

# Repairing a Nation

Landon Woodson, Stephanie Berry and Phil McGlaston in "Repairing a Nation."

PHOTO COURTESY



## Repairing a Nation

### Wake Forest's The MainStage Theatre

Thurs, Aug. 6	8 p.m.
Fri, Aug. 7	8 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	3 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	8 p.m.

**\$41**



Nikkole Salter

**P**roductions rooted in historical events have always been popular at the National Black Theatre Festival. This year, "Repairing a Nation" can be added to the "education" category.

The play, written by Obie winner Nikkole Salter, is set in 2001 in Tulsa, Okla., where the Davis family has gathered to celebrate Christmas. The festiveness hits a bump when one member of the clan – Lois – argues that the Davises should join a class action lawsuit seeking reparations for the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 that devastated the family. Lois is egged on by Debbie, a young community organizer who used to date Lois' son Seth, a law student at NYU. Lois' insistence irritates her cousin Chuck, a family elder, and his wife, Anna, and opens 80-year-old family wounds, some of which go beyond the riot.

Salter's work is one of fiction, but the two-day Tulsa Race Riot was very real, though it was long omitted from state records. White residents, angered by a false report that a black man had assaulted a white woman, burned the prosperous Greenwood District (or Black Wall Street, as it was known) to the ground and killed blacks indiscriminately. There had long been white resentment over the success of Greenwood, with its streets lined with every kind of black-owned business imaginable. Officially, 39 people were killed during the riot, but many survivors put that figure closer to 1,000.

A 2001 report commissioned by the Oklahoma legislature found that Tulsa's black community had been greatly adversely affected by the riot. Compensation for

victims was recommended but never implemented; a scholarship fund for survivors' descendants and a memorial site did come to fruition. Also that year, famed attorneys Charles Ogletree and Johnnie Cochran filed suit against the state on behalf of five riot survivors Citing statute of limitations laws, district and appellate courts dismissed the suit.

Salter, whose Obie came in 2006 for "In the Continuum," told Broadway World that she wrote "Repairing a Nation" to broach the topic of reparations from all sides.

"I wanted to talk about reparations beyond the staunch opinions and concerns about whether or not it was feasible or who would pay for what," she said. "I wanted to talk about why it's so difficult - the complexities of inherited wounds, the nature of apology, healing and reconciliation."

"Repairing a Nation" is being presented by the Crossroads Theatre of New Brunswick, N.J. and directed by Marshall Jones III, Crossroads' producing artistic director. The theatre earned universal kudos for its staging of the play earlier this year, when Stephanie Berry played Lois; Phil McGlaston played Chuck; Chantal Jean-Pierre played Anna; Angel Moore played Debbie; and Landon Woodson played Seth. The creative team included costume designer Sasha Corrodus-Odum; lighting designed Jeff Carr; sound designer Matt Bittner; scenic designer Gennie Neuman Lambert; projection designer Alan Peters; and stage manager Karen Parlato. ■