

Experience L.A.

Sweat

by Lynn Nottage

Friday, September 7, 2018

Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles

KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW

- Playwright Lynn Nottage was born in Brooklyn in 1964 and was educated at Brown University and the Yale School of Drama. She is the recipient of a MacArthur “Genius” Grant and is the only woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice.
- Nottage won the Pulitzer for *Ruined* in 2009 and for *Sweat* in 2017. Her other plays include *By the Way*, *Meet Vera Stark* and the popular *Intimate Apparel*.
- *Sweat* is based on extensive interviews with residents of Reading, Pennsylvania, a town that has a famous precedent in American literature – it’s the hometown of the major American novelist John Updike (1932–2009), and many of his stories are set there.

SWEAT

Sweat premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2015, opened Off-Broadway at the Public Theater in 2016, and moved to Broadway, at Studio 54, in 2017.

Lynn Nottage was inspired to write about poverty around 2011, after realizing “how close we live to poverty” when a friend in Brooklyn revealed her own financial precarity the same week that Occupy Wall Street started. To understand contemporary economic struggles, Nottage decided to research a city with an especially high poverty rate in the wake of de-industrialization, which she perceived as “the biggest shift in American sensibilities since the 1960s.” She chose Reading, Pennsylvania, which at the time she started her research was ranked the poorest city of its size in the United States, with a poverty rate of more than 40 percent.

Reading was once connected by train to Philadelphia and bustled with the industry of steel and coal mines as well as textile factories. But the train to Philadelphia stopped going to Reading in the early 1980s, and by the early 2000s, most of the foundries and factories were closed or significantly downsized. The loss of manufacturing jobs hit the city’s residents hard, with families that had for generations been solidly middle-class with union jobs now finding themselves working-class or unemployed and poor, with extremely limited job opportunities.

Nottage spent two and a half years interviewing residents in Reading in order to write *Sweat*, which takes place in a fictional Reading bar.

“Replace judgment
with curiosity”
—Lynn Nottage





CLASS AND LABOR IN 21ST-CENTURY AMERICA

DOWNSIZING The firing or laying off of employees in significant numbers for the purpose of reducing the size of a business

FAIR TRADE Trade in which producers are paid prices that allow them to pay fair wages. The fair-trade movement aims to create transparency, equality, sustainability, and fair distribution of wealth in the context of an international economy.

FREE TRADE A free-market approach to trade in which international trade is allowed to proceed without tariffs, quotas, or restrictions such as laws protecting workers or the environment.

GLOBALIZATION The development of an increasingly interconnected international economy, characterized by free trade, the free flow of capital, and the use of the cheapest labor forces wherever they may be found on the globe.

LABOR MOVEMENT The U.S. labor movement grew out of a need to protect workers from exploitation on the job. For instance, the movement helped end child labor and gave us the 40-hour work week. A key pillar of the labor movement is unionization, which enabled workers, especially in the industrial sector, to gain better wages, reasonable hours, and safe and fair working conditions through collective bargaining (the negotiation of wages and other working conditions as a group rather than on an individual basis). From the 1930s through the 1970s, the labor movement and collective bargaining helped create and expand America's middle class. Changes in the economy and economic policy have led to the decline of unions, union jobs, and the labor movement since the 1980s, resulting in increasing income inequality and economic precariousness for many.

MIDDLE CLASS There are many ways to define the U.S. middle class. It can be defined by income level; wealth level (savings and investments); job type (with salaried professionals and managers considered to be in the upper middle class, while skilled craftsmen would be in the lower middle class); or lifestyle (things like level of education and type of family vacations). Economic definitions vary based on the varying cost of living in different cities and states, with middle-class incomes generally defined as being above the median income in a given area.

NAFTA The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994 by the United States, Mexico, and Canada. By establishing a free trade zone among the North American nations, it allowed many manufacturing operations to move to Mexico, where wages are lower.

THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT Beginning with Occupy Wall Street in New York in September 2011, the Occupy Movement is a global movement against social and economic injustice, and for active local democracy, that was marked by lively sites of public protest especially in U.S. cities in late 2011 and 2012. The Occupy slogan "We are the 99 percent" referred to the increasing concentration of wealth among the top 1% of income earners.

OUTSOURCING The procuring of goods or services from an outside source; this term is especially used to refer to companies' sourcing labor from foreign or non-union suppliers, with the resultant loss of local, union jobs.

POVERTY Poverty is the state of lacking sufficient resources to meet basic needs such as food and shelter.

RUST BELT The Rust Belt refers to parts of the U.S. Midwest and Northeast that once thrived on the steel industry but are now struggling with economic decline and general decay as a result of de-industrialization and outsourcing.

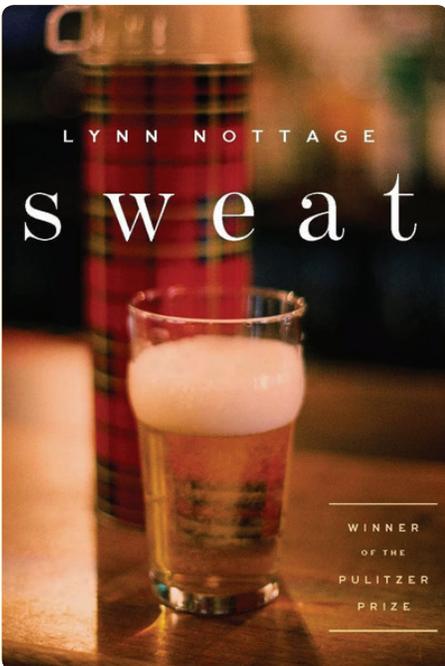
WORKING CLASS The U.S. working class is also variously defined, but it tends to refer to people who are employed for wages, especially in manual or industrial work. Wages are paid on an hourly, daily, or piecework basis, as opposed to middle-class salaries, which are a fixed form of compensation paid on a regular basis.



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CENTER THEATRE GROUP

The nonprofit Center Theatre Group is one of the largest theatre companies in the United States, offering year-round programming at the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The company has been producing theatre for more than 50 years, and regularly programs award-winning revivals as well as world premieres.

MARK TAPER FORUM

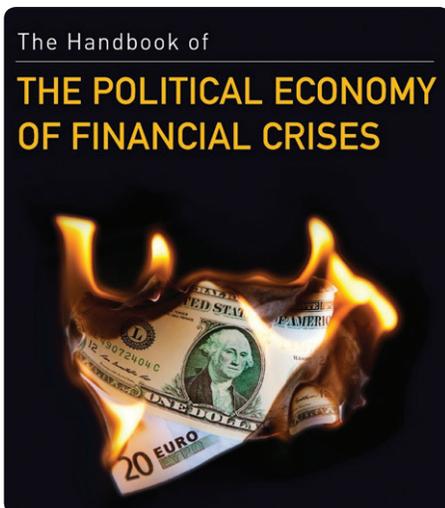
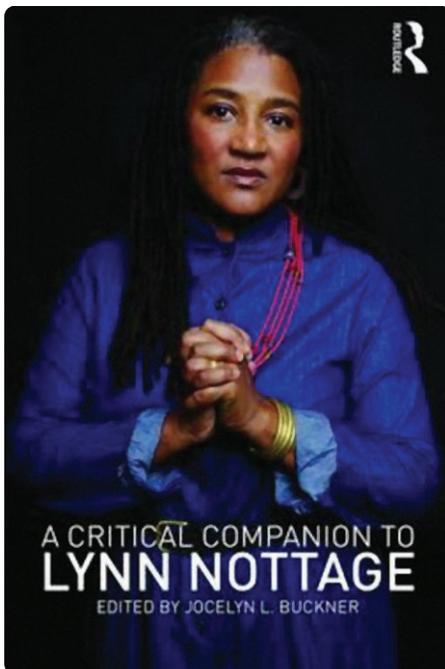
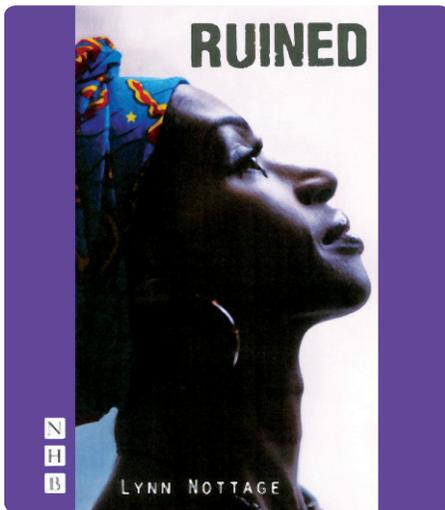
The Mark Taper Forum is known for presenting new and innovative plays in an atmosphere more intimate than that of its Music Center neighbors, the Ahmanson Theatre and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The Music Center was designed in the late 1960s by Los Angeles architect Welton Becket, whose firm created many iconic L.A. buildings, including the Capitol Records Building, the Beverly Hilton Hotel, and the Carousel of Progress at Disneyland, which looks a bit like the Mark Taper Forum. The Taper, which is named for real-estate developer Mark Taper, underwent a major renovation in 2007, which retained its signature circular shape but significantly updated the interior. The 739-seat theatre features a thrust stage, which extends into the audience on three sides.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ Lynn Nottage has described her plays as having “morally ambiguous heroes or heroines.” Where does the moral ambiguity lie in some of the characters of *Sweat*?
- ⦿ *Sweat* premiered in 2015. It has been widely reviewed as illuminating some of the dynamics that played out in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. What themes in *Sweat* do you think relate to the election of Donald Trump?
- ⦿ How do class and race intersect in the individual stories told in *Sweat*? What about class, race, and immigration? And gender?
- ⦿ If you have read John Updike, what differences and similarities do you see between Updike’s Reading and Nottage’s?

IF YOU LIKED TONIGHT’S PERFORMANCE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- ⦿ Lynn Nottage online
www.lynnnottage.com
- ⦿ Lynn Nottage and Kate Whoriskey discussing *Sweat* and Trump’s America on the *New Yorker* podcast
www.newyorker.com/podcast/political-scene/lynn-nottage-and-kate-whoriskey-talk-to-david-remnick-about-putting-trumps-america-onstage
- ⦿ The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
www.laane.org
- ⦿ Other plays at the Mark Taper Forum
www.centertheatregroup.org/tickets
- ⦿ Some of L.A.’s other theatrical venues
www.thelatc.org
www.geffenplayhouse.org
www.thebroadstage.org



DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

ANTHONY ANDERSON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about tonight's performance. You can access online resources, including the audio visual materials and databases listed below, through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Berberoglu, Berch, ed. *The Global Capitalist Crisis and Its Aftermath: The Causes and Consequences of the Great Recession of 2008-2009*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014.
VKC Library HB3717 2008 .G54 2014
- Buckner, Jocelyn L., ed. *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
Doheny Library: PS3564.O795 Z57 2016
- Nottage, Lynn. *Sweat*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2017.
Doheny Library: PS3564.O795 S94 2017
- Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009.
Doheny Library: PS3564.O795 R85 2009
- Wolfson, Martin H., and Gerald A. Epstein, eds. *The Handbook of the Political Economy of Financial Crises*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
VKC Library: HB3717 2008-2009.O94 2013

AUDIO VISUAL MATERIALS

- Brown, Jeffrey, and Lynn Nottage. ***Conversation with Playwright Lynn Nottage June 15, 2009***. Theatre in Video: Volume I. Arlington, VA: MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, 2009.
- Fuller, C., Levine, Nottage, Reynolds, and Transient Pictures. ***Charles Fuller in Conversation with Lynn Nottage***. Academic Video Online: Premium. New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 2013.

SELECTED ELECTRONIC DATABASES

- **America: History & Life with Full Text:** "The definitive index to articles and other literature (books, dissertations, book reviews, etc.) covering the history and culture of the U.S. and Canada, from the 15th century to the present. Indexes nearly 1,800 journals from 1860s to present, including all key journals in the discipline, state and local history publications, and selected articles from scholarly journals in the social sciences and humanities."
- **IIPA (International Index to the Performing Arts):** "IPA draws its current content from more than 100 international performing arts periodicals from 9 countries, and also indexes feature performing arts articles and obituaries appearing in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. IIPA covers nearly all aspects of the world of the performing arts, from the most scholarly studies to the latest crazes. Most IIPA records in the current coverage (1998 forward) contain an abstract."
- **JSTOR:** "A growing full text collection of core social science, humanities, and science journals."