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*Dramatic Publishing*

# SMOLDERING FIRES

By  
KERMIT FRAZIER



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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For  
Eliisa and Katja,  
my two wonderful daughters

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*Smoldering Fires* was commissioned by and premiered at the First Stage Children’s Theater, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on January 27, 2006. The director was Rob Goodman. The production included the following:

**CAST**

Emma Johnston/Marcher . . . . . Sheri Williams Pannell  
 Delroy Tyler/Marcher/Neighbor/Martin Luther King Jr./  
 Community Leader . . . . . Chiké Johnson\*  
 Juanita Tyler/Marcher/Neighbor . . . . . Libya Pugh\*  
 Willis Patterson/Marcher . . . . . Anthony Wills Jr.\*  
 Bogus/Marcher/Neighbor/Mayor . . . . . Joseph Hemphill  
 Mr. Crawford/Marcher/Preacher/Drug Buyer/  
 Teacher . . . . . Michael A. Torrey\*  
 Bull Conner/Neighbor/Teacher/Drug Buyer/  
 Police Chief . . . . . Dan Katula\*  
 Alex/Police/Neighbor/Thug. . . . . Alexander Knapp•

Understudies . . . . . Tina Machele Brown, Kemaine Holland

<b>YOUNG PERFORMERS</b>	<b>Freedom Cast</b>	<b>Hope Cast</b>
Corey Tyler	Joel Boyd**	Justin Gaworski**
Dashaun Johnston	Christopher D. Stone**	Josiah Williams**
Keisha Tyler/Marcher	Alayah Walls**	Keelee Roggenbuck**
Gerald	Jeremy Warwick	Sam Markwardt**
Evelyn/Hip Hop Girl	Trinity Little**	Kelli Kimbrough
Rose	Lashanda Slade**	Julia Burke**
Harold Matthews/Marcher	Lonnie R. Smith**	Ryan Green**
Jetts/Marcher/Neighbor/Thug	Derrek Carter	Wesley Haas**
Marcher/Suburban Woman/ Police/Student	Carole Alt**	Emily Widen**
Police/College Guy/Student	Chris Osterndorf	Josh Greiveldinger**

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Scenic Designer . . . . . Felix E. Cochren, USAA  
Costume Designer . . . . . Daryl Harris  
Lighting Designer . . . . . Christopher Brown  
Mask & Puppet Designers . . . . . Max Samson  
Sound Designers. . . . . Ernie Brusubardis, Ted Brusubardis  
Music Director . . . . . Sheri Williams Pannell  
Production Stage Manager. . . . . Mark Baughman\*

*\* Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.*

*\*\* Denotes students of the First Stage Theater Academy, the second largest theater training program for young people in the country.*

*• Denotes First Stage Children's Theater performance intern.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Rob Goodman and Max Samson for giving me the opportunity to write this play.

Also thanks to the Blue Mountain Center for providing me with a place to begin writing it.

# SMOLDERING FIRES

## CHARACTERS

Dashaun Johnston . . . . . 12 years old  
Corey Tyler . . . . . 12 years old  
Emma Johnston . . . . . Dashaun's grandmother, 49  
Delroy Tyler . . . . . Corey's father, 35 years old  
Juanita Tyler . . . . . Corey's mother, 31 years old  
Keisha Tyler . . . . . Corey's sister, 9 years old  
Willis Patterson . . . . . drug dealer, 25 years old  
Bogus . . . . . drug addict, early 20s  
Harold Matthews . . . . . 13 years old  
Mr. Crawford . . . . . neighbor, middle-aged  
Alex . . . . . drug hawker, 16 years old  
Jetts . . . . . drug tout and runner, 15 years old  
Rose . . . . . civil rights marcher, 12 years old  
Gerald . . . . . civil rights marcher, 14 years old  
Evelyn . . . . . civil rights marcher, 16 years old  
Bull Connor . . . white man, Birmingham police chief, 40-50  
Martin Luther King Jr.

*All above, except Bull Connor, are African-American.*

Various African-American students and neighborhood folks; also teachers, public officials, police, drug buyers, marchers, demonstrators of various ethnicities.

TIME: The present—and into the past.

PLACE: An American city.



NOTE: For the original production of the play, masks and puppets were designed. For example:

- Huge moving and talking head for Bull Connor
- Realistic-looking snapping dog
- A ten-foot, shoulder-mounted Willpower in Dashaun's nightmare scene
- Huge bobble heads for Mayor, Police Chief, and Community Leader in "public form" scene
- Masks for Bogus, Mr. Crawford, Preacher and nearly all nonspeaking roles

This excerpt begins on page 6 of the text.

*After a moment, the neighborhood sounds fade out as the lights rise upstage on a park that slightly overlooks the neighborhood and more fully overlooks the city's riming, newly revitalized downtown, which is so near yet so far away. The park itself is rather rundown, unkempt.*

*DASHAUN and COREY run in from UR and then down to their special "hang," a part of the park where they hang out at times after school and on the weekends.)*

COREY (*breathlessly*). Caught you and beat you. (*They take off their backpacks while catching their breath.*)  
I'm always gonna be faster than you, D.

DASHAUN. Maybe. But you ain't never gonna be as big.  
Or as fly.

COREY. And that's why you got it on with Harold?

DASHAUN. No. Wasn't about all that. It was nothing.

COREY. Nothing? It was enough to make you miss my book report.

DASHAUN. Oh, yeah. How was it? Bet it was tight.

COREY. Tight as can be. (*They pound fists.*)

DASHAUN. You got an "A"?

COREY. "A plus."

DASHAUN. Man, see. There you go again. That's why I be getting C's and D's in English.

COREY. What do you mean?

DASHAUN. Okay. It's my theory of balance, see. I figure that the whole class has got to be balanced out. And you keep on stretching the class way, way up there. So to even it out, somebody's got to be stretching it way, way down here.

COREY. And that somebody's got to be you?

DASHAUN. Hey, what are friends for?

COREY. You're crazy.

DASHAUN. I know. *(They laugh.)*

COREY. But hey, check it out. *(COREY takes his paperback copy of Freedom's Children from his backpack.)*

DASHAUN *(reading the book cover)*. "Freedom's Children." Must not be about us.

COREY. No, but it *is* about black kids. How they marched and demonstrated and fought for integration. You know, the civil rights movement.

DASHAUN. Oh, yeah, all that stuff way back when.

COREY. Not so way back. Wanna read it?

DASHAUN. Man, you know reading gives me a headache.

COREY. This won't.

DASHAUN. I don't know, Corey. Shoot, if they fought so hard for integration, how come we don't have any around here?

COREY. Huh?

DASHAUN. Well, integration is like mixing, right? Folks all mixed up together?

COREY. I guess. Sorta.

DASHAUN. Well, do you see any white people living around here?

COREY. Okay, but that's not the only thing about integration. I mean, we can go anywhere we want to now. Movie theaters, stores, amusement parks, beaches. Back then black people couldn't even use the same drinking fountains as white people.

DASHAUN. I know all that. I know we can "go" places. But people ain't always happy to be seeing us when we *do* go places. *(Looking downstage toward downtown.)*

It's almost like they wanna be stopping us sometimes. White people's eyes all up on us like we're gonna be ripping them off.

COREY. Not all of them. Just because some white people don't like us doesn't mean they all don't.

DASHAUN. And just 'cause they like *you* don't mean they like me.

COREY. Well, I know one or two *black* people who don't like you either.

DASHAUN. Fo' sho'.

COREY. Why'd you fight him *this* time?

DASHAUN (*reluctant to say*). I don't know... I just wish I had me some better clothes.

COREY. You look all right.

DASHAUN (*defensive despite himself*). I know I look all right.

COREY. He talked about your clothes? (*DASHAUN says nothing.*) Man, don't you even *wanna* graduate from middle school?

DASHAUN. Yeah, like *tomorrow*, yo. (*Looks up at the sky.*) Man, I sure wish I had me a pilot's license. And my own personal jet. I'd be able to go anywhere at any-time.

COREY. You'd be a great pilot.

DASHAUN (*confidently*). Yeah, I know. Zooming across the sky. (*Looking around.*) And maybe I'd even drop a bomb or two on certain rundown things around here.

COREY. It'd be better if we could fix stuff up. This ole park, some of the houses. And kick out all the drug dealers.

DASHAUN. Well, you can forget that. They ain't going nowhere ever.

COREY. They will if my moms and pops have anything to say about it.

DASHAUN. Yeah, they're all right, your moms and pops.

COREY. Your grandma's not so bad either.

DASHAUN. Except when she gets on me. Also, she's getting kind of old all of a sudden. Gonna be fifty soon.

COREY. Fifty?

DASHAUN. Uh-huh. And I got about zero dollars to buy her a present with.

COREY. Wow, fifty!

DASHAUN (*begins beating out a rap rhythm, rapping*).

To make fifty put the five and zero together

It'll make you feel cool no matter the weather

Or not you're too hot or going down slow

To the sto' on the corner

Whenever you wanna

'Cause you're still my fine grams

Who cooks me chicken and ham

And all the other things I like

To keep me hopping and psyched

And... (*Faltering.*)

And... got no more rhymes in my head

Cause...

COREY (*rapping*). Your feet's full of lead.

DASHAUN. Yo, what?

COREY. Just trying to help.

DASHAUN (*begrudgingly*). Thanks.

COREY. I know. You could finish that rap and make *that* your grandma's birthday present. That'd be free.

DASHAUN. Naw, it's got to be a thing. A big, expensive thing!

COREY. But you don't have any money.

DASHAUN. I'll get me some somehow.

COREY. You could bag some groceries.

DASHAUN. Chump change.

COREY. Not if you keep saving it.

DASHAUN. Shoot, I'd be fifty myself by the time I'd saved enough. (*Reflectively.*) I just want stuff, Corey. You know?

COREY. I know. Me, too.

DASHAUN. A big ole house.

COREY. A big back yard.

DASHAUN. A big-screen TV.

COREY. A little red sports car.

DASHAUN (*almost without thinking*). A girl I can talk to. (*He and COREY look at each other, both a little embarrassed. They just as quickly look away.*) Well, you know...

*(A siren SOUNDS in the distance. COREY jumps and looks at his watch.)*

COREY. Oh, man, I'm gonna be late.

DASHAUN (*jumping up*). Yeah, let's bounce.

*(COREY and DASHAUN hurry off UR as lights cross-fade from the park to the neighborhood street and street SOUNDS rise again slightly.)*

*The boys dash onto the street. Only a couple of people are around. In addition, WILLIS looms UL in the shadows.)*

COREY. See you tomorrow, D.

DASHAUN. Yeah, all up in school.

COREY (*taking out the book*). Wait, the book.

DASHAUN (*looks at the book, then takes it reluctantly*).  
Thanks.

*(The boys pound fists. Then COREY exits DL just as WILLIS comes downstage to DASHAUN, who puts the book in his backpack.)*

WILLIS. Yo, little bro'. (*DASHAUN turns to WILLIS.*)  
What's going on with you, man? How you be?

DASHAUN (*coolly*). A'ight.

WILLIS. Good, good. Listen, like I'm gonna be straight with you, okay?

DASHAUN. Okay.

WILLIS. 'Cause there's still space in my crew for somebody as bright and ambitious as you. You feel me?

DASHAUN. Yeah.

WILLIS. And like I know there's got to be all kinda things you need that your grams can't get for you. Not that she don't be working hard, but you know what I mean.

DASHAUN (*somewhat wary*). Yeah.

WILLIS (*putting his arm around DASHAUN*). So look here. Walk a ways with me some.

DASHAUN (*looks around quickly*). Awright.

*(DASHAUN walks UR into the shadows with WILLIS just as the lights come up DL on the Tyler home. There, JUANITA TYLER, a 31-year-old black woman and Corey's mother, is at the dining room table writing. [She's drawing up a petition.] KEISHA TYLER, Corey's 9-year-old sister, is practically circling her mother.)*