

BUS STOP



SHOW GUIDE

WELCOME

We're delighted to share this Show Guide for CSC, NAATCO, and Transport Group's production of William Inge's *Bus Stop*, which gives you a deeper look into this production.

CSC, NAATCO, and Transport Group bring their shared mission of reinvigorating classic works for this groundbreaking production.

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A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

INTRODUCTION:

This collaborative production of *Bus Stop* brings together three theater companies with a shared vision to innovatively reimagine classic plays for today's audiences—National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO), Transport Group, and Classic Stage Company (CSC). Featuring an all Asian American cast, this production offers a fresh take on William Inge's story of loneliness and connection in the 1950s Midwest. CSC Teaching Artist Emmy Weissman interviews **Mia Katigbak** (Co-Founder and Artist-Manager, NAATCO), **Jill Rafson** (Producing Artistic Director, CSC), and **Jack Cummings III** (Artistic Director, Transport Group).



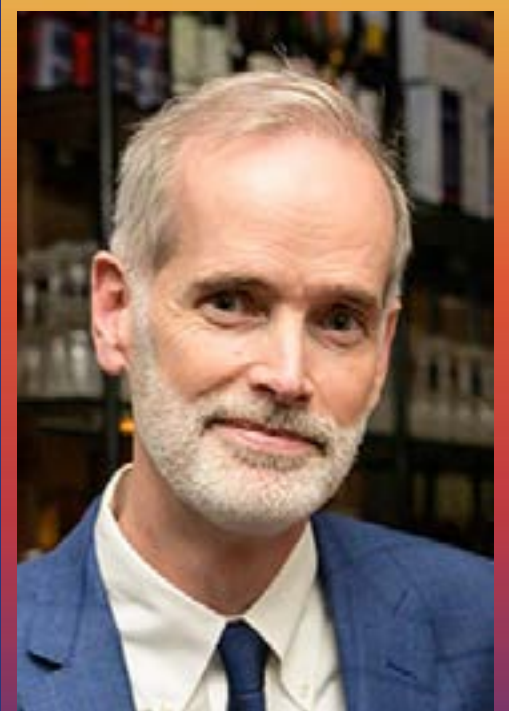
MIA
KATIGBAK

CO-FOUNDER AND
ACTOR-MANAGER,
NAATCO



JILL
RAFSON

PRODUCING
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
CSC



JACK
CUMMINGS III

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
TRANSPORT GROUP

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE MISSION OF YOUR COMPANY AS IT RELATES TO THIS PRODUCTION OF *BUS STOP*?

Mia: NAATCO was founded 35 years ago by two actors with the mission of staging American and European classics with Asian American actors, who are not usually seen in classical repertoires. We want to more accurately represent Asian Americans in terms of the picture of the United States—culturally, socially, and every other way.

Jill: Classic Stage Company is all about reimagining the classics for today's audiences. We put a lot of thought around what the canon has traditionally been and who gets to decide that. Our job is to take a modern lens and say, how do we expand who's directing, designing, and performing these plays, and what are the new classics? Inge is such a classic American writer. I love that we get to take a work that has this Americana feel and get people to see that Americana in a different light.

Jack: Transport Group is nearly 25 years old. We focus on the American experience, staging works from the 20th century on—classical revivals, musicals, and new plays. William Inge is really at the center of that target. This is our fourth Inge play, completing our staging of his major canon.

Mia: In a corollary to what Jill and Jack have said, this project is meaningful in terms of the encapsulation of what “universal” means. Who represents what’s “universal” and who gets to represent what “American” is? For an all Asian American cast to do this quintessentially American play meets all our missions. Every time we do the classics, Asian American actors say, “Oh my gosh, we never get a chance to do this.” There’s a premise that classics are accessible to everyone, but it’s rarely acceptable when they’re done in America in English by non-white people. Asian Americans are aligned with this material because it deals with human nature, and we should have access to performing these plays.

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING AN AUDIENCE MEMBER WALKING OUT OF THIS PRODUCTION WILL TAKE WITH THEM?

Jill: I want people to say, “Why aren’t we doing *Bus Stop* more often?” It’s a great play that addresses what it is to be American and how that lands today. As for this production, watching this show through a specific lens can make it land even more universally.

Jack: From 1950 to 1960, Inge wrote four hit plays, all turned into successful films. He won the Pulitzer and was the envy of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. But over time, Inge’s work has been neglected. His dialogue isn’t as floral as Williams or as didactic as Miller—it comes from the mouths of Midwesterners, whom Easterners might not view as poetic. Yet,

there's poeticism in his portrayals of everyday life if one knows how to listen for it. I hope Easterners leave with a deeper, expanded understanding of Midwesterners. This casting also reilluminates Inge's writing, because it won't look the way the play is normally done.

WHAT THEMES IN THE PLAY STAND OUT TO YOU, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS PARTICULAR PRODUCTION?

Jack: No one tackles loneliness like Inge. It's a specific kind of American loneliness where if you haven't succeeded or fit into an accepted view, the loneliness is overwhelming. He was a gay man in the mid-20th century who suffered from depression. You see this loneliness in his characters—it's hanging over everybody. They're in limbo trying to find connection. The characters in *Bus Stop* are stuck in purgatory, a dark night of the soul. And even if they do emerge, the triumph is only temporary. It's what leaves them in a dramatic limbo that's compelling on stage.

WHAT KIND OF ROLE DO YOU SEE OFF-BROADWAY/DOWNTOWN THEATER PLAYING IN PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF CLASSIC THEATER?

Mia: I've always gone to Off-Broadway for interesting work and reimaged classics. I believe in our bravery to look at things in new ways. I love this partnership—it means so much because of our shared values. We're warriors on the same side, and I'm grateful for that.

Jill: I hope Off-Broadway keeps making space for the classics. They're essential to our vocabulary, and it's necessary to keep revisiting them. The new is always in conversation with these texts.

Jack: All work – experimental, new, classics – goes hand in hand. We need to get new playwrights produced and also do the classics. Mid-century American writing is what we're standing on. It's our Shakespeare, our inheritance. It helps me with new work to re-study where we came from.

CASTING AN ALL-ASIAN AMERICAN *BUS STOP*

Mia Katigbak, Co-Founder & Actor-Manager of NAATCO



There were Asian immigrant communities in Kansas City as early as World War I, with sociopolitical factors in their countries of origin influencing waves of forced or voluntary migrations in subsequent years. Early migrants were the Chinese, typically laborers. There was a wave of Filipino immigrants from the medical profession from the 1940s to the 1960s, in response to active recruitment by the U.S. due to the shortage of nurses in hospitals. In the 1950s, South Asians from India arrived, many attracted by the availability of high-tech jobs. The end of the Vietnam War brought the Vietnamese and the Hmong.



But this information does not figure in NAATCO's considerations when it comes to our presentations of American and European plays from the classical canon.

Whether or not there were Asians in Kansas in the 1950s is basically immaterial because, as Ezra Pound said, “A Classic is a classic not because it conforms to certain structural rules or fits certain definitions. It is a classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness.”



NAATCO (National Asian American Theatre Company) was founded to give Asian American actors opportunities to play the roles in the western classical canon to which they have no access. In 1989, the year of our founding, we were still relegated to the margins of this repertory: as spear carriers, nannies, domestics, and other supernumeraries. What was then called “non-traditional” or “color-blind” casting was limited to these marginal parts when it came to Asian Americans.



NAATCO offers a new perspective on these classics. We say that new insights into old works can come from unexpected faces. In the context of the constant influx of cultures and ethnicities that have made magnificent transformations on the American body and



in American life, our all-Asian American interpretations of the European and American canon have naturally offered fresh,

contemporary, and thought-provoking experiences.

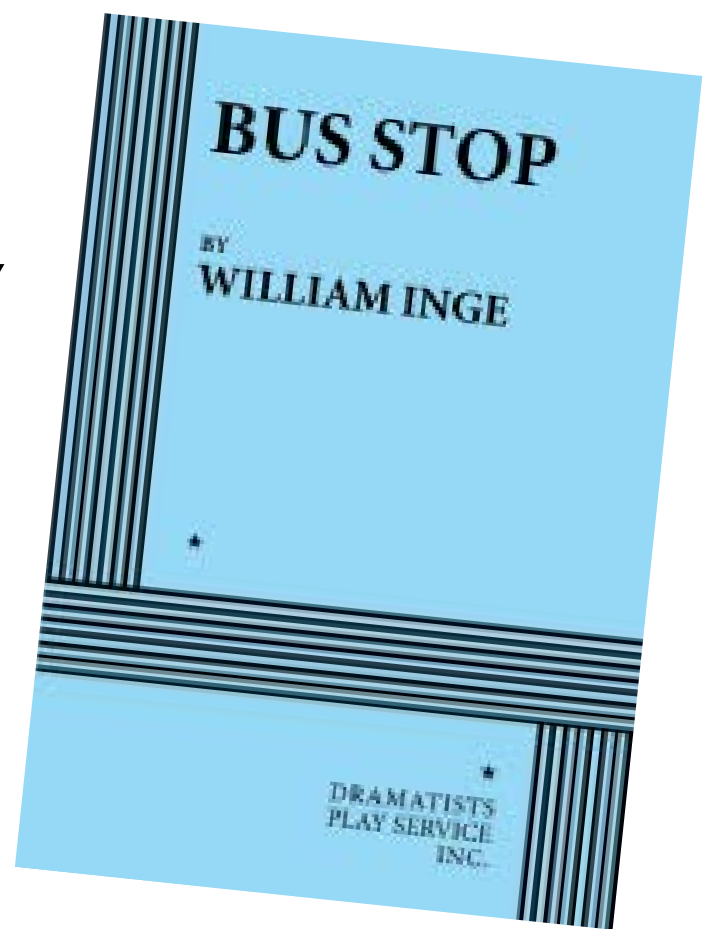
When NAATCO presents this repertory, we do not reset them in an Asian environment. While this has been seen as innovative in

the past, it limits and constrains us because it is often considered the only plausible way Asian Americans could have access to the material. We believe in the transformative powers of the theater. We trust that the power of the classics and our capacity to interpret



them will illuminate abiding characteristics of human nature regardless of time and place. Regardless of skin color.

In *Bus Stop*, an all-Asian American cast will inhabit William Inge's characters in their bodies, voices, heads, and hearts. In every aspect, except in our Asian features, they will be transformed. Without changing a word, the play, set in a diner in the Midwest, will bring that eternal and irrepressible freshness. Our Asian American faces will represent the "Universal."



We have produced a good range of European classics: Shakespeare, Molière, Sophocles, Shaw, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Chekhov, Strindberg, Lope de Vega, Lorca, Fry, Brecht, Pinter.

From the American canon, we have presented O'Neill, Wilder, Finn, Williams, Odets, Albee, Kaufman and Hart – not as geographically diverse as the European cohort.



It is with pride that NAATCO, in valuable partnership with CSC and Transport Group, adds what is considered a quintessentially Midwestern play to our production history.

THE CASE FOR INGE

written by Jack Cummings III, Director and Artistic Director of Transport Group

I am going to make a rather bold statement.

William Inge is one of the most revolutionary playwrights the American theatre has ever produced.

For some people, such a statement may come as a bit of a surprise. Over time, Inge's work has come to be regarded as quaint and old-fashioned—an irrelevant relic of the past. Revolutionary is not a word one naturally associates with front porches, diners, tweed suits, little old ladies, and teenagers in saddle shoes. But Inge is not to be underestimated. Accepting his "Americana" settings and characters at face value is to overlook the many daring gifts his plays have so generously given us for over 75 years.



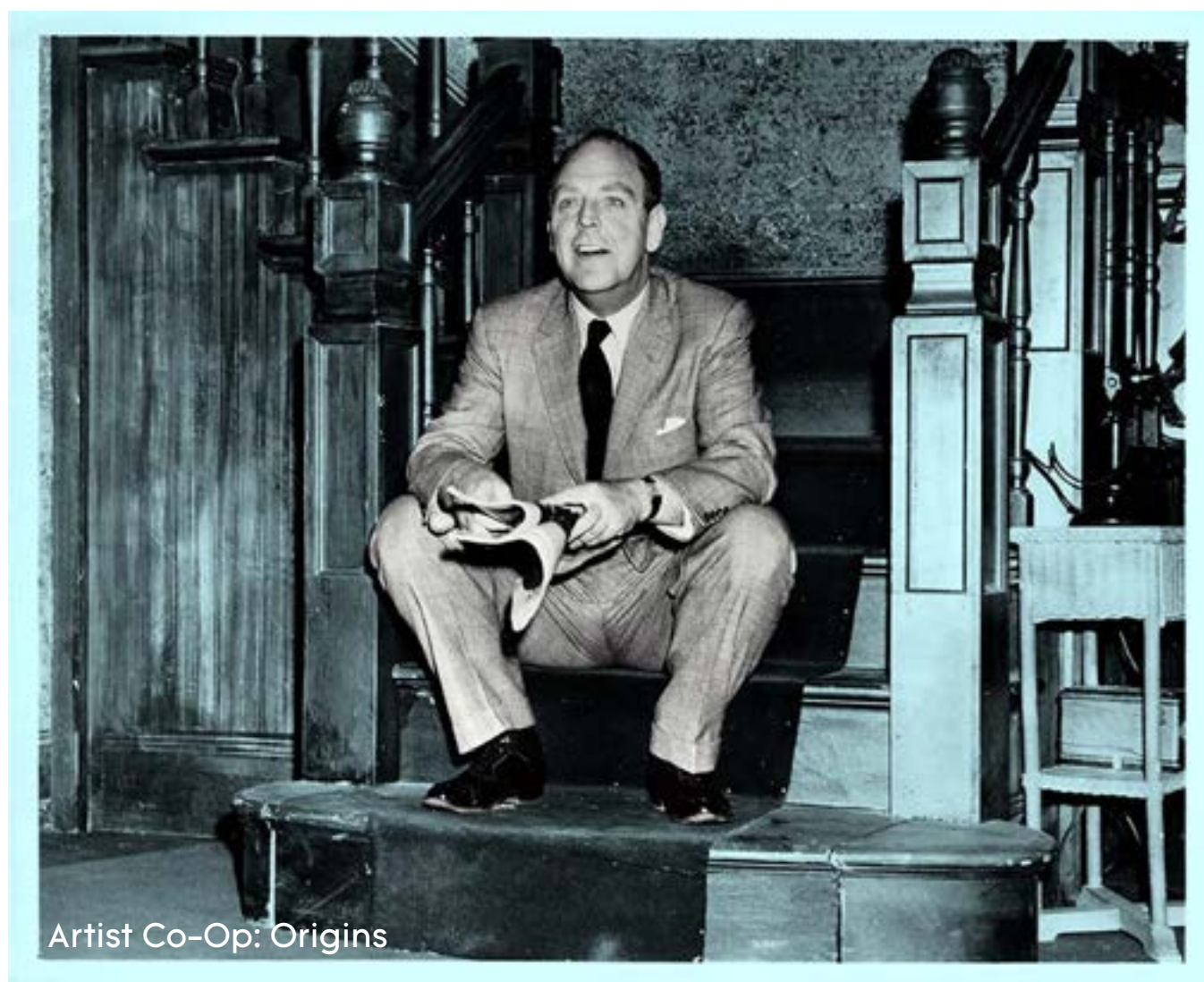
Portrait of William Inge by Carl Van Vechten

Fresh from victories in both Europe and the Pacific, post-war America was on a high and determined to never look back. The economy was booming—color TVs, cars, dishwashers, Elvis, Mickey Mouse, drive-ins, brick homes with driveways, sidewalks, and picket fences—the

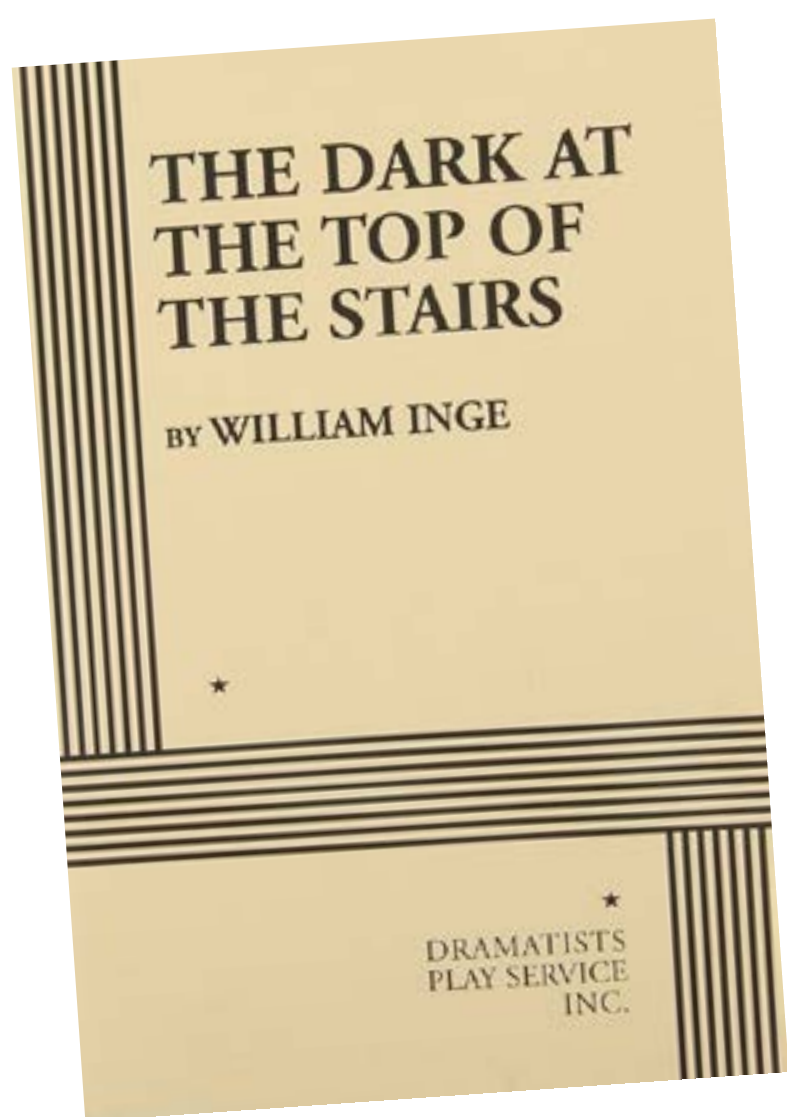
list goes on and on. America was like one big cowboy winning every rodeo in sight. At night, the nation fell asleep with Norman Rockwell visions dancing in their head.

But William Inge knew different. William Inge knew the truth. And he wrote it.

Inge saw that underneath the country's technicolor was a world of post-war shock, disillusion, and abject terror. He dared to lift the curtain on the debilitating loneliness Americans were living with but too fearful to admit—even to themselves. He instinctively understood that the constant barrage of commercial bravado was merely a cover-up of far more serious issues. Time and time again, his characters grapple with everything from addiction, repressed or closeted sexuality, adultery to love and the basic search for happiness. His characters crave to fit into the world around them but often realize too late the world has no place for them—assuming the world they sought was even real in the first place.



In *Come Back, Little Sheba*, Doc's alcoholism destroys his career and most tragically his marriage. At the end of the play, both husband and wife are condemned to spend the rest of their lives pretending to ignore the sadness that fills every inch of their home. In *Picnic*, Madge and Hal run away together towards an uncertain future that will most certainly fall apart once their mutual sexual attraction runs its course. In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, a young boy witnesses both violence



and animal attraction between his parents while an off-stage suicide hangs heavily in the air. *Bus Stop* operates in a Twilight Zone of its own making with characters seemingly doomed to live in a snowbound purgatory from which there is no actual escape.

While Inge so bravely confronted these human complexities head on, his true masterstroke was where he chose to explore these issues. Rather than working with larger-than-life people in big urban areas (politicians, corporate executives, sports heroes, movie stars, and other assorted accomplished types), Inge deceptively chose *everyday* people. And not just everyday people—*small town* everyday people. These were housewives, doctors, waitresses, bus drivers, sheriffs, teachers, to

name a few. We recognize these people—we know them or want to know them as they take us back to a time that feels simpler and gentler. So, we innocently step onto their porches, into their homes, their diners where we may enjoy some coffee or pie. But beware, for this is exactly where Inge wants you. Before you know it, you are on a terrifying journey into the darkest parts of your soul where the fear (and consequences) of your loneliness grows by the minute—and all the while surrounded by the cozily familiar.



Credit: St. Louis Walk of Fame

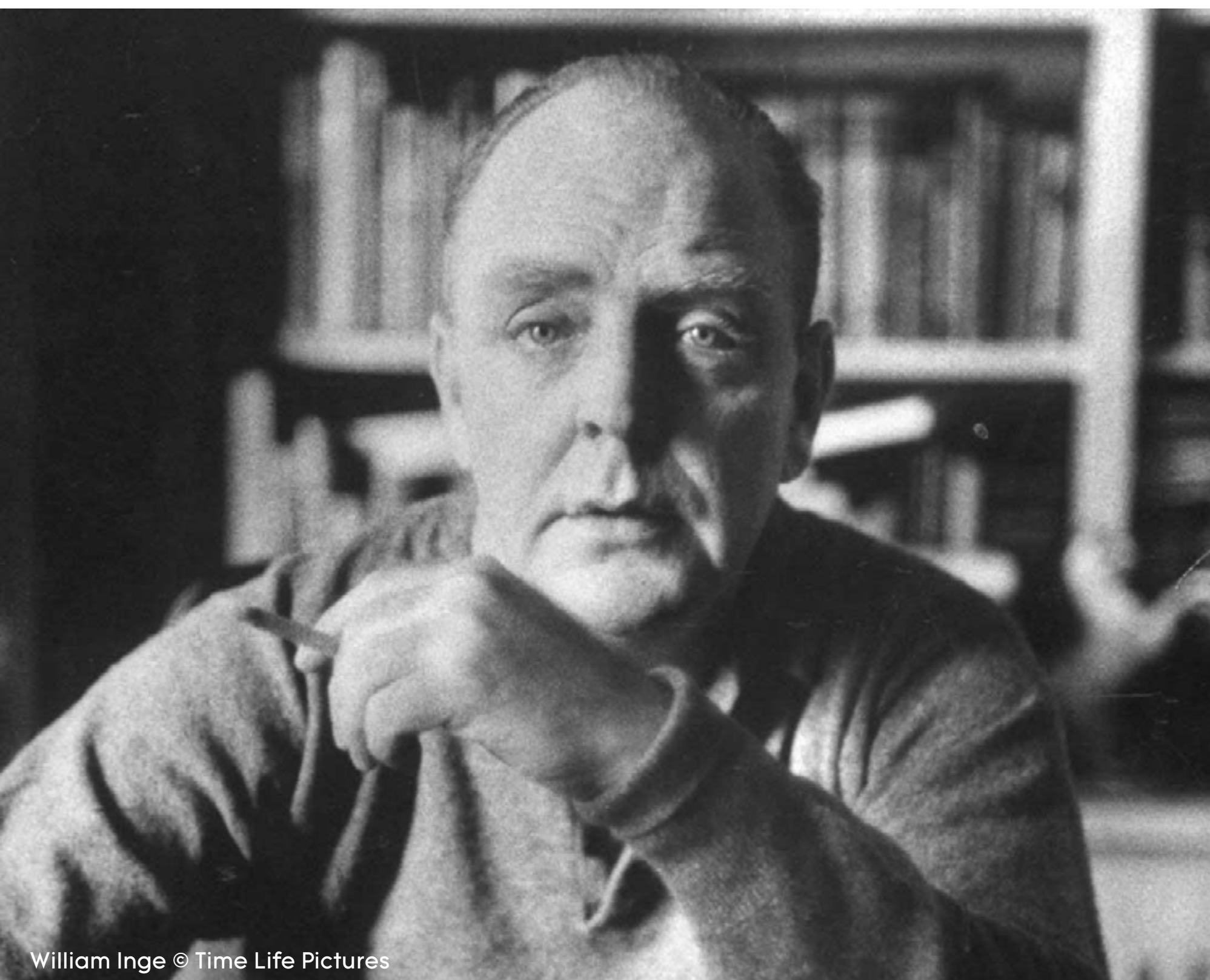
This is precisely why Inge was a true revolutionary. He dared to call out the hypocrisy of the American dream and the American hero—the very foundation upon which the entire country is built. He dared to say we're not all happy, we're not all successful - in fact, most of us are lonely and afraid -

and sometimes we can't even figure out why. Nobody else was writing what Inge was writing about, for no one better understood the small town American and their fears more than a closeted, alcoholic, manically depressed, former Kansas schoolteacher. Through his work, Inge stood up for all of us—expressing what we could not. And he did so deftly, endowing his characters with the utmost

humor, poetry, and pathos. He allowed us to see ourselves with a bit more clarity, a bit more honesty, and most importantly, a bit more compassion.

Not all revolutionary heroes come with banners, guns, and marching mobs. Sometimes, they come quietly through the back door of a small town diner on a snowy night, telling us quietly, "I see you."

Thank you, William Inge, for seeing us. In 2025, I cannot think of a more revolutionary act.



William Inge © Time Life Pictures

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Compiled by CSC Teaching Artist Elena V. Levenson

AUG.
1948

A one-time member of a 1930s Communist Party USA spy ring testifies in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He names former U.S. State Department official Alger Hiss as part of an underground Communist group operating in federal government.

JULY
1949

“Burning bridges behind” (his own words), 36-year-old William Inge leaves his teaching job at Washington University in St. Louis and moves to New York City ahead of the pre-Broadway try-out of a play he wrote the previous year. In *Come Back, Little Sheba*, renting a room to a young college student (and seeing her with two suitors) jolts a middle-aged couple into crisis. “I have written my heart out,” Inge wrote to a friend at the University of Kansas. “If the play doesn’t make it, I’m through.”

SEPT.
1949

While the Westport, Connecticut run is a hit, the director and actors in *Come Back, Little Sheba* have commitments that prevent the play from going straight to Broadway. The delay lasts for months; an anxious and alcoholic Inge once again begins drinking heavily.

JAN.
1950

Alger Hiss is convicted of two counts of perjury and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment. *Come Back, Little Sheba* has performances in Wilmington, Delaware and in Boston.

FEB.
1950

At a West Virginia club, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin claims to hold “a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.”

In later speeches across the country, McCarthy’s number of alleged Communists in the State Department fluctuates wildly (from 205 to 57, 81, or 10) and he suggests that homosexuals are especially susceptible to being recruited as Communist agents. These claims lead to Congressional investigations into federal employees’ political beliefs and sexuality—part of what will later be known as the Second Red Scare and the Lavender Scare.

Come Back, Little Sheba premieres on Broadway. Reviews are mixed; for instance, *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson calls the play “underwritten to the point of barrenness” but adds that “it provides the parts for some of the most tumultuous and poignant acting of the season.” In a *Variety* poll of New York drama critics, Inge is named “most promising playwright” of the 1949–1950 season.

In “Concerning Labels” in the *New York Times*, Inge writes, “Expectations, of one’s self and of others, can be troubling...We are being unfair to a writer if we expect him always to equal our conception of what is his best.”



**JUNE
1950**

The Soviet-aligned Democratic People's Republic of Korea launches an invasion of the U.S.-aligned Republic of Korea. While President Harry S. Truman insists "we are not at war," the United States provides around 90% of military personnel for U.N. forces.

**JUNE
1951**

Congress passes the Universal Military Training and Service Act. The new law requires that men between the ages of 18.5 and 26 register for the draft.

**OCT.
1951**

"I Love Lucy" premieres on CBS. The show pioneers practices that become standard for "situation comedies," including shooting on film and using a three-camera set-up that allows actors to perform live in front of a studio audience.

The primary cast of I Love Lucy are (from left) Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz



**JUNE
1952**

The 250-page omnibus bill introduced by Sen. Pat McCarran in 1950 (and subsequently challenged, revised, reintroduced as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, vetoed by President Truman, and passed by Congress) becomes law.

While the law's sponsors deny "any theory of Nordic superiority," they reaffirm a 1924-era quota system based on national origins to "preserve the sociological and cultural balance" of the United States. The law also creates quotas limiting immigration from former British colonies in the Caribbean and from the "Asia Pacific Triangle."

The legislation eliminates racial restrictions on naturalization, allowing Japanese and Korean immigrants to become citizens (following earlier legislation allowing Chinese, Indian, and Filipino immigrants to naturalize); creates four preferred categories of immigrants (based on skills and family reunification); and explicitly excludes declared or suspected Communists and anarchists.

Paramount Pictures releases the film version of *Come Back, Little Sheba*, starring Shirley Booth (who originated the role of Lola on Broadway) and Burt Lancaster.

Six years after William Inge began the play—initially titled *Summer Romance*, then *Women in Summer*, then *Front Porch*, then *A House with Two Doors*—and three months after its premiere on Broadway, Inge is awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Picnic*.

The United Nations, North Korea, and South Korea sign an armistice agreement that establishes the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The newly defined borderline between North Korea and South Korea is very similar to the pre-war border.

Burt Lancaster plays Deborah Kerr's paramour in *From Here to Eternity*. The blockbuster film makes over \$30 million at the box office and is nominated for 13 Academy Awards (winning 8 of them, including Best Picture).

MAY
1953

JULY
1953

AUG.
1953



**AUG.
1953**

The Termination Era begins when Congress passes House Concurrent Resolution 108. The law ends protected trust status of all Indian-owned lands and calls for termination of federal recognition of tribes in California, Florida, New York, and Texas, as well as specific tribes, including the Potawatomi Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska.

**APR.
1954**

ABC begins televising a Senate committee's investigation into charges that Sen. McCarthy and attorney Roy Cohn had improperly pressured the Army into giving special treatment to a former McCarthy aide who was drafted in November 1953.

**MAY
1954**

In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court issues a unanimous decision ruling that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.



Getty Images



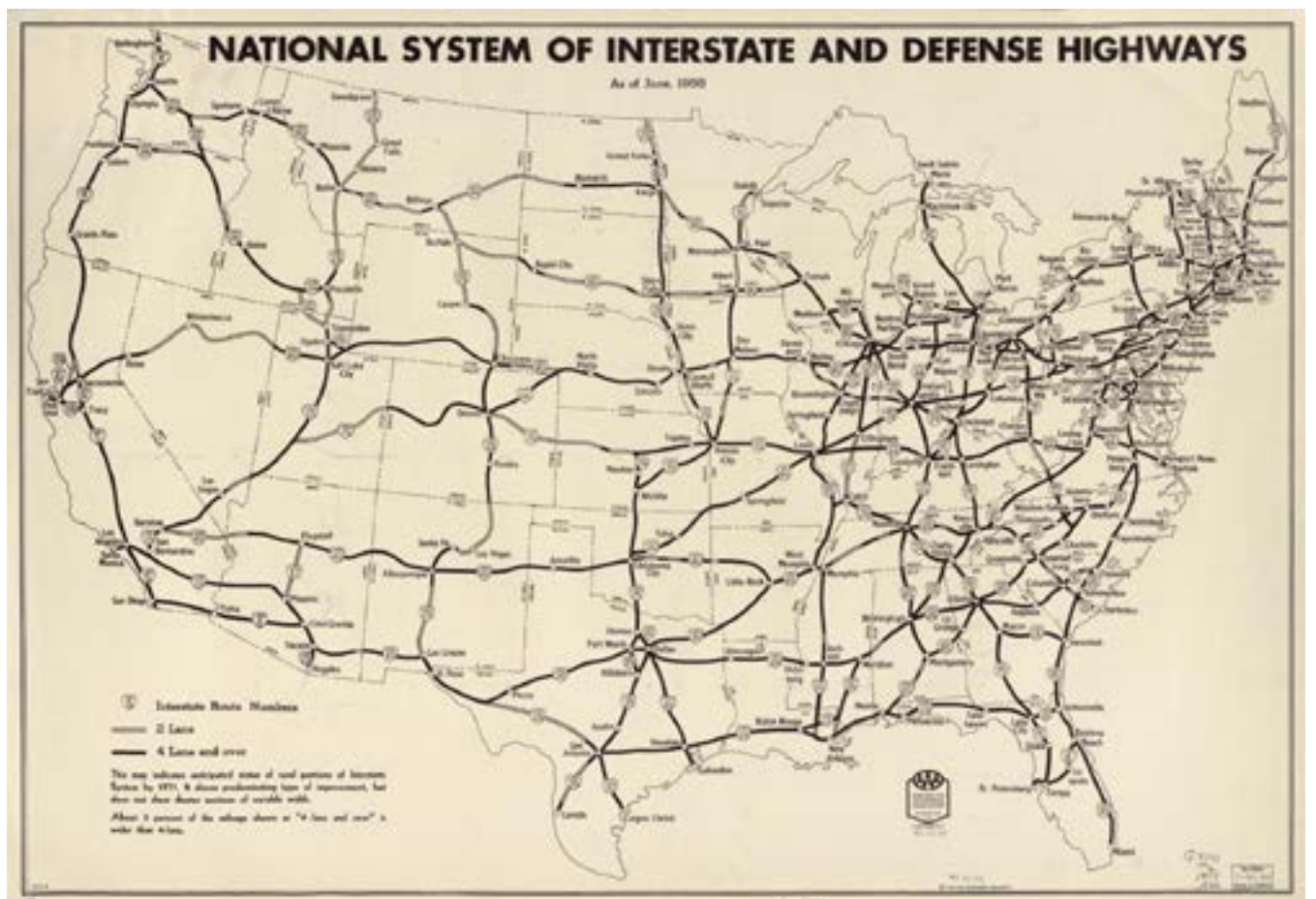
**JUNE
1954**

In a heated back-and-forth with McCarthy during a Congressional hearing, Army chief counsel Joseph Welch's "Have you no sense of decency, sir?" inspires such widespread applause that a recess is called. Gallup polls now show that public opinion of McCarthy is down 16% since six months prior.

SEPT.
1954

Eisenhower appoints an advisory committee on a "national highway program." After being shocked by road conditions during a transcontinental U.S. army convoy in 1919 ("one succession of dust, ruts, pits, and holes") and impressed by the German autobahn when serving as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force during World War II, Eisenhower makes the construction of an interstate highway system a priority in his second presidential term.

American Automobile Association. National system of interstate and defense highways: as of June. Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1958. Map.



MAR.
1955

Bus Stop opens on Broadway.

15-year-old Claudette Colvin is arrested in Montgomery, Alabama for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white rider. She becomes one of four plaintiffs in *Browder v. Gayle*, which challenges bus segregation. Nine months later, her mentor Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white rider, sparking the yearlong Montgomery bus boycott.



EDUCATION SECTION

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

This section was developed to help students and teachers prepare to see *Bus Stop*. Feel free to share it!

SUMMARY

On a snowy night in Kansas, a diner can be an oasis, a prison, a place to hide, or a place to discover yourself. When a bus is forced to take shelter from stormy weather outside, a mismatched group of dreamers and cowboys, waitresses and outcasts find unexpected warmth in one another. In William Inge's 1955 classic, this great playwright of the Midwest gives voice to memorable characters who'll linger like the perfect cup of diner coffee. This production of *Bus Stop* is the first to feature an all-Asian American cast taking on this quintessential play of the Midwest.

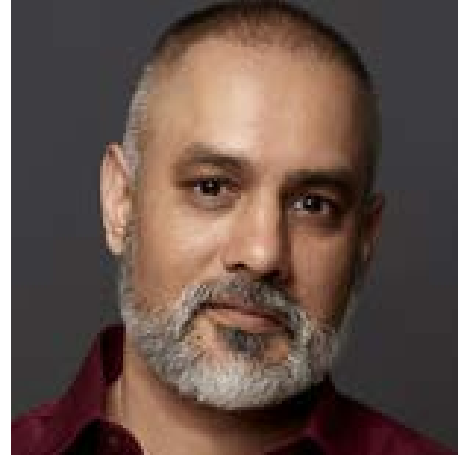


Credit: Michael Kushner

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS



**ELMA
DUCKWORTH:**
A waitress.



**DR. GERALD
LYMAN:**
A former
college
professor.



**GRACE
HOYLARD:**
Owner of the
diner.



CARL:
A bus driver.



**WILL
MASTERS:**
A Sheriff.



**VIRGIL
BLESSING:**
A ranch
hand.



CHERIE:
A nightclub
singer.



**BO
DECKER:**
A young
rancher and
cowboy.

THIS SECTION CONTAINS SPOILERS!

THE STORY

The play opens in the diner. It is one o'clock in the morning, and the owner of the diner, Grace Hoylard, and her teenage waitress, Elma Duckworth, are waiting for the Kansas City-to-Wichita bus to arrive. The local sheriff, Will Masters, enters the scene and tells the two women that due to the blizzard, the roads have been closed, and the bus will have to remain in the parking lot of the diner until further notice. The bus arrives, and five passengers descend, making their way into the diner, unsure of how long they will be stranded together.

One of those passengers is Cherie, a young woman in flashy clothes and makeup. She approaches Sheriff Will, asking him to protect her from a cowboy who is still on the bus. Cherie claims that he has abducted her from her job as a singer at the Blue Dragon nightclub in Kansas City.

Another passenger, Dr. Gerald Lyman, a former college professor and full-time alcoholic in his fifties, makes a connection with Elma, the young waitress. Carl, the bus driver, flirts with restaurant owner Grace at the counter. It is clear that something is going on between them.

The door to the restaurant suddenly swings open, revealing a young cowboy, Bo Decker, and his older friend, Virgil Blessing, who is carrying a guitar case. There is instant conflict as Bo and Will argue about closing the door. Virgil tries to warn Bo not to antagonize the sheriff, but Bo is headstrong, launching into a tirade about his ranch and his prowess at the rodeo. He then orders food and sits at the counter to talk to Cherie. He hugs and kisses her roughly, which embarrasses Cherie. Grace complains of a headache and retires to her apartment for the night. Around the same time, Carl leaves the diner to go for a long walk.

Cherie tells Bo that she is not interested in him, although Bo refuses to believe it, insisting that they must get married because they have been intimate. Will promises Cherie she will not have to go with Bo on the bus. Virgil takes Bo aside and tries to calm him down, but Bo struggles to come to terms with the fact that any woman would refuse him.

Dr. Lyman tries to impress Elma with his vast knowledge and life experience, and they make a plan to meet the next day in Topeka. Bo reveals to Virgil the loneliness he has been feeling. Cherie tells Elma about her life and begins to realize that marrying Bo might be a reasonable choice, despite her reluctance.

Cherie sings as a means to entertain her fellow passengers and pass the time. Her

voice inflames Bo's passion to the point that he lifts her off her feet. Will comes to her rescue by lunging at Bo, enabling Cherie to free herself. Bo and Will go outside to fight, as Grace hears the commotion and comes downstairs to watch. Outside, Will finally subdues Bo, slapping handcuffs on him. Lyman wakes up long enough to go to the restroom, and Virgil convinces Cherie not to press charges. He reveals to her that she is the first woman Bo has ever made love to. Cherie seems to be touched by Bo's naïveté.

In the early hours of the morning, Will announces that the highway will soon be cleared. He then explains to Bo that a person does not have a right to get whatever he wants: he must earn it. At Will's urging, Bo apologizes to everyone, offering money to Cherie to return to Kansas City. Bo shows genuine humility, which allows Cherie to see him in a different light, and she decides to go to Montana with him. Virgil lies to Bo, telling him that he has taken another job as he wishes to give the lovers their time together.

Carl reveals to Grace that Lyman has been in trouble many times for getting involved with girls. Will teases Carl and Grace, making it clear that he knows their earlier excuses were to cover a rendezvous. This embarrasses Grace in front of Elma, who later assures her not to worry about it. Bo and Cherie say goodbye to everyone and leave happily. Grace sets about closing the restaurant as the bus pulls away.

She sends Elma home and sends Virgil outside so she can go to bed. Virgil has no idea where he will go next. Grace takes one last look around the restaurant before turning off the lights.

Credit: Allison Stock



ACTIVITY

Help the bus find its way to the diner.



[The Saturday Evening Post](#)

"Kansas is the 'Times Square' of the United States, where the cross-currents of traffic meet and mingle and pass on... where the West says Howdy to the East, and where the North shakes hands with the South."

- 1953 State Map of Kansas

In the 1950s, bus travel was a major mode of long-distance transportation in the United States. Greyhound and Trailways were the largest companies at the time. With the Federal Highway Act of 1956, work began to create a national network of Interstate Highways. Buses moved to using faster routes, no longer relying on local roads.

FOUNDATIONS

WILLIAM INGE

William Inge is often referred to as the “Playwright of the Midwest,” because his writing captures both the joys and sorrows of life in small-town America. Inge grew up in Kansas, where his mother ran a boarding house during his early childhood. The women he met there had a great influence on him, and his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Picnic*, is based on his insights about these boarders and the sadness of their lives. He wrote many dramatic plays, novels, and screenplays (one of which earned him an Academy Award for Best Writing of an Original Screenplay).



THE ROADSIDE DINER

Bus Stop is set in a small diner along the highway. It is a perfect spot for strangers to meet, for people to hash out their differences, and for everyone else to get a decent meal. Diners saw their peak during the 1950s and have since maintained the status of an American icon. With interesting architecture,

neon lights, and a slice of pie for each visitor, it is no surprise that this setting is commonplace in American literature, movies, books, or television shows.



Truck Driver in diner. Clinton, Indiana (Source: Library of Congress, Photo by Arthur Rothstein)

RODEOS AND COWBOY CULTURE

The character of Bo in *Bus Stop* is serious about the profession and its potential for publicity.

Rodeo stars were a regular feature of major news magazines during this time period.

"Cultural traditions, strong character, and hard work define the cowboy way of life. The cowboy's origin story comes from African and European herding traditions. A cowboy's clothing and tools reflect form, function, style, and culture. American rodeo is the living legacy of the working cowboy. Since 1955, cowboys and cowgirls have been inducted into the Rodeo Hall of Fame."

– [National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum](#)



Photo of Blanche Altizer Smith, 1950s National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame



DeVere Helrich Photograph, 1950s Digital Collections at Dickinson Research Center

TRIVIA

*It is not uncommon for plays and books to cite outside sources or even to quote famous lines in their own text. Dr. Lyman, one of the characters in *Bus Stop*, has a habit of quoting Shakespeare. In the space below, identify the Shakespearean play or sonnet from which the line or passage comes and, after reading it in context, try your best to summarize its meaning.*

QUOTE	SOURCE	MEANING
"This castle hath a pleasant seat."		
"Nymph in thy orisons, be all my sins remembered!"		
"That time of year thou may'st in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang / Upon those boughs –"		
"Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day? / Thou are more lovely and more temperate: / Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, / And Summer's lease hath all too short a date."		
"'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; / Thou art thyself though, not a Montague. / What's a Montague? It is not hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, or any other part / Belonging to a man. O! be some other name"		

Extra Credit: Can you find any other lines in *Bus Stop* that are not the playwright's? Identify their source and their meaning in context as well.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS



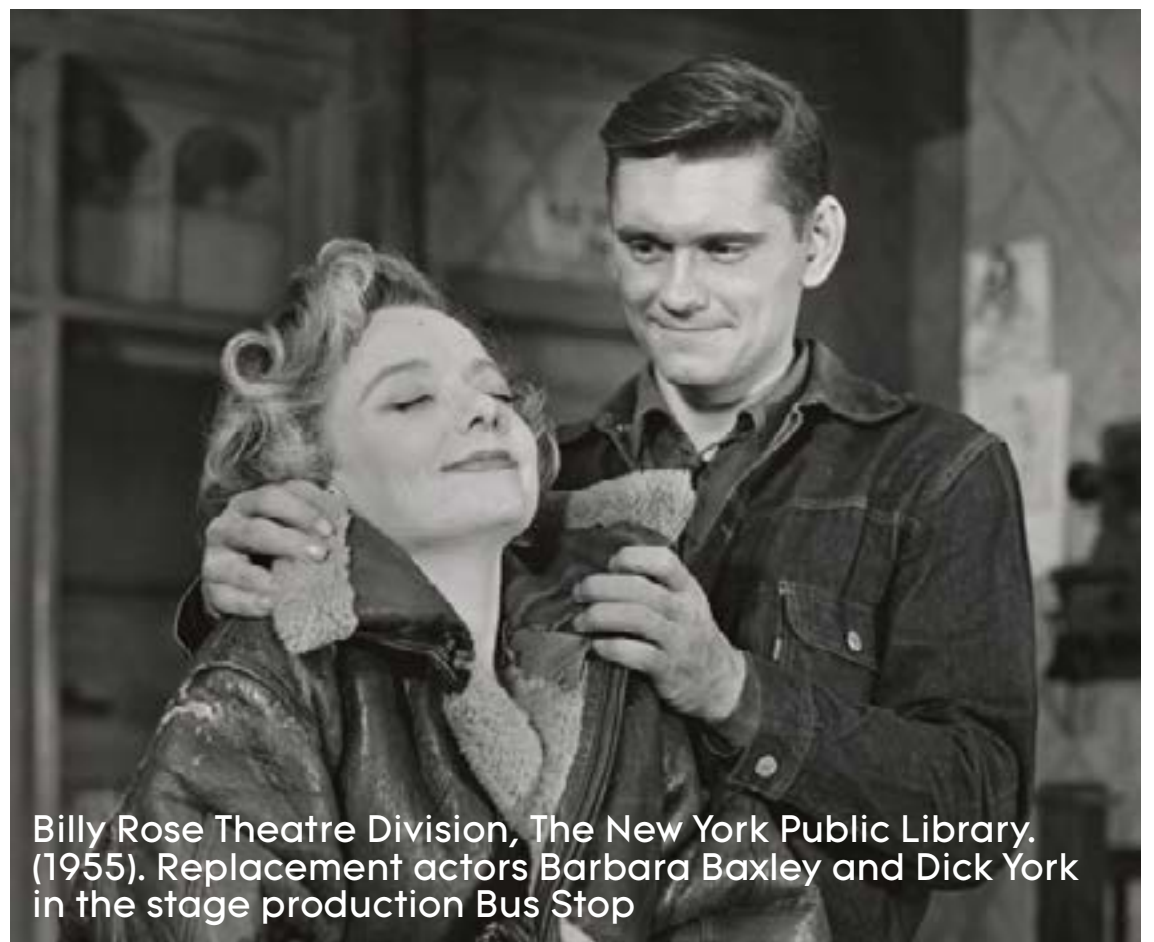
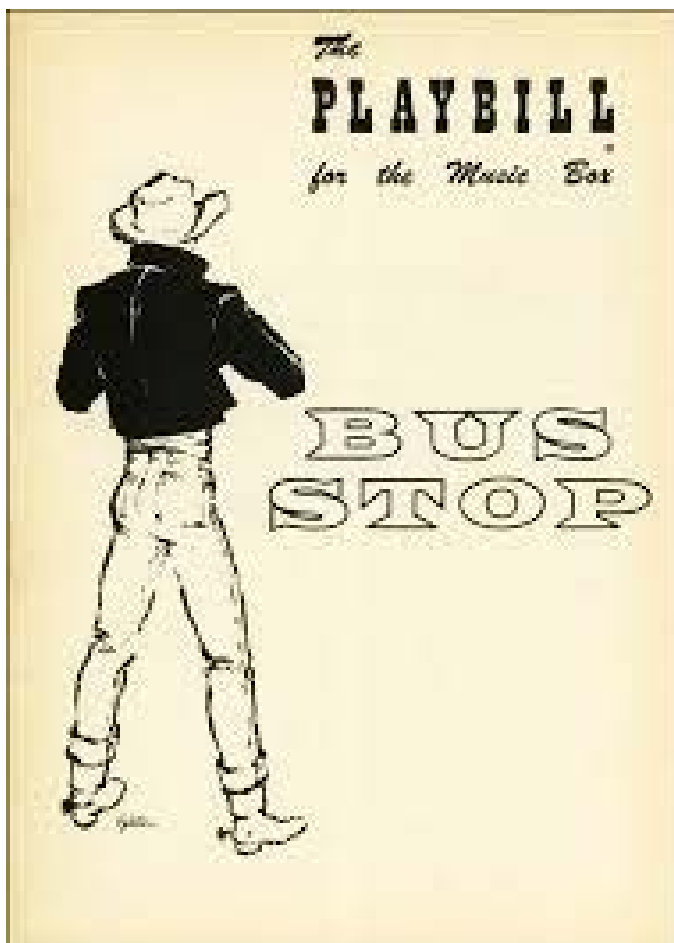
Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. "Patrick McVey, Elaine Stritch, Phyllis Love, and Kim Stanley in Bus Stop" The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1955.



The New York Public Library. "Kim Stanley and Anthony Ross in Bus Stop" The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1955.

THEMES

Bus Stop deals with many themes. Choose one of the themes on the next page or identify your own, then talk with a partner about how that theme is revealed over the course of the play. How does this theme impact the characters?



Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. (1955). Replacement actors Barbara Baxley and Dick York in the stage production *Bus Stop*

SMALL-TOWN LIFE AND BIG-CITY DREAMS

For the characters in *Bus Stop*, there is a stark contrast between “Small Town USA” and the “Big City.” They are stranded between two metropolitan areas, St. Louis and Topeka, examining where they have come from and where they are going. But where do these characters belong? It seems that Dr. Lyman is looking for a city in which to disappear, while Bo prefers his ranch far away from the rodeo scene. Grace must face the fact that her birth and death might happen in the same place, while her youthful employee, Elma, recounts her adventures in Topeka.

Questions: What is the play saying about small-town and big-city life? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each? Are they really so different? If you have lived in one setting and recently moved to another, share your experience in adapting to the change.

YOUNG LOVE

The passion between young Cherie and Bo is quite different from the casual relationship between the older Grace and Carl. The ups and downs of their time together, their dramatic fights, and Cherie’s sudden change of heart at the end of the play all make sense in context of their age and immaturity. Grace and Carl are more pragmatic. They take advantage of the opportunity and convenience of their affair, accepting it for what it is, seemingly unconcerned with whether it will lead to anything more.

Questions: What is it that makes “young love” so intense? Can that feeling be recaptured later in life? How, if at all, do our attitudes about love change over time?

LONELINESS AND LONGING

If the characters in *Bus Stop* have one thing in common, it is loneliness. They all long for a love they have not yet found, and fear they may never find it. Dr. Lyman suggests that fear might be the reason for their loneliness, in that love requires people to “give up something of themselves,” and many people are either afraid or unwilling to do so. The play is, in part, about characters learning to overcome that fear. But it ends with Virgil’s sad reminder that “some people” are “just left out in the cold.”

Questions: Why do humans long for love and feel lonely when they do not have it? What things must we give up to get it?

SELF-DISCOVERY

Although both Bo and Dr. Lyman exude confidence, neither has everything figured out. Bo thinks that he can catch a girl like he catches cattle, not realizing the respect and kindness that marriage requires. And Dr. Lyman, despite constantly quoting Shakespeare on love and happiness, has been unable to attain them in his own life due to a long trail of mistakes. During the play, both characters take a journey of self-discovery, recognizing their shortcomings and beginning to conquer them.

Question: What made those personal breakthroughs possible?

RESOURCES AND RELATED WORKS

To broaden your familiarity with William Inge and the key topics in the play, consider consulting the following resources:

Plays

Come Back, Little Sheba by William Inge (1950)

Picnic by William Inge (1953)

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs by William Inge (1958)

A Loss of Roses by William Inge (1959)

Natural Affection by William Inge (1963)

Books

The American Diner by Michael Karl Witzel (2006)

A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph by Ralph F. Voss (1990)

A Living History of the Ozarks by Phyllis Rossiter (1992)

Movie Love in the Fifties by James Harvey (2002)

Films

Bus Stop starring Marilyn Monroe and directed by Joshua Logan (1956)

Diner directed by Barry Levinson (1982)

High Noon directed by Fred Zinnemann (1952)

Story Synopsis from SuperSummary.

Trivia answers: 1) Macbeth 2) Hamlet 3) Sonnet 73 4) Sonnet 18 5)

Romeo and Juliet