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# Periphery



Docudrama  
by  
Ed Simpson

# Periphery

**Docudrama. By Ed Simpson.** *Cast: 8 to 9m., 4 to 8w., extras if desired.* The February 1960 sit-in by four young college freshmen at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, galvanized the civil rights movement in the United States. In the process, ordinary citizens from both the black and white communities in Greensboro—and across America—were forced to grapple with their beliefs about race and justice. Utilizing both dramatic and comic scenes, monologues, and dramatized news reports, *Periphery* focuses on ordinary citizens—particularly two families, one black and one white—whose lives are touched by the changing world around them. The central stories in *Periphery* are not those of the courageous “Greensboro Four” but instead include those who stand witness to the historic events in this Southern city—those on the periphery of the sit-in demonstration—who must choose between continuing the injustices of the past or moving forward toward a more just America. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes. Code: PG8.*

*Community Theatre of Greensboro under the direction of Bill Raulerson featuring  
(l-r) Alison Williams, Hayden Crawford and Tashia Dorsey.  
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By  
ED SIMPSON



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(PERIPHERY)

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For Ola Conrad...  
With love and gratitude.

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*Periphery* was first produced on May 14, 2008, by the Community Theater of Greensboro, Greensboro, N.C., Mitchel Sommers, executive director, under the direction of Michael Kamtman, with settings by David Bell, lighting by Lindsley Thompson, costumes by Bob Smithey, and stage management by Adrienne Blocker, with the following cast:

Young Man . . . . . Antonio DeGraffenreaidt  
Hazel/Jerry’s Mom . . . . . Lynne Buchanan  
May/Elderly Woman . . . . . Armina Thurman  
Margaret . . . . . Angela Williams Tripp  
Billy . . . . . Hayden DeCosta Crawford  
Mike . . . . . Adam Young  
Debbie . . . . . Rachel Roberts  
Eugene . . . . . Bobby Pittman  
Deirdre . . . . . Latoya Harris  
Phil . . . . . Doug Brown  
Nate . . . . . Jeffrey L. Wall  
Red . . . . . Jeremy Engel  
Jerry . . . . . Andrew Speakman  
Jenny . . . . . Sarah Calvin  
Newspaper/Editorials/Chorus . . . . . LaShon R. Hill,  
Eric Justice, Joe Toler, Andrew Speakman,  
Rachel Roberts, Lynne Buchanan,  
Armina Thurman, Angela Tripp Williams



*Periphery* was subsequently produced on February 18, 2011, by the Community Theater of Greensboro, Mitchel Sommers, executive director, under the direction of Bill Raulerson, with settings by David Bell, lighting by Lindsley Thompson, costumes by Bob Smithey, and stage management by Ashby Petigrew, with the following cast:

Young Man . . . . .	Hayden Crawford
Hazel/Debbie/Jenny . . . . .	Alison Williams
May/Elderly Woman/Mother . . . . .	Pat Shumate
Margaret/Yvonne . . . . .	Tashia Dorsey
Billy/Lawrence . . . . .	Woodrow Bumbry
Mike . . . . .	Lee Wilson
Eugene . . . . .	Bobby Pitman
Deirdre . . . . .	Dorothy Lennon
Phil/Editorials . . . . .	Matthew Giehl
Nate . . . . .	James Sims
Red . . . . .	Darren Kern
Jerry . . . . .	Thomas Barker
Chorus . . . . .	Ensemble

# PERIPHERY

## CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

YOUNG MAN . . . 20. A well-dressed African-American student.

PHIL/EDITORIALS . . . 40s. White. Calm, thoughtful and strong.

MAY/DEBBIE/MOTHER/CHORUS TEN. . . . . 20s. White.

HAZEL/CHORUS NINE/JENNY/ . . . . . 20's. White.  
ELDERLY WOMAN

MARGARET/CHORUS EIGHT/. . . 30s-40s. African-American.  
YVONNE

BILLY/CHORUS FIVE/LAWRENCE . . . . . 30s-40s.  
African-American.

EUGENE/CHORUS ONE. . . . . 18. African-American.

JERRY/CHORUS TWO . . . . . 20s. White.

NATE/CHORUS THREE . . . . . 40s. African-American.  
Proud and powerful.

DEIRDRE/CHORUS FOUR. . . . . 18. African-American.  
Pretty, strong.

RED/CHORUS SIX . . . . . 30s. White with reddish hair.

MIKE/CHORUS SEVEN. . . . . 18. White, studious.

## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

Various locations in Greensboro, N.C., February-April 1960.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SETTING**

Panels of photographs depicting the people, place, and events of the 1960 Woolworth's sit-in demonstration are scattered about the upstage areas. The actors remain onstage throughout, sitting on chairs. The various locations are suggested by a few selected set pieces and props which are moved into place by the actors.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

The action of the play should be continuous, without pause for scenic and costume changes.

The actors who play multiple roles effect the changes in full view of the audience, using the addition of simple costume and props pieces.

Throughout the play, a pre-recorded "Broadcast" is heard over the action. If desired, the "Broadcast" lines may be assigned to members of the chorus.

Although this script calls for 8 men and 4 women, more actors may be used for ensemble and chorus roles if desired.

*Periphery* is performed without intermission.

# PERIPHERY

SETTING: *Various locations in Greensboro, N.C., February 1960.*

AT RISE: *In silhouette we see the ACTORS sitting in various positions scattered about the upstage area, leaving playing areas at center stage and on either side.*

*LIGHTS UP on the YOUNG MAN who stands center.*

YOUNG MAN. It was personal. We really hadn't planned on starting anything. (*He nods and laughs slightly.*) I'd ridden a bus all day, coming back to school after being away for Christmas. And I was tired and I was hungry. I had maybe a dollar in my pocket, maybe not that much. Last half hour coming into Greensboro, all I could think about was taking that dollar and buying something good to eat. So I hopped off the bus at the station, took my dollar... (*A beat, then, in measured tones.*) And I wasn't allowed to sit down in the bus station restaurant and eat. I wasn't allowed. And that was it. I walked back to school, back to Scott Hall, filled with anger, filled with...indignation. (*A slight laugh.*) And still hungry. My roommate, a couple of other guys down the hall—we talked about it that night, the four of us. Like we had done so many times that year already. We were young,

all of us freshmen. And we kept talking about it the next night...and the next night and the next until finally...we got tired of just talking about it. (*A beat.*) See, we didn't like the idea of not having our dignity. Of not having respect. So...

(*LIGHTS OUT on YOUNG MAN and up on MAY and HAZEL, side by side, at a counter.*)

*As they "ring up" unseen customers we hear the BROADCAST.*)

BROADCAST (V.O). "At 4:30 p.m. yesterday, four Negro freshmen from Scott Hall at A&T College—"

MAY. That will be two fifty-six. (*She takes "money."*)

BROADCAST (V.O). "—sat without being served—"

HAZEL. One thirty-eight. (*She takes money.*)

BROADCAST (V.O). "—at the downtown F.W. Woolworth Company store."

MAY (*to "customer"*). And thank you.

HAZEL (*to "customer"*). Come back.

(*MAY's feet are killing her.*)

MAY. Lord, Hazel—

HAZEL (*watches her customer walk away*). I like that color, don't you?

MAY. Hmmm?

HAZEL (*motioning*). On her.

MAY. The blue?

HAZEL. Well, it's turquoise, isn't it?

MAY. Is it?

HAZEL. I don't know. (*She looks away and she sees something at the lunch counter.*)

MAY. Hmmm. (*She looks at her watch.*) Oh—almost four thirty.

HAZEL. Well, now what...?

MAY (*sighing loudly*). Just hang on another hour.

HAZEL. My Lord—

MAY. I know, I am worn out. My feet are just...

HAZEL. No—

MAY. Thank God Herb's taking me to Guilford Dairy for dinner. I am *starving!*

HAZEL (*taps MAY on the shoulder*). Look!

MAY. Hmmm?

HAZEL. Do you see that?

MAY. What—?

HAZEL. At the counter.

MAY (*finally looks toward the counter*). The counter—?  
(*She sees. A shocked beat.*) Oh, my—

HAZEL. See? (*They stand together, looking toward the counter.*)

MAY. Well, now isn't that—?

HAZEL. What are they *doing*?

MAY. What *are* they doing?

HAZEL. Don't they know—?

MAY. Didn't they ask—? (*A beat.*)

HAZEL. Well, they can't just—

MAY. I *know*.

HAZEL. I *mean*—

MAY. They just can't.

HAZEL. He was just over here.

MAY. Which one?

HAZEL. That one—with the glasses.

MAY (*simultaneously*). —with the glasses, that's right. I sold him a...something.

HAZEL. A notebook.

MAY (*simultaneously*). —book, right. *And* pencils.

HAZEL (*nodding*). That's right.

MAY. Well... (*A beat as they shake their heads.*)

HAZEL. He *seemed* like a nice young man.

MAY. Very polite.

HAZEL. Very well-spoken.

MAY. So why would he—?

HAZEL. I guess you just don't know.

MAY. You can't judge a book by its cover.

HAZEL (*a beat as she looks around*). Where's Curly?

MAY. Where *is* Curly?

HAZEL. I don't know— (*MAY looks around for the manager.*) Shouldn't somebody tell him?

HAZEL. *Somebody* should tell him. I mean, he's the manager. He's around here somewhere.

MAY. The manager should know. (*A beat.*)

HAZEL (*slowly shaking her head*). Do you *believe* this?

MAY (*slowly shaking her head*). I don't believe this.

HAZEL. Me either.

MAY. I do *not*.

HAZEL. They just can't—

MAY (*nodding*). I know.

HAZEL (*shaking her head*). I *mean*—

MAY. I *know*. (*A beat as MAY nods and HAZEL shakes.*)

HAZEL. What're they trying to do?

MAY. Sitting at the counter...

HAZEL. *Honestly*.

MAY (*pointing*). There's a sign.

HAZEL. It's right there—

MAY. Plain as day.

HAZEL. It's just not their place.

MAY. Maybe somewhere else but not here.

HAZEL. Not here. (*A pause.*)

MAY. What should we *do*?

HAZEL. What *should* we do?

MAY. I don't...I don't know. (*A beat.*)

HAZEL. What are they doing?

(*LIGHTS UP on "the kitchen" at Woolworth's. MARGARET, a kitchen worker, wiping her hands on a towel as she looks toward "the counter."*)

MARGARET. Good Lord...?

(*BILLY enters, carrying a tray of dirty plates and glasses.*)

BILLY (*irritated*). Damn! You see that?

MARGARET. What're they doing?

(*BILLY is agitated and sorting the dirty dishes, plates and silverware.*)

BILLY. Oh, man, now this is something—

MARGARET. Must not know—

BILLY. This is somethin' *else*! Damn—!

MARGARET. Must be from outta town, sittin' there like that.

BILLY (*turns to her*). Naw! They not from outta town. They from the college!

MARGARET. What?



BILLY. I've seem 'em here before.

MARGARET. From the college?

BILLY (*continues sorting the dirty dishes*). Damn college fellas, comin' in here, actin' like they're all grown, bein' all "respectful." Damn!

MARGARET. Then they know they're not supposed to be in here, sittin' there, doin' what they're doin'. (*A beat.*) What *are* they doin'?

BILLY. They *think* they're makin' some kinda statement.

MARGARET. A statement?

BILLY. Damn!

MARGARET. Disgraceful.

BILLY. Well, I got a statement for them—y'all got all this time to sit around a damn lunch counter, y'all oughta be in class, college boys!

MARGARET. Why're they actin' so ignorant and disrespectful?

BILLY. 'Stead, y'all come down here where people got their business, where people tryin' to make their *livin'*?

MARGARET. Trying to stir up trouble.

BILLY. I mean, damn, you ever think about *that*?

MARGARET (*shaking her head*). Uh, uh, uh...

BILLY. You ever think they don't see the difference? They don't see the difference! White folks look at them, they look at *me*, they don't see this hardworking brother needs his job.

MARGARET. Uh-huh.

BILLY. What they *see* they look at me is some disrespectful colored boys, makin' it hard on everybody else when they should be in school takin' them classes so they can better them-damn-selves instead of tryin' to eat this nasty Woolworth's food!

(MARGARET looks at him as the LIGHT comes back up on MAY and HAZEL.)

BILLY (*con't*). Damn! I work here—you think I wanna eat that mess? I don't wanna eat this mess! (*He sees MARGARET looking at him.*) No offense.

HAZEL. Well, somebody needs to say *something*.

MAY. Somebody ought to—

MARGARET. Well, I'm gonna snatch 'em bald. (*She steps forward.*)

BILLY. Damn statement!

HAZEL. I'm going to say something.

MAY. I think you should.

(HAZEL steps forward.)

MARGARET. Come on—get along now—

HAZEL. Excuse me—

MARGARET. You know you're not supposed to be in here.

HAZEL. Young man—

MARGARET. Y'all get back to your business and stop bein' so ignorant.

HAZEL. We don't serve colored here. (*A beat.*)

YOUNG MAN (*quietly*). I'm sorry...but you just served me at a counter right over there. I bought a notebook and two pencils. Why is it you take my money at one counter but won't take it at another?

HAZEL. Well, because... (*A beat.*) That's just the way it is.

MARGARET. Stop your sassin' and go on!

HAZEL. We are closed.

*(LIGHTS OUT on the store.)*

YOUNG MAN. We didn't know what to expect when we went in. Figured we might get arrested, figured we might get thrown into jail. Might even get beaten up. We just didn't know. And, really, it didn't matter.

BROADCAST (V.O). "The students stayed until the store closed at 5:30 p.m. The four left without further incident."

*(Lights up on the CHORUS of BLACK and WHITE ACTORS.)*

CHORUS ONE. Did you hear about it?

CHORUS TWO. Did you see it?

CHORUS THREE. Something in the paper—

CHORUS FOUR. Something on the TV—

CHORUS FIVE. I watched it—

CHORUS ONE. I saw it—

CHORUS SIX. On the TV—

CHORUS THREE. I read it—

CHORUS FOUR. In the paper—

CHORUS SEVEN. The four of them—

CHORUS ONE. Big as can be—

CHORUS TWO. College boys—

CHORUS THREE. Just kids—

CHORUS FOUR. Sitting there—

CHORUS SEVEN. Just *sittin'* there—

CHORUS ONE. Lookin' straight ahead—

CHORUS SIX. Straight ahead—

CHORUS ONE. Quiet—

CHORUS THREE. Strong—

YOUNG MAN. I walked out of the Woolworth's and I felt as if I were...invincible. I felt clean and relieved. And we went back to our dorm that night to tell the others.

*(LIGHTS OUT on YOUNG MAN.)*

CHORUS FIVE. Did you see it?

CHORUS FOUR. Did you hear it?

CHORUS EIGHT. Did it even happen?

CHORUS FIVE. I saw it—

CHORUS EIGHT. I read it—

CHORUS FIVE. It happened—

*(LIGHTS out.)*

*LIGHTS up on EUGENE, a freshman at A&T.)*

EUGENE. I heard them! Last night—right after they got back. Bunch of us in the basement of Scott Hall, we'd heard about it, didn't really believe it. But they came back and talked to us. Told us everything. They said they just...walked in and sat down. *(Shakes his head.)* I couldn't believe that at first. But this one guy, Franklin—lives down the hall from me? I swear, he came in tonight and he looked different. Changed. It was... power. It was like he had this light in his eyes. He said it was the first time in his life he didn't feel afraid. He seemed bigger than life and when he talked, he was...he was alive. *(A beat.)* They want us to join them. *(He frowns, thinking it over, suddenly uncertain.)* Tomorrow...