

Interviews with actors in *Public Enemy: Flint*

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The WSWWS spoke to a number of the actors who appeared in *Public Enemy: Flint*, an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882), performed last week in Flint, Michigan.

We asked them how they got involved in the production, their thoughts about the Flint crisis and their reactions to the audience response.

Michole Briana White (Dr. Heather Stockman)

This is something bigger than myself, doing a project on this level with so much integrity. It was extraordinary to be a part of something like this.

In many ways, it scared me to death. I did not know how people would receive the monologue I deliver towards the end. But I wanted to move beyond my fears, the point of this play was to help people.

The way the director [Purni Morell] organized the cast was unusual. Her thought process was inspiring. She is interested in dealing with the truth. She is a very courageous woman. There were actors from all over the country. Our stage manager and crew members live in Flint. People from Flint really shared their truth with us. Hearing people from the city speak up during the play about how the water crisis hurt so many people ... was difficult, and rewarding. There are incredible people in Flint who want to fight for what they have. It was very meaningful, quality work.

When we broke the fourth wall and invited the audience in, it was important to Purni that it not be simply about the play, that it be about the people and what the people are going through. The director came from London, England and spent the time to really immerse herself in the community, so she could understand what was really going on in Flint. Hearing about Flint in Britain!

It blew me away that we had to use canned water in the building where the play was performed. This project takes the cake in terms of the work I have done. It is the most meaningful. This was a super-bonus, to

really be in the thick of it. The work has a much stronger purpose than just entertaining.

Chris Young (Billing)

It was so meaningful, coming together from all parts of the country. We were all so focused on one thing. Every time we gathered before a show, it was so emotional. The response from the children of Flint, the response from those whose children have passed away, those who may be afraid to speak up...! Or those who are discouraged because they feel that even if they speak up nothing is going to happen. We as a collective cast have given Flint a little more hope.

I was born in Flint at Hurley Hospital. I was raised in Detroit. I came back to Flint seven years ago. My dad has lived on the north side of Flint for about 20 or 30 years. He has developed a lot of health problems. It's just recently that he has been having these difficulties. He spoke up during the last night of the play--Saturday night--about the things he's gone through because of the water crisis. He mentioned about the difficulty in lifting the cases of water. They even had to have cases of water in the bathrooms of the building where the play was performed!

There are things as small as remembering not to wash your hands with the tap water. Naturally, you want to go into your bathroom and kitchen and turn on the water. But in most of the houses in Flint, it's not possible to do that. Who wants to wash up by pouring water on their body? Most of the people don't feel clean enough because that's what they have to do. Even when I take my short showers, my skin becomes chapped because of what seeps into my skin.

Because the situation is urgent, it is one of the reasons we decided to have free admission. What would be the purpose of us putting a ticket price on this production? We all know that most of the money that gets collected for the crisis is not used for that purpose. We wanted to make a difference by waking up or

educating Flint, or giving the people their voice back. Give them the hope back that they've lost because things are not improving.

Madelyn Porter (Stephanie Anderson)

Theater can be a tool for political change. It's important to speak up and speak out. Education through the arts is one of the most important things that a society can provide. I have a long history of political awareness and struggle going back to the 1970s.

There's always been a struggle over the Detroit water. A lot of these cities around Detroit are dumping grounds and Flint doesn't have a good filtering system.

Flint's pipes have been corroding forever. They're not just corroded as the result of the last five years. In any case, it's not just the pipes in Flint, it's an economic issue, with all the plant closures and everything else.

This play gave the people of Flint inspiration. They had reached a point of wanting to throw their hands up. I thought it was important if we could help rekindle that desire to fight. The system takes advantage of poor people and people of color and certain communities. It's not right! I react when there are problems all over the world, not just in Flint or Detroit!



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