



Marcus Gardley on *An Issue of Blood* and *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*

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As the **Chicago Commons Producer** for HowlRound, I spend a lot of time thinking, talking, and writing about Marcus Gardley's work, which means I spend a lot of time thinking about structural racism. This topic is in the two plays Marcus has written while in residence at **Victory Gardens Theater**. Marcus's first premiere, *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*, set in Englewood, was a response to the harrowing gun violence present in many neighborhoods in Chicago. His second piece, *An Issue of Blood*, was an abrupt switch in programming. Marcus felt he couldn't finish the play he originally set out to write. Instead, he had to respond to the current state of police brutality and the murders of African Americans, and the response it engendered. Marcus began writing his new play less than three months before its scheduled opening night, which is a testament to his collaboration with Chay Yew, the Artistic Director of Victory Gardens.

An Issue of Blood takes place in colonial Virginia during the year 1676. It's an anachronistic time period that doesn't respond to the racial violence of 2015 on the surface. However, Marcus rewinds back to the early moments of slavery in America to revisit the economic incentives for a massively expanded slave trade that are the roots of the structural racism alive and well in our society today.

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During spring 2015, I spent hours watching rehearsals and runs of *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*. I heard audiences talk to one another formally and informally after the show, while accompanying Marcus and Victory Gardens staff to community programs across the city and to youth workshops in conjunction with local organizations that sought to reduce gun violence. The casualty rate for some neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago mirrors that of the civilian casualty rate in Bagdad during the height of the Iraq War. This fact belies the city's nickname "Chiraq."



Boarded up homes are common sights in Englewood, the setting for Marcus Gardley's *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*. Photo by Dan Plehal.



While Englewood ranks as one of the city's most violent neighborhoods with an average income well below Chicago's average, it is also a vibrant neighborhood, an image not often depicted on the news. Photo by Dan Plehal.

From Marcus's first Victory Gardens premiere to his second, the violent murders by police officers of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Grey, and **countless others** sharply changed the national conversation on

race and exposed the ugly realities of institutional racism, broken models of law enforcement, and the historic marginalization of blacks in America, all of which have fundamentally shaped the geography of major American cities like Chicago and the inequalities that exist in their neighborhoods.

The South Side of Chicago, by far the largest geographic area of the city, is a diverse swatch of the city, which has strong cultural communities, a rich history of art and activism, gorgeous green space, renowned universities, and cultural institutions. It also houses a significant portion of Chicago's poverty and gun violence.



One of the young men who showed our photography team around the neighborhood. He works with I Grow Chicago, an Englewood organization focusing on yoga and meditation, sustainable farming, and visual arts.

Photo by Dan Plehal.

Geographically, three of the 119 theatres registered in the **League of Chicago Theatres** are located on the South Side, including the University of Chicago's Court Theatre, and the recently relocated Redmoon Theater. By contrast, the affluent neighborhood of Lincoln Park, in which Victory Gardens is located, has twelve theatres in its three square miles.



A side street in Lincoln Park, one of the most sought after residential neighborhoods in Chicago. Photo by Dan Plehal.



One of a few sit-down restaurants in the neighborhood, Kusanya Café is a not for profit that serves as a connecting hub within the community. Englewood falls into one of Chicago's major "food deserts" with no major grocery stores in its area. In a controversial move, a Whole Foods plans to open in the neighborhood in 2016.



By contrast, upscale boutiques and national chains crowd the streets surrounding Victory Gardens Theater.

Photo by Dan Plehal.

Tasked with writing about *The Gospel Of Lovingkindness*, I wanted to accompany Marcus's words about his work to describe what it means to tell the story of Englewood, one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods, while physically standing in Lincoln Park, one of the city's wealthiest zip codes. Although the neighborhoods Marcus writes about are historically and systemically deprived of adequate resources from city and state governments, these neighborhoods deserve more than characterizations of violence and poverty.

Beyond discussing the visual vibrancy of Englewood, I hope to illustrate how Lincoln Park's prosperity is the direct result of unified effort to shift the demographics of the neighborhood, most dramatically by destroying the infamous housing projects of Cabrini Green after the city-mandated eviction of its residents. What remained were vacant lots, which are now under construction for condos and luxury stores.



An abandoned church adjacent to the land that held Cabrini Green. Today, a new shopping development dubbed “New City” is rising on the land where the infamous housing project once stood. Photo by Dan Plehal.

The complex systems of privilege, equality, and hegemony mark Chicago’s neighborhoods, contributing to the continual system of racial oppression and police brutality that we

see today.

The complex systems of privilege, equality, and hegemony mark Chicago's neighborhoods, contributing to the continual system of racial oppression and police brutality that we see today. Marcus's plays unearth these systems through the eyes of his characters in *An Issue of Blood*. My hope is that his words and photos from the production will reflect the embedded systems of privilege and structural racism inside our own beloved institutions in the theatre.

Scene from *An Issue of Blood* by Marcus Gardley

ACT ONE

Nova Goode, age unknown, out of breath, runs onto the back porch and stops before her husband, Dozens, age also unknown, who sits on a stool shelling peas. It is 1676.

NOVA

I have some news to tell you, my husband. But I'm afraid it just might kill you.

DOZENS

Then don't tell me.

NOVA

But I must. I must get this off my chest before it breaks my heart into pieces.

DOZENS

Then be quick about it, my wife. I'm old. I don't have enough years left on my life to sit through one of your prologues so get to the plot.

NOVA

Well, I can't just spit it out like a loose tooth. This news is heavy. I'm going to need to sit somewhere so I can get this weight off my back.

She waits for him to give up his seat, he does.

DOZENS

I thought you said it was on your chest, now it's on your back too?
Sounds like it be everywhere but coming out of your mouth-

NOVA

—Do not start on me this morning, Dozens Goode—

DOZENS

—I wouldn't have to start on you if you started telling your story./Ain't you supposed to be a Griot? What kind of Griot can't tell a story?

NOVA

/I'll tell it when I gets ready to tell it! I don't tell you how to tell your tacky tall tales. I have to warm up to it—

DOZENS

—It's too hot for you to be warming up! Hurry now and speak!—

NOVA

—The field hands are going to revolt!!!

DOZENS

Woah. Come again.

NOVA

The field hands: them boys who work in the fields with their hands.

They're going to revolt! I overheard them whispering when I was in the tobacco fields this morning.

DOZENS

You mean to say you were eavesdropping on the again.

NOVA

I mean to say I was in the fields when they were *easily dropping* whispers that drifted into my ear this morning. T'was early: Mother Dawn had already danced over the Red Hills and now she was picking up her sun from the river and lifting his golden face into the sky. Myself: I was walking by the tobacco fields, gathering flowers for the wedding when I overheard them—the field hands. They said they're going to set fire to their master's crops and houses then meet on the main road to form an army and burn Jamestown to the ground. There's going to be a slave revolt, my husband. These Negroes done lost their godforsaken minds—

He moves her away from possible earshot.

DOZENS

—Shhh! Are you sure they said they were going to revolt?

NOVA

Well they didn't use that word but what else you call it when slaves take up arms, set fire to crops and burn down their master's houses. I wouldn't call it a country picnic, I'd call it a barbecue! I better go to tell our Mistress! She must be warned!—

DOZENS

—Hold your thighs! We can't get involved in this. We're House Negroes. House Negroes are only supposed to tend to matters concerning the house.

NOVA

But they're going to burn down the house. And with us in it.

DOZENS

So, this ain't our house! We were bought by the mistress to be servants in the house, which means we're here to serve not to protect. We need to just keep quiet, then right before dusk falls we'll run for shelter in the hills. If we tell our mistress what the field hands are up to, who do you think they're going to put their hands on next?

NOVA

Those men would never harm you; you're like their father.

DOZENS

Don't matter, they're angry. Even in this red heat, I can feel their rage coming to a boil. Word in the wind say the Virginia Courts are trying to pass a new law legalizing lifetime slavery for all Negro servants. Can you imagine? Forced to be a slave for your entire life when you were told you only had to be an indentured servant for several years! These colonists are getting so rich off of Negro labor that they are even willing to bend laws to feed their fat bellies and England's great mouth. Now the courts will pass this law in three days if somebody doesn't fight back. If folks don't demand their rights as human persons, they'll seed this very earth with our blood.

NOVA

Mercy. Just listen to yourself. If I didn't know you any better, I'd assumed you'd had joined the revolt yourself, my husband. *(beat.)*
My husband, have you joined the revolt yourself?

DOZENS

—Sometimes a man has to follow his own convictions—

NOVA

—Well, don't this skin the cat—

DOZENS

—He has to do his part so others will look in the annals of history

and know, that somebody stood against tyranny.

NOVA

But I'm your good woman. How can you stand anywhere without me by your side? How can you even stand for long? Don't you got two trick knees?

DOZENS

I'm standing on the memory of our son! And it's too dangerous for you by my side, that's why I keep you in here: in my heart. I'm your husband and a husband's duty is to protect his wife. I'm protecting you sugar lumpkin—

He tries to kiss her neck, she moves.

NOVA

—Keep you're lump of sugar, I need you to be alive. We'll be free in three years. We just need to be patient; we'll have our own land, our own farm—

DOZENS

—Woman, ain't you listening? They're taking our freedoms. In three years, we'll not only be slaves, we'll be old slaves. The time to act is now. We're going to do it tonight right before dusk when the guests are heading back home from the wedding. We want to see the masters' faces as they watch their houses burn. Then we'll meet on the main road, march into Jamestown and burn the courthouse to the ground. But first I must set fire to this house; even these walls here must come down.

NOVA

What about John-Israel? He's going to lose all of his wealth if you burn down his house and crops. It's his wedding day, his first day home and this is how you plan to welcome him?

DOZENS

He's not our son, woman—

NOVA

—He's my heart.

DOZENS

Is that so!? And if you moved him in there, tell me, where do I stay?

—

NOVA

—On my nerves, mostly! That boy is the closest thing to a babe that I've got and I care a great deal about him. I can't sit idle; won't stand idly by knowing his life is in danger.

DOZENS

You think he'd do the same for you? Open your eyes! John-Israel was gone for three years in England and he didn't write you once. Then the minute he gets back to Jamestown, he shacks up in some cottage ten miles from town with a gal nobody's seen, doing God knows what and the devil knows how. He didn't even come by the house to tilt his hat or holler 'hello.' Then has the gall to send us a work note, telling us to prepare for his wedding.

Wake up, wife! He treats you like his mammie not his mother—

NOVA

—Bite your tongue! I'm the only mother he's got since the one upstairs found Jesus and lost her mind. And truth told, I didn't want to do it, didn't want him coming back since there's a curse on his life but... I miss him so. He's still my boy.

DOZENS

He's a master, not a boy! When he comes back you'll see how the white world has turned him. Money makes masters of all men—

NOVA

—Mercy!! Would you listen to yourself, you don't even sound like you.

It must be the heat. Come, sit. Let me fix you a cool glass of water and we shall wash our hands of this—

He grabs her softly.

DOZENS

—I know this is hard for you to swallow but I've bit my tongue for thirteen years and now it's time for me to speak, to act. I'll do what I can to make sure the boy is safe... but I've still got to burn down this house. It's the only way to make sure we are not slaves for the remainder of our lives. And I implore you. Do not mention a word of this to our mistress or her son. Do not betray your husband.

NOVA

But you know I can't keep a secret to save my life—

She tries to break free but he grabs her.

DOZENS

—Look at me! You will keep this secret. A wife's duty is to serve her husband. You've served this house for thirteen years now I believe it's time that you served me.

He lets her go.

NOVA

You're a fool for following those field hands. The law is going to hang you!

DOZENS

Who says I'm a follower. Look at me good, my wife. Your husband's the leader.

This news hits her like lightning.

Rebecca Stevens: Can you talk about where the impulse to write *An Issue of Blood* came from? What made you want to go from writing about present day Chicago to Colonial America?

Marcus Gardley: Writing a play about Chicago in the present made me feel like there was a larger conversation that needed to be had. There are so many areas you can't touch when you talk about socio-political issues because most plays tend to be very short. We only spend an hour or two experiencing them and they are grounded in character. And you don't want it to be "message-y," so you pull back on the things you actually want to discuss. There are a lot of things in [*The Gospel of Lovingkindness*] that I could not discuss, but I felt needed to be talked about. What was so interesting was placing [*An Issue of Blood*] in history. There was a nice interplay between both the history we know and the history we don't know, which gives you the language to talk about what's happening today. I actually find it has a more profound effect. What people are really responding to is "Oh no, oh things have not changed!" and *that* gets people caught up emotionally.

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Rebecca: The first play you wrote as part of this residency was about the current crisis of gun violence on the South Side of Chicago. *An Issue of Blood* takes place in the year 1676 in Virginia. Did it feel different to write a play for a Chicago audience that was based in the south? Or did it feel like you were talking about a national issue that needed to be addressed?

Marcus: It's definitely a national issue. What's interesting about Virginia is that it's the first colony and in some ways it's a national symbol. It's not quite "Southern" as we know it during this period, but it has what we would consider today a Northern sensibility. Later in history Virginia becomes part of the South, and by then they had basically killed all of the First Nation people. Things changed immensely to become the Virginia that we know now. Even the land looked different.

Rebecca: Typically in the American theatre, plays take years to go from a first draft to a premiere, usually with lots of developmental stages along the way. Can you talk about going so quickly from page to stage affected your process?

Marcus: Plays for me gestate. I do think the plays that I write take about seven years, but I'm meditating on them for four or five years. I've learned there's no sense in going to the pad right away. I'll think about an idea, and then two or three ideas will join and they'll start. There will be two or three characters that have arcs, there'll be a central story, and there'll be a serious conflict. For me, my ideas need to somehow resonate in the present and there needs to be a purpose for writing it. I'll get a pad, jot notes down, and do book research for a year until it turns into a play.

I decided to write this play at the last minute because I already knew I wanted to write about this period—I've always been

obsessed with this period. But that is all that I had. I didn't have any characters, a story, or anything that comes from research. I knew I wanted to talk about issues that were happening in our country now—Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice. I knew I wanted to touch on that and issues that we face in Chicago, so it all came together in a beautiful, but fast way.

Rebecca: Can you talk about writing a play that directly dealt with a current social issue?

Marcus: I think that American theatre doesn't want you to be too topic oriented. I don't think there are enough venues where we can have an honest discussion about it. And the reason why is not because we don't want to, but that we don't have context. If I wrote a play that was happening now, it could feel like an exposé, or a news report. But when you deal with history, the foundation of this country, you realize a couple of things. For starters, laws were based upon race not because people thought, "I'm better than you"—that's the mistake we make. Instead, the logic was, "I want your money" or "I want you to work for me for free so I can have a whole bunch of money." When you talk about race in terms of economics, a strong truth arises and it's almost too much. I think the problem is no one wants to talk about capitalism. We'd really have to deal with our shit, right? So what I am talking about is capitalism and how greed influences all sides. In some ways, greed has transcended race, but nobody wants to call greed out by its name. Racism feels like a social construct that overtime we can fix; but capitalism, how do we fix that? Fixing that will topple the country because everything's founded on capitalism. We're not founded on democracy and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That is not our foundation, but making a profit was.



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Rebecca: Let's talk about the sometimes comedic-tone of *An Issue of Blood*, which surprised me. Was that something you discovered in the course of writing it? Or did you set out to deliberately play with humor and tragedy and what we expect a discussion about race to sound and feel like?

Marcus: These are such beautiful questions. When we traverse in this period, there are very few stories—let alone plays—about this period. From what I've seen, anything about colonial times, or even the revolutionary war is humorless.

Rebecca: That's so true! I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts, and I have spent my whole life childhood surrounded by colonial reenactments. And it's a bastion of earnestness.

Marcus: Precisely! It's this Puritan, prudish, proper society, which we know couldn't be true for everybody. People laugh and that's just a part of human nature. So, I wanted to show a different tone in the period. The truth is that we laugh and cry with the same muscle. There's an authenticity about crying out of laughter, rather than manipulating people into tears. If I drench people in tragedy, and then something awful happens at the end, it feels dishonest to me.

I'm just speaking about my own work and there are other people that can do this very well in their work. But for me, it feels like I haven't given you the complete spectrum of who these people are. If you start with the comedy, it's different. And these people use comedy to not only express joy to one another but also they know something's coming, and it's denial that's creating laughter.

Rebecca: In *An Issue of Blood*, the local sheriff stops the main character—a wealthy, free black man recently back from Europe—and demands to see his papers. The scene is so striking because it speaks to the historical moment of the play and the present moment of harassment and brutality by law enforcement towards African Americans. How much did you intentionally look for those moments? How did writing about a historical time period parallel to the time period you're actually writing in?

Marcus: I purposefully did not look for moments that were parallel because I didn't want it to feel like I was manipulating history. What was fascinating about this period is that the aforementioned scene actually happened all the time. I mean the shock of a wealthy person of color ordered to show their freedom papers is both fascinating and devastating.

There are also other moments that evoke emotional responses. I had some friends see the show and they were upset about a play where a black man chases after a white woman. [Laughter] You know, I thought, "OK, right!" It's interesting because the whole point of her being an indentured servant didn't matter because they only saw her as white. I thought that was so fascinating, and a bit disturbing. In this period, there would be no delineation between the Irish servant and the black servant. In other words, servants were seen as servants. Today, we can't get our minds around that because in this country, racism really fucked us up.

Rebecca: I think that's why the Negro Mary, the matriarch and

planation owner, is so brilliant. Her “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” rhetoric is something I usually locate in the mouth of a different kind of person, but this makes her worldview really exciting.

Marcus: I'm toying with all of that. The thing I wanted to do was open a conversation. The only way to have a conversation is to give people the space where they have to deal with their own shit. For most of us, you have to deliver a shock—you have to give the audience electrocution. Then they realize, “Oh, wait a minute, these Irish people joined forces with First Nation people who joined forces with black people and then they start the first rebellion—why don't we have that in our history books?” Telling the story of a protest movement of all peoples joining together—now that's real power. And you see it in the current protests: people looked just like both of us. I feel like there's an onslaught for this kind of multicultural, multigenerational, multiethnic, millennial-based protest movement because it actually looks like what we want. That's the work that I do.

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Rebecca: Can you talk about the language in *An Issue of Blood*?

Marcus: What I love is sitting in the performance and hearing the audience respond, or not respond. I've noticed that with this play in particular is that they hang on every word—in a lot of ways it's a language play. I always get flak for what I've done, because people say, "OK, if you're going to write about the 1600s, write the way that language was used." The problem with this advice is that you can't. We don't have audio recordings of how people sounded, we only have books. The way you write may not be the way you speak, especially in that period. There is a style and art form to rhetoric. Also, how do people who can't read or write sound back then? I felt that if I'm going to be fair, everyone gets an amalgamation of terms to use. I wanted some English phrases, so I put some Shakespeare in there. I also wanted some black vernacular, and I even used some contemporary idioms. I'm not trying to duplicate what they sound like and I don't even come close. I'm trying to bring you into a world that is unfamiliar, and the way you do that is through language. And so, your ear has to go in the first five minutes, where am I? And then you adjust. And because your ear adjusts, your body adjusts, so you're opening to accept the world of the play as truth.

Rebecca: Does being referred to as "lyrical" frustrate you? It strikes me that there is so much more going on your language than simply being lyrical. It's a term we now use for black male writers that are taking on race and class in different way than the earnest, straightforward discussion of race that we have come to expect in the theatre, which is predominantly authored by white men.

Marcus: I love this question because no one ever asks me, and this is

what we talk about all the time. When August Wilson landed, the end goal was to be equal to him because he was the master. He was a poet first and he employed poetic language. Because of his poetry, his blackness and maleness, there's a generation of black male writers coming up who are in some way influenced by him—how could you not be? But they are really doing a *completely* different thing. And since everybody, especially in the American theatre, is polarized by race, they want to compare us to him. The first review I ever got said, "This is the next August Wilson." Do you know I spent ten years getting out of that hole? For ten years, every time I would talk to someone I would say, "I am *not* the next August Wilson because—"

Rebecca: It's like saying Will Eno is the next Arthur Miller.

Marcus: Exactly! I'm sure Will Eno has something where he's riffing off Arthur Miller, but let the audience make that connection. It's not like people can't appreciate the work, but they have a different context for it, so their trying to figure it out, but setting up the comparison just confuses them. I think the reason that this happens is that some theatres don't want to deal with what the writers are actually writing. If we just talk about the language and excuse it as *only* poetry, then we don't have to deal with what the writer's actually talking about.

There's also this onslaught against female writers who write in a poetic language. I've heard it from *everybody* and it's disgusting. They'll say, "Oh no, that's one of those female language plays that isn't about anything, it's just language." I think this is one of the reasons why women writers aren't produced. I mean they read two or three pages and they go, it's "poetry." What they are really saying is "women writer's shouldn't do that." It's shocking. I always ask people to explain it. Cause I want to know what this is. Their response always starts with, "well you know." "You know."



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Rebecca: We call something lyrical if the work isn't slamming you over the head with the casualty of each action. But racism today doesn't always have the same kind of blatant cause and effect. It seems like most of the plays about race that we see on major stages are so satisfying to audiences because it is so clear.

Marcus: It's too clear. What I mean by clear is that racism is muddy. Racism upsets people because nobody can be an authority on it. It's a social construct and a conditioning. But if you say that, some people get upset because they think that it let's people off the hook. What it really means is you actually can progress. You actually can change. I was at a talkback where people wanted to know what they could do individually. I thought it was so powerful because the artist's response was "Love a stranger, and work on you." If you say check your privilege at the door, people can actually hear that in a different way because we all have some level of privilege. The thing about privilege is that you can't change some privilege. The world would have to change to do that. In our lifetime, that's probably not going to happen. But people can hear it and check their privilege. With racism, however, people just shut down because the connotation behind it is you're bad. What I try to do in my conversations is to talk about systems that are racist so that people can be open about wanting to do the inner work. And I refuse to

give people answers because who am I to give the answers?

Rebecca: Victory Gardens is a theatre located in one of the whitest, wealthiest neighborhoods in Chicago and is physically very distant from the neighborhood you wrote about in *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*. The audiences at both plays you premiered can be very diverse, in part because the theatre paid for buses to and from the South Side. How does the location of the theatre and the audience makeup affect your experience of seeing your work?

Marcus: During the first talkback, a black gentleman sat in the front. As soon as we asked the first question, he spoke and didn't even really answer the question. He said,

I have to commend this theatre. I'm shocked that you are doing this play about this subject matter in the whitest part of Chicago. I actually don't believe this is real. I don't believe this is happening. I must find out who's running this theatre—it's just amazing.

And I'm going to be honest, I don't know if we purposefully set out to do that—maybe Chay did. I wanted to work here because of the work that he does, the work that we do together, and because it's Chicago. I love the idea that we bring audiences together, but I also love the idea that we're not speaking to the choir. To really have a profound experience, you need to have a diverse audience. Because

that diversity speaks to what we really are as a country. If you're sitting in the same space with people that don't look like you and are not your age, that's a different experience.

I love that these audiences are engaging with us. The conversations should be about what are we going to do moving forward. *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* didn't do that, but every talkback we've had for *An Issue of Blood*, the audience asks, "What are we gonna do?" That's what's so powerful about history. If people realize we started this way and we changed that much over 400 years, that means we're all guilty. You know what I mean? We're all guilty and we all can do something.

Scene from *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* by Marcus Gardley

Spotlight on Mary at a radio station. Two men sit beside her, Zachariah, a radio DJ, and Jude, state representative.

ZACHARIAH

Forty-two murders so far this month in the city of Chicago. It's been more than a decade since the city has seen a January this bloody. Illinois State Representative Jude Scarot is one of the lawmakers calling for immediate action to be done to combat the violence. He joins us from Springfield this morning. Also with us, from Chicago, is Mary Lee Black, a mother who lost her son just a few weeks ago. Her son was shot and killed two blocks from her house for a pair of shoes and the assailant is still at large. Thanks to both of you for being with us this morning.

JUDE

Thank you, Zach.

MARY

Thank you for having me.

ZACHARIAH

So there has been much talk about solutions to decrease the number of homicides in Chicago. The city's mayor announced today that he will put two hundred police officers from the city's already stretched force, back on the streets to target high crime areas. Jude, let's start with you. Do you think this will have a substantial effect on crime?

JUDE

Quite frankly, no. Chicago is the murder capital of the world. We need to treat it as such. We need to stop pussyfooting around the issue and take control over our streets. We need to call in the National Guard.

MARY

Isn't that unconstitutional?

ZACHARIAH

Just a minute, Mary. We will get to you.

JUDE

We need the police superintendent and the governor to meet and demand Marshall Law. We need to let these criminals know that they cannot rob the lives of our children. We will not live in fear.

MARY

Really? You live in fear? Where do you live Congressman?

ZACHARIAH

Uh...Mrs. Black—

MARY

—You live in Lake Forest, right?

JUDE

I live in Chicago, Mrs. *Black*.

MARY

Right. Lake Forest, Chicago. Your shoes cost more than my car.

JUDE

Wait a minute, am I on trial here? I thought we were talking about violence—

ZACHARIAH

We are. Mrs. Black please let me ask the questions.

MARY

My apologies. I'm just trying to get the answers.

ZACHARIAH

I understand but let me. What's your reaction to the possibility of the National Guard being called in, Mrs. Black?

MARY

I think they're asking for trouble. We don't need them coming in our community with tanks and guns, and taking away the rights of brown people. A lot of Chicagoans are reminded on a daily basis that they are not equal as others who live in affluent neighborhoods. We don't need Marshall Law to Jim Crow an already segregated city. We need to talk about more gun laws. We need to talk more about communities coming together. Congressman, you work in the legislative branch—this is for you. I would like for you to make a promise, live on this radio broadcast. I would like for you to swear that you will support legislation that will make it tougher to own guns in this city. Can you do that, Mr. Scarot?

JUDE

Uh...she's still asking me questions, Zach. I would prefer if she wouldn't ask me questions.

ZACHARIAH

Right. Um...Mrs. Black...let's take the heat off of Mr. Scarot for a

second. You seem to be very critical of him—

MARY

—I think it's my right to be critical of men who profess to represent me and my values while they are running for office but change their agenda once they are elected. But Scarot's not the worst, he's just a nut on a much larger fruit tree. Shake it, and everything that falls is rotten to its core. I don't have time to shake trees, I'm trying to plant hope. It's time to change the conversation and start thinking outside the box. The number one issue facing Chicago is a desperate economic situation. This has been the case for decades, almost a century. Instead of using state and federal dollars to bring in more law enforcement, why not use that money to help somebody get a J.O.B. or build a community center. How about hiring mentors for these young people. People need vision, they need hope. They don't need another cop putting a gun in their face.

JUDE

I agree with Mrs. Black to some extent. But the sad fact is, for many young people and adults in this situation, drugs, dealing drugs and gangs are the only way for them to make a living. So although having a vision is a nice idea and makes me want to dance under rainbows and ride unicorns, the harsh reality is that certain people are not going to give up their bad habits just because you offer them a decent job or a community center. Everybody's not going to flip a burger at McDonald's when selling crack gets you a hundred thousand dollars a year and tax free, I might add.

ZACHARIAH

Mary, I have to agree with Jude on this one. I mean, how are you going to convince businesses to come to a place where you're looking at murder rates being comparable to the number of people killed in the war in Iraq? Wouldn't help making the streets safe to begin with be priority number one?

MARY

You can't help make the streets safe if you don't give people better options, Zach. Everybody acts like instilling hope into young people is romantic or far reaching. They act like just sitting down and talking to them, all of them is impossible. We forget where we came from. Big Momma didn't play. Most folks didn't deal in dirt because they didn't want to shame their families. Our fathers instilled in us a sense of pride. But we lost our way somehow. We've convinced ourselves that young people can't be talked to; that the cold stares on their faces are impenetrable. Well, I come here to humbly, fervently disagree. I come here to tell you that it takes a village. I'm so sick and tired of being sick and tired of people who don't live in my community coming up with answers from across the proverbial Mason Dixon line! You all say you want to stop the violence but you also want to use violent tactics by calling in the National Guard. Here's a secret —no neighborhood is safe. No person is safe. Bullets fly and they don't obey borders. Just ask the moviegoers in Aurora, Colorado, or the innocent children that survived Sandy Hook. It's just a matter of time before the violence spreads; knocks upon your door. I thought I was safe. I lived in the good part. That's what the realtor told me. She said you bought a home in the best part of the South Side, Mrs. Black. There were no murders on my street in twenty years but that fact didn't spare the life of my child. When are we going to try and combat violence with more than just data sheets and theories? When are we going to pull up our sleeves, cross our party lines and political opinions and do something! Everything is not gang-related. If you walk these streets long enough, you'll know that there are a whole lot of people who are not involved in gangs or drugs of any kind. And so what if they are. Even they deserve a hand up. They just got their backs up against the wall. Most of you Northerners wouldn't know that because you haven't gone down South since The Great Fire. News flash! The fires out! It's okay to cross Jordan!