in the continuum
One stage. Two worlds. In one—South Central, Los Angeles—a young girl draws a circle on the ground for a game of hopscotch. In the other—Harare (Ha-RAH-ray), Zimbabwe—a second young girl does the same. Soon they are playing so closely together and running so quickly past each other that, if not for their different languages, they could be sisters. This is the prologue to In the Continuum, which tells parallel stories of two different women. Though they never meet, and they never enter each other’s worlds, their stories are so similar that the 10,000 miles between them feel no more than a hopscotch jump.

Abigail Murambe (MOO-RAHM-bee) is a television news reporter on ZBC, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, a job she treasures almost as much as she treasures her husband, Stamford, and her young son, Simbi (SIM-bee). Nia (NEE-uh) James is 19 and has been living in Los Angeles shelters and foster homes since she was kicked out of her mother’s house. Nia has been dating Darnell, a star high school basketball player, for “10 months and 3 weeks.” Both Nia and Abigail find out they are pregnant, and even though Darnell and Stamford have been neglectful lately, each woman hopes her new child will repair the fading relationship. It is difficult for them to be excited, however, while they’re each feeling so under the weather.

Soon, Nia and Abigail discover they are not only pregnant, but have contracted HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. They must face their respective partners with this news, but both know that contracting HIV/AIDS, especially for women, can mean being ostracized by family, friends and community, and enduring emotional as well as physical hardships. Nia and Abigail embark on separate but parallel journeys, visiting friends, enemies, witch doctors, and other people in their lives, in search of a miracle, or at least some assurance they will be treated with due respect.

At the end of the play each stands in front of her loved ones. She must decide whether to speak the truth about her diagnosis or to hide it—as so many women do—for her own protection.
Part of what makes *In the Continuum* exciting to watch is that it requires each actor to play a wide variety of parts and interact with characters—even groups of characters—who are invisible to the audience.

### Nia’s world
- **Patti** Nia’s social worker
- **Mama** Nia’s mother
- **Keysha** short for Keyshawn, Nia’s gay cousin
- **Gail** Darnell’s mother

### Nia’s invisible world
- **Trina** Nia’s friend at the club
- **Nurse** at the local hospital
- **Imani** Mama’s baby and Nia’s half-brother
- **Darnell and teammates** at the scholarship ceremony

### Abigail’s world
- **Nurse Mugobo** works at the local clinic
- **Petronella** high school friend
- **Witch doctor**
- **Sex Worker** high school friend
- **Abigail’s maid**

### Abigail’s invisible world
- **Evermore** assistant at ZBC
- **Street kids** harass her while she’s on the phone
- **Lovemore** Petronella’s driver
- **Church congregation & Sisi Thembi** a woman who knows the witch doctor
- **Abigail’s family** at her house for Simbi’s birthday party
All plays borrow from centuries of theater history. In the Continuum continues the legacy of existing theatrical forms by combining traits of three different kinds of plays: solo drama, activist theater, and journey plays.

solo drama

Although monologues and soliloquies have been a part of theater since the Greeks (see page 10), recently a new kind of theater experience has become popular—the play with just one performer, and in some cases only one character. Although In the Continuum is performed by two actors, it uses the same conventions as solo drama, with each actor existing entirely in her own world. Here are just a few examples that have been written and performed in the last 30 years.

Twilight: Los Angeles 1992
written and performed by Anna Deavere Smith
When many theater-goers think of solo performance, they think of Anna Deavere Smith. After the city of Los Angeles exploded into riots following the 1991 police beating of Rodney King, Smith interviewed people from all over the city—politicians, professors, activists, King’s family, and average citizens—and recorded them on tape. Then she learned to mimic everything the people did and said, combined their stories into a single theater piece, and performed all the characters herself.

The Syringa Tree 1999
written and performed by Pamela Gien
Gien embodies over a dozen characters in telling the story of two families, one white and one black, living in Johannesburg during and after apartheid, a period of legislated racial segregation in South Africa. Embodying both white and black characters, Gien’s play chronicles over 20 years of friendship between the remarkable families as they try to live outside their society’s strict codes of prejudice and injustice.

Bridge & Tunnel
written and performed by Sarah Jones
One of the most exciting solo performers to burst onto the recent theater scene is Sarah Jones. She wrote and performed slam poetry at New York’s famed Nuyorican Poets Café before turning her talents to the stage in the form of solo plays. Her most successful, Bridge & Tunnel, produced on Broadway by Meryl Streep in 2006, earned Jones her first Tony Award. In it, she reenacts a multi-cultural poetry slam featuring a range of characters including a Pakistani accountant, a young Vietnamese poet, Mexican labor organizer, and an elderly Chinese mother. Jones’ ability to transform herself into any ethnicity, age, or gender is a testament not only of this actor’s enormous talent but also the richness of a diverse America.

Additional titles include

The Belle of Amherst 1976
written by William Luce, performed by Julie Harris
the story of the eccentric 19th-century poet, Emily Dickinson

Homebody (later Homebody/Kabul) 2001
written by Tony Kushner
a British woman becomes fascinated with Afghanistan reading guidebooks from the safety of her home

No Child... 2006
written and performed by Nilaja Sun
a young actress teaches theater to high school students in the Bronx
activist theater

Nikkole and Danai have said that they created *In the Continuum* because they were “deeply concerned about the experience of black women in the present fight against HIV/AIDS.” As the production travels around the world, it teaches audiences about the isolation black women feel when living with AIDS. A piece of political activism as well as a piece of theater, *In the Continuum* follows a long tradition of plays that serve a political purpose. Here are just a few examples.

**Lysistrata**  
**by Aristophanes**

Even the ancient Greeks, who developed Western drama as we know it, used theater to promote causes they believed in. Aristophanes, the most famous comic writer of his time, wrote this anti-war play in which a community of women band together and vow not to sleep with their husbands until they stop fighting a war. On March 13, 2003, over 1,000 readings of the play took place around the world as part of The Lysistrata Project, a global protest against the American invasion of Iraq.

**The Crucible**  
**by Arthur Miller**

In the early 1950s, Americans were absolutely terrified that Communists within the United States were planning to destroy the country. At the height of this “Red Scare,” a U.S. senator named Joseph McCarthy began a campaign to identify and punish anyone suspected of Communist sympathies. He falsely accused hundreds of Americans, including theatre, film and television artists, ruining many of their livelihoods, before he was revealed as a fraud in 1954. Watching the McCarthy hearings, playwright Arthur Miller was reminded of the 1692 Salem Witch Trials. His play *The Crucible* depicts the story of those earlier trials, and audiences could recognize a connection to the hysterical “witch hunt” that was going on around them. *The Crucible* won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1953 and has become an American classic.

**Angels in America, The Normal Heart, and other HIV/AIDS plays**

Because the AIDS virus struck the gay community sooner than any other, much HIV/AIDS theater argues for the right of gay Americans to fair treatment by the government and society. The two most famous examples are Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* (1985), a driving polemic against the government’s unwillingness to respond to the crisis, and Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1993-4), a sweeping, two-part epic in which a gay man living with HIV/AIDS must choose life or admit defeat after being visited by a not entirely friendly angel. Other HIV/AIDS plays include *As Is, Love! Valor! Compassion!*, and the musical *Rent*.


**Additional titles include**

**The Trojan Women** 5th century B.C.E.  
**by Euripides**

a dark anti-war play about what the Trojans endured after losing the Trojan War

**A Raisin in the Sun** 1959  
**by Lorraine Hansberry**

an inspiring drama about an African American family’s attempt to move into a white neighborhood
journey plays

Journey plays are structured around a main character’s travels, during which he or she encounters many different people and places on the way to a specific goal, all the while learning something crucial about the world or about him/herself. Think of the “road trip” storylines of many recent independent films, like *Sideways* or *Little Miss Sunshine*, or the popular *O Brother Where Art Thou?* These movies are perfect examples of journey stories.

*Great Journeys in Literature*

Some of the best examples of journey plots are found not in theater but in literature. Homer’s *The Odyssey*, in which the Greek warrior Odysseus endures many adventures before returning home, is the oldest example. Many journey novels written since the 18th century, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, show a main character becoming an adult, emotionally if not literally. This special genre of the journey novel is called a “bildungsroman.” (BILL-duhngs-rome-AHN)

*Everyman*

by Anonymous

The most famous play of the Middle Ages is also the most famous journey play. At that time, theater was primarily used to dramatize well known stories from the Bible and to teach religious lessons. *Everyman* is the name of the main character, and at the beginning of the play he is summoned by Death to leave the world behind. On the way he goes from one friend to another—including Beauty, Kindred, and Worldly Goods—asking them to join him to the grave, but only one, Good Deeds, finally agrees.

*Peer Gynt*

by Henrik Ibsen

Many of Ibsen’s plays take place in small houses and have a limited number of settings, but in *Peer Gynt* (1876) the title character grows from a mischievous young man to a world-weary sage, traveling the globe and escaping trolls, the Sphinx, a madhouse in Cairo, and many other dangers before returning home again.

*Other great journey novels include*

*The Aeneid* 19 B.C.E.

by Virgil

an ancient Latin poem, similar to Homer’s *Odyssey*, which tells of the warrior Aeneas and the foundation of Rome

*The Divine Comedy* 1308-1321

by Dante Alighieri

a humble poet is led through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in a quest to find his true path in life

*The Canterbury Tales* 1387–1400

by Geoffrey Chaucer

a group of traveling pilgrims tells wild and often funny stories to each other

*Don Quixote* 1605-1615

by Miguel de Cervantes

a crazy Spanish nobleman travels the world for adventures as a “knight-errant”

*A Christmas Carol* 1843

by Charles Dickens

Ebeneezer Scrooge journeys through Christmases past, present, and future and learns the holiday’s true meaning

*The Catcher in the Rye* 1951

by J.D. Salinger

young Holden Caulfield spends a few days wandering the streets of New York City after being kicked out of high school
The CDC estimates 1 million people globally are HIV-positive. The Normal Heart, a play by Larry Kramer, opens in New York City. Ronald Reagan makes his first public comment on AIDS. First reported case of AIDS in Zimbabwe.

1986
To combat the spread of HIV/AIDS through needle sharing among IV drug users, Jon Parker, a former addict, starts the first needle exchange in the U.S. in New Haven, CT. The CDC reports that three times as many African and Hispanic Americans have contracted HIV/AIDS as white Americans.

Robert O’Hara, Director

In the Continuum almost didn’t have a director. Early on, Nikkole and Danai controlled every aspect of the production—writing, acting, and directing. How did you become the third member of the In the Continuum company?

I had previously worked with both Danai and Nikkole at NYU and was invited to see a very rough presentation of the piece. It completely and totally blew my mind.

The actresses had already been performing a version of the play around the New York area. What did you bring to the process?

I helped them take the script apart and rearrange the storyline. I subjected them to an intense summer writing workshop where I would encourage, cajole, and harass them into clarifying and unifying the piece. I suggested new characters and themes, and they worked boldly to come up with something fresh every day.

The fantastic thing about this piece and these writers is that it was developed while they were in acting school, so they were open to someone with an outside eye. They also needed a director because they had been doing three jobs—writing and acting and directing. They had very strong takes on each of the characters because they were their own creations; it was just a matter of helping them to find the correct tone and range for each one. Also Danai and Nikkole are brilliant actors first and foremost, so that made working with them a joy.

One of the biggest challenges for an actor in In the Continuum is the interplay between characters who are seen and not seen. How do you help a performer create that illusion?

The most important thing about having a conversation with someone who is not there is to make the audience believe you are listening to someone. The audience has to know exactly where that person is and how he or she is responding to you. This is particularly interesting in In the Continuum because both women establish characters very early on who then become the “invisible” person their other characters talk to. Usually a lead character does not disappear twenty pages into a script. But this play actually tells you more about the characters you don’t see by showing the reactions of the characters you do see. Initially that was difficult to achieve, but it proved tremendously rewarding.

This play is designed to evoke strong reactions from those who see it. What do you hope audiences will take away from watching In the Continuum?

I want the audience to experience renewal and hope. A renewal in the capacity of theater and a hope that many others will find their voices and use the communion of theater to speak their truth.
From watching you in In the Continuum, it is obvious that the passion you had when you wrote it remains fresh. Can you take us back to the time when you first started to put this play together?

In the third year of New York University’s (NYU) Graduate Acting Program I knew that I wanted to create a one-woman piece, mostly because I had chickened out of the opportunity to do so during my time as an undergrad at Howard University. There were only two spaces available for performance, so in December 2003, I approached Danai Gurira to ask if she wanted to share a space. She had been presenting little vignettes dealing with Zimbabwean women’s issues, and I assumed she was piecing all of that together for a one-woman show. She, in fact, hadn’t decided what her show would be about, but my proposal helped solidify her purpose. In February of 2004 we set out with a little more than three weeks to create our shows.

It was one of our professors who suggested that we put the pieces together. From that point on we continued to be responsible for the separate story lines, but we knew that ultimately they would go together. Everyone loved the piece when we finally performed it at NYU, so we kept working on it, performing it in classrooms, during Alumni meetings, in smaller performance spaces, and in playwrights’ festivals. Eventually, Primary Stages in New York City offered us an Off-Broadway run.

How did you become interested in the plight of HIV-positive women in America?

One day I saw an MTV special about HIV/AIDS and all the celebrities that had fallen victim to its death sentence. During that program a statistic about African American women and HIV/AIDS really hit me: AIDS was the leading cause of death in African American women ages 25-34. I was 24 at the time, and most of my Black girlfriends fell within that age range. I wondered where these women were. I wondered why their stories weren’t told. So, I decided that HIV/AIDS is what my piece would be about.

The idea of Abigail and Nia being part of a continuum, or linked together by all the other women with HIV/AIDS in the world, is very provocative for this play.

The title was your idea. How did you come up with it?

I was walking down the street one day and I saw some young men loitering. Across the street from them were some old men loitering. I wondered if the young men looked at the old men and saw where they were heading. I wondered if the old men looked at the young men and saw themselves…. I began to think about myself and my family and how what I have done and am doing with my life came out of nowhere….by all accounts, I should be someone else, doing something else. I wanted to show how Nia, my character, is a part of a cycle of opportunities, of depravity, of expectation, and she doesn’t even know it. When Danai and I put our pieces together the continuum represented even more…an African diasporic continuum …a woman’s continuum.
How has the play been received differently in Zimbabwe and in South Africa?

In Zimbabwe, Danai’s half of the play came to life. All the idiosyncrasies really resonated with the people who lived in the places Danai was writing about. They also participated in the performance actively, audibly. It was the same in South Africa. It was also amazing how much they connected with Nia’s story.

What did you learn from taking the show abroad?

Well, I already knew this, but I was able to see it in action: There is universality in specificity. When you appeal to the truth of the matter, unapologetically, people can empathize. Theatre is powerful.

How do you play so many different characters without leaving the stage?

You take on the desires, the fears, the strivings, the viewpoint of the character and you allow it to become yours. You make it personal.

What do you hope your audiences take away from their experience of your play?

I hope they talk about the subject matter. I hope they understand how stigma hurts us all and that we are all affected by HIV/AIDS regardless of whether or not we are infected.

What’s been the most rewarding part of performing this play?

The feeling that what I do for a living touches people. I love receiving letters from students, for example. It makes me feel useful...relevant...good.
Theater began in Athens, Greece, in the sixth century B.C.E. when, during festivals honoring the god Dionysus, a chorus composed of male citizens would perform a dithyramb, a well-rehearsed choral song and dance. They would sing a lengthy text to the audience celebrating the city and honoring the Greek gods. In a way, these dithyrambs constituted the world’s first theatrical monologues. Eventually a performer named Thespis stepped out from the chorus and began to speak with the choral leader, inventing dialogue. It could be argued, then, that well before there was dialogue in the theater, there was monologue.

A monologue is a lengthy, uninterrupted speech by which a character conveys important ideas and emotions. Exterior monologues are spoken either to the audience or to another character (who may or may not be onstage at the time). The character of Tom in The Glass Menagerie is famous for his lengthy, evocative exterior monologues. Interior monologues take place when an actor is speaking to him or herself, articulating inner thoughts that no one else is meant to hear. The most famous interior monologues are soliloquies, which are performed alone onstage. Another kind of monologic speech is the aside, where a character briefly steps away from a conversation to say something to himself or to the audience (usually to both) and then returns to the scene. Hamlet’s first line in his play is an aside: When Claudius addresses him as “my son,” he tells the audience he is “a little more than kin and less than kind.”

Monologues are particularly useful to playwrights because they create a bond between a character and the audience. After a character has had some “alone-time” with an audience, it’s easier to feel sympathy for his or her situation, even when the character is not so deserving. William Shakespeare, perhaps the most famous writer of monologues and soliloquies, was a master at manipulating audience sentiment for many different purposes. He could create a serious bond with a main character, such as when Romeo, watching as Juliet “leans her cheek upon her hand,” tells us “O, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek!” By contrast, Shakespeare could create bonds that were ironic and so play with an audience’s love of wicked characters, such as when the evil Richard III winks at his spectators and calmly explains, “since I cannot prove a lover to entertain these well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain.” Some of Shakespeare’s most beautiful and most psychologically interesting verse, such as Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be…” or Macbeth’s “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow…,” can be found in his monologues.

Stand-up comedy is also a form of monologic art, as are the 5-minute comic monologues that talk show hosts, like Jay Leno or Ellen Degeneres, use to begin their programs.

In the Continuum uses exterior monologues to create audience sympathy in a particular way. After Danai and Nikkole establish Nia and Abigail during the first part of the play, these main characters become “invisible” to the audience as the actresses take on other personas in each world. When this happens, the audience is quite literally asked to take Nia’s and Abigail’s places, watching the reactions of the characters to whom they are speaking.

1994
HIV/AIDS becomes the leading cause of death for Americans ages 25 to 44.

1995
President Clinton hosts the first White House conference on HIV/AIDS.
1997
U.S. AIDS-related deaths decline more than 40 percent from 1996, largely due to a new treatment called the AIDS “cocktail.”

In Zimbabwe, the National AIDS Coordination Programme (NACP) is set up to organize HIV prevention and treatment initiatives, but it soon proves ineffective.

1998
The CDC reports that African Americans account for 49% of all AIDS-related deaths in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harare, Zimbabwe</th>
<th>Los Angeles, California</th>
<th>New Haven, Connecticut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,600,00 Harare</td>
<td>3,820,000 L.A.</td>
<td>125,000 New Haven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12,000,000 Zimbabwe)</td>
<td>(35,400,000 CA)</td>
<td>(3,400,000 CT)</td>
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<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>150,873 sq. miles</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Age population</strong></td>
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<td>26.6% of population ages 0–18</td>
<td>23.9% of population ages 0–18</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic breakdown</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>98% African, 1% white, 1% other</td>
<td>43.9% Hispanic, 33.5% White, 12.3% Asian, 10% African American</td>
<td>43% White, 37% African American, 21% Hispanic, 4% Asian</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Warm, sunny, low humidity year-round, 60-95°</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe)</td>
<td>Hollywood, television and movie studios, beaches</td>
<td>Yale University, theatres, museums, and art galleries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (official), Shona, Sindebele</td>
<td>English, Spanish, and many others</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>City government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-appointed commission</td>
<td>Mayor and City Council</td>
<td>Mayor and Board of Aldermen</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National government</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President and House of Assembly</td>
<td>President, Congress (Senate &amp; House of Representatives), Supreme Court</td>
<td>President, Congress (Senate &amp; House of Representatives), Supreme Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (esp. tobacco), textiles, clothing, steel, nearby gold mines</td>
<td>Entertainment, tourism, international trade, petroleum, agriculture, and aerospace</td>
<td>Education, clocks and watches, rubber and paper products, textiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance from New Haven</strong></td>
<td>7,746 miles (12,466 km)</td>
<td>2,500 miles (4,023 km)</td>
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In the mid-1990s, Zimbabwe was the “breadbasket” of Africa. Its economy, mostly agricultural, was strong enough to export food crops like maize and other basic cereals to the rest of the continent. Although the country was still recovering from years of social and political strife after its 1980 liberation from white minority rule, the international community generously provided aid and support. Zimbabwe’s president and former freedom fighter, Robert Mugabe, was seen as a great humanitarian and leader of his people, often spoken of in the same sentence as South Africa’s Nelson Mandela.

Today Zimbabwe has one of the poorest economies in Africa. Rather than exporting to its neighbors, the people of Zimbabwe depend on international aid for food and other resources. The inflation rate has grown higher than 1000%. The bill with the largest denomination in the country, the $100,000 ZWD (Zimbabwe dollars), barely buys a loaf of bread, and the monthly salary of a public servant, $12 million ZWD, can buy either a semester of high school for one child or a pair of shoes. It’s a common experience for young children to be forced out of school when the price of attendance rises beyond what parents can afford. Food and basic necessities are scarce, as people wait in long lines at supermarkets whose shelves are virtually empty. More than 70% of Zimbabwe’s people are unemployed, and the average life expectancy has decreased to a mere 38 years.

In stark contrast to his people’s wretchedness, Mugabe and his cronies live opulent lives in luxurious, gated homes barely miles from the desolation. The government controls all newspapers and television news stations—such as the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) where In the Continuum’s Abigail Murambe works—and runs news stories about Zimbabwe’s great health and Mugabe’s success as a ruler. Many of those who have spoken against the government have either been forced out of the country, tortured into silence, or killed.

One of Mugabe’s most dramatic initiatives in the last few years has been his seizure of thousands of acres of farmland, nearly a third of Zimbabwe’s farmable land, owned by white farmers or believed to be opposition strongholds, leaving tens of thousands homeless. In many cases these farms have been handed over to Mugabe’s family and friends who don’t know how to work the land. The resulting dramatic decrease in agricultural production, combined with the suspension of much foreign aid in response to Mugabe’s policies, has made the situation exponentially worse.

With a weakened economy and increased poverty has come reduced access to education and healthcare, turning Zimbabwe’s HIV/AIDS epidemic into a national crisis. Nearly one in four Zimbabweans are HIV-positive, and the vast majority cannot afford treatments, which cost $7 million ZWD a month. Organizations like the National AIDS Coordination Programme (NACP) and the National AIDS Council (NAC) have tried to control the spread of the disease, but resources are too scarce for them to be effective. Worse, many Zimbabweans believe that people—particularly women—who have HIV/AIDS deserve to lose their jobs, their spouses, and their livelihoods because many believe it is their fault that they are sick. The result is that many people hide their diagnosis, increasing the likelihood of spreading the virus.

Slightly improved statistics in the last few years suggest that there is hope for Zimbabwe’s fight against HIV/AIDS—perhaps because of better education and safer sexual practices—but much more dramatic improvements are needed to turn the tide. Mugabe, who will be 83 years old in 2007, will soon have to choose a successor, and many hope that the next transfer of power will be an opportunity for Zimbabwe to begin the long journey back to health and prosperity. Until then, plays like In the Continuum, which was performed in Zimbabwe this past summer, help to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and combat the social stigmas that hurt those suffering from the disease.
The Land
Zimbabwe, which was known before its 1980 liberation as Rhodesia, is slightly larger than Texas. It is landlocked below the Sahara Desert by its neighbors, Mozambique, Zambia, South Africa, and Botswana. The country is named after the ruins of an ancient civilization from the third century C.E. (“Zimbabwe” literally means “stone houses”). Subtropical temperatures and modest mountain ranges give it a varied and beautiful landscape.

Zimbabwe is also the home of one of the seven wonders of the natural world—Victoria Falls, a breath-taking waterfall twice as large as Niagara Falls. The Falls were once a major tourist destination, but in the last few years with worsening social and economic conditions, tourists have stopped coming, draining the troubled nation of yet another important source of income.

A Miracle Cure: The N’yanga
In In the Continuum, Abigail Murambe visits a n’yanga (pronounced nee-YAHN-guh, run-n-ning the first two syllables together), or traditional healer, in search of a miracle cure. The idea of a n’yanga comes from the ancient, mystical Shona religions to which many Zimbabweans still adhere, despite the increasing prominence of Christianity. Traditional healers are much less expensive than Western-style doctors and so provide hope for curing illnesses that Western medicine cannot. Although many people in Zimbabwe (and around the world) see n’yangas as witch doctors, forcing many of them to do business in secret, they are in fact serious professionals whose herbal remedies have given comfort for centuries. The Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) grants licenses to practitioners who meet their standards of expertise. ZINATHA is run by respected professor Gordon Chavunduka, who is, incidentally, playwright Danai Gurira’s uncle.

The n’yanga portrayal in In the Continuum is the result of first-hand research and experience.

Glossary

While English is spoken throughout Zimbabwe and is the official language of its schools and government, over two-thirds of Zimbabwe’s people also speak Shona, their native language. Shona is derived from a group of ancient languages that have been in Zimbabwe for over 1,000 years. Abigail often uses Shona words in casual conversation, as do many of the other characters she interacts with. Here is a list of some of the most common Shona words used in In the Continuum.

aiwta = no
amai = mother (also used as a sign of respect to a woman)
baba = father
bhudi = brother
barance = idiot
ini = me
kana = or
kuma = in
kwete = no
makadei = how are you?
maskwera sei = salutations! (a respectful greeting)
mira = wait
ndaskwera = I am fine
ndibatsirewo = help me out
ne = and
n’yanga = witch doctor/traditional healer
pamsoro = excuse me
saka = so
sha = man, dude (i.e. “come on sha”)
shamwari = friend (also used as an exclamation)
sekuru = grandfather/older uncle
sisi = sister
suwa = sure
tafara = we are happy
wuya = come here
zvangu = myself
(used as emphasis)
South Central, Los Angeles, where Nia’s story takes place, is south and southeast of downtown L.A. and bounded on the north by the Santa Monica Freeway. On the other side of the Freeway lie the beautiful beaches, the spacious homes, and the glamorous Hollywood celebrities we usually associate with Los Angeles. For the people of South Central, the vast majority of whom are African American, such luxury is nearly unreachable. The promises of prosperity that drew their ancestors to L.A. in the early 1900s, when the great civil rights leader W.E.B. DuBois wrote (in 1913), “Los Angeles was wonderful…Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high,” have vanished.

“South Central” is not a political district but rather a general term describing the predominantly African American neighborhoods of Los Angeles, including Watts, Morningside Park, Baldwin Hills, and Jefferson Park. The conditions in South Central today are the result of many years of racial oppression. Before the 1950s, African Americans were legally prevented from living outside South Central, turning what used to be a land of opportunity into an American ghetto. After this housing segregation was lifted, few African Americans could afford to move out of the area. High unemployment, severe overcrowding, and L.A.’s notoriously poor public transportation (which makes it difficult to work in other parts of the city) left many families “stuck,” working sometimes two or three low-paying jobs to make ends meet. As of early 2006, the 14% unemployment rate for African Americans in Los Angeles was nearly twice that of whites.

Gang violence, and the illicit drug networks that accompany it, are such a problem in South Central that shootings and other violent crimes are a part of everyday life. Many gangs, such as the Bloods and the Crips, began life as political organizations to promote African American solidarity, but have degenerated into networks of power and greed that terrorize local neighborhoods. It’s not unusual to find children playing games like “drive-by shooting,” where they compete to see who can take cover the fastest each time a car speeds past. As many of these children get older, they may face strong peer pressure to join a gang, longing for the sense of power and family they can provide.

Many Los Angeles school districts cannot meet these children’s needs, and the dropout rate for the Los Angeles Unified School District is 30-50%. In part, the quality of the schools is to blame—financial resources are too scarce to provide money for more teachers, smaller class sizes, and better facilities. In part, the South Central lifestyle makes schooling difficult—many young people have to work to support their families, and domestic abuse or other problems at home can make studies a low priority. For most students, however, a strong education, particularly at one of the local private or magnet schools (which require overcoming difficult tests and intense competition), and a scholarship to college are the best way to break out of the cycle of poverty and unemployment. The struggle to “get out” of South Central can be so fierce that something as simple as a scholarship—or a marriage to someone with one—can be a matter of life and death, as we see in *In the Continuum*.

When many Americans think of South Central they remember the 1992 L.A. riots. After a group of white policemen who had severely beaten a black man, Rodney King, were acquitted of their assault charges and set free, the area was overcome with five days of some of the worst riots in U.S. history. Fifty-four people lost their lives, while over 2,400 were seriously injured and 3,100 businesses were damaged or destroyed. The costs to repair the damage caused by the riots totaled nearly $1 billion. There were many reasons for the outbreak, including an unusually high unemployment rate in the affected areas, a widespread belief that the LAPD had been engaging in racial profiling without punishment for years, and the increasing displacement of African American jobs and businesses to the recent influx of Hispanic and Korean immigrants.

The geographical boundaries of South Central have not changed significantly since the riots, though
Before the Show
Discuss the power of monologues, both in theater in general and in *In the Continuum*.

How is *In the Continuum* an activist play?
In addition to HIV/AIDS awareness, what other political and social issues does the play discuss?

Notice the way different characters talk about HIV/AIDS, especially when they don’t know that Nia and Abigail are HIV-positive. What do these statements tell us about the societies Nia and Abigail live in? How do the people in your school or neighborhood speak casually about HIV/AIDS?

There is an interesting lighting choice made at the end of the play. Be prepared to discuss its significance.

After the Show
Discuss your reaction to Nia’s and Abigail’s final decision. What would you have done?

Petronella tells Abigail that, when teaching people about AIDS in Africa, “you have to get the highest statistics possible in order to get them to do anything.” Is *In the Continuum* like one of those “highest statistics?” Do you feel this play sensationalizes the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

Abigail’s traditional healer assumes she is a white tourist who wants “to see the witch doctor like the one they see on TV,” so he comes onstage singing, dancing, and spouting ridiculous curses. Once he recognizes Abigail, he stops his stereotypical behavior. What other stereotypes do we see in *In the Continuum*? How does the play present stereotypes in order to break them?

Patti tells Nia: “You tell the universe exactly what you want to experience by the choices you make.” Does Nia have as much power to change her life as Patti thinks she does? Why or why not?

Why do you think Darnell and Stamford are not in the play? How do you feel they affect Nia’s and Abigail’s journeys.

Imagine that the play has one more scene. Try your hand at writing it, keeping in mind the monologic style.

After seeing this play, what messages will stay with you?
IN THE LIBRARY...

**The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics**
by Cathy Cohen

Nikkolé and Danai used this book when they were creating *In the Continuum*. Cohen writes about how the HIV/AIDS epidemic has affected African Americans, how they have responded to it, and what more needs to be done.

**Where We Have Hope: A Memoir of Zimbabwe**
by Andrew Meldrum

Meldrum is an American journalist who worked in Zimbabwe from 1980 until he was expelled from the country in 2003 for writing critically about the government. He saw first-hand Robert Mugabe’s development from national hero to bloodthirsty tyrant, and his memoir is a very readable, very engaging story of Zimbabwe’s last quarter-century.

**Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe**
by Martin Meredith

Another book describing the rein of Robert Mugabe. This author struggles to understand how a man once believed to be so good could turn out to be so selfish.

**IN THE LIBRARY…**

**60 Seconds to Shine, Vol. 1 & 2: 221 One-Minute Monologues for Men and Women**
edited by John Capecci and Ziegler Aston

This collection of monologues for men and women features an index where the pieces are organized by age. It’s a great place to look if you’re excited by the idea of monologues and want to read, write, or perform more of them.

**ON THE INTERNET…**

**Frontline: The Age of AIDS**
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontend/aids/view

This past summer the television show *Frontline* aired a two-part documentary on the history of AIDS from its discovery through the present-day. This excellent companion website contains the entire four-hour documentary along with a wealth of facts, images, and a comprehensive timeline.

**Frontline: Zimbabwe—Shadows and Lies**
www.pbs.org/frontend/world/stories/zimbabwe504/index.html

The same station also made a half-hour documentary on the current situation in Zimbabwe, and the companion website contains not only the entire documentary but additional interviews with people living in the country today, recollections on Robert Mugabe, and other facts and activities.

**AIDS Clock**
http://www.unfpa.org/aids_clock

This homepage features a world map showing percentages of young people with HIV/AIDS as well as running estimate of how many people have the disease. There are many more statistics to be found here, as well as additional links and information.

**The Body**
www.thebody.com

The Body is arguably the best resource on the Internet about HIV/AIDS. It contains everything from medical information to statistics to breaking news, and is a great place to start for whatever questions you might have about this important topic.

**Yale University’s Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA)**
http://cira.med.yale.edu

Supported completely by a grant from the National Institute on Mental Health, CIRA’s mission is to support the conduct of interdisciplinary research focused on the prevention of HIV infection and the reduction of negative consequences of HIV/AIDS in vulnerable and under-served populations nationally and abroad.

**Campaign to End AIDS (C2EA): Youth Action Institute 2006**
www.campaigntoendaids.org

(click on Youth Action Institute)

This site provides information about a diverse, exciting new coalition of people living with HIV/AIDS, their advocates and their loved ones, and includes youth related programs.

**Youth AIDS:**
“*It’s about changing the world.*”
http://projects.psi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home_homepageindex

Go to this website and read about programs organized by young people who are dedicated to making a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

**also visit...**
www.blackaids.org
www.avert.org

YALE REPERTORY THEATRE

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For more information on Yale Repertory Theatre and In the Continuum, go to our website: www.yalerep.org