege or heterosexual privilege.

- **How does Lynn Nottage investigate white privilege in *Sweat*?** Which characters can be said to have white privilege? What do you think those characters would have to say about white privilege? Would they recognize their white privilege? Why or why not? Which characters recognize and call out white privilege and why? After seeing the play, do you have new thoughts, feelings or curiosities about privilege?
- **Do you think it is important to recognize privilege based on things like race, gender, sexual orientation, ability and class? Why or why not?**

Enhance your understanding of white privilege by reading “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy MacIntosh, included in **Section I1** of this Study Guide.

Prompts for delving into privilege and intersectionality in *Sweat*

Cynthia and Tracey are both working class women and best friends, living in the same town and working at the same factory. How are Cynthia and Tracey’s backgrounds, identities and circumstances similar? Do they have the exact same opportunities at work? How do you think Cynthia would answer this question? How do you think Tracey would respond?

Chris and Jason are the same age. They are best friends who grew up together in the same town and whose parents had the same jobs and level of education. How are Chris and Jason’s identities and circumstances similar? How might they experience the world differently and how might those experiences impact their lives?

Cynthia and Brucie are both African American and they used to be married to one another. How are Cynthia and Brucie’s circumstances similar and how are they different? How are their opportunities and constraints similar and how might they be different?

e) NATIVISM & XENOPHOBIA

Nativism is the protection of rights and benefits for native-born citizens over immigrants and newcomers. Xenophobia refers to discrimination against anyone from another country – typically migrants, refugees and immigrants. Nativism and xenophobia are connected to race because xenophobic discrimination in the US and Canada is most prevalent against black people and people of colour. In a Canadian context, for example, a white person is less likely to experience xenophobia than a black person or a person of colour, even if they are all immigrants.

- How does *Sweat* highlight the forces of nativism and xenophobia? Reflect on **Oscar’s** experience in the play – how does it illuminate issues of racism and xenophobia? How

do the characters in the play treat Oscar and why? Reflect on the specific ways that Tracey, Stan, Jason and Chris all treat Oscar. What are the similarities and how are each of these relationships unique and why?

- Have you observed politicians in America or Canada using nativist or xenophobic language? Come up with specific examples and have a conversation about why you think they do this. What are politicians trying to accomplish with these statements? What is the impact on individual newcomers, immigrants and people of colour? What is the impact on our communities?

I. Suggested Reading for In-Depth Dialogue

1. “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh

(excerpt from *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies*)

www.docs.google.com/Doc?id=dd323hvj_1204hbf24wcm)

McIntosh’s seminal essay is an excellent starting point for confronting and unpacking questions of race-based privilege. Begin by recognizing the ways Lynn Nottage addresses white privilege in *Sweat*. Then read the following essay and facilitate a group discussion about what it means to acknowledge our own privileges.

JASON: And how come there’s no White History Month?

CHRIS: Psh. I’m gonna let you ponder that question!

– *Sweat*, by Lynn Nottage

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.

Through work to bring materials from women’s studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to women’s statues, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women’s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended. Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women’s studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, “having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?” After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges

from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are just seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence. My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.

11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.
17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.
18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.
19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.
25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.
28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.
29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.
30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.
31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.
32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.
33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.
37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.
38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.
45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.
46. I can choose blemish coverup or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.
48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.
49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.
50. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

2. Don't dismiss them as 'crackpots': Who are Canada's yellow vest protesters? They feel ignored and like they are being left behind, political scientist says
By Elizabeth Hames, January 11, 2019, CBC News

Bring some of the themes of the play into the here and now by reading this news article and discovering connections between the points of view of the people featured in this article and the characters in *Sweat*. What are the common social, political and economic forces driving their fears and what are the results?

This weekend in Edmonton, protesters wearing bright yellow vests will gather at the Alberta legislature. Just like they did last weekend, and every weekend before that for the past month. "No point making all those beautiful signs if nobody gets to see 'em," an organizing group said in a Facebook post about plans for Saturday's rally. "Looking forward to our biggest turnout yet."

Some protesters may stand at the podium shouting conspiracy theories about how powerful Jewish families control the world, as one man did at a rally at the Alberta legislature on Jan. 5. Some may sport red "Make Alberta Great Again" hats while recording the crowd with their cell phones, in an effort to be their own media.

Members of anti-immigration group Soldiers of Odin, which was founded in Finland by a white supremacist, attended a December yellow vest rally in Edmonton. (Scott Neufeld/CBC) Others may prowl on the sidelines dressed like they belong to a biker gang. Only instead of Hells Angels patches, they have "Wolves of Odin — Canadian Infidels" sewn onto the back of their leather jackets.

But most of the protesters are not voices from the fringes. Some have jobs building high-rises or driving for Uber. Others are teachers, pipefitters, real estate agents.

One thing in common

And while their message may be muddled by a cacophony of divergent grievances and opinions, they all have one thing in common: they feel ignored and like they are being left behind.

"Certainly there's this growing discontent that governments are ignoring the concerns of ordinary citizens," said Chaldeans Mensah, a political scientist at MacEwan University in Edmonton. That's echoed by Lynn Smith, a former oil and gas worker who now works in the school system. The yellow vest rally on Jan. 5 marked the fourth time she had attended such an event.

"They're just giving our country away," Smith said about why she was there. "We have no rights anymore. They're taking them all away. No more Lord's Prayer. But they're putting

praying rooms in schools ... Merry Christmas — you're not allowed to say [that] anymore. It's supposed to be 'Happy Holidays.'

"They're changing our country and we've got to stand up and say something about it because this is our country. I was born here. My parents were born here. ... It's wrong."

The protesters say they are not opposed to immigration, but much of the focus of Edmonton's yellow vest rallies has been on who comes into the country, and how they get here.

"We're overwhelming our resources," said Brent Webster, a father of five who works in the construction industry. "We can't properly vet these people and make sure it's safe for them to come in and make sure that they're skilled and assimilate to our country and know our ways and our values."

Trudeau a target

In January 2017, soon after U.S. President Donald Trump put in place a travel ban on people from seven Muslim-majority countries, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered a message via Twitter: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #Welcome to Canada."

Not long after that, the flood of irregular border crossings into Canada spiked. Some asylum seekers were put up in hotels while their claims were being processed. Critics said Trudeau's tweet contributed to the border crossing issue.

Then, in December, Trudeau signed the United Nations global migration pact, a non-binding initiative designed to provide an understanding among nations about how to deal with the global migration crisis.

At the same time, people in Western Canada have been losing their jobs, and projects that could bring work to area — like pipelines — are stalled. And a carbon tax appears on their heating bill. And their restaurant and child care bills go up, tied to the latest hike in Alberta's minimum wage.

"Trudeau keeps giving all of our money away to immigrants," said Samantha Quaghebeur, a mother of five. She attended the Jan. 5 rally with Webster, her husband, and two of their children. It was her first protest — for any cause.

"We are stuck paying for all of his money that he wants to give away to everybody but Canadians. My kids are going to grow up, my grandkids and all their kids are going to be poor and stuck in a hole that they're never going to get out of."

Muddled message

Immigration is not the only issue on the yellow vest agenda. A manifesto making the rounds online lists "illegal immigration" as just one of many concerns: carbon tax, pipelines,

dependence on foreign oil, electoral reform, transfer payments, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and sovereignty over immigration policies.

Meanwhile, a different group of Western Canadians has been bringing a pro-pipeline message to the streets. Groups like Rally 4 Resources and Canada Action have held rallies in communities across Alberta, calling for an end to Bill C-48 and changes to Bill C-69, which they say makes it more difficult to get pipelines built in Canada.

These protesters are organizing a convoy of big rigs from Western Canada to Ottawa next month, which will end with a rally on Parliament Hill.

While their pro-pipeline message overlaps with that of the yellow vest protesters, they are not the same. In recent days, the pro-pipeline groups have distanced themselves from yellow vest protesters, who have been accused of harbouring racism.

Even the yellow vest protesters can't agree on who the "official" yellow vests are. Glen Carritt, who is organizing a "yellow vest" convoy to Ottawa (different from that organized by Canada Action), said he is not affiliated with other groups calling themselves yellow vest protesters.

Whether or not other Canadians agree with the message of the yellow vest protesters, political scientist Mensah said they should not be ignored.

"If we observe these demonstrations, try to understand where they're coming from and not simply dismiss them as crackpots or anti-immigrant," he said.

"Because if we do that, some of these people may go underground, which is not a healthy situation for the democratic system."

3. Unifor president Jerry Dias vows to continue protest at GM headquarters blockade in Oshawa

By Reka Szekely, Jan 23, 2019, Durham Region News

After seeing Sweat, consider how people are experiencing deindustrialization and unemployment right here at home. What are the labour issues relevant to our communities today?

OSHAWA — As the rain poured down Wednesday afternoon, Unifor national president Jerry Dias addressed Unifor members and their allies who had blockaded the road to General Motors Canada headquarters.

The blockade on Colonel Sam Drive was set up around 6 a.m. on Jan. 23 to protest GM's decision to close its Oshawa plant.

"You have no idea how proud I am of you and thankful for everyone being here today," Dias told about 100 people at the blockade just after 2 p.m. "Because this is not just about our members at GM, it's not about our members at the supply plants, this is about the community in Oshawa, this is about (GM's) determination to turn Oshawa into Flint North, this is about our commitment to ourselves and each other — working class people — and we're just not going to let them get away with this."

GM issued a statement calling the union's actions illegal.

"Illegal actions like these affect third parties and cannot be condoned," said GM Canada spokesperson Jennifer Wright. "GM's work will not be affected today as we are prepared with alternate plans."

Dias responded that he thought it was illegal to take a bailout from Canadian taxpayers and then to announce the closure of the Oshawa plant and to end operations in Oshawa before Unifor's collective agreement expires in September 2020.

"When we talk about what's illegal, I suggest to you it's illegal for a company to announce a \$6-billion profit in the first nine months of their year and then announce they're going to close our assembly plant and pay their employees in Mexico \$2 an hour," he said. "So if we want to talk about what's illegal we should also talk about what's immoral."

He said the union was not going away in its fight to save the Oshawa plant.

"What is happening here today is going to happen tomorrow it's going to happen on Friday, it's going to happen in different locations ... we're going to see you in the auto show that runs until the 27th, the simple reality is we are not going to stop."

Despite the protests, Dias said he was not calling for a boycott of GM because of the plant workers in Ingersoll and St. Catharines who continue to build GM products.

Durham Unifor members were joined by union members from Windsor as well as members of other local unions.

Victor Pierrynowski, Newmarket resident and a retiree from Unifor Local 112 at Bombardier Aerospace, joined the blockade in the morning.

"I'm here to support (Unifor) Local 222 to save Oshawa General Motors," he said. "It has a big impact because if General Motors falls the rest are going to follow."

Oshawa NDP MPP Jennifer French joined protesters at the blockade on Wednesday morning.

"I wanted to come out and stand in solidarity, rally with our local workers and it has been quite a day," said French. "Obviously it's miserable weather, but the commitment is awesome and I think that speaks volumes about the commitment of our workers. We've got folks from across the province who have driven in and I'm glad to see that kind of support."

J. Additional Resources

Articles

“The First Theatrical Landmark of the Trump Era” by Michael Schulman in The New Yorker, March 20, 2017:

An in-depth look into Lynn Nottage’s biography, the creative process behind Sweat, and the play’s political resonance:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/27/the-first-theatrical-landmark-of-the-trump-era>

“‘They just told my story’: What happens when a play about union busting tours Rust Belt cities” by Peter Marks in The Washington Post, October 2, 2018:

An account of The Public Theatre’s mobile unit tour of Sweat through American cities plagued by unemployment, poverty, addiction and other impacts of deindustrialization:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/they-just-told-my-story-what-happens-when-a-play-about-union-busting-tours-rust-belt-cities/2018/10/02/13a43648-c376-11e8-8f06-009b39c3f6dd_story.html?noredirect=on

“In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation” by Matthew Desmond in The New York Times Magazine as part of “The 1619 Project”, August 14, 2019:

An advanced, in-depth look at how American colonialism, slavery and cotton plantations shaped America’s economy:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html>

“No one cares till someone dies: El Paso activists long feared their city was at risk” by Vivian Ho in The Guardian, August 14, 2019:

The racism, xenophobia and violence portrayed in Sweat reads like a precursor to the waves of anti-immigrant sentiments and mass violence we have experienced in recent years. Use this article to begin a conversation about how the seeds of hatred as witnessed in Sweat, can grow, yielding devastating impact:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/13/el-paso-far-right-white-supremacists-racism>

“Dangerous idiots: how the liberal media elite failed working class Americans” by Sarah Smarsh in The Guardian, October 13, 2016:

Written at the same time that Sweat was opening at the Public Theatre, this essay is an excellent companion read to attending Sweat:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/oct/13/liberal-media-bias-working-class-americans>

Videos

“Lynn Nottage on the origins of SWEAT”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcReO9WfWeQ>

“Mobile Unit National: The Public Theatre”:

Watch this brief video for an extraordinary example of community engagement – New York’s Public Theatre touring production of Sweat to “rust belt” communities, offering free public performances for people whose lived experiences reflect those of the characters in the play:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsgR4SG58EQ>

“Painkiller: Inside the Opioid Crisis” by Matthew Embry:

In Sweat, the characters Tracey and Brucey both provide glimpses into opioid addiction. The play predates North America’s current public health crisis of opioid addiction and overdose deaths but provides an opportunity to engage with this vital topic. Watch this 43 minute Canadian documentary to delve into this important topic through a compassionate lens:

<https://www.telus.com/en/health/personal/painkiller?linktype=subnav>

“Opioid abuse in Ottawa’s booming construction industry” by Jean Levac, from the Ottawa Citizen:

Check out this brief five-minute video for an excellent personal account of opioid addiction and its connection to physical labour (the work people do in *Sweat*). The link includes a summary article as well as links to further reading on the topic:

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/building-an-addiction-why-construction-workers-are-so-prone-to-opioid-addiction>

Services

The Canadian Government website provides information about **naloxone** – a life-saving drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Naloxone kits are available to anyone at most pharmacies:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/opioids/naloxone.html>