

Dramaturg's Note by Daniel Smith

To mark the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives has sponsored a yearlong series of events called Project 60/50. *60/50 Theatre Project* represents the Department of Theatre's contribution to this campus-wide effort to stimulate conversation and debate around issues of inclusion, diversity, and Civil Rights.

Building on archival research and personal interviews, playwright Rob Roznowski has developed a "fictional documentary" that imagines histories of citizenship at MSU. What does it mean to be a citizen of this community on the banks of the Red Cedar? As Michigan Agricultural College (1909) morphed into Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science (1925) and eventually became Michigan State University (1964), how has Spartan citizenship changed over time? Some characters in this play express their citizenship by wearing green and white, painting the Rock, cheering at football games, and attending such campus events as the J-Hop. Other characters enact citizenship by raising their voices in protest, demanding changes in university policy on a variety of issues. Roznowski defines inclusion broadly: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, social class, and political ideology are all discussed in this play.

One important aspect of the production is its approach to casting. Each member of the ensemble portrays several characters, and these characters may be of a different race or gender than the performer. This practice is indebted to the work of playwright/performer Anna Deavere Smith, who crosses race and gender lines in her verbatim performances of interviews, thus raising questions about gender and race as social constructions. Smith will speak at the Wharton Center on November 10, also a part of Project 60/50.

Still, recent events remind us of the materiality of these categories: the invention of a nail polish that can detect date-rape drugs in a drink; the beating of a transgender woman in New York City; the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. 50 and 60 years later, have we come far enough?

Join the conversation! Check out the Project 60/50 website here: <http://project6050.msu.edu/>