

# Cycle of Poverty: Part 2 with Sage Martin & DeLane McDuffie

**Veralyn Jones:** Welcome to Writers Revealed, a podcast from LA-based BIPOC-theatre company, Lower Depth Theatre. This podcast emerged from our monthly series Writers Revealed, which presents a personal and stunningly honest look at the writer behind the words and the person behind the page. Each month, we invite two new writers to read their own work - whether that's an excerpt from a play, novel, poem, essay, or something else entirely. After the readings, writer/producer/EDI facilitator, L Trey Wilson leads the two writers through an engaging discussion - a deep dive into everything from their writing process to unique ways in which the world informs and inspires their work. To learn more about our writers, please visit our show notes or our official website [lower-depth.com](http://lower-depth.com). We hope you enjoy Writers Revealed.

**L. Trey Wilson:** In this very special episode of Writers Revealed, you will hear from two playwrights in our Commission Fellowship Program, Sage Martin & DeLane McDuffie, followed by a discussion moderated by me, L. Trey Wilson. Each of these outstanding storytellers were selected to write plays that examine the "Cycle of Poverty."

First, Sage will read from her play, MINE. This chilling story follows a family haunted by the loss of a family member, killed by the cruel and uncaring hands of a mining company. The family fights to keep their home from the company's clutches and discovers that they are haunted in more ways than one.

Then, DeLane will return to Writers Revealed with his play, FOLLOW THE LADY, about a black con artist in the 1940s who takes advantage of people of color....until she discovers Enaake - a magical land where people of color live in harmony, free from the prejudices & systemic inequalities of the United States.

Please enjoy this episode of Writers Revealed.

**Sage Martin:** MINE by Sage Martin.

(SAFI crawls into bed and then remembers she is supposed to pray. As SAFI prays, MOSS walks around in the kitchen. She is practicing witchcraft, attempting to connect with the dead and hear them.)

SAFI

Angel of God, my guardian deer, to whom God's love commits you here, ever this night to be at my side, to light and guard and rule and guide. Amen. Also, God, I have some questions. Number one... Why did you give us guardian deer? And not a guardian bear or lion, something scary? I guess if the guardian deer have big antlers then that's okay. ...How many guardian deer are there? Does everyone have one? Does the whole world share a pack of them? If you die, does yours go to someone new? If you can, God, please tell my Daddy's guardian deer that it can visit me whenever it wants to. I know I won't see it but the idea sounds nice. ...God bless Mommy, Daddy, Safi, all the coal miners, all the babies in the world, all the sick old people, and all the kids who don't have daddies anymore. Thanks. Amen.

(SAFI crawls into bed, turns her baby monitor on, and covers up. MOSS

hears this through the baby monitor in the living room and smiles.)

MOSS

I am ready to listen. I remain open. I await your guidance.

MOSS puts several things inside a mason jar. Namelie's hair from the shower drain. Safi's hair from her sweater. Dirt from outside. Dirt from the county line.

MOSS shakes the contents. NAMELIE watches secretly at the doorway.

Break the bond between these people and this house. They must leave. May Spirit guide them far from here. I know the Mountain's are angry and I fear what comes next.

MOSS washes the jar out at the sink.

Let go. Let go. Let go.

MOSS washes her hands and NAMELIE sneaks away.

SCENE 9: Frenchie and Namelie's Home

(FRENCHIE soars in, chasing a giddy SAFI. She holds a tie in each hand.)

SAFI

It's tie pickin' time!

FRENCHIE

Tie pickin' time! I got my meeting today!

(FRENCHIE grabs NAMELIE and dances with her.)

NAMELIE

Today?! Oh lord Jesus. Are you ready?

FRENCHIE

I got some ideas in my head.

SAFI

Okay! Left hand or right hand!

FRENCHIE

Hmmm... Left.

(SAFI shows the tie in her left hand from behind her back.)

SAFI

You should say right.

FRENCHIE

Okay, right hand.

SAFI

Yay!

NAMELIE

Safi, that tie...

SAFI

Is great!

Page 1 of 5

NAMELIE

It's for Easter.

SAFI

...

NAMELIE

You can't wear an Easter tie to a business meeting, Frenchie. It's not even Spring.

SAFI

Why?! It's fancy!

FRENCHIE

I picked "right hand". Fair is fair.

(FRENCHIE puts the around his neck. NAMELIE ties it into a knot for him in silence as SAFI watches with a huge grin.)

NAMELIE

Baby if you wear this, they're gonna laugh at you.

FRENCHIE

They were always gonna laugh at me.

(FRENCHIE kisses NAMELIE on the forehead. She thaws, just a touch. SAFI is hit with sudden concern that derails her every thought.)

SAFI

Wait! Wear the other one! If you get coat dust on the colors, it'll

FRENCHIE

Nah, baby, I'm going to an office today.

SAFI

What?

FRENCHIE

Yeah. With people typing on computers and printing stuff out to look at or read, makin' phone calls

SAFI

Why?

Page 2 of 5

FRENCHIE

Because that's their work.

SAFI

That's work?

FRENCHIE

For some people.

SAFI

... You know how to talk on the phone.

FRENCHIE

Sounds like a boring job.

SAFI

Why are you going to an office?

FRENCHIE

I'm gonna tell the guys who work there what I need, what all my friends at work need, to keep doing our jobs the best way we know how.

SAFI

Like what?

FRENCHIE

We want the mine to be safer, so nobody gets hurt. I want to be able to come home and have dinner with you and your mom.

SAFI

Yeah, that's a good one.

FRENCHIE

I want to spend my weekends in front of the TV-

(SAFI squeals in excitement!)

FRENCHIE

Watching football.

SAFI

...Maybe not that one.

FRENCHIE

And I wanna make more money so we can go on trips and see things!

SAFI

Oh yeah! That's a good one! Like the zoo?

FRENCHIE

Yes!

SAFI

Woo! Yeah!

(FRENCHIE spins SAFI in a circle. NAMELIE blushes with love.)

SAFI

If we go to the zoo, can we stay all day?

FRENCHIE

Yeah, we can do that.

SAFI

And get one of those red and blue drinks like on the commercials?

NAMELIE

Safi, that's a snow cone.

SAFI

It's SNOW?!

NEMELIE

Like shaved ice. You eat it.

FRENCHIE

Yeah, we can probably do that too. Y'all stay beautiful, hear me?

SAFI

Bye Daddy!

NAMELIE

Good luck.

(FRENCHIE kisses NAMELIE. He exits through the kitchen door. Page 4 of 5

Blackout.)

SCENE 10: Namelie's Home (During blackout)

SOUNDSCAPE: Appalachian night. Crickets and frogs stand guard with the moon.

Then, an explosion echoes out through the space. Namelie's house shudders. The Depth groans. The greed is closer than ever.

(The baby monitor crackles. The door to outside opens.)

BABY MONITOR THE DEPTH

Saaafiiii. Safiiiiii.

(MOSS enters eventually. She looks around the space.)

MOSS

Hello?

(MOSS notices the kitchen door is open. As she approaches it the baby monitor crackles again, growing louder and louder the closer she gets. Then, it turns off. MOSS carefully shuts the door and exits.)

(The sun rises. Stillness.)



**DeLane McDuffie:**

FOLLOW THE LADY by DeLane McDuffie.

INEZ

Told ya to keep your eye on the lady.

The couple storms off.

Inez collects all the money, stuffs it in her satchel. As she's breaking down the table setup, the young man comes back.

YOUNG MAN

Excuse me, ma'am, but can I have my money back?

Inez turns around and faces him.

INEZ

No, you may not.

They laugh.

INEZ (CONT'D)

You're late, Ambrose.

Going forward, the young man will be called AMBROSE, Inez's apprentice and partner-in-crime.

AMBROSE

Ambrose is right on time.

INEZ

No, ya ain't. Ya late.

AMBROSE

Aw, c'mon, Inez. We got the mark.

INEZ

Correction. I, as in Inez, got the mark. You did shit.

AMBROSE

We. We are a team. But should we be worried about that man bringing the law to our doorstep?

INEZ

Hell, that man ain't hittin' on nothin'. He too peacock proud to tell the law that he's been down here slummin' it with the chocolate and butter pecan folk. Besides, by the time he find any policeman down here, he'll be so tired he'll be dead in his wingtips.

Ambrose snickers.

AMBROSE

Why were they down here for anyway?

INEZ

Lookin' for trouble. It is not a good sign when folks like us see folks like them strollin' 'round all willy-nilly in neighborhoods where they forced us to stay. Means they lookin' to take that land back. Kick us all out. They dress it up and call it "urban renewal." Lipstick on a pig.

AMBROSE

Not our problem. We stay on the move.

INEZ

That's right. We ain't in the gettin'-fucked-over business. We in the fuckin'-you-over business. Let the church say--

AMBROSE

Amen! At least you got those marks.

INEZ

Chile, that apple almost copped a heel on me. Had to play to his ego to rope him back. His and hern.

AMBROSE

Ambrose don't believe that one bit. Not you. Not Inez Faye May. If he flew the coop, I wouldn't be standing here watching you stuffing saw-bucks and C-notes in your bag now, would I?

INEZ

Yeah, and you know what kind of work I had to do to get here? I roped a John Bates down on Oleander, a fink over yonder near Ward's Grill, and a coupla eggs on the way here.

AMBROSE

Sounds like somebody was working hard.

INEZ

Working as hard as thunder bumps a stump. Plus, I had to work this score up from a push-note and a fin. I was dry as a bone.

AMBROSE

Now we're rich as possum gravy.

INEZ

We ain't rich. If we were steppin' in high cotton like that, we wouldn't need to hopscotch like this. We'd find one spot, set up a big store, and live it up like Limestone Chappie and Yellow Kid Weil. Them Chicagah and New Yawk boys.

AMBROSE

Don't fret now. We're working on that. We'll be glitterati in no time.

INEZ

Glad to see we on the same page. You wanna make this money, right?

AMBROSE

Hell. Yes.

INEZ

Well, then why were you late? You never said why.

AMBROSE

Wasn't late.

INEZ

You slower than a crippled turtle.

AMBROSE

Said I wasn't late.

INEZ

Well, let me rephrase.

(clears her throat)

You were not in the immediate vicinity at the precise time you needed to be present and accounted for. So...yo' ass was late.

INEZ (CONT'D)

(pauses)

You up there fuckin' 'round with some floozy? Again?

AMBROSE

Emma Jean is no floozy.

INEZ

Oh, her name's what now? Emma? Emma Jeeeeeeaaaaaan.

AMBROSE

She's aces, I tell ya. Inez, you ain't never seen a more lean, mean, clean, pristine machine human being. Fine as all outdoors. Met her over there at that juke over by where Cornelius Green got shot.

INEZ

Which one?

AMBROSE

Which one? There's only one juke over there.

INEZ

Naw, which Cornelius Green? Senior or Junior?

AMBROSE

Wait. Junior got shot, too?

INEZ

'Bout 4 months ago. Right in front of the Yellowjacket. Senior got shot down by Lynwood Roscoe's juke.

AMBROSE

Well, damn. Didn't even know about Junior. Rest in peace.

INEZ

Rest in peace, June.

AMBROSE

Negro owed me a favor and some turkey neckbone.

INEZ

That boy sho could cook.

AMBROSE

You ain't never lied. Put his foot in it.

INEZ

Put the little pot in the big one indeed.

AMBROSE

Anyway, I met Emma Jean at the Yellowjacket. Her and some anchor clanker just went Splitsville, so Ambrose jumped in as back-door man, baby!

INEZ

Stop trying to make yourself sound like you bad. You just said they done quit each other.

AMBROSE

So?

INEZ

So you a clean-up man, not a back-door man. 'Cause you ain't gotta sneak through no back do' if they ain't together, fool.

AMBROSE

Anyhow, we shut the juke joint down last night. We were jitterbugging and Lindy Hopping all night long. She's a good dancer, too. A real ducky shincracker.

INEZ

Not a dead hooper like you, huh?

AMBROSE

You crazy as hell. I'm a jive bomber on the dance floor.

INEZ

So that's why you late? You layin' up in the bed, Slow Draggin' with Emma Jean? She be doing Snakehips on her back? Up there all between that girl's thighs when you need to be planning the next hustle with me?

AMBROSE

You ain't seen her, though. She's a real fine dish. Real fine. She's sealskin black with a right nice rumble seat. It'll change your mind, your religion, and the weather. Thinking about it gives me the shivers. Brrrr.

(trembles like it's cold)

Where's my scarf? But you'd like her. I think I might love her.

INEZ

You don't know what love is, boy. You barely old enough to pee straight. You always gettin' all doll dizzy when we hopscotch this way. Messin' up our grift flow.

AMBROSE

Ay, don't get all pissy now. I don't say nothing when you get your little urges every now and then. You be gon' plum khaki wacky your-damn-self.

INEZ

Difference between me and you, though, is that I can compartmentalize my shit. You cain't. Ass don't stop me from gettin' this cash, baby boy.

AMBROSE

You don't know how to spell compartmentalize.

INEZ

What makes you think I cain't?

AMBROSE

Spell it then.

INEZ

C-O-M--

AMBROSE

Uh-huh.

INEZ

P-A-R...you gonna help me with this fuckin' table or what?

They bust out in laughter and finish packing up the table.

Lights out.

\*\*\*



**L. Trey Wilson:** Hello, Sage. Hello, DeLane. Thank you so much for joining us. How are you both doing today, DeLane? How are you?

**DeLane McDuffie:** Doing well, doing well. How are you doing yourself, sir?

**L. Trey Wilson:** I'm good. I'm good. How are you doing, Sage?

**Sage Martin:** I'm good. I'm happy to be here.

**L. Trey Wilson:** We're happy to have you. So, uh, you are writing these pieces for Lower Depth for this is, uh, pieces regarding poverty, correct? Yes. Yes. So, a couple of questions. First off, uh, Were you already working on pieces that were related to this type of issue or was, uh, being asked to do something for lower depths regarding this issue? The prompt to have you write the pieces you're writing? I'll start with you, Sage.

**Sage Martin:** I have, um, let me think about that. I don't think that I Have ever written something from the corner of poverty, uh, or like the, the eye of poverty. But when I read the description of what lower depth was looking for, I knew immediately, oh, I have a story that needs to be told. That is definitely in that, that vein.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Okay. How about you DeLane?

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah, in the past I've written pieces about poor people, but they didn't really see themselves as poor, you know? So for this particular piece, the, uh, the prompt was the, the impetus for, for, for this play,

**L. Trey Wilson:** yeah. Okay. Okay. Now I understand that you're both in your, what draft are you in at this point for your pieces?

**Sage Martin:** Uh, I am probably a sigh. I, this is probably draft four for me, and I think I'll probably have. six by the time we get to the, the live reading in the spring, um, it's just, I've noticed that I, I kind of get everything out and I give it away, and then I bring a chisel in and I re-look at it. I reexamine everything and I like working that way. I don't mind the repetition of rewrites. Um, I would rather throw everything at the wall, see what sticks, and then try again.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Nice. How about you, DeLane? Where are you in the process?

**DeLane McDuffie:** Officially this, I'm working on my, this would be, what, two and a half to my third draft. Um, but yeah, I'm not a big fan of rewriting. Um, I know I, I have to do it. Um, but yeah, I just, I, I'm sort of where sage is. I, I, I wrote a lot. I wrote this huge draft and now I'm just kind of chiseling it down, so, . That's where I am as of now.

**L. Trey Wilson:** This moment. I think I, I think our listeners are, are interested in the process of writers and how things get created and developed. In terms of doing a rewrite, do you read it over yourself or do you have actors read it out loud and, and get from that what you need to do and chisel away from what's, what are the steps did you take in the process? deciding that you need a rewrite and, uh, what you're going to rewrite. I'll start with you this time, DeLane.

What, what, what's your process? Do you have, do you have to hear it out loud from someone else and others, or do you just kind of go over yourself and say, you know what, I need something more here.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah. Well, I, uh, initially I'll, I'll read it aloud myself. Um, I'll read it in my head and I'll read it, uh, aloud. And then, um, I use final drafts, so I'll use their, um, AI voices and I was like, you know, had them sort of read in different tones and, you know, uh, intonations and, and then eventually, um, I will, if, if, if my actor friends are available, I'll have them read a scene or two or, you know, um, usually they aren't cuz they'll be working. So then I'll just, you know, just roll the dice and Eventually it'll, you know, it'll, it'll come out. Everything comes out in the wash.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it. Got it. How about you Sage? How do you do that?

**Sage Martin:** I. Mostly I will spend X amount of days. and just, that's all I do. Get it on the page and then I don't reread it. I just walk away from it for at least a week, and then when I come back to it, it's really easy to read it and look at the holes or be like, what was I thinking?

That doesn't make any sense, or This character would never do that. Or, okay, I'm onto something and after I get to a place where I'm like, . Okay. I, I think this is, this is pretty cleaned up. I usually ask someone whose feedback I really value to read it, and I, I adore feedback, especially from people who don't read plays or people who are in theater, but they don't write to hear their perspective on it from.

A directorial position or a, an acting position lighting. That's really interesting to me and I love getting that info.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it, got it. And with these pieces in particular, um, follow the lady and mine. , what stage in the process did the title occur for you? I know for me sometimes the title comes first.

Sometimes it's the last thing. In this case, uh, how did it come for you? Or, or was it something that the minute you started thinking about the, uh, what you're gonna write about, the title was present for you? Sage, how about you first? How did the title occur for.

**Sage Martin:** I didn't know what I was gonna call it at first.

I, I kept playing around with different things and eventually I was explaining it to someone and said, it's, it's about greed and capitalism, but it's also about people in the coal mines and everybody's fighting for ownership. And they were like, oh yeah, mine. And I was like, Like a coal mine and they were like, oh, no, like ownership.

I was like, oh my God. Yeah.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Nice. Who was that person? ,

**Sage Martin:** my girlfriend, thank goodness. So I can , I can claim ownership. She was like, you can have that one for free. .

**L. Trey Wilson:** Oh, nice. Nice. . Something. You're getting something out of the The relationship, huh? Yeah, that's right. . That's, how about you DeLane? How did follow the lady, how did Follow the Lady come to.

**DeLane McDuffie:** first, yeah, Sage. That's the perfect title. Uh, . You can't get better than that. Thank you. Uh, like Sage. I didn't know, um, if I didn't know what to name it. Um, so I wrote maybe three or four scenes and, uh, The, the, the draft, well, the, the play in its current state starts off with a, a, uh, a, a game of three card Monte.

And, uh, I was talking to a friend and, uh, he was like, yeah, uh, you mean find a lady? , you know, he's like, you know, that's another name for three Card Monte. And I was like, find the lady. And then I was like, oh wow. So I looked it up and another name for three Card, three Card Monte is Follow the Lady. So I was like, oh, that's perfect, because, you know, that's what, that's the deal.

The, the main character is, is is, you know, is dealing with, you know, she's trying to, um, Trying to guide people to the, the promised land, if you will. And

uh, yeah, so it just kind of worked. It was a phrase that worked metaphorically and you know, and what she was actually doing. .

**L. Trey Wilson:** So I have to ask your friend who told you that there was another term for Three Card Monte...Isn't Sage's girlfriend? Is it?

**DeLane McDuffie:** might be

**Sage Martin:** Julia's out here changing the way that playwriting happens, ,

**L. Trey Wilson:** I would have to interview her and ask her about, you know, being the, the title Queen? Yes. Um, . That's great. That's great. I, I'm fascinated by how titles come to writers and, and, and I, and something you said said, Sage, uh, resonated with me, which is when you hear it, it makes sense.

It's like, ah, yes, that's it. And DeLane, I think the same with you as well. It's like, okay. Yeah. Got it. Is that the correct? Is that right? Yeah.

**DeLane McDuffie:** That's right. Nice. Yeah, it just clicks, you know? Yeah. You hear it and you're like, oh, that's it, that's it,

**L. Trey Wilson:** that's it, that's it. It just, just happens. So now, and I wanna go back to something you said, Sage, that uh, when you had the prompt or, um, the opportunity to write about poverty, you pretty quickly knew the circumstances or the situation that you wanted to delve into.

Uh, how was that the case?

**Sage Martin:** Well, I, I'm from Kentucky and I spent my entire life here until I went away for college. And the poverty that exists in Kentucky is remarkable. And it is, um, it. Poked fun at it is, it's like a comedic thing. It's so poor, and I've always taken issue with that. And I lived out in LA for a couple of years and I was never embarrassed to say that I was from Kentucky, but when I did, people would genuinely be like, oh, but you have shoes.

and, and I'm like, yeah, of course. Like we all know like rednecks on tv, hillbillies, stuff like that. But like there's lots of people in Kentucky who don't have shoes. And uh, and I just, I thought, I wanna tell, I love writing about the south. That's like, one of the things that I do over and over again is, is just writing about home.

And I thought I would love to, to look at this through. My lens, but also really like skewer poverty in a way that I haven't before.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it. Nice. How about you DeLane? Uh, you were given this prompt around poverty. How quickly did this idea of these characters in this situation occur for you and, and why do you think they did in the way they.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah, it took me a while to, to figure out exactly what to write about. Um, I knew that it wa I wanted it to be based in the south, like sage. I'm from North Carolina, so I, I also write a lot about the south and home and, uh, yeah, I. I don't know. Like I, I decided that I wanted to write, I, I wanted to write about poverty, but I wanted a different angle on it.

So I landed on two villains, or slash Antiheroes, who. Were who wanted to do everything, who were doing everything they possibly could to stay out of abject poverty. You know, they already grew up in poverty, had a taste of it, didn't wanna live that life anymore, and by any means necessary, they wanted to, you know, they would do whatever they had to do to stay out of it.

And being that they're, you know, uh, you know, Not very, not particularly good people. I thought that would be a challenge to, to get the audience to kind of empathize with. To quote unquote bad guys, you know, who are just trying to make do. Um, yeah. So that's where, that's where that journey started.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it. And I'm gonna add another dimension to this, which is, you know, it's not just poverty, it's the cycle of poverty. , what's your taking on, what's your thoughts on that? The cycle of poverty, uh, and how that occurs. And, and how is that, is that an aspect of what you're attempting to address in your pieces? . Sage, what about you in terms of the cycle of poverty?

**Sage Martin:** I mean, I'll talk to you for the rest of your life about the cycle of poverty. I okay. it. Nothing pisses me off like the cycle of poverty. It is just, it is completely unnecessary. Like we are one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We still face cycles of poverty and it blows my mind. And like I was raised with the belief that like all people are good until they are changed into something that that does not put, you know, joy and, uh, connection and taking care of other people at the center of their soul. And so like holding onto that is really like metal to me, right? Like to be compassionate in a world that wants you nothing but hardened is such like a rockstar move in my opinion.

And. To see the way that, like the cycle of poverty has not only been villainized, but it's also been kind of pushed into like this criminal thing. It, it just, it blows

me away and. . I have a lot of rage about poverty and that has fueled a lot of my writing. And another part of our, our like fellowship that, that we're doing is to put people of color at the center of it.

And I think that's, that's vital to all of our stories as well, cuz we're not only telling stories about poor people, we're telling stories about people of color in the cycle of poverty. Um, which is very different from the cycle of poverty and the way that it affects white people. . Um, but yeah, I mean, I could, I will actually talk your ear off. You will have to go to the doctor. It really gets to me .

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it, got it. How about you, DeLane, the ideal, the cycle of poverty. How does that resonate for you?

**DeLane McDuffie:** I grew up in a PR pretty, uh, poor county in, in North Carolina and in Georgia, and uh, yeah, it's, I'm like, like Sage. It Pisses me off too. It's the cycle of poverty has nothing to do with the people actually in it, but with, it has everything to do with the people who can actually do something about it, you know?

And the people who, the people who in power, who have, who you know, literally can just flip a switch and change hundreds, thousands of lives. You know, we have all the resources. We just don. , you just don't pull that, you're gonna do it, you know? And that l you know, living with that, just knowing that. Things can change.

You know, it's not hard. Things can change, but there are forces out there that just don't want to make those moves. Um, no matter how much, you know, we as a society object or protest or, you know, write plays about it, you know, write songs about it. It's, it comes down to people who, who can. Push the button.

They just don't want to. And that's infuriating, you know? And I think that sort of seeps into all of my writing and at, in some, in some form, you know, that, like Sage was saying, that rage, um, I will try to not write something political or , you know, dealing with society. And I can't help it. It just comes out.

It just comes out of me, you know? And it's because that's just, that's just what I wanna say or that's just what my heart is, is focused on. So it is, you know, I just have to accept it and just do write me, be me.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Something both you said, and I wanted to, uh, really want to ask about this is that you both were speaking in terms of the external forces that.

Contribute, or however you want to say it, uh, this cycle of poverty. Uh, what I'm curious about is your thoughts about, that external force gets internalized for people that are existing in it. And how then it almost becomes this, an internal cycle, a perpetuation within one's community or one's family, how it gets absorbed in one's beingness.

Um, um, what's your thoughts about that? Uh, either one of you delaying or sage, any thoughts around that and how that happens? and what can be done about that too. I'll start with you, DeLane.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah. It's, it's very hard to, to, uh, be something, um, you're not, if, I don't know how to phrase this. If you, if you're, if you're an environment is one thing and you want to.

It takes a, uh, you know, it takes a huge effort, um, and a huge amount of faith and, and, and, and power to lift yourself out of certain circumstances, you know, and if that's all you see, and if that's all you're about and that's all you know, then. That just seeps into you. It becomes you, you know, if you let it, you know, and it's, that's the thing.

And it is, it is really hard to get a lot of people to see anything else because it starts to affect your self worth and, and how you value yourself and, and people around you who are in the same situation, you know? And.

That's, that's just such an uphill battle to, to, to, to fight, you know? And yeah, that's, I, I feel like that's step one, changing people's minds. Um, you have to change the environment. You have to go in there and, and, you know, , you just have to make hell . I dunno. It's like going to hell and, and taking some Febreze , just, you're in hell.

But, you know, let's, let's make it smell a little nicer. Um, not quite that, but you know, you have to, you have to start with the aesthetics, I feel. And that, you know, if you, if you're. , if you're, you see your, you're in your neighborhood and, you know, windows aren't broken and you know, the street's clean and people are, you know, that's, that affects your mood, you know, and yeah, that's just that one.

What

**L. Trey Wilson:** about you, Sage? I, I saw you nodding a good bit on that. What are your thoughts about that?

**Sage Martin:** Yeah, I agree with DeLane, but I also think that the . , the, like, the thickness of the cycle is, um, it's so layered and it is so endless and you see it. Mm-hmm. in. Impoverished rural communities of like, uh, like if we use coal miners for instance, it's like, okay, well we don't need coal miners like we used to back in the day.

But if you come from a family line of coal miner after coal miner, after coal miner, and you have pride in that, then it doesn't matter if you have the ability to do something else. That's what your family does. And. , what, what is that? And then what does it mean to come from a line of working men and then be like, no, actually I, I'm gonna go to school to be a therapist.

Is that a betrayal? Is that a quote, unquote, an upgrade? But then you have to leave your family like, That to not have the infrastructure for success in communities that we mock for having nothing really weird.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Yes. Yes. Uh, so we talked about the poverty aspect, but now I'm gonna talk about a little bit, some specifics about your pieces.

Uh, Follow the lady, um, about a pair of grifters who seem to be taking advantage of people that aren't all that well off either. Is that the case? Yes.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah, that's the .

**L. Trey Wilson:** Um, what, what, what had you decide to enter into this, uh, theme with that idea?

**DeLane McDuffie:** Yeah. I, I, I wanted. Like I, uh, mentioned before, I wanted two anti-hero, 2 characters that the audience would initially not like.

Um, and I wanted them to do something that would, would be pretty despicable. Like, okay, let's, we're, we're a a step above these four people. Let's take advantage of them. I wanted to have those characters in a really terrible wait, a terrible mindset and a sticky situation. But I wanted, um, Inez, the, the main character in particular to be faced with a choice.

Um, and that choices should. Continue to think about self and just, you know, be all about making money and, and, and just taking care of herself. Um, and, you know, taking herself, taking care of herself while taking advantage of her



community. Uh, or should she? About herself, like sacrifice herself in order to, um, support and to, you know, guide or help out the larger community.

Um, I thought that would be a really interesting, um, place for a character to be. And I hadn't really written from. Perspective before and every, you know, it just really drew me and, uh, it would be, yeah, it was more of like, this is challenging. I'm going to write about this. I don't know exactly where she's going to end up.

I don't even know what her name is now. , you know, that's what propelled me. Just that, that, that pure challenge. And as long as I stay within the parameters of, you know, the cycle of poverty and, um, you know, I, I adhered to that theme, um, I thought I would be all right. So, okay. I say I thought because I'm still in the process, I'm still still in that journey, but, uh, yeah, so that's where it came from.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Got it. Uh, I, I wanna get in a couple of things before we, uh, finish up. Both of you had such amazing colloquial terms, uh, in your pieces. Uh, I, I noticed some of them, but one I was really intrigued by was Folk Craft, um, Sage in yours. Uh, can you tell a little bit about that? And also I'm gonna have you answer two questions at once, which is DeLane hit on something.

Once you start this piece, did you have a sense of how it's going to end or are you kind of in the process and kind of open to what might be the end of the piece? So folk craft and uh, how much do you know about whether this piece is gonna go?

**Sage Martin:** Yes. So I, uh, really love folklore. It's like one of one of my favorite things, specifically folklore of the United States and of the South because the south is such a haunted.

Ground. Um, it just, it's like the dirt has seeped up all of these stories and all sorts of grief and sadness and fear, and it lives here in a way. And specifically the Appalachian Mountains. Lots of people, uh, have reported strange things. They've, they've seen things. They've heard things. People from that area are like, yeah, watch your back.

and I, I love that because it's like a respect for something else, right? Like it's just, I feel like we, we cohabitate with something else that we can't quite name. And there are people who practice witchcraft, but they don't like the Association with witch. And so they call it Folk Craft. I've heard it called Granny Magic or Mountain Magic.

It's like, you know, different areas have different names for it. But I, I'm partial to, to that one. Um, and I knew from the time that I started this piece how I wanted it to go. My idea was always, what if I took the narrative that ha has happened here for hundreds of years of you don't have what other people have, so you're gonna get screwed and you're gonna pay for it and just reverse.

what if people who have everything just don't get what they want in the end? And, um, and I have like a, like a specific passion for horror theater. Um, it is such a, a small part of theater, but I. am very much into it. And I knew that I wanted to write something scary, and so I thought, what if it is kind of like this horrific piece about capitalism that is placed in like a, a magic space that happens to be in the Appalachian Mountains?

**L. Trey Wilson:** Wow. Nice. Very nice. How about you, DeLane? I mean, your piece is littered with all these great phrases and sayings, uh, throughout, uh, so I'm curious about that. Do those, are those. Just naturally yours that you know, or did you start looking up things or are those things that you're familiar with? And also, I'm gonna a two part question for you as well.

Why does Ambrose speak of himself in the third person? I was curious about that too. So those are your two questions.

**DeLane McDuffie:** All right. Uh, the, the, the language, some. I, I know some of it. Um, I grew up and heard being said, you know, around the area, my grandmother or some aunts or, you know, um, a lot of it is, um, I pulled from just like fem noir, um, some old blues records, uh, stuff from the jazz era, Harlem Renaissance, a lot.

Stuff I, I pulled because it's 1941, you know, late thirties, early forties, a lot. World War II is about to happen. Um, there's a lot of rich language, a lot of stuff that's pulled from the military at that time. Um, military slang that. You know, seeped into, you know, the American lexicon. Um, yeah, it's just a very rich time, language wise, so I just, I've always been enthralled by it.

Um, yeah, I just, I, I just love the era. Um, as far as Ambrose being named, I mean, Amber's referring to himself in third person. He's, he's sort of based on. A kid I grew up with, um, who would always say he, he would always say me. He wouldn't say I, he would use me. So he would say, me, me. So hungry, you know? And I was like, wow.

Even you know, I'm 6, 7, 8 years old. Even that was weird. I was like, who? Who tossed like that? And he would never say, call the teacher by her name. He,



Um, I'm gonna start with you this time, Sage. Uh, what is that? What causes that? What, what's that mechanism that happens for you that says, this is a story I've got to tell? The first thing

**Sage Martin:** that I ever wrote was, uh, It was kind of like a response to the way that the industry was moving in terms of casting.

I mean, it's the way that it's moved forever, but like I wanted to write a play that was all about fat women and the things that they experienced because I had never gotten to play a fat woman on stage. I felt like my story was never told like, cuz you can only play a grandmother so many times when you're 18.

You know, like it was, it was really exhausting and. You can't just do hairspray forever. So I was like, I wanna write something for fat woman by a fat woman. And nobody can tell me. Now. Once I realized, oh, I can kind of write whatever I want, I can use this as a platform to say what I wanna say and kind of like explain it to people on a grand scale.

There's, there's almost something about playwriting that's like, I could. But people might not get it. So instead, I'm gonna turn it into a hundred page thing that you have to sit through, and hopefully the seeds will be at least planted, if not watered, and begin to sprout by the time my story is done.

That's like my goal. with what I write.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Nice. DeLane, same thing.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Wow. Um, it's a heavy question. Great answer. Sage. Um, I, I started writing poetry when I was a kid and, um, that kind of morphed into, I, I still write poetry, but that, uh, opened up a. To, uh, short story writing. And then in my late teens, I started writing screen, uh, you know, screenplays.

And, you know, maybe three or four years ago I, uh, started playwriting and it, you know, I was doing it sort of casually, not necessarily like. Professionally, but it just clicked. One day I was like, Hey, I, I write. That's why I like to write. And um, frankly, besides living, it's the only thing, only other thing I want to do, you know, forever.

It's, um, It's, it's just, I'm just so used to it now, and it's, it's probably the best way of communicate. Um, I'm a much better writer than I am a public speaker or even a private speaker. You know, like you, you, you, I'll write down and say, oh, you, you want me to answer that? I'll gimme a second. I'll, I'll text it to you.

Mm-hmm. and, uh, you. understand it much better than if, you know, the words coming out my mouth as you can hear now. But yeah, just it's, it's, and for me, uh, just to add to that, um, . I really, um, like writing, uh, stories that I haven't heard before. Yes. You know, if there's an angle or some sort of point of view perspective that I'm not seeing on tv, I'm not reading about, I'm not hearing through the media, the, you know, that.

You know, that is an, an open door for me and I will go through that door head first. And, you know, if I fall in face, I agree with that. Whatever. Yeah. I'll just keep, cause cause it's fresh and it's interesting and it's just, you know, I, it's not stale. Stale bores me.

**Sage Martin:** So. And you get the opportunity to like confront assumptions.

Yeah. And kind of like, I don't know. Maybe poke at people's perceptions. Yes. And maybe just, maybe someone will leave a little bit more curious, a little bit more compassionate and a little more open. Yeah. And that's like the, the glory of theater to me.

**L. Trey Wilson:** Wow. Well, I'll tell you what's the glory of doing this podcast for me, which is speaking to two amazing writers like the two of you preach.

And DeLane, I understand that you said that writing is your. , um, more preferred way of communicating, but you did pretty well with this podcast too, so you're, you're doing good with public speaking. , um, Sage DeLane, uh, I'm so excited to see the final results of these pieces. Uh, but I wanna thank you both so much for this conversation.

So engaging the time students go by. It's so fast. Cause. A thousand other questions. I could ask both of you, but I'm really glad that you were selected for this process. Uh, clearly. Um, Gregg Daniel knows what he's doing, , and um, I like to think that. Thank you for joining me today. So thank you, Sage. Thank you, DeLane.

**DeLane McDuffie:** Thank you. appreciate it.

**Sage Martin:** Thank you, Trey. This was very enjoyable. Thank you.

**L. Trey Wilson:** You're welcome. Have a good evening.

**Veralyn Jones:** This podcast is produced by Lower Depth Theatre. We'd like to thank Regina Miller and Matthew Soraci for their service and support, Lead

Producer, AJ Dinsmore, Producing Managing Director, Courtney Oliphant, our Host L. Trey Wilson, Graphic Artist Nursery Wall Art Studio and Maritri Garrett for her original music. We would also like to acknowledge our four founding members: Artistic Director, Gregg T. Daniel, Board President & Artistic Associate, Yvonne Huff Lee, and Artistic Associates, Veralyn Jones and Jason Delane Lee.