

STUDIO

THEATRE

DAVID MUSE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

REBECCA ENDE LICHTENBERG
MANAGING DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

PASSOVER

BY ANTOINETTE NWANDU

DIRECTOR
PSALMAYENE 24

SET DESIGNER
DEBRA BOOTH

COSTUME DESIGNER
BRANDEE MATHIES

LIGHTING DESIGNER
KEITH PARHAM

SOUND DESIGNER
MEGUMI KATAYAMA

PROPERTIES DESIGNER
DEBORAH C. THOMAS

MOVEMENT
TONY THOMAS

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER
ROBB HUNTER

DRAMATURG
LAUREN HALVORSEN

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
AUTUMN J. MITCHELL *

CASTING BY
LAURA STANCZYK, CSA

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION
JOSH ESCAJEDA

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
JEFFERY MARTIN

The world premiere of *Pass Over*
was produced and presented at
Steppenwolf Theatre Company,
Chicago, IL;

Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director
and David Schmitz, Managing
Director

Produced by Lincoln Center Theater
New York City, 2018

Developed by Cherry Lane Mentor
Project, Angelina Fiordellisi,
Founding Artistic Director

Pass Over is presented by special
arrangement with Samuel French
Inc, a Concord Theatricals Company



**Member Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional
Actors and Stage Managers in the United States*

Antoinette Nwandu was an adjunct professor at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, teaching public speaking and introductory theatre to mostly Black and Brown students, when George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012. A year and a half later, a Florida jury found Zimmerman not guilty. The verdict was a formative moment for many young Black Americans, solidifying their sense that Martin's murder wasn't an isolated incident, but part of a greater epidemic of violence against young Black men, and the structural failings of the legal system to deliver them justice.

Nwandu's day job put her in close proximity to that targeted demographic, and she witnessed first-hand the ramifications of unrelenting oppression. Two of her students struck up a friendship, and their lives went in opposite directions over the course of the class: one finished the semester, while the other ended up back in the system after a series of absurd restrictions caused him to violate his parole. Their divergent fates, and the greater political climate, fueled Nwandu to start writing *Pass Over*.

Pass Over riffs on two texts—the Exodus story and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—imbuing the inherent intimacy of the play with the weight of history and theatrical tradition. Like the iconic Didi and Gogo of *Godot*, Moses and Kitch are eternally waiting, stuck in a repetitive cycle of existential dread—except they're trapped on their block, living in constant fear of police violence and dreaming of a different future. "How can I keep the surface area of the play small but give it very deep roots?" Nwandu asked herself, "When you compare contemporary young Black men on a street corner to young slaves to young Israelites, what essential truths can we distill from all of these different historical moments?"

Nwandu mines Beckett's dark humor, but a jazzy, joyful energy permeates Moses and Kitch's dynamic. The two men riff, they roast, they dance on the precipice of the abyss with a mix of soaring musicality and gallows humor. "It makes you ask, 'Okay, why are we making jokes right now?' We're making jokes right now to remind ourselves that we're alive, we're together, and we're trying to survive. Survival humor," says Nwandu. "The radical nature of that act, of that choice, is a form of resistance—of continuing to promote and honor your own humanity when every single voice and person says you're not a human."

Pass Over interrogates the American myth of equal opportunity: Who's actually allowed to get ahead? Who makes the rules in this country? And who passively stands by while injustice accumulates? The play asks its audience to consider how the world ascribes value to Black lives and reveals the harrowing consequences of white people's inaction and paralysis in the face of racist violence. It's a direct confrontation of complicity, but one that's in line with Nwandu's artistic mission: "I'm here to be witness to truth. Full stop. To be a witness to what I see happening in the world today."

—Lauren Halvorsen, dramaturg