

CONTENTS

The Play
Meet the Playwright and Director
Power Plays
A Work in Verse
Historical Inspiration
Cuban Missile Crisis
Central Intelligence Agency
Three Big Questions
Resources

THE PLAY

A meditation bell rings. We are in the afterlife and meet a soul.

That soul sees another — a spirit they knew in another time, that they would recognize anywhere. Others join them.

The story then takes us to when these souls knew each other in life, beginning at a school dance. We meet **Mary** at age 15 and **Jack**, who flirts with pursuing her.

Over nearly 30 years, Jack and Mary's lives overlap and collide. Dramatic moments in history unfold with each playing their role.

All the while, Mary is driven by a desire for peace and a more just world. She wants to do something meaningful with her life. When in a position of great influence, to what lengths will she go to achieve these ends? What will be the consequences?



WORLD-PREMIERE POWER PLAY

CHANGE AGENT

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY **CRAIG LUCAS**

ARLENE AND ROBERT KOGOD CRADLE | JANUARY 21 – MARCH 6, 2022

**“No, you don’t know me. I’m a hidden figure from our hist’ry.
Let’s bring everything to light. You ready? Set? It starts like this.”**

— Mary, *Change Agent*

Prime Sponsorship for *Change Agent* is generously provided by Decker Anstrom and Sherry Hiemstra.

Change Agent is the recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award.

Arena Stage's community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by Denie and Frank Weil; The Estate of Ms. Toni A. Ritzenberg; AT&T; Joanne Barker; Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; Floyd E. Davis Family Foundation; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; Alice Shaver Foundation; Theatre Forward; Collins Aerospace; England Family Foundation; Friends of Southwest D.C.; GEICO; JBG Smith; Wayne and Susan Jonas; Foley & Lardner LLP; Weissberg Foundation; Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela; Actors' Equity Foundation; and Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR



“Everything that is
worth doing artistically
is scary.”

—Craig Lucas, in an interview with
The New York Times, May 26, 2002

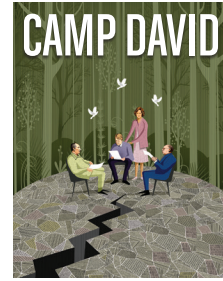
Craig Lucas was born on April 30, 1951, in Atlanta, Georgia. On that day, his mother abandoned him in the backseat of a car with a note explaining that she could not take care of him. Eight months later, he was adopted by a couple from Pennsylvania.

Growing up outside Philadelphia, Lucas took acting lessons and started writing plays as a teenager. At Boston University, he majored in theater and creative writing. After graduation, he moved to New York, where he was cast in numerous shows, including a few on Broadway.

When he wasn't acting, Lucas wrote plays. It was his 1988 play, *Prelude to a Kiss*, which put him on the map. It won an Obie Award and earned Lucas a Tony Award nomination. The play was later made into a movie. In 2005, Lucas received another Tony nomination for *The Light in the Piazza*, which he also directed. His other plays and libretti (text for a musical or opera) include *I Was Most Alive With You*, *Reckless*, *An American in Paris* and *Blue Window*.

POWER PLAYS

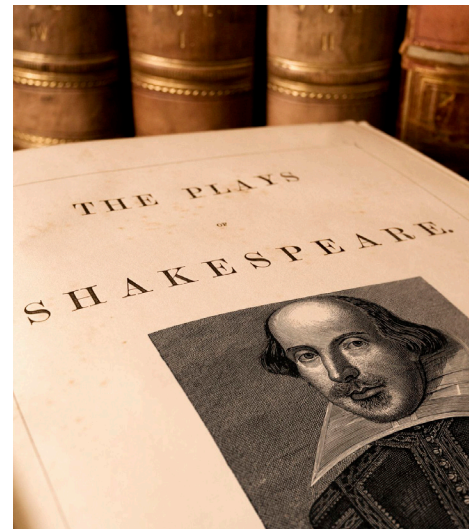
Washington, D.C., is one of the most powerful and political cities in the world. People from all over the globe travel to Washington, D.C., to examine and understand what it means to be American. In this rich political, cultural and historical landscape, Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith has chosen to focus on power and politics with a major commissioning project called Power Plays. When a theater commissions a play, it hires and pays a playwright to write a new play for the theater. Over 10 years, Arena Stage will commission 25 new plays and musicals — one for each decade of American history. These plays explore the people, events, culture and ideas that have shaped American identity. Power Plays are written by emerging and well-established playwrights who represent the diverse fabric of America. Power Plays fall into five categories or cycles: Presidential Voices, African-American Voices, Insider Voices, Musical Theater Voices and Women's Voices. Other Power Plays have included *Camp David*, *The Originalist*, *Snow Child* and *Sovereignty*.



A WORK IN VERSE

It probably won't sound like it when you hear it, but *Change Agent* is written in verse. Verse has a long history in Western theater, dating back to the ancient Greek tragedies. William Shakespeare is famous for his use of a verse form called "iambic pentameter." The playwright, Craig Lucas, uses iambic pentameter, too: 10 syllables in each line following the pattern of unstressed, then stressed syllables. An "iamb" is one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. "Penta" means "five." Therefore, it's called "pentameter" because there are five iambs, adding up to 10 syllables. Iambic pentameter mimics the rhythm of the human heartbeat.

An example of iambic pentameter is this line from *Romeo and Juliet*: "Two households, both alike in dignity."



HISTORICAL INSPIRATION

The play is a work of imagination, but the characters are based on some figures from historic record.



MARY PINCHOT MEYER was born into a wealthy Pennsylvania family and attended Vassar.

She married Cord Meyer in 1945, and they had three children. She later moved to Georgetown and became a socialite and artist. She met John F. Kennedy at a high school dance, and she and Jackie Kennedy were friends, taking walks together on the canal towpath in Georgetown. According to *Smithsonian Magazine*, she was admired for her originality and independence. She lived at a time when women's roles were too few and narrow.



JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY, also known as "JFK" and "Jack," was the 35th U.S. president from 1961-1963.

Kennedy was the second of nine children in the famous, wealthy and influential Kennedy family led by Rose and Joseph Kennedy. After attending Harvard, he served in the U.S. Navy in World War II and was injured in the Pacific, leading survivors to safety in spite of his injury. He authored *Profiles in Courage*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in history.

At age 29 he was elected to Congress, representing the Boston area for three terms. In 1952, he was elected to the Senate. He married Jacqueline Lee Bouvier in 1953. In 1961, at the age of 43, he became the youngest U.S. president by a narrow margin. He was also the first Catholic president.

Kennedy called upon Americans to "Ask not what your country can

do for you, but what you can do for your country." He founded the Peace Corps, committed the U.S. to landing a man on the moon before the end of the 1960s, and put plans in motion for sweeping civil rights reforms. He permitted the botched Bay of Pigs Invasion (an attempt to overthrow Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro) and navigated the Cuban Missile Crisis (see article on page 4).

On the surface, Kennedy's life seemed golden. He was popular, good looking and successful at an early age. Privately, he struggled with chronic pain his whole adult life. He suffered from Addison's disease, which attacks the adrenal glands. He also had four major back operations and wore a lace-up corset brace to keep his back straight and stable. He kept this a secret to maintain his image of health and vitality.

On November 22, 1963, he and his wife were riding in an open limousine in downtown Dallas when he was struck by two bullets and died. Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested and charged with the murder. Oswald was killed three days later, shot by a nightclub owner with ties to organized crime. The Warren Commission was organized to investigate Kennedy's assassination.



JACQUELINE KENNEDY ONASSIS

or "Jackie" was born into a wealthy New York family. She excelled in horseback riding and academics, noting in her yearbook that her goal was "not to be a housewife." She graduated from George Washington University with a degree in French literature and started a job as a columnist for the *Washington Times-Herald*.

She met John F. Kennedy in 1952, and they married in 1953. They had two children, Caroline and John Jr. Their third child, Patrick, died two days after his premature birth.

According to the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, the Kennedys "brought a new, youthful spirit to the White House. The Kennedys believed that the White House should be a place to celebrate American history, culture, and achievement. They invited artists, writers, scientists, poets, musicians, actors, and athletes to visit them. Jacqueline Kennedy also shared her husband's interest in American history. Gathering some of the finest art and furniture the United States had produced, she restored all the rooms in the White House to make it a place that truly reflected America's history and artistic creativity. Everyone was impressed and appreciated her hard work."

Jackie Kennedy was a fashion icon. She was also fluent in French, Spanish and Italian and spent a lot of time abroad. After her husband's death, she married Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis.



CORD MEYER JR.

served in the Marines in World War II, in which he lost an eye and his twin brother died. He became a pacifist (anti-war). He married Mary Pinchot in 1945, who shared these ideals. He was one of the earliest recruits for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and rose to be one of its highest officials over his 26 years with the organization.

ART FROM HISTORY

History is a rich source of inspiration for artists. Why? As a reader, listener or audience member, how do you know what aspects of a story are true and which are invented? What role does research play in the creation of art inspired by history?

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The play shows some key events in American history between 1936 and 1965. One of these is the Cuban Missile Crisis.

After World War II, the United States thought that the spread of communism was a threat to freedom. Once allies in World War II, the U.S. and Soviet Union engaged in a Cold War from 1947 to 1991. This means, although they did not deploy their militaries directly against one another, the two competed on every front for the greatest global influence. The two countries sought to influence or control other countries and establish democratic or communist states. They raced to stockpile deadlier weapons, particularly nuclear ones. They even competed to be the first to put people in space. Tensions ran high, and the countries seemed on the brink of an apocalyptic war.

In October 1962, the U.S. and Soviet Union had a political and military standoff known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. In response to U.S. nuclear weapons in nearby Turkey, the Soviet Union positioned nuclear missiles in Cuba, a communist country which is 90 miles from Florida. President Kennedy decided to use a naval blockade — Navy ships that blocked access to Cuba — in order to make it clear that the U.S. was ready to use military force if the missiles were not removed. People feared this could be the start to global nuclear war. In *Change Agent*, we see this dramatic moment in history unfold.

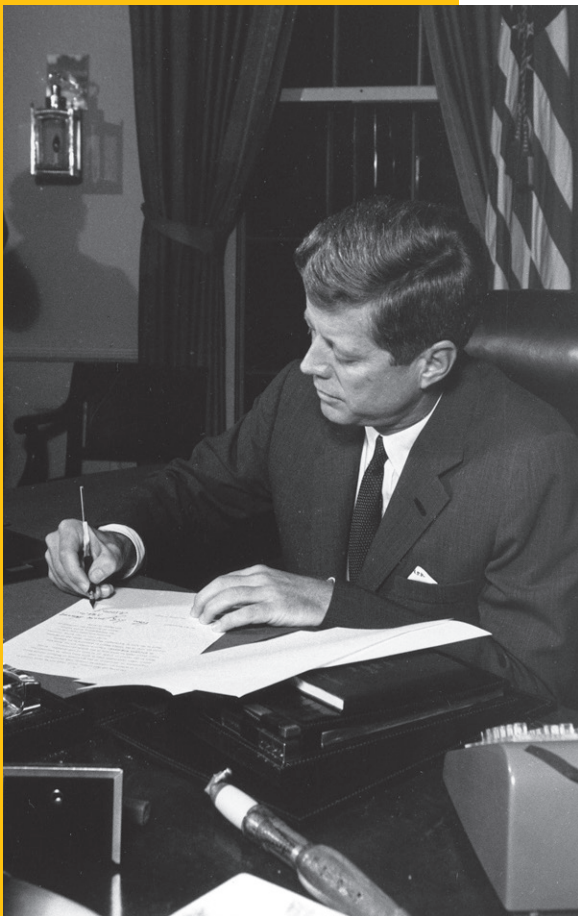
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CIA stands for Central Intelligence Agency. People often associate it with international spies, undercover operations and secrets the public never gets to know. The CIA evolved from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

During World War II, the OSS helped win the war through espionage (spying) and having all that information go to a central agency. The OSS was created after the bombing of Pearl Harbor to ensure another surprise attack did not occur. Although it was meant to be dissolved after the war, the U.S. government saw a need to outdo the Soviet Union in gathering information on other countries and on possible security threats against the U.S.

The CIA was founded in 1947 when President Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act. According to the Harry S. Truman Memorial Library, although Truman intended “to establish an agency that correlated all intelligence and delivered reports to the president, he soon realized that under the Cold War structure, the agency would become more than that. Moreover, Americans who once had feared the establishment of such an agency began to embrace it as a necessary tool to winning the Cold War. Still, the establishment and use of the CIA, during the Truman administration and subsequent presidencies, remained a topic of controversy.”

Unlike the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the CIA is not a law enforcement agency and is prohibited from collecting information from U.S. persons.



THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What does it take to make change?

2

What role do individuals have in history?

3

What is the power of art?

RESOURCES

Biography. "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis."

Accessed December 2021.

<https://www.biography.com/us-first-lady/jacqueline-kennedy-onassis>

Britannica. "John F. Kennedy."

Accessed November 2021.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-F-Kennedy>

"Cicely Angleton, Poet and CIA Official's Spouse."

The Washington Post, September 9, 2011.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/cicely-angleton-poet-and-cia-officials-spouse/2011/09/24/gIQA5GHDvK_story.html

"Cord Meyer Jr. Dies at 80; Communism Fighter at the CIA."

The New York Times, March 16, 2001.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/16/us/cord-meyer-jr-dies-at-80-communism-fighter-at-cia.html>

History.com. "The Central Intelligence Agency."

Accessed December 2021.

<https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/history-of-the-cia>

History.com. "The Cuban Missile Crisis."

Updated October 2021.

Accessed December 2021. <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis>

The John F. Kennedy Memorial Library. "Life of John F. Kennedy."

Accessed November 2021.

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy>

Kim, Leena. "Inside the Unsolved Murder of JFK's Mistress Mary Pinchot Meyer." *Town and Country*, May 25, 2020.

<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a32599090/mary-meyer-jfk-mistress-murder/>

Morrow, Lance. "44 Years Later, A Washington, D.C. Death Unresolved."

Smithsonian Magazine, December 2008.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/44-years-later-a-washington-dc-death-unresolved-93263961/>

The Harry S. Truman Memorial Library. "Establishment of the CIA."

Accessed December 2021.

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/establishment-cia>

The White House. "John F. Kennedy."

Accessed November 2021.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/john-f-kennedy/>

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



the mead center
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Phone: 202-554-9066
Fax: 202-488-4056

Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.