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ADMISSIONS

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Originally produced by
Lincoln Center Theatre
New York City, 2018

Admissions is presented
by special arrangement with
SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

Admissions is generously underwritten by
Albert G. Lauber and Craig Hoffman and by
Joan and David Maxwell.



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Like his savage comedy *Bad Jews*, Joshua Harmon's *Admissions* is a hyper-precise and loquacious look at what gets said behind closed doors: what insiders of a world say when outsiders aren't around. Harmon knows how to exploit the taboo of the unsayable with an onslaught of language—and in *Admissions* he focuses on white liberals, whose sanctimonious behavior he first noticed during his suburban Westchester upbringing. (Harmon, like the characters in *Admissions*, is white.) He observes, "The people who were the most progressive and vocal also tended to be the first people to pick up the phone and make a call for their kids to make sure that their kids got everything they wanted out of life."

Admissions is set at Hillcrest, a second-tier boarding school in New Hampshire, where the white, progressive admissions director Sherri Rosen-Mason and her husband Bill, the school's equally liberal headmaster, have worked to diversify the mostly white student body, increasing the number of students of color from 6% to 18%. But after their son Charlie's Ivy League aspirations are jeopardized, Sherri and Bill find themselves snarled in hypocrisy: trying to dismantle an oppressive system during their professional lives while also capitalizing on its advantages (and backchannels of privilege) to secure a desirable future for their son.

Part comic provocation, part cautionary tale on unexamined entitlement and the insufficiency of good intentions, *Admissions* considers the well-worn routes of upward mobility available to white Americans and the challenge for white parents like Sherri and Bill to balance priming their children for success with ensuring similar access and opportunity for historically marginalized groups. The journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones writes, "True integration, true equality, requires a surrendering of advantage, and when it comes to our own children, that can feel almost unnatural." It's one thing to want an equitable world—but without sharing the limited access to power, the system will stay the same.

Wrestling with privilege—of any kind—is difficult, to say nothing of the process of actively dismantling it. For white Americans, the very concept of privilege seemingly contradicts every inherited expectation about fairness, a level playing field, and the pay-off of hard work. *Admissions* ends in April 2016, months before the presidential election results kick-started an ongoing reckoning with the fictions and realities of these national narratives. Many white people are seriously grappling—some for the first time in their lives—with the need to examine their whiteness on a personal and political level. *Admissions* reveals the stark, necessary accounting of that self-reflection: if you're a well-intentioned white liberal, what is the cost of living your values—and what are you willing to pay?

—Lauren Halvorsen