

K **L** **N**
THEATRE

**RETROGRADE
VISUAL STORYBOARD**

The Cast and Characters



IAN BONAR

plays

Bobby

White, American, aged 35, Screenwriter



IVANNO JEREMIAH

plays

Sidney

Black, American, aged 28, Actor



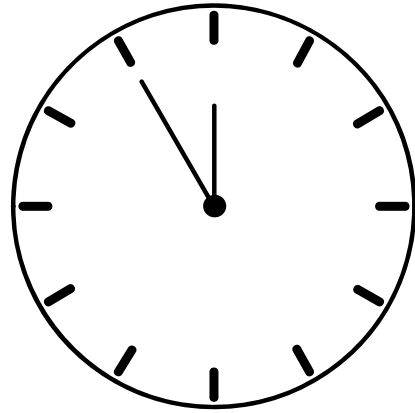
DANIEL LAPAINE

plays

Mr Parks

White, American, aged 50,
NBC Studio Executive Lawyer

Show Notes

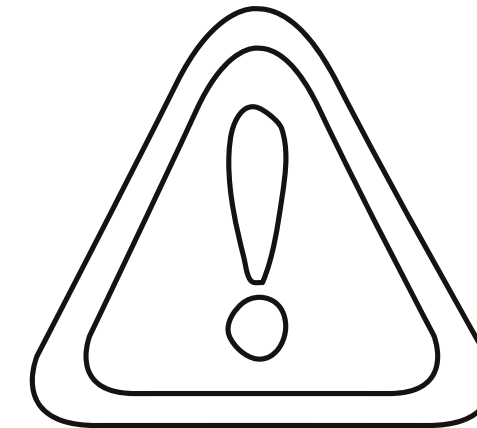


Running Time

The show is approximately 90 minutes.
There is no interval.

Age guidance: 14+

For further content advice visit
KilnTheatre.com/content-advice



Content Advice

- Haze and the smoking of cigarettes on stage
- Explicit language
- Racial slurs
- Racism
- McCarthyism

References

Retrograde is a work of fiction, based on historical events and figures. We have compiled here a list of historical terms and figures which appear in the show to give additional context to the events of the story.

Communism is a theory or system of social organisation in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

Loyalty Oaths are added to contracts to prove that the person who is signing the loyalty oath shares the same values as the company or organisation. Loyalty oaths became a common practice that Hollywood studios used with artists.

References cont.

Blacklisting was the practice of denying employment to entertainment industry professionals believed to be or to have been communists or associates. The lists, known as Hollywood Blacklists, were sent to managers of film studios who then relayed the charges to the agents of the artists.

McCarthyism refers to the investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, from 1950 – 1954, which aimed to get rid of communists in America. These investigations were known to be based on unsupported evidence and ruined the trust and reputation of many individuals.

House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was created in 1938, to investigate alleged disloyalty of American citizens, employees, organisations and the film industry who were suspected of following a communist ideology. Those who were suspected would be tried in a court of law, expected to reject communism and expose others. Anyone who refused to do so was blacklisted.

References cont.

Denouncement Statements are public statements that strongly criticise someone or something as being bad or wrong.

Red Channels was a document that contained information on 151 people, consisting of actors, writers musicians and more, who were believed to have communist connections. It was known as the Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television.

The Red Scare was a period of perceived threat posed by communists in America during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. This intensified between the 1940s and 1950s, causing fear and hysteria across the government and society. Governmental employees were investigated to test if they were sufficiently loyal to the government or to communism. These investigations continued across the country in many industries including Hollywood.

References cont.

Historical Figures

Sidney Poitier (1927 – 2022) was a renowned Hollywood actor and Civil Rights activist, who paved the way for Black actors through his career. He was the first Black man to win Best Actor at the Oscars in 1963.

Harry Belafonte (1927 – 2023) is an American singer, activist and actor. He was also Sidney's best friend.

Paul Robeson (1898 – 1976) was an actor, singer, baseball player, lawyer and political activist. He was a huge inspiration to Sidney Poitier and his good friend.

Canada Lee (1907 – 1952) was an American boxer, actor and activist. A friend to Sidney.

Jackie Robinson (1919 – 1972) was a professional American baseball player, who became the first African American to play in major league baseball.

Sylvester Weaver (1908-2002) was an American manager of a media company, who was the president of NBC between 1953-1955.

John G Keenan was one of the founders of the Red Channels.

Visual Story



The play is set in 1955, America, in an office at NBC Studios in New York. During this period in America, McCarthyism and the Red scare created an atmosphere of suspicion. The fear of communism spread in Hollywood, and film studios required artists to sign loyalty oaths before they worked with them. Artists who were suspected of being communists were blacklisted and unable to work with anyone.

The play takes place over the course of one meeting, in real time, one morning in summertime, in the office of Mr Parks. The rectangular office is set on a slight angle, its left side (from the point of view of the audience) jutting out into the space. There are just two walls, at the back and on the right, coloured plain beige, with the overall colour palette in the office - browns, reds and oranges, with flashes of blues and golds - giving the office a slick, luxurious, 50s feel. The ceiling overhead boxes the space in, increasing the feeling of claustrophobia in the office.



Bobby & Mr. Parks

- Bobby, a screenwriter, visits NBC's Studio Executive Lawyer Mr. Parks, to sign a contract for his new movie, *A Man is Ten Feet Tall*. Bobby believes his script will be a success for his career and will help to bring a positive change in the industry for Black actors in leading roles.
- Bobby's movie is meant to star his long-time friend Sidney Poitier. Mr. Parks indirectly questions Bobby to check whether Sidney is a communist, but Bobby reassures him he has nothing to worry about.





Sidney & The Phoenix project

- Sidney Poitier enters to sign the contracts for Bobby's project. The men celebrate this momentous occasion with drinks.
- Mr. Parks questions why Sidney turned down The Phoenix project, a high profile film he was offered a role in, and is dissatisfied by his response. To ease the growing tension, Bobby advises Sidney to show more of his fun side instead of his beliefs to ensure they get this contract signed.
- Mr. Parks brings up Bobby's script, mentioning he doesn't think Sidney's character, a Black man, would be placed in an authoritative position. Sidney and Mr. Parks start to argue, and Mr. Parks asks Bobby to leave the room.



The Loyalty Oath & The Denouncement



- Mr. Parks reminds Sidney that he holds a lot of power over Sidney. He tells Sidney that NBC studios want him to sign a loyalty oath to prove he is not a communist.
- Sidney is interrogated about his friends and his past. Offended, he asks Mr. Parks who has given him this information, but Mr. Parks refuses to respond.
- To increase Sidney's anxiety, Mr. Parks informs him that John G Keenan, the head of the Red channels, has confirmed that Sidney is on the blacklist.



- Mr. Parks adds that the loyalty oath won't be enough: Sidney will need to publicly denounce his biggest inspiration and friend, Paul Robeson, as a communist. Sidney is shaken but decides that he will not agree to do this and would rather risk losing his role.
- Mr. Parks reveals that he has already booked him a radio slot to read the denouncement in the next hour; and if he doesn't go through with it then Sidney will be trialled by HUAC, stay on the blacklist and risk losing his career.
- As a defeated Sidney decides to sign the loyalty oath, Bobby bursts into the office to ask about what is going on. Sidney leaves the room, to get some air and think about his decision.



Bobby Vs Mr. Parks

- Bobby tells Mr. Parks that he is not happy about the situation. He stands up for Sidney and decides he doesn't want to make his film with NBC anymore. Mr. Parks reminds Bobby that NBC own his script and therefore the film.
- Mr. Parks threatens Bobby by stating that if Sidney doesn't sign the loyalty oath and denounce Paul Robeson, Bobby's name will be linked to Sidney's. This would associate Bobby to communism and could end his career.
- Bobby takes a moment to think before suggesting they recast the role and do the movie without Sidney, but Mr. Parks refuses. Bobby realises Mr. Parks is acting on behalf of someone else.





- Mr. Parks reveals to Bobby that the FBI are after Sidney. They are worried about the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and communism and want to reduce Paul Robeson's influence. They have chosen Sidney, who is both a Black actor that audiences love, as well as Paul's friend, to publicly criticise him.
- Bobby is shocked. Sidney knocks on the door, and Mr. Parks encourages Bobby to manipulate Sidney to convince him to sign. Mr. Parks lets Sidney in and leaves the room.



Bobby Vs Sidney

- When Sidney reveals the conditions Mr. Parks has given him to do the movie, Bobby attempts to minimize the scale of the situation and tells Sidney that he wouldn't be the first Black person to denounce Paul, since Jackie Robinson (the first Black player to play Major League Baseball) did and his career is doing well.
- Sidney questions Bobby: is the denouncement the right thing to do if it goes against everything he believes in? Bobby avoids answering, encouraging Sidney to focus on putting money on the table instead of worrying about integrity and values.



- Bobby repeats advice Mr. Parks gave them earlier on, which Sidney notices. He questions whether Bobby is working with Mr. Parks.
- Bobby is offended by the accusation and turns on Sidney, blaming him for their situation.
- Angry, Sidney delivers an emotional speech to Bobby explaining he has had to censor himself for a long time as a Black man and has not been allowed to freely express himself or his emotions due to the racism that is present in America. Bobby tries to console Sidney after his speech but Sidney backs away, hurt.



Sidney's final decision

- Mr. Parks comes into the office joyfully, assuming that Sidney is going to sign. He pops champagne and prepares glasses and cigars. He places the loyalty oath and the denouncement in front of Sidney.
- Sidney signs the loyalty oath, but sits and stares at the denouncement.
- After reflecting on the action he has just taken, Sidney asks Mr. Parks if he has ever heard Paul Robeson sing, and talks about the Peace Arch concert in 1952 which he witnessed.





- Mr. Parks interrupts Sidney and tells him to shut up and listen to him, but instead Sidney counters, telling Mr. Parks to shut up and listen.
- Sidney apologises to Bobby but refuses to be on the wrong side of history. Sidney picks up the loyalty oath and tears it up. He then leaves, followed by Bobby then Mr. Parks.
- Once the stage is empty, we hear the audio of Sidney Poitier accepting his Honorary Academy Award in 2002. Sidney returns to the stage, gazes at the set then at the audience. As the audio of the speech ends, Sidney takes off his hat at the public and smiles.