

Playwright example - BAD

PROJECT TITLE: Face to Face with Florida History: 3 Gateway Plays for a Milestone Year

FUNDER: Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs Specific Cultural Project (SCP) grant is designed to fund a cultural project, program, exhibition, or series taking place within the grant period (July 1 through June 30). The grant activities must support the mission of the organization and further the state's cultural objectives.

Contribution and Significance

Writing plays to explore the past is an idea as old as playwriting, but it remains a fresh and compelling call to making art today. Theater is the most powerful tool that can connect us with the past and nontraditional theater can invite people to step out of the Now and Explore Then. How do we learn from our past to experience our present? I live in a state, nation, and identity that's undergoing drastic, dynamic transition. How did we get here? How can I find a place where I can see and reflect on my own incompatible ideals about equal status and individual exceptionalism, the common good and the private fortune, the supremacy of the spirit and the almightiness of the dollar? How can I find perspective on the friction between the competing cultural viewpoints that surround me – the seemingly insoluble war between immigrant and resident, newcomer and native, Anglo and Hispanic?

I hope to write plays that will help eradicate cultural problems that exist between Spanish and Anglo people in Florida and bring about cultural unity. The project will create plays that will be performed in environments that are free, thus creating economic equality in Florida and addressing educational inequity. Playwriting can take us on journeys into historic moments that mirror our own, give us new perspectives on ourselves, and reconnect us with our cultural roots, so we can build dynamically rooted relationships across cultural differences with each other. That is theater's primary function at all times – to bless us with (as Lope de Vega puts it in *Nuevo mundo*, a play fundamentally informed by Florida history) “a Mirror where / we see ourselves ... / ¡Farol, norte, luz, espejo!” Theater nurtures the best in our natures by holding that mirror up to us.

Expert studies of citizen interactions with the arts show that live theater offers unique opportunities for people to experience intellectual stimulation, emotional expression, aesthetic enrichment, artistic captivation, and social bridging and bonding (see *Counting New Beans*, 2012). I write plays to pursue precisely these purposes – to build playgrounds for the imagination, where my fellow Floridians and I can reenact and reexamine our pasts, so we can re-imagine our futures. Theater scholars and practitioners from all over the US will provide feedback on the plays so we can make them most engaging to the public.

Because I see theater as a meeting place for the whole community, a place that becomes more productive as the audience becomes more reflective of (and more responsive to) every element of society, it doesn't make sense for me to write plays for places where most people never go, in forms which exclude most people from active participation. That's why I write plays that can tour, fluidly and flexibly, expressed in terms that everyday citizens can understand. That way, my scripts can take people by surprise, in places where they never expected to find a performance. They can actively involve audience members in performances, before they realize they've been lured into a hot new love affair with dry old history. This project aims to bring the context of Florida's historical milestones to the public in outdoor arenas rather having them sit inside a theater in order to bring the history more alive.

I propose to do this by creating plays that deal with Florida's complex relationship between Hispanics and Anglos and highlight key Florida milestones. This will bring people face to face with Florida history and will probe how English-heritage differ historically from Spanish-heritage points of view. In 2021, we'll mark the 200th anniversary of Florida transitioning from Spanish provincia to US territory – such a definitive step in our country's development that John Quincy Adams called the day he signed the Florida Treaty “the most important day of my life.” In 2024, we'll mark the 200th anniversary of founding Tallahassee, a government decision that created an English-speaking capital where Native caciques and Spanish conquistadores once ruled. In a state where complex, conflicting relationships between Hispanics and Anglos, natives and newcomers, old-timers and tourists still define us, these milestones offer once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to bring people face to face with Florida history.

This project creates 3 gateway plays to bring people face to face with Florida history, during a period in our public life that is richly endowed with historic milestones.

(This proposal is edited from a successful proposal by Ben Gunter funded by Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs in 2019. Edits are the responsibility of the presenters and should not be attributed to Mr. Gunter)

Playwright example - BETTER

PROJECT TITLE: Face to Face with Florida History: 3 Gateway Plays for a Milestone Year

FUNDER: Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs Specific Cultural Project (SCP) grant is designed to fund a cultural project, program, exhibition, or series taking place within the grant period (July 1 through June 30). The grant activities must support the mission of the organization and further the state's cultural objectives.

Contribution and Significance

History comes alive when you are face to face with people from the past whose fears, dreams, and life goals clearly intersect with your own, but differ in ways that challenge your Now to re-engage with their Then. I've seen this happen most remarkably with people who are not sitting in a traditional theater, and sometimes not even expecting to see a play – for example, folks stepping into Shakespeare's world during an Elizabethan Faire, or stumbling into an adventure with the Alaskan Gold Rush during dinner in Denali Park. The year 2021 will mark the two hundredth anniversary of Florida transitioning from Spanish provincia to US territory and the year 2024 will mark the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of Tallahassee, a government decision that created an English-speaking capital where Native caciques and Spanish conquistadores once ruled. In a state where complex, conflicting relationships between Hispanics and Anglos, natives and newcomers, old-timers and tourists still define us, these milestones offer unique opportunities to bring people face to face with Florida.

My goal is to write three immersive and non-traditional plays to create gateways between everyday people and the extraordinary milestones in our pasts. By bringing audiences face to face with our roots, we can share fresh perspectives for building brighter futures and create common ground for exploring conflicts. The proposed gateway plays will be designed to engage significant upcoming historic milestones by dramatizing first-person events. write plays that can tour, fluidly and flexibly, expressed in terms that everyday citizens can understand. I have experience in successfully creating scripts can take people by surprise, in places where they never expected to find a performance, including founding Theater with Mission in 2008 to combine my formal training in dramaturgy with my love of Florida's history in three success festivals to date. In "Face to Face with Florida History", we will probe how English-heritage viewpoints differ historically from Spanish-heritage points of view, and how differences between them can be negotiated by people of vision and goodwill. We will use a workshopping program with public readings that that empower people to handle historical sources firsthand, debate different tactics for dramatizing them, and make direct input into scripting.

Three theatrical encounters will create gateways for Floridians to explore state historic milestones:

1. Face to Face with Spanish Florida in 1540: Three Kings Day with the de Soto Expedition
2. Face to Face with French Florida in 1565: Life Among the Timucua with Jacques LeMoyné
3. Face to Face with Territorial Florida in 1821: Florida Sold

This project takes the important step of minimizing economic barriers to community engagement by providing free public readings, previews, festival appearances, and touring performances of new scripts. Indeed, creating "Face to Face with Florida History" will generate a whole series of interlocking, mutually supportive, and publicly accessible opportunities for community engagement. Public theater also provides economic value in raising regional profiles and in support of business near the performance space.

Specific Positive Social Developments Expected from This Project

- New perspectives on, and new respect for, Florida as a site of instructive cross-cultural contact
- Enriched instruction in Florida history, especially in title 1 schools
- Lively public engagement with a once-in-a-lifetime juncture in Florida history via Florida Sold during the 200th anniversary of the Florida Treaty
- New opportunities to experience live theater in underserved areas through free field-test performances on tour.
- New opportunities for members of the public to participate in artistic creation, via free public meetings that explore primary sources and shape them into scenes
- New aficionados of Florida history with new cultural sensitivities among citizens who experience these plays

In a state defined often by the complex, conflicting relationships between Hispanics and Anglos, natives and newcomers, old-timers and tourists, these upcoming milestones offer a rare opportunity to bring people face to face with Florida history. This this kind of playwriting will be designed to create sorely needed common ground among people who are highly diverse and intensely divided – and builds a hopeful basis for theater to rediscover its place as a truly popular art at the heart of the present day.

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