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## THE PLAY

August 2008. **Chris** and **Jason** have just been released from prison. The boys made a decision years ago that changed their lives forever.

Flashback: January 2000. In the small industrial town of Reading (REDD-ing), the steady job in town is running and repairing machines on the factory floor of Olstead's Metal Tubing. The workers pride themselves on joining generations of local employees that have forged a name for the town through hard work. Best friends **Cynthia** and **Tracey** are employees at the factory and long-time members of the workers' union. Their sons, **Chris** and **Jason**, have also become employees.

After a long day's work, the employees go straight to the local bar, where the bartender **Stan** will pour them a few glasses of beer and listen to their troubles.

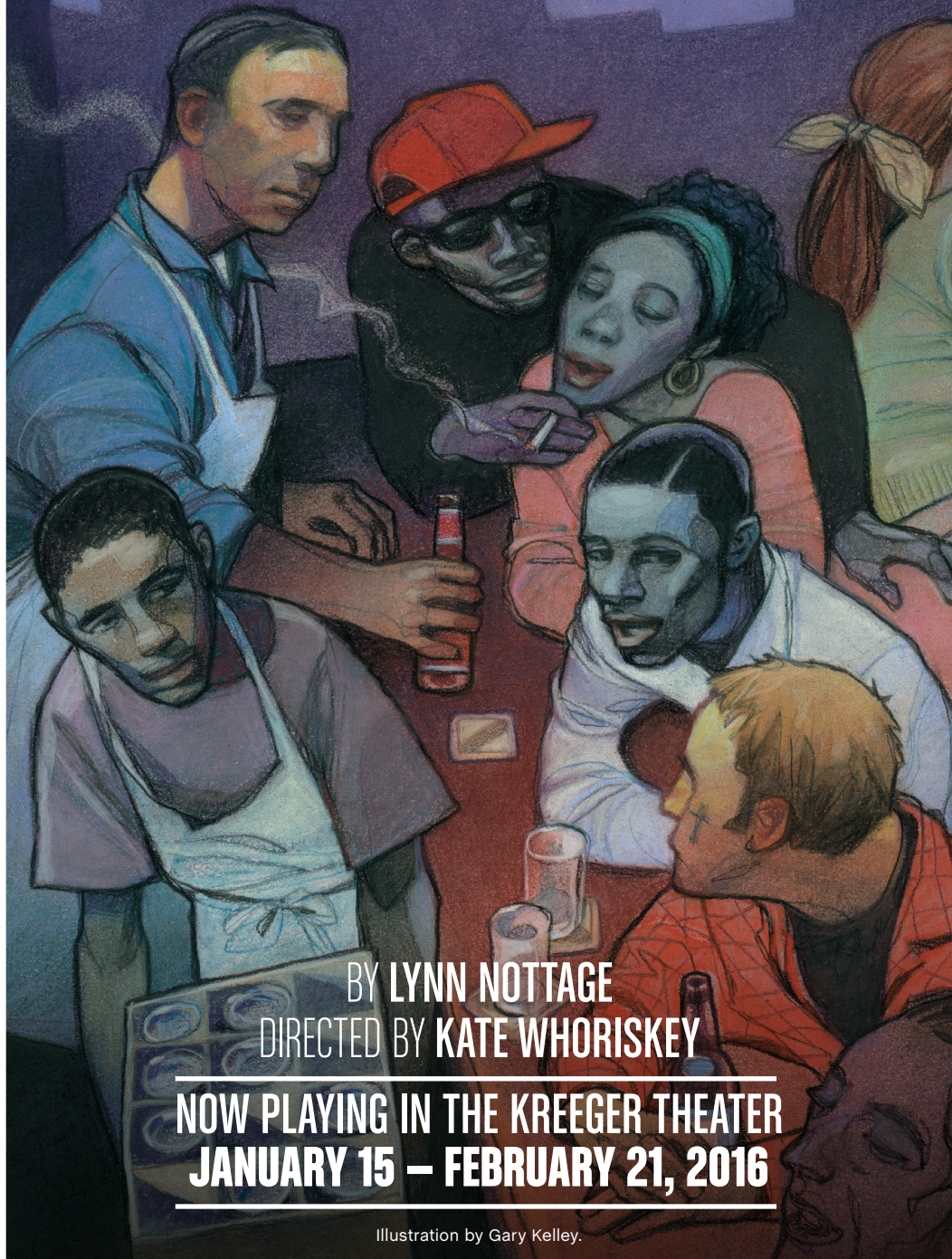
Then, word spreads that Olstead's is firing workers to make room for faster, cheaper labor. The union's power is put in jeopardy. Each worker must decide whether to stand with the union or the company.

In a town built on close ties and elbow grease, what is more important: loyalty or a livelihood?

“NOBODY TELLS YOU THAT  
NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU  
WORK THERE WILL NEVER BE  
ENOUGH MONEY TO REST” – *Chris*

OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL'S WORLD PREMIERE OF

# SWEAT



BY LYNN NOTTAGE

DIRECTED BY KATE WHORISKEY

NOW PLAYING IN THE KREEGER THEATER  
JANUARY 15 – FEBRUARY 21, 2016

Illustration by Gary Kelley.

The D.C. Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation.  
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# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



LYNN NOTTAGE

“SOMETHING MORE NEEDED TO BE DONE ... I COULD READ ALL THE BOOKS, BUT I’M SOMEONE WHO LIKES TO BE IN THE SANDBOX.”

Lynn Nottage has a gift for finding important stories and capturing their spirit onstage. Her passion for human rights is central to her exploration of complex characters facing difficult circumstances.

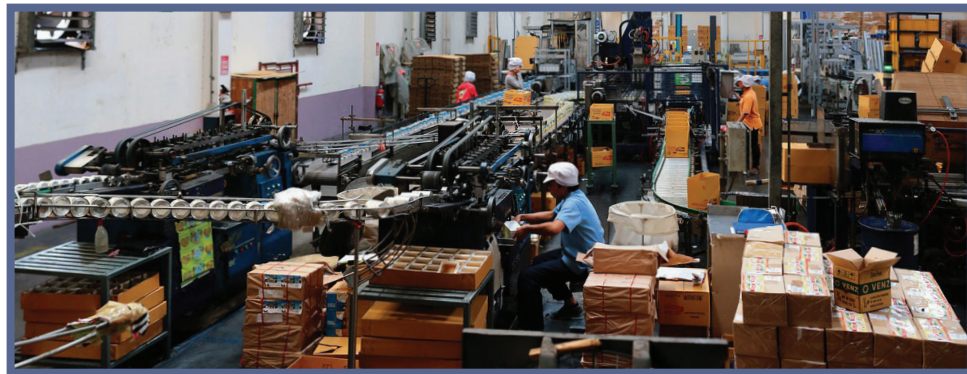
Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., Nottage discovered her fascination with storytelling through her mother, grandmother and friends. She attended New York’s High School of Music & Art in Harlem and was inspired to write her first full play after seeing the school’s productions.

She pursued her love of playwriting at Brown University and the Yale School of Drama. After graduation, she took a break from writing to work as a human rights activist with Amnesty International. The social injustice she encountered through this advocacy work became the core of her plays when she started writing full time in 1995.

Nottage works include *Intimate Apparel*; *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*; and *Ruined*. She is a 2007 MacArthur “Genius” Fellow and the recipient of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

**MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship** – an award that recognizes people who excel in their fields, giving them \$625,000 for their creative pursuits.

# READING, PENNSYLVANIA



According to the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau, the town of Reading, Pennsylvania had the highest poverty rate in the United States. The town was once an industrial capital of the East Coast. In the mid-1900s, Reading was a center for steel and textile production, serving as headquarters for the Reading Railroad (known to many of us as a square on the Monopoly board). How could this booming industrial town become the poorest city in the country? This is the story of *Sweat*.

Lynn Nottage wanted to explore the impact of the recession on everyday citizens (see article). When she learned of Reading, she traveled there to learn the town’s story.

Nottage said, “I went to Reading in 2011, which was sort of right in the midst of the economic collapse in the United States, and I went armed with this question: how would you define your city? What I found was that they always said, ‘Reading was...’ They always spoke of their city in past tense and that really made me quite sad because I thought a city that can’t imagine itself in present tense (or in future tense) is really going to have a struggle with identity in the future.”

“I spent considerable time interviewing and collecting compelling stories from local historians, community organizers, business owners, artists, politicians, educators, parole officers, police officers, students, homeless men and women, drug addicts, social workers, gardeners and the community at large.”



“Reading has been through an incredibly hard time. There was a level in some rooms of desperation, of profound sadness. In some rooms you could feel the nostalgia for what was and the longing for that to return. In some cases, there was genuine confusion: like, we signed a contract with America, these were the things we were supposed receive, and somehow we were lied to. So I think that people felt betrayed.”

What is the American Dream? What happens to the American Dream when the economy collapses? More importantly, what happens to people who believe in that dream?



How would you define your hometown?  
Make a list of your own thoughts and interview neighbors and friends. Use the information you have collected to create a play, poem, drawing, etc. That represents the place you call home.



Photo by Stephanie Gould.



**“I immediately loved the warmth and comfort of this bar in Reading. The intimacy ... definitely spoke to me and seemed a natural place for my characters to inhabit.” – Lynn Nottage**

## THE STRENGTH OF THE UNION

**“...And when I got my union card, you couldn't tell me anything. Sometimes when I was shopping I would let it slip out of my wallet onto the counter just so folks could see it. I was that proud of it.” – Cynthia**

For decades, Olstead's factory employed union workers. Most of Sweat's characters belong to a union, or an organization that protects the well-being and wages of its members. A worker can join a union if they meet the criteria for membership and pay their monthly dues.

By joining forces, employees have the power to stand up for their rights and needs, such as wages, health benefits and retirement plans. Unions engage in collective bargaining, where representatives from the union negotiate with a company to improve conditions and benefits for all union employees. If

the company does not accept these terms, union members can strike, or refuse to work. No labor will occur until the workers' voices are heard.

Typically, a strike will push a company to negotiate and reach an agreement. But what happens if your company never gives in? Never asks you back? What if you can easily be replaced?

Unions can be important, especially in an unsafe or unfair environment. They can also be problematic. Many workers cannot afford to go without pay for the length of a strike. Yet, to “cross the line” and enter the workspace would be seen as a betrayal.

Listen as the characters discuss their relationship with the union. Who defends it? Who criticizes it? Where would you stand?



Cynthia (Kimberly Scott) tells Stan (Jack Willis) about her side of the union battle. Photo by Jenny Graham.

## THE AMERICAN RECESSION

In December 2007, the U.S. economy entered a recession or a period of economic decline. The balance of spending and saving had become unstable. The stock market plummeted and international exchange slowed. Housing mortgages lost their value. Jobs became harder to find and lower in pay. Over 8.4 million workers lost their jobs. Many others lost their health coverage and other benefits. Although the recession officially ended in January 2009, the U.S. is still working to recover.



# NAVIGATING NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico that sets the rules for trade and investment. NAFTA began on January 1, 1994 and increased commerce between these nations substantially.

However, NAFTA also created a free jobs market. Suddenly, U.S. companies not only had their choice of local workers, but of workers from across Canada and Mexico. It became increasingly difficult for local workers to compete with those who would work for lower wages.

This shift in labor dynamics was accompanied by a modern revolution in technology. Workers could no longer match the efficiency of machines. As a result, a widespread layoff of American workers occurred around 2000. This is when we find the characters in *Sweat* struggling to keep their jobs.

Flash forward to today. A new agreement called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is currently being debated on Capitol Hill. This partnership would open up trade with Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam, Brunei, Chile, Singapore and New Zealand. Some argue that this will bring economic growth similar to NAFTA, while others argue that this would be dangerous to the American labor force.

Learn more about the partnership here: <https://ustr.gov/tpp>

# THE READING PROJECT

Lynn Nottage's interviews became the foundation of The Reading Project. The Reading Project tells the story of the town and its people by creating original art. *Sweat* is one of the first works created by this project. The fictional characters onstage are inspired by the real citizens Nottage interviewed. Their stories should be heard, because Reading's story is also the story of factory towns throughout America. Nottage and others hope that the art will incite critical dialogue about the lives of working people in a changing America.

To see videos and find out more about The Reading Project, visit [www.lynnnottage.com/the-reading-project](http://www.lynnnottage.com/the-reading-project).

## THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What events have shaped your community?

2

How have jobs and workers changed over time?

3

How do you recover from a dramatic change in life?

# 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 at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat 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.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- 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 repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

# RESOURCES

*American Theatre*: "How Lynn Nottage, Invertebrate Wanderer, Found Her Way to Reading and 'Sweat'" <http://goo.gl/Y66qUv>

*Economic Policy Institute*: "The Great Recession" <http://goo.gl/V3CfFG>

*Guernica Magazine*: "History of Omission" <https://goo.gl/xLSRVu>

NAFTA: <https://goo.gl/QUn1yK>

*New York Times*: "Extracting Art from a Downfall" <http://goo.gl/WgKOWQ>

Oregon Shakespeare Festival 2015 *Illuminations Magazine*

The Reading Project: <http://goo.gl/ScgauX>

This American Life: "The Giant Pool of Money" <http://goo.gl/gk1X>



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