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**From the Selected Works of Denise Hart**

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Fall September 1, 2009

# Zooman and the Sign Directors Notes

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## Zooman & the Sign

### Dramaturgy/Director's Notes – Professor Denise J. Hart

In 1965, a gang member comes into a neighborhood in West Philadelphia intent upon shooting a rival gang member and as the shots ring out, a little girl sitting on her front steps is shot and killed. This incident served as the impetus for Pulitzer Prize winning Playwright Charles Fuller to begin writing *Zooman & the Sign*. Fuller did not complete the play until 1979, the time period in which the play is set. Long before gansta rap's inciting lyrics begin to influence the consciousness of many of our youth; Fuller is noted for saying that after King's death in 1968 there were Zooman's everywhere; in every urban city all over America. Zooman was running rampant.

Fast forward to 2008, when one of my 16 year old twin nephews is arrested for allegedly shooting into a crowd at an October-fest in my hometown of Omaha Nebraska. Thankfully, no one was hurt. The police told my brother that both of my nephews were known gang members. My entire family was in shock. We of middle class upbringing, college educated people with good jobs... how could this be happening? We were in denial until I called a family meeting and asked my nephews to tell us the truth. Eventually they affirmed what the police had said. They said that college wasn't for them; that they wanted the glamorous life of the gangster. I remember watching them sitting across from me and thinking that if we didn't do *something*, they would become the Zooman of 2008 and onward.

My nephews along with all of the other black males who feel that their only choice is to become a predator amongst their own are the impetus for my decision to tell this story. A friend of mine said to me that the storyline of *Zooman* is so intense and it's rather disturbing. I responded that the play is only as intense and disturbing as our real lives can be. Let's not look away from that truth.

Despite a multitude of advancements in our country, on the play's 30 year anniversary, unfortunately the consciousness of *Zooman* continues to permeate our communities and society at large. With the advent of the internet this consciousness has only become more visible as seen with the recent YouTube video showing the beating death of Derrion Albert in Chicago. Similar to the community in *Zooman* the onlookers of Derrion's death initially would not come forward to identify the perpetrators. They said they feared retaliation. As well, the perpetuation of the 'No Snitch' campaign has created even more confusion in the hearts and minds of those who would be inclined to do the right thing (even anonymously), but don't want to seem un-cool. The solutions to eradicate the consciousness that creates a *Zooman* and a morally conflicted community are complex. The play does offer a resolution, but not a solution. Yet, the play does provoke us to think and to feel and hopefully to confront the unspoken questions reverberating throughout: What would you do if this were to happen to you? What would you do if you or your loved ones become the Tates? What would you do if a *Zooman* is in your family or your community? What can/should/will you do?