

PASSAGE POSTSCRIPT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION,
INTERVIEWS, AND COMMENTARY

Caged

Written by the New Jersey
Prison Cooperative

Directed by Jerrell L. Henderson

May 3 – 20



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one play at a time

Passage
THEATRE COMPANY



Caged

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Thank You!

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This *Passage Postscript* was conceptualized, written, and
created with the help of Passage volunteers:

Jennifer Nelson and Inaya Ahmed

We are incredibly grateful to both of them for their time and expertise. If you or anyone you
know would like to volunteer for Passage, please contact us at volunteers@passagetheatre.org.

Thoughts from Passage

Growing up, how did your family influence your decisions on what to do with your life including getting an education, planning for a career, and choosing a partner?



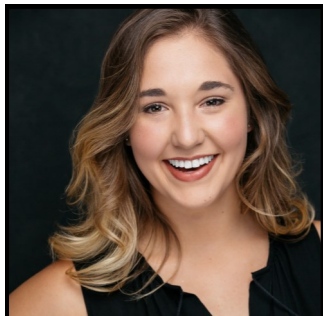
Rianne Domingues, Artistic Director

My mother went back to school when I was a young girl. I was so lucky to watch my mother go through her undergraduate studies when I was in Elementary school. Watching her struggle and succeed taught me the value of education and shaped the student and artist I am today.



Elizabeth Zuckerman, Producing Associate

Family is a tremendous influence on me. In many ways my family has set the pattern of my life, in everything from my education to my work. But most importantly, they support me even when I make choices that are different from theirs.



Kara Jönsson, Artistic Intern

I am very lucky to have a family that fully supports the arts. They have always encouraged me to pursue my passions and follow what makes my heart happy. Without their support, I would not be where I am today. Moving across the country from California at age eighteen was a huge step for my family and I, but they made attending my University and pursuing my career possible. I will always be grateful for them and their undying love!

About the Play

Three years ago, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Chris Hedges offered a creative-writing class to twenty-eight inmates at a prison in New Jersey. The prisoners at the maximum-security prison wrote scenes on the horrors of mass incarceration and the drama in their lives, while Hedges, who has taught at Princeton, Columbia, and New York University, offered guidance. There, Hedges found “more brilliance, literacy, passion, wisdom and integrity than in any other classroom.” He promised that he’d share their voices with the world and mount the play. Boris Franklin, the only writer from the group who has been released from prison, became the lead playwright on the project. The world premiere of *Caged* takes place May 3 at Passage Theatre in Trenton.

Featuring:

**Will Badgett*, Andrew Binger*, Boris Franklin, Ural Grant,
Nicolette Lynch*, Brandon Rubin*, and Monah Yancy**

Scenic Design **Germán Cárdenas-Alaminos**

Lighting Design **Daniel Schreckengost**

Costume Design **An-lin Dauber**

Sound Design **Beth Lake**

Projection Design **Miranda Kelley**

Production Stage Manager **Laura Marsh***

Production Manager **Dan Viola***

** Denotes members of Actors' Equity Association*

Dedication

We have been buried alive behind these walls for years, often decades. Most of the outside world has abandoned us. But a few friends and family have never forgotten that we are human beings and worthy of life. It is to them, our saints, that we dedicate this play.

The Characters

Chimene Moore: A black woman, about 55. Thin and tired, a result of her long struggle with breast cancer. She is endowed with an inner strength that makes her majestic. She is the mother of Omar, Sharonda and Quan.

Omar Moore: A powerfully built black man. He wears jeans and a T-shirt and no flashy jewelry. He once oversaw most of the drug dealing in the neighborhood, but left with his family to live in Georgia. He has come back after four years away is rebuilding his drug trade.

Quan Moore: 16. He is the younger brother of Omar. His brother and mother have protected him from the streets. Omar is his father figure.

Sharonda Moore: Omar and Quan's 20-year-old sister.

Jimmy Moore: Father of Omar, Quan and Sharonda and husband of Chimene. A junkie.

Blood Money: Prisoner in Essex County Jail

Officer Watkins: A middle-aged black man, built like an out-of-shape heavyweight boxer. He has worked in the prison intake unit for more than a decade.

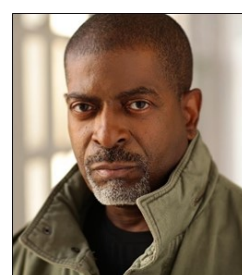
Ojore Abu Sharif: A long-time prisoner in Scarborough State for the murder of two Newark policemen in a bank robbery. He is a radical from the 1960s. Ojore was a member of the Black Liberation Army. He spent 22 years in solitary confinement, recently released to the general population. A devout Muslim.

Mr. Charlie: An elderly black prisoner in Scarborough State Prison.

Theo "Shorty" Terrell: A black man of about 18. He is a low-level drug dealer and drug user in Newark.

Jackie: A dope addict in her thirties, attractive, well put together. She lives in a small apartment in Newark and often cooperates with the Newark police in exchange for protection and money.

Daryl Stokes, aka Slash or Uncle Bip: 60's, Omar's godfather. In Scarborough State Prison for a double life sentence. A devout Muslim.



About the Playwrights: The NJ Prison Theatre Collective

Lawrence: Camden. 24 years in prison. Eligible for parole at age 70 in 2045. Arrested at the age of 14.

Gene: Edison. 30 years in prison. Paroled in 2014. Navy veteran. He served as a hospital corpsman. The father of seven children.

Leonardo: Jersey City. 13 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2022 at age 53. The father of a beautiful girl and boy.

Thomas: Newark. 23 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2021 at age 51. Son of Zuberi B. Bandeie and Willa Dollard.

Ronnie: Jefferson. 2 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2032 at age 55. Never been married. No children. Graduated from high school in 1995.

Boris Franklin: New Brunswick. 11 years in Prison. Paroled in May 2015 at age 42. Father of four. Assistant director of the New Directions program for prisoners. Currently a full-time student at Rutgers University.

Shaheed: Newark. 16 years in prison. Paroled in 2016 at age 38. Arrested at the age of 18.

Jacinto: Willingboro. 28 years in prison. Ex-husband. Ex-father. Ex-soldier, U.S. Army. 11 years on death row.

De-Von: Newark. 11 years in prison. Paroled in 2017 at the age of 37. For my son Je'veon. I've changed for you. For my mother Kathy Holloman. For my beautiful wife, Amira Hubbard Holloman. Loyalty is royalty.

Sincere: Paterson. 17 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2037 at age 68. Father of Pilar L. Jackson. Son of Mary E. Riggins. Sentenced to a prison term of life plus 40 years, 115 years, with a 50-year parole ineligibility.

Brian: 11 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2028 at age 50. Was once lost and without hope. But found hope through the blood of Jesus.

Anthony: Plainfield. 18 years in prison. Release date 2029 at age 52. Arrested at the age of 18. Learned to read and write in prison at 20. Self-taught musician. Wrote the 7 music for the play.

James: Elizabeth. 21 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2024 at age 55. I am a Muslim striving to get closer to Allah, as I also continue to fight to regain freedom to be a better leader for my family during those days and times.

Robert: Newark. 11 years in prison. Release date 2019 at age 34. Arrested the age of 18. Found freedom behind bars.

Domingo: Paterson. 24 years in prison. Serving 30 years to life. Eligible for parole in 2021. President of the Lifers Group. Writes poetry.

Omar: Newark. 14 years in prison. Paroled in 2016 at age 35. Arrested at the age of 18.

Sammy: Newark. 21 years in prison on a 45-year to life sentence. Eligible for parole in 2033 at age 63. Hopes one day to do prison ministry.

Samuel: Queens. 21 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2023 at age 47. Arrested at the age of 17. A son, an uncle, a husband, the father of a little girl and a proud Puerto Rican.

Fernando: Trenton. 12 years in prison. Paroled in 2018 at age 36. Arrested at the age of 19. Looks forward to the day he can again be with his beautiful mother, Ani.

David: Brooklyn. 28 years in prison. A 12-year veteran of the Air Force. Eligible for parole in 2025. The father of two wonderful children.

Habeeb: Newark. 15 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2024 at age 45. The father of Kayla Monec Scott. A Muslim.

Timmy: Paterson. 19 years in prison. Conceived of rape in South Carolina. Raised back and forth between the calm of the country and Paterson. Eligible for parole in 2025 at age 52. Arrested at the age of 20.

Marvin: Irvington. 22 years in prison. Army veteran. Eligible for parole in 2020. The father of Ta’Nazia Spears.

Hashim: Newark. 22 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2021. From the 7th Avenue Projects. Father of Nadiyah. Son of Marie Stokes.

Ra’zulu: Atlantic City. 23 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2024 at age 55. Father of three, Samira Stewart, Shameek Stewart and Shawn Ra’Zulu Chambers.

Hector: Newark. 24 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2019 at age 47. Arrested at the age of 17.

Jasson: Trenton. 19 years in prison. Paroled in 2018 at age 46. The father of two daughters, Destinee and N’zinga, who have never experienced a day of their father’s freedom.

Stephen: Newark. 15 years in prison. Eligible for parole in 2018 at age 45. Father of Ayannah Hunter-Ali, SaKinah M. Banks, Javonte’ Jackson, Stephan Banks and Keon Hunter.

Serena Green: Jailed for 44 days an outstanding warrant for an old DWI.

Ron Pierce: 31 years in prison. Full-time student at Rutgers.

Ojore Latulo: Newark. Member of the Black Liberation Army. Was released from New Jersey's Trenton State Penitentiary on August 26, 2009, after spending 28 years in prison. He spent 22 of those years in solitary confinement in the Management Control Unit.



The playwrights of *Caged*
with Chris Hedges

About the Lead Playwright

Boris Franklin



Boris Franklin is the lead playwright of *Caged*, and plays the role of Officer Watkins in it. A resident of Piscataway, he is currently studying at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. He is also an advocate and educator. He has guest lectured at the Global Center for Advanced Studies' Democracy Rising Workshop in Brooklyn, New York and at the Democracy Rising: Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2015, he was released from prison after serving an eleven-year sentence.

"Caged is the voice of the oppressed taking control of the narrative"

-Boris Franklin



Q&A with Boris Franklin:

Interview by Jennifer Nelson

Nelson: Why is it important for a play like *Caged* to be written and produced?

Franklin: It is important for a play like *Caged* to be written and produced because it's a real story that rarely gets told; at least not from the vantage point of the individual who have experienced life below the poverty line. More over this plays is about prison as well and plays about prisons are almost never told by prisoners. When stories like this are told the poor, oppressed and prisoners usually find themselves looking at themselves threw the eyes of other people. *Caged* is the voice of the oppressed taking control of the narrative and shedding light on the fact that race and class are still issues in America.

Nelson: What is the main message you want audiences to take away from the play?

Franklin: First I want to humanize the black family. Also I want people to realize that race, Real estate, education and incarceration are connected and work together to continuously oppress the poor black and brown citizens of this country.

Nelson: The play was a collaborative effort between many writers in prison and Chris Hedges. How did this process work? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having so many voices in the play?

Franklin: The process for writing cage was that half of the class would write from their experiences on the outside and the other half of the class would create scenes that would take place inside prison. No one was allowed to put their names on the scenes. Professor Hedges would take the scenes home and him and his wife Eunice Wong (who is a professional actor) would go through the scenes and pick out the strongest scenes. These scenes were later put together to create the first draft of cage. The advantage of having so many voices was that nothing gets left out. If there was any disadvantage I would have to say it was not many of the authors got out to continue the work we had started together because it was our song, and our voices, which Chris Hedges often referred to from "Joe Turner Come and Gone".

Nelson: This is the world premiere of *Caged*. Talk about the development stages of the play, including the on-stage reading at Mercer County Community College.

Franklin: The play was first read publicly at Mercer County College where we got a chance to listen to it differently and get some feed back. After which I began working with Prof. Hedges and his wife Eunice Wong to consolidate the characters in the play and give it more coherent dramatic form. We based many scenes, especially those involving the Moore family in the play, on my own experience with the devout Christian mother and a father who was a drug addict. I rolled myself and my siblings into the three siblings in the play. I sought to create the emotional complexity and family dynamics should know complexity and family dynamics that give expression to the radical love, as the director Jerrell Henderson likes to express it, which is at the heart of the play. The play was later workshop in New York three times under the guidance of Jeff Wise. These workshops allowed us to critique the play as strengthen it as a dramatic production. Doing this workshop characters evolved and were given more depth.

Nelson: Where do you see the play going next?

Franklin: I believe that the play will grow legs and be put on in the number of different theaters. I definitely want to see you come to the theaters downtown New Brunswick such as The George Street Playhouse and Crossroads once there done renovating because that's where I grew up.

Nelson: *Caged* talks about the benefits of education for people to get out of poverty. What educational reforms would you like to see to help rebuild the lives of African-Americans?

Franklin: I would like to see curriculums for economically disadvantaged communities of color that resemble the ones in more affluent communities. Of course I know this firsthand having lived in a communities that was economically different from the poverty-stricken environment of New Brunswick where I was given a second class education. Do I believe this is the cookie-cutter answer absolutely not but we have to start here and that the voting booths because we never got it right after the civil rights move. People walked away after the bill was passed and nobody look to make sure that things will be handled properly.

Nelson: What was your childhood like, and how do you think it contributed to your time in prison?

Franklin: My childhood was one that was filled with poverty an addiction in a community that was fighting for survival. Poverty contributed to the crime and oppression led to miss placed aggression. It was a very challenging time that was not only experienced by African-Americans. Jewish emigrants, Irish emigrants, and Italian immigrants all committed crimes against each other when they occupied the ghettos but those stories are much more romantic; so much so that the characters involved, no matter how bad the crimes they committed to survive, still blended well into the white back drop of American Society and FHA subsidize suburbs where the white middle-class was constructed. While the African Americans remained caged and shackled but urban renewal plans that left their communities devastated.

Nelson: Is there anything else you would like to add about working on *Caged* at Passage Theatre in Trenton?

Franklin: Working on “Caged” at Passage Theaters is like working from home. Passage theater is a safe and intimate space for *Caged* to grow. The theater community and actors at Passage are wonderful people one understand how important this play is we are working well into the night to make sure that this production is as entertaining as it is educational.



About the Director

Jerrell L. Henderson



Jerrell L. Henderson is a director and teaching artist. Recent directing credits include *In The Red And Brown Water* at Northwestern University and *Bud, Not Buddy* at the Children's Theatre of Charlotte. Other credits include *Red Summer: A New American Play with Music* by Shepsu Aakhu and Andy White with MPAACT & Fleetwood-Jordain Theatre, *The Freaks Of Mercy* by Joel Drake Johnson at Chicago Dramatists: The Saturday Series, *Trouble In Mind* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at Franklin and Marshall College. As an assistant director, Jerrell has worked with Victory Gardens Theater, The Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, and Lookingglass Theatre. As an educator, Jerrell has taught and directed at several institutions including Illinois State University, Northwestern University, and The University of the Arts. He also worked with the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, PA for nine years, splitting his time between teaching performance classes, devising and directing scripts with students, and directing several professional outreach productions for the education department. He received a BA in Theatre Arts from The Pennsylvania State University, an MFA in Directing from Northwestern University, is a member of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab and currently a member of Victory Gardens Directors Inclusion Initiative.

Q&A with Jerrell L. Henderson

Interview by Jennifer Nelson

Nelson: Why did you want to direct *Caged* and how did you find out about the play?

Henderson: The play was brought to my attention by artistic director C. Rynne Domingues. After reading through the script, as it was a few months ago, the moments of direct love between some of the characters seemed to call out for a recognition of all the characters' humanity. This is true despite some of their less than stellar actions. The play allows the characters to be who they are as each of them attempts to survive in an unjust world with limited resources. It challenges its audience to see these characters as whole individuals and to embrace them for who and what they are...or not.

Nelson: Please explain the importance of the set, lighting, and costumes to *Caged*?

Henderson: Each of these elements of design are essential to providing detail in terms of time period, pace/flow of the story, as well as insight into what the characters may be feeling and/or thinking at any given moment during the play. I hesitate to say more for fear of giving away moments in the play. I'd be interested to hear what audience members read into these elements and how it helped or hindered their understanding of the play's progression.

Nelson: What is the main message you want audiences to take away from the play?

Henderson: Two things. One, recognizing a person's humanity is essential in *every* situation. Two, love, hope, compassion, and the belief in steadily moving forward in life are all choices that are both active and necessary. This is not to say that maintaining these traits and allowing them to manifest throughout our lives is easy. It is not easy. But it is necessary.

Nelson: Can you relate to any character or situation in *Caged*? If so, which one or ones, and why?

Henderson: So many, so often. However, because we spend so much time with him, I tend to connect the most with Omar. He finds himself caught in a system which captures him after exploiting the limitations of his family's resources in addition to his past mistakes. He spends the play bouncing back and forth between embracing the love given to him at home and embracing the ways of the streets in order to survive. When he is caught within the system and despairing, he must fight to maintain a sense of his own humanity. It is a believable/relatable journey.

Nelson: Explain your idea of "radical love" and how it's essential for African-American families to embrace.

Henderson: It's an indelicate definition, however, Radical Love, as it relates to this play, is simply the concept that one person is able to extend a love, not based in exploitation or romance, to another for no reason other than the person offering love chooses to see the person they are offering it to as fully human and thus deserving. It is a concept in which all families, all people, regardless of race or religion, should embrace.

Nelson: Why did you become interested in pursuing a career in directing and theatre arts?

Henderson: It was a field which captured my imagination. I was effortlessly interested in becoming better and so I tried to study and practice and play in order to get better. I love the idea of being connected to a project larger than myself and I love telling stories in a manner which can allow audience members access to a part of themselves they've locked away, or perhaps did not realize was there at all. It is a fun, and taxing, profession and every once in awhile one can really make a difference.

Nelson: Is there anything else you would like to add about working on *Caged* at Passage Theatre in Trenton?

Henderson: It has been a wonderful experience getting to know the city of Trenton during my stay! Also, the staff and personnel at Passage Theatre are incredibly generous people and fantastic artistic collaborators.

Pre-Show Discussion Topics

1. Family & Friends

Who are your role models in life? Do you seek guidance from your parents when you have decisions to make? Or is it your friends and peers who guide you? Who do you think controls your destiny?

2. Upbringing

Imagine growing up in a family in which your father was in prison and your mother took drugs. Neighbors are involved in drug dealing and gambling. It's not uncommon for shootings to occur and police to arrest those you know. How do you think this would shape your view of the future and influence your goals in life?

3. Poverty

Most of the characters in *Caged* live in poverty. How do you think this impacts the characters' view of their lives? How important do you think access to money is for success later in life?

Post-Show Discussion Topics

1. Oppression

In the opening scene of *Caged*, Chimene sings a Biblical song about the oppression of people. Think about how the characters in *Caged* feel oppressed in light of the practice of slavery in America from 1619 to 1865 and the current racial tensions between African Americans and Whites.

2. Education

Omar encourages his brother Quan to stay in school instead of dealing in drugs. How can education help people break the cycle of poverty and incarceration, and create a way for people to move into the middle class? Who can young people look to as role models to help them create a future in which they aren't imprisoned or selling drugs?

3. Radical love

Boris Franklin, the main playwright of *Caged*, talks about the importance of "radical love." Chimene loves Jimmy Moore even if he's a drug dealer, and both parents look out for their children despite the harsh world in which they live. Franklin believes that "radical love" is needed to rebuild the lives of African-Americans. What do you think of this idea of "radical love?" Is it possible for parents to care for their children if they are sick and involved in illegal activities?

4. Black Liberation Army

In *Caged*, Ojore Abu Sharif was a member of the Black Liberation Army before he was imprisoned for the murder of two Newark policemen in a bank robbery. He spent twenty-two years in solitary confinement, and was recently released from prison. He is a devout Muslim.

Research the Black Liberation Army in America. Who were the group's leaders? What did they want? How did they achieve their goals? What do you think of their methods?

5. Life in Prison

In prison, Omar wants revenge for the killing of his brother Quan. He talks about stabbing fellow inmate, Push, who was convicted of the murder. But Slash, his godfather, and Ojore, another prisoner, watch out for him, and stop him from committing further acts of violence. Omar, like his father, needs to learn how to survive in prison. Go through the play, and find out how he does this. What keeps him motivated to avoid conflict? What does he read while in prison? What do Slash and Ojore say to change Omar's mind?

6. Haitian Revolution (1791-1804)

In prison, Ojore talks about the Haitian revolution as the only successful slave revolt in history. Research this revolt. Who were the leaders of the revolt? Why did they revolt? How many people were killed? What was the result of their revolt for Haiti, then known as Saint Domingue?

Glossary

Ad. Seg. – Administrative Segregation where a prisoner is held for lengthy periods of isolation for institutional infractions.

A Bundle – 10 bags of heroin.

CRAF - Central Reception Assignment Facility. Where prisoners are first processed and held before being assigned a permanent cell.

Cased up – charged by the police

C.O. – Correction Officer

Code 66 -- a medical emergency

Custy – slang for customers

The Five-Percent Nation, also referred to as NGE or NOGE, the Nation of Gods and Earths, or the Five Percenters -- an American organization founded in 1964 in Harlem by Clarence 13X, a former follower of Malcolm X and The Nation of Islam. The group rejected the assertion by the Nation of Islam's founder W. Fard Muhammad that he was God. It believes that ten percent of the people of the world know the truth. The power elites allegedly keep eighty-five percent of the world in ignorance to maintain control. Five percent know the truth and seek to enlighten and liberate the rest of humankind.

G Pack – \$1,000. worth of drugs.

La Hara – slang for the cops are coming

The Hole - where prisoners are first sent for pre-hearing detention for committing infractions in prison. Prisoners in the hole are not permitted to have any personal property or phone privileges.

They are held in the hole for between five and thirty days before being returned to the general population or transferred to Administrative Segregation.

Iron pile - weightlifting equipment

I.A. – Internal Affairs is made up of Department of Corrections staff that investigate correctional officers for infractions.

Jack Mack- pouched mackerel available from the prison commissary.

Jum'ah – the Muslim prayer on Friday.

Lock Down -- when there is no movement permitted to the prisoners within the prison because of an emergency or incident.

MCU – Management Control Unit. It was created in Scarborough State Prison in 1975 for prisoners who had not broken prison rules, but who were, because of their political beliefs, deemed to be a threat by prison administrators. It was first used to quarantine members of the Black Panthers and the Black Liberation Army. Prisoners in the MCU spend up to 23 hours a day in their cells, are isolated, under constant surveillance and have their correspondence and reading material heavily censored. It is, in essence, a prison within the prison.

The Ninja, or the Monster – slang for HIV.

Old Head- Older prisoners who come out of an older prison culture where there is more respect given to fellow prisoners and a stronger sense of loyalty.

Rock – the cooked up hard form of cocaine Runner – a prisoner allowed to carry out duties such as cleaning the tiers, passing out cleaning supplies and handing out juice or trays.

Shank – an improvised knife made out of metal, plastic or other material.

Snitch – informant.

Stash – where drugs or a body is hidden.

Stinger – an immersion coil heater.

Tier – the row of cells on a block that can be four stories, or tiers, high.

Turtles, also known as Ninjas – Members of the Prison SOG (Special Operations Group) , the prison's version of a SWAT team. The SOG teams, which handle disturbances in the prison, wear black uniforms, body armor, helmets with visors, shin guards, forearms pads, and are equipped with gas masks. They carry batons, shields and pepper spray.

Uncs – older male junkies. Older female junkies are called aunties.

Vroom Building – the psychiatric unit attached to Scarborough State Prison.