

Robbie McCauley's *Primary Sources*: creating routes to an alternative public sphere

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Abstract:

In this paper, I argue that *Primary Sources*, a series of three community-based theater productions by African-American artist Robbie McCauley, constituted creation of an alternative public sphere in the locations across the United States where it was produced and presented in the 1990s. These productions provided an important forum for the airing of conflicting ideas and emotions about issues of race, class, education and law enforcement and clearly spurred examination of deeply embedded social and political attitudes in revised, more informed ways among many participants. *Primary Sources* can thus be seen as a model for artists and activists who aim to open paths of their own to alternative public spheres as well as a source of insight for researchers who seek to link theories of democratic publicity with front-line struggles in community activism and social change.

Key words: public sphere, theater, race relations, Mississippi, Boston, Los Angeles

Introduction

From 1991 to 1996, African-American artist Robbie McCauley created and presented *Primary Sources*, a series of three performance theater works dealing with race

relations in the United States, using pivotal events from the 1960s and 1970s in Mississippi, Boston and Los Angeles as her starting points. She certainly was not the first artist to focus on this subject matter nor the last, but in many ways her approach to these themes has been unique within an American art world that has increasingly seen, supported and at times debated the merits of social issue-oriented subject matter developed in community settings. I will attempt to show that these three productions, in the ways they were formed by McCauley and her community collaborators and then used by audiences, constituted the creation of an alternative public sphere as defined by radical social theorists such as Claude Lefort and Nancy Fraser. Perhaps under-recognized at the time of inception, *Primary Sources* today merits renewed attention for the important insights it can provide into how new spheres of democratic publicity might be opened for the benefit of those traditionally marginalized within contemporary society.

Though there were antecedents for *Primary Sources* in McCauley's earlier artistic production, and most of her subsequent work has built upon it, this paper will focus on the three works in this series: *Mississippi Freedom* (1992); *TURF: A Conversational Concert in Black and White* (1993); and *The Other Weapon* (1994). In considering McCauley's work of the last thirty-five years, it is clear that *Primary Sources* was both a testing ground and a watershed for her thinking about the role theater can play within popular discourse on social issues. As then-director of The Arts Company, the non-profit organization that produced the series, I had the rare perspective of both participant and observer as the story of each production unfolded.¹

A brief history of *Primary Sources*

Mississippi Freedom was the first of the three, premiering in Jackson, Mississippi, on 29 May 1992 and subsequently touring to six theaters and community centers throughout

the state later that year.² Many of the characteristics of the series as a whole were present in this initial project. The piece was created in the Jackson area in collaboration with local artists and other residents and was based on personal stories of the freedom riders and the voting rights struggle in Mississippi in the 1960s. On initial visits, McCauley had extensive conversations about the proposed subject matter and goals of the project with local actors, storytellers, singers, activists and 'ordinary' citizens. She subsequently chose eleven collaborators with different racial, class and educational backgrounds, ranging in age from early 20s to late 60s, who worked intensively with her for approximately a year.³

Though McCauley ultimately was the director and scriptwriter of *Mississippi Freedom*, these eleven played crucial roles in its creation and presentation. McCauley was in residence in Mississippi for about one third of the piece's total development time, and while she was away her collaborators collected most of the personal stories for the work by interviewing fellow residents of the state (referred to as 'witnesses') who had lived through or been significantly affected by the civil rights struggle. Though all of the collaborators lived in Jackson by the early 1990s, the original homes of many were elsewhere in the state, allowing them to identify and tap into the stories of people with a wide range of perspectives on the civil rights era. [Figure 1 approximately here]

Their own stories and attitudes about race relations at the time figured significantly in the production as well. All eleven actually performed in *Mississippi Freedom*, and McCauley used an unusual technique for involving them in creation and presentation. Only the last several meetings of the group were traditional rehearsals. Most of the cast's get-togethers with McCauley consisted of intense dialogues about race, class, politics, religion and sexuality, and there were many fights, tears and silences mixed in with reasoned conversation. With the cast's consent, a good deal of what went on in

private became public as it was mixed with excerpts from the interviews and improvisational material in the performances. And one of the key contributors to the effect *Mississippi Freedom* had on audience members was that most seemed to know that individual performances were partly in the first person singular. Though understandably a little nervous about it, the cast and McCauley were open about this aspect of *Mississippi Freedom* in pre-show publicity, much of which occurred on talk radio.

All segments of *Primary Sources* were scripted by McCauley in a collage of past and present stories, songs, slide projections and video -- she has called it 'a jazz-like, organized improvisation' and 'conversational music that reflects the language of ordinary people' (Cieri 1992). As such, it was not a linear retelling of stories and experiences, nor did the actors appear as single or discrete characters throughout the performance. In this way, identity had a way of floating from one performer to another; for example, whites sometimes said things that were actually expressed by blacks and vice versa. Because of this, meaning was not static either, and could change depending on the context in which dialogue or action was portrayed.

Each performance of *Mississippi Freedom* lasted approximately one hour and twenty minutes, including a couple of breaks for levity and the passing around of food. At the conclusion, there was always a 'talk-back' period of an hour and a half or more, when most audience members stayed to tell their own stories about the civil rights era and discuss the meaning and contemporary import of the many social issues raised by the piece. In this way, the audience played a large part in shaping the tone and content of each evening.⁴ McCauley and the cast set the drama in motion, and audiences were responsible for adding much of the unique content, analysis and emotion each night.

The other installments of the series, *TURF: A Conversational Concert in Black and White* and *The Other Weapon*, were created and presented in Boston and Los Angeles over fourteen- and nine-month periods, respectively. *TURF* explored issues of education, race and class relations in Boston over the previous two decades by probing the impact of the controversial 1974 court order to desegregate the city's public schools. *The Other Weapon* focused on stories of the Black Panthers and issues of community empowerment, race relations and law enforcement in Los Angeles over several decades. There were many carry-overs in methodology from the first piece in the series to these two, but a few modifications and/or additions also were made.

For example, in Boston, *TURF* was purposely presented in four distinct neighborhoods of the city⁵ that were closely associated with the busing controversy and issues of race and class that arose in its aftermath. The hope was that this would attract local residents who were not regular theatergoers but might be inclined to come to a performance dealing with issues they cared about if they did not have far to go to see it. In Boston, this seemed to work well, not only in this regard, but also in bringing people from other sections of the city and the suburbs who clearly stated in the talk-backs that they wanted to hear from and engage in conversation with people from these neighborhoods and from different races and classes. [Figure 2 approximately here] A similar strategy of neighborhood-based performances was followed in Los Angeles with less success -- there was one section of the city (Inglewood) where people of all races seemed disinclined to go because of perceived danger.⁶ Blacks, whites, Asians and Latinos in Los Angeles were drawn to the same locations (Hollywood and Westwood), where conceivably they felt safer and were accustomed to going, even if they lived in South Central, East LA or Inglewood.⁷ [Figure 3 approximately here]

Beyond the considered location of performance spaces, many other efforts were made to attract a diversity of people to *Primary Sources* and to make it a true forum for the airing of public opinion. Ticket prices were kept low and sometimes were free, as in mostly poor-to-working-class Lexington, Mississippi.⁸ Presentation partnerships were formed with a number of social service, activist and artistic groups in each location to strengthen local ties to the project and to spread a before-the-fact understanding of what might develop.⁹ In Mississippi and Boston, especially, the press was instrumental in getting the word out about what was planned.

Perhaps most important were the dozen or so collaborators in each location, who were the ones most visible on the ground during each piece's development as well as during performances.¹⁰ These people were known in their communities and were seen as actively engaged in projects dealing with socially contested issues. There was also a concerted attempt to present the pieces in intimate settings that would be conducive to the conversational nature of the performances and to the talk-backs afterwards, and, when these couldn't be engaged, seating was limited within larger spaces. Most performances played to capacity or near-capacity audiences of 100-150 people, though there were a few instances of audiences numbering 200-300. On most evenings, there was a mixture of race, ethnicity, age and residential location that is rare at most art, social or political events in the US.

In Mississippi, overall audience make-up was about 65 percent black to 35 percent white, ages pre-teen through 80s, with poor and working class as well as middle class representation. In Boston, a number of evenings, especially in the traditionally white enclaves of South Boston and Charlestown, featured dialogue among people who otherwise have little contact with each other: black and Hispanic teenagers and white businessmen, white working class mothers from South Boston and their more affluent

suburban counterparts, lifelong residents and newcomers to the area. On one evening in Hollywood, the audience included several self-identified former Black Panthers; students from five different colleges; the mother and several supporters of a young black man who was considered a political prisoner by part of the black community; a Hollywood film director and a group of preteens and teens from Watts; as well as Asian, Latino and white attendees from different sections of Los Angeles. One must ask the question: when does it ever happen that people from such diverse backgrounds and points of view get together and talk with each other?

Taking routes to democratic publicity

For this and related reasons, the three productions within *Primary Sources* created an alternative public sphere, an arena where people who are not often heard in traditional public settings were able to tell their stories, listen to and argue with others and debate the conditions and consequences of the current structure of American society.

Mississippi Freedom also toured to New York City and Houston, and *TURF* was made into a one-hour radio program that was aired on dozens of National Public Radio stations across the country in 1996 with live call-ins involving McCauley, some of the Boston performers and residents in six different listening areas. In slightly altered ways, these expansions of *Primary Sources* also constituted extensions of this newly created public sphere, one in which non-normative communications and connections between people from diverse backgrounds were being made. [Figure 4 approximately here]

There also were indications *Primary Sources* held long-term significance for many of those involved, sometimes spurring them to take specific actions. For example, a new parents' school liaison group was established through the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center in Lexington after *Mississippi Freedom* was presented there, the result of parents and children alike talking with cast members and to each other about the

struggle for civil rights and issues of rural violence, education and religion. Two of the actors from *Mississippi Freedom* started a multi-racial collaboration to work with teenagers in the Jackson public schools. McCauley has since created pieces similar to *Primary Sources* in the Czech Republic in collaboration with the Roma and in western Massachusetts with a rural, working class population that lost their homes to construction of a reservoir in the Swift River Valley.

Additionally, people who participated as audience or collaborators approached McCauley or myself for several years afterwards to say that their involvement altered their thinking in some important way or, in the case of some cast members, transformed them even more deeply. For example, one middle-aged white man in the Boston production who had been a closeted homosexual said that because he had been able to deal with racial prejudice on stage, he had found the courage to come out in his home community of South Boston, even though virulent homophobia had been quite evident there. But the reality of everyday life is such that most people find it extremely difficult to remain actively engaged in any type of public discourse, even if they have the will to do so. It can be said that both the dominant powers within society and the very structure of that society militate against it.

Constitution of an alternative public sphere, in theory

Debates about the existence and nature of the public sphere have figured prominently in social theory since German sociologist Jurgen Habermas in the 1960s first posited the public sphere as a hallmark of bourgeois society. In his view, the bourgeois public sphere is the place where people leave behind or transcend their identity and interests to act on behalf of the common good. A major goal in Habermas' public sphere is a unanimity and universality based on the possession and exercise of reason by public man as opposed to the emotion and economic drive that rules the private sphere, which

he felt must be kept separate. Though Habermas knew that the ideal of a universalizing public sphere was never fully realized, and that it actually masked bourgeois avarice, he still upheld the ideal not only as something to work toward and but as something from which we had fallen, even in its imperfect state (Habermas 1974).

But many subsequent theorists such as Bruce Robbins (1992); Iris Marion Young (1990); Nancy Fraser (1992); Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) have pointed out that Habermas' lost ideal of the bourgeois public sphere never really existed, and that it is in fact a dangerous concept in that it excludes most people from full social interaction on the basis of their race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religion or any number of other differentiating factors. They have maintained that 'the private,' of which these categories are considered a part, should not be seen as separate from the public because such a view leads to oppression of those outside the channels of mainstream power and to protection of 'private' practices (such as sexual abuse and questionable business practices) that ought to be subject to public scrutiny and challenge.

Some of these contemporary theorists therefore have called for recognition and/or creation of 'alternative,' 'subaltern' or 'counterpublic' spheres, where those who have traditionally been marginalized from the public sphere of official society can participate fully in the democratic process. In opposition to the notion that the public sphere should be harmonious, these theorists posit that all public spheres and public spaces (even the idealized bourgeois kind) must include conflict and contestation in order to truly exist.

As Fraser has pointed out, subaltern public spheres have been present in western societies for nearly 200 years, and they arose precisely because of the exclusions through which formation of the bourgeois public sphere was accomplished (1992: 5-7)

Moreover, Fraser has maintained that the existence and creation of subaltern public spheres should not preclude permeation of one public sphere by another:

The point is that there are no naturally given, *a priori* boundaries here. What will count as a matter of common concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestation. It follows that no topics should be ruled off-limits in advance of such contestation. On the contrary, democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so (Ibid.:20)

French theorist Claude Lefort has provided one of the most comprehensive criticisms of dominant notions about public space and the public sphere as well as one of the most emphatic declarations of the creative potential of contestation within the public realm. Seeing that these dominant notions about public space are used by both the left and right, and at their extreme can contribute to totalitarianism, he has attacked them on several levels: that as long as public space is associated with social unity, particularity and conflict are seen as its downfall; that social unity is derived from the idea that there is an absolute foundation (which renders demands from those who deviate from the norm, such as gays, the homeless, welfare mothers and racial minorities, invalid and even destructive of the social order); and that a claim to exercise of power in public spaces is not only authorized by this foundation but is part of a natural order, therefore beyond debate.

What Lefort has put forth instead is an idea of public space that directly attacks foundationalism and is dependent on the upholding of democratic principles: 'I have said that the survival and extension of the public space is a political question. I mean by that that it is the question that lies at the heart of democracy' (1988:43). According to Lefort, democracy presupposes questioning of the social order and uncertainty about the foundations of social life. Without questioning, he believes there is no democracy, and the public sphere is the place where this questioning can occur. It is also where

new political forces can insert themselves into the debate. And within his theory, the extension of rights to all levels of human differentiation is essential to the existence of public space and the public sphere (1988).

...and on the ground, through Primary Sources

I maintain that this and related radical reformulations of the public sphere are what *Primary Sources* and similar projects by McCauley are all about. Elements of these theories are evident in the everyday language of people who attended the performances and of journalists who either reviewed the works or reported on their social impact. Here are some examples:

From an African-American woman who saw *TURF* in the Dorchester section of Boston: 'It was near 12:00 [midnight] when we left, and I could have sat there all night because that's what we need, I see the need so much...talking -- that's one way to start -- and really getting to know each other.' (Williams 1993)

A Boston theater reviewer: 'In fact, one of the most exciting parts of the performance was the discussion with the audience afterward. The relaxed atmosphere and the familiar feeling with the actors gave audience members the freedom to talk about their own prejudices and perhaps begin to think about them in a different way.' (Byrne 1993: 58).

'I went thinking that I might stay for an hour or so because I had elsewhere to go, but I stayed,' said Father Coyne, pastor of St. Catherine's Church in the Boston neighborhood of Charlestown. 'I thought it was honest. I lived through busing. I'm still living through it.'¹¹ (Hernandez 1993:1).

From a Jackson, MS, reporter, writing about *Mississippi Freedom*:

It's not some Broadway or Hollywood interpretation. The informal, non-fiction script... is illuminating instead of condescending...For both performances, a multiracial Jackson cast drew large multiracial crowds who remained in sweltering heat in the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center's sweltering auditorium to see this thoughtful work...As part of the play, the audience discussed modern questions: Did integration work? Are we really sharing lives? 'Mississippi Freedom' is dramatically positive, culturally inclusive and philosophically expansive. It speaks to every American. (Myers 1992: 1F)

A Los Angeles newspaper writer referring to *The Other Weapon*: 'The ensuing dialogue [with the audience] invites a self-actualizing introspection on the part of the participants; this dialogue may very well be McCauley's underlying purpose.' (*The Los Angeles Reader* 1994) [Figure 5 approximately here]

And from a frustrated theater reviewer from *The Boston Globe*, who perhaps unknowingly expressed observations and opinions that fall on both sides of the theoretical argument about the public sphere:

For a number of reasons, it left me profoundly disturbed, terribly confused, and grappling for words...Wounds are opened. Rage is unleashed. But the piece fails to channel this raw emotion into an organic whole....One thing is certain, though: people are talking. After Saturday night's performance, the sit-on-the-floor room only audience stayed for a post-performance discussion that was both engaging and enraging...None of it, I tell you, none of it is easy. But if 'Turf' has accomplished anything, it proves a need for a forum. In this city, it's rare to sit in a packed theater discussing the issue of race. That alone is testament to the fact that people are starving for serious theater that asks serious questions. (Hartigan 1993:52)

McCauley's own views about these projects are an interesting mixture of aesthetic reflection and social and political analysis. In a subsequent interview, she had this to say about *Primary Sources*:

My goal is to find that meeting place or that public space, or else to make it happen. And why do that? I think it can be a place where art and people meet around an event that I see and that they see as something that has affected their community. I think that through the craft/art of acting, that

event can be listened to and talked about and transmitted through imagery that then reaches out to the larger community. That probably doesn't sound terribly unique, but I think what is important is really using the acting craft in ways that have to do with listening. (McCauley 1999)

Some of the most compelling things that *The Boston Globe* reviewer said about *TURF* were that it left her 'profoundly disturbed... grappling for words,' that 'wounds are opened,' that it didn't gel 'into an organic whole,' that 'none of it is easy.' This was said mainly as a criticism of the event, and the implication in part is that people should have come away from *TURF* feeling better, more secure by having been provided a distilled knowledge of the world, and that social conflict is perhaps not something that should be part of our experience of art, or of the public sphere for that matter. But according to Lefort and Fraser, this is precisely what is needed to ensure democratic publicity.

This was not the first time this type of reaction surfaced in response to *Primary Sources* in its six years of development and presentation. It happened frequently when sites and co-sponsors were being sought for presentation. For example, in Hattiesburg, MS, The Arts Company had been working for several months with the drama teacher at the public high school to present *Mississippi Freedom* there. Local residents had said the school would be the best place to attract a diverse audience to the work. Only a few weeks before the performances, The Arts Company was informed that the principal had removed *Mississippi Freedom* from the schedule because he was not in favor of discussions about race at the high school.¹²

In Los Angeles, a number of potential co-sponsors lost their initial interest in the project when they found out the extent to which the piece and talk-backs would be sites for public airings of difficult stories about race, law enforcement and other controversial topics. While scores of National Public Radio stations across the country agreed to air the prerecorded radio version of *TURF*, many of those asked to add a call-in element to

discuss issues of race, class and education on a local or regional level were clearly reluctant to do so.

On a more individual level, several cast members of *Primary Sources* initially had difficulties with the project because they did not want to appear politically incorrect or to expose their vulnerability or group-member prejudices on stage. And in all three production regions there was fear among some potential interviewees that speaking freely would result in negative repercussions. In Los Angeles, especially, some residents anticipated violent reactions if they talked about certain issues and events related to conflict within the black community.

'It's better not to talk about it' was a comment that from time to time was privately and publicly put forth to the *Primary Sources* organizers and collaborators. Sometimes this could have been construed as a personal reluctance to expose oneself in the public sphere, but more often it seemed to be a message from those with some degree of social and political power that dissent from outside the dominant and 'unified' public sphere is not acceptable.

This latter attitude was most clearly exposed in South Boston, resulting in an extraordinary meeting between Robbie McCauley, myself and approximately 20 local politicians, community leaders and residents who in some way had been involved in the busing controversy of the 1970s. The meeting occurred just a few weeks before the scheduled opening of *TURF* at the Boys and Girls Club of South Boston, and McCauley and I were summoned to justify why we should be allowed to present the piece in the community. After ninety minutes of discussion, heated argument and some tears from at least one mother whose children had been bused, the majority of the group decided that the show would go on. In the words of the director of the Boys and Girls Club, 'The

population of South Boston is changing, we see it at the club, so I think it's good for the kids who come here if we start talking about race. They're going to have to deal with it sooner or later anyway.' (Cieri 1993b)

Partly because of this, and because of related disagreements about showing *TURF* in South Boston, the piece was featured on National Public Radio twice and on the front page of *The Boston Globe* (Hernandez 1993). Seen from a certain standpoint, this allowed the public sphere of *Primary Sources* to break into the dominant public sphere in a way that is unusual for a small-scale, non-profit arts event.

McCauley's reaction to the South Boston meeting was typically complex and considered:

That meeting, it was very different from what I expected. I was very moved because I felt that the people I would consider having totally different views from mine were sympathetic. Just seeing the normal discourse that came out of all that tension at first. That was also the first time I had heard that statement, 'We thought we were doing the right thing' [about busing]. And I believed it. We also heard that one guy say, 'Oh, you're talking about art. You're not coming here to put us down.' I experienced that people listened to us and maybe something happened at that meeting as well as in the performances. And there was relief in the room toward the end. People think to bring up race is so dangerous that they have to be afraid, and that whole experience with South Boston was a way of just dealing with that. (McCauley 1999)

One of those who had tried to block the South Boston performances behind the scenes was the director of operations for all the Boys and Girls Clubs in Boston. A resident of South Boston and at first a supporter of the project, his head was turned by a number of conservative power brokers in South Boston who warned that *TURF* could stir things up in the neighborhood. He ended up being quoted in *The Boston Globe* after *TURF*'s run at the Boys and Girls Club: 'Robert D. Monahan, 38, ...said he saw the play at the Strand Theater in Dorchester on March 19 so that he would know what to expect at the

South Boston clubhouse. 'I thought it was OK in presenting a very complex and emotionally charged topic....It lacked the intensity and the passion of the actual events.' After a moment, Monahan added: 'If it came across too intense, perhaps the dialogue might not have happened. It remains a very emotionally charged topic. No doubt about it.' (Hernandez 1993: 1) [Figure 6 approximately here]

Through this conciliatory statement, Monahan was also able to position himself as a protector of the unity and public order of the neighborhood. Despite its lack of 'intensity' and 'passion,' *TURF* was, in fact, said to stir up trouble in South Boston, when a racial incident occurred soon after at the local high school. McCauley's reaction to the perceived connection was this: 'I don't believe it. People keep saying it's better not to dredge this up, just forget about it, but forgetting doesn't make it go away. If the circumstances are there, it's going to break out one way or another.' She then talked more about the role of conflict in her work and within the public sphere:

I'm not sure that people who are in charge don't want conflict. They want conflict on their own terms, with their own definitions of the sides and so forth. So I'm much more interested in what emerges from the meeting that includes differences. And I'm not saying that the result is that the conflict is resolved. The result is that people ultimately can behave differently around the subject matter because of listening in the middle of the conflict, speaking in the middle of the conflict in a way they don't have a chance to, and that the art, the music of language and the aesthetics of the content allow a kind of listening and transformation that I feel is different from the other public sphere, where people neither have an opportunity nor are able to look at things differently. (McCauley 1999)

This strong statement from McCauley convincingly argues not only for the existence of alternative public spheres within societies that aspire to democratic process but also for the role of theater, created with and within specific communities, to provide the conditions necessary for constructive public contestation and transformation to occur.

Routes to the future?

It seems clear that *Primary Sources* opened up avenues to an alternative public sphere in the places it was presented. This was achieved in part through a number of strategies and practices employed by McCauley and The Arts Company, among them extensive community involvement from inception onward; situating performances within communities and neighborhoods that had specific and long-standing connections to the histories and issues portrayed; presentation within intimate and familiar settings that proved conducive to the conversational nature of the performances and talk-backs; and a press that was often willing to engage in as well as record the attendant discourse as it unfolded.

Perhaps most important was the fact that voices known to the community past and present were featured, whether through interview material woven into the performances or enactment of storylines by recognizable figures from the local area. As many viewers noted, listening to what is generally unspoken in public and witnessing how a community, through the medium of the performers, might engage in productive contestation, provided a powerful framework for the talk-backs and broader discussions that followed. As McCauley has stated, her work is geared toward offering audiences the opportunity to 'behave differently' around charged subject matter, and to potentially carry that new behavior out of the theater and into the world at large.

But theater has its limitations too – of time and space, and of participant memory and energy. It also costs money to produce, even within a grassroots, non-profit context, especially when a primary goal is to be inclusive and to bring socially relevant theater to communities where the issues involved are lived on an everyday basis. When contemporary societies make priorities for spending, generally very little goes to the arts; for that matter, very little goes towards any endeavor that would open current

power structures to true democratic publicity and the possibility of significant social change.¹³

Testimonies have been made as to how *Primary Sources*, at least temporarily, filled a broadly felt need for democratic discourse about deeply embedded social issues, and how for some it provoked profound changes in thinking and personal courses of action. The opportunity for the productions themselves to function as non-normative public spheres has faded with time and distance, however, so the challenge becomes one of taking lessons learned from *Primary Sources* and putting them to productive use now and in the future (Cieri and McCauley forthcoming). This might again be within the context of community-based theater, but could also appear within other contexts such as community organizing, development of alternative media, or grassroots protest. McCauley's work offers important insights into effectively breaking down barriers to creation of an alternative public sphere as well as providing a basis for further scholarly research that aims to link theories of democratic publicity with front-line struggles in community activism and social change.

Acknowledgements

[to be added]

[Notes, References and Captions – click on View/Footnotes to reveal]

Notes

¹ Except where noted, much of the content of this paper has been derived from The Arts Company archival material and, to a lesser degree, recollections of the author.

² The premiere was at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in Jackson. Subsequent performances took place in September and October 1992 at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center in Lexington, Alcorn State University in Lorman, Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson, Delta State University in Cleveland and Millsaps College back in Jackson. We tried to secure performance spaces where blacks and whites alike would be inclined to go, and we found that college facilities were often the best (sometimes the only) options, especially in rural locations.

³ They were Ona Banks, Veronica Cooper, James Green, Willie Horton, Deborah Imboden, Dick Johnson, Kent Lambert, Sadat Muhammad, Sameerah Muhammad, Sheila Richardson and Kay King Valentine.

⁴ In Mississippi, talk-backs sometimes occurred during the performance as well.

⁵ the South End, Charlestown, Dorchester and South Boston.

⁶ In fact, on the night before the Inglewood opening, police imposed a curfew on males under the age of 21 because of recent gang violence.

⁷ The fourth Los Angeles performance site was a theater in South Central.

⁸ The Arts Company is a non-profit organization which depends in part on admission fees to finance the projects it produces and presents. If it had been financially possible to offer all performances for free, it would have been done in keeping with the idea of *Primary Sources* as a public venue. Interestingly, community partners in Los Angeles were opposed to the idea of free or nominally-priced tickets, as they felt potential attendees consequently might view *The Other Weapon* as an amateur undertaking. The Los Angeles ticket price of \$10 for adults was the highest in the series.

⁹ For example, community cosponsors for *TURF* in Boston were the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston (Charlestown, Roxbury and South Boston clubhouses); and the United South End Settlements. In Los Angeles, they included KA/OS Network; the James S. Coleman African Studies Center, the World Arts and Culture Program and the African Arts Ensemble at UCLA; the Labor/Community Strategy Center; the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations; Southland Cultural Center; Crossroads National Education and Arts Center and the Vision Complex; and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE).

¹⁰ McCauley appeared in each performance, but either as an ensemble member or as an 'outsider'/observer of the proceedings.

¹¹ This front-page story appeared the day after the last performance of *TURF* in Boston.

¹² On short notice, the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg agreed to host the performances in one of its theaters.

¹³ The situation regarding private funding is a bit different: while some private foundations, individuals and an occasional corporation will underwrite arts productions having an agenda for social change, they very rarely provide funding to sustain presentation of existing work; preference generally is given to creation of something wholly new.

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Figure Captions:

Figure 1 Some *Mississippi Freedom* collaborators and 'witnesses' on a road just outside Jackson. Left to right: James Green; Veronica Cooper; Leroy Divinity (a witness); Kay King Valentine; Deborah Imboden; Sameerah Muhammad (partially

hidden); Kent Lambert; Clarie Collins Harvey (a witness); Sadat Muhammad; and Sheila Richardson. Source: author, May 1992.

Figure 2 Mari Novotny Jones, between Juanita Rodrigues and Janice Allen, in a scene from *TURF* that offered differing perspectives on education and race in Boston. Source: Jaye R. Phillips, courtesy The Arts Company, March 1993.

Figure 3 Left to right, Robbie McCauley, Denise Uyehara, Raquel Salinas, Lyvingston Holmes, Jane Zingale and Charley Hayward in a scene from *The Other Weapon* (photo projection of Black Panthers and Los Angeles police in background). Source: Martin Cox, courtesy The Arts Company, March 1994.

Figure 4 Performance of *Mississippi Freedom* at the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center in Lexington, MS, on 26 September 1992. On stage, left to right, are James Green; Sadat Muhammad (in shadow); Kent Lambert; Ona Banks; Deborah Imboden; Sameerah Muhammad; Robbie McCauley; Dick Johnson; Willie Horton; and Kay King Valentine. Note the small degree of separation between actors and audience (dark figures in the foreground). Source: author, September 1992.

Figure 5 Robbie McCauley tells the story of Black Panther Geronimo Pratt in *The Other Weapon*. Source: Martin Cox, courtesy The Arts Company, March 1994.

Figure 6 Left to right, actors Paula Elliott, Juanita Rodrigues and John Ennis recording *TURF* for National Public Radio broadcast, May 1996. Source: author, May 1996.