

**STUDY GUIDE**  
COMPILED BY BRITTANY A. LITTLE, DRAMATURG



**CAROLINE, OR CHANGE**

BY TONY KUSHNER  
MUSIC BY JEANINE TESORI

**COURT THEATRE**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2008-OCTOBER 19, 2008  
DIRECTED BY CHARLES NEWELL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
MUSIC DIRECTION BY DOUG PECK



Photo: E. Faye Butler as Caroline and Jacqueline Williams as Dotty in *Caroline, or Change* at Court Theatre. (Brosilow)

# **CAROLINE, OR CHANGE: STUDY GUIDE**

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## SUMMARY CHARACTER LIST & PLOT SUMMARY

### CHARACTER LIST

**Caroline Thibodeaux**-39 years old, the Gellman's maid

**Emmie Thibodeaux**-16 years old, Caroline's daughter, supportive of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

**Jackie Thibodeaux**-Caroline's younger son

**Joe Thibodeaux**-Caroline's younger son

**Dotty Moffett**-An old friend of Caroline, also works as a maid

**Noah Gellman**- 8-years old, the Gellman's son

**Stuart Gellman**-A professional clarinetist and teacher/Noah's father

**Grandpa and Grandma Gellman**-Stuart's parents

**Rose Stopnick Gellman**-Noah's stepmother, a friend of the family who marries Stuart after his first wife's death

**Mr. Stopnick**-Rose's father, liberal New York Jew

**The Domestic Appliances**-Caroline has given personalities and voices to the washer, dryer and radio that keep her company in the basement as she works.

- The Radio is portrayed by three women that look and sing like a Motown girl group.
- The Washing Machine, portrayed by an actor, is brand-new and a good force that pushes Caroline to move forward in life.
- The Electric Clothes Dryer, portrayed by an actor, torments Caroline throughout the play.

**The Moon**- Also portrayed by an actor, the Moon is a calming and healing presence throughout the play.

**The Bus**-Also portrayed by an actor, is the primary source of transportation for the African American characters in the play.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Caroline or, Change is set in 1963 in Lake Charles, Louisiana during the America Civil Rights Movement, just before, after and during the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Caroline Thibodeaux is a 39-year-old African American maid for a middle class, Southern Jewish family, the Gellmans. Caroline, a divorced mother of four, has been working as a maid for 22 years. During her work, she spends most of her time in the humid basement, where she passes her time with the radio, washer and dryer.

The Gellmans' young son, Noah, whose mother recently died of cancer, shares a special relationship with Caroline, a woman resistant to the sweep of change she sees around her. Noah's new stepmother Rose, struggling to bond with Noah and unable to give Caroline a raise, enlists Caroline's help in a plan to teach Noah a lesson about leaving change in his pants pocket. Rose tells Noah and Caroline that when Caroline does the laundry, she should keep the money she finds in Noah's pockets. Although Caroline does not want to take money from a child, she eventually concedes due to her own children's desperate need for food, clothing and shoes that she cannot afford with her regular salary.

This arrangement goes wrong when a \$20 bill goes missing, and leads to an upsetting fight between Caroline and Noah, which causes a rift between her family and the Gellmans. With the death of JFK, the strength of the Civil Rights Movement and the inspirational speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sweeping change begins to affect Caroline's life, forcing her to come to terms with the possible personal and national transformation. But the upbeat ending, involving Caroline's daughter Emmie, portends hope for Caroline's community.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

### PLAYWRIGHT-TONY KUSHNER

(Source: [barclayagency.com/Kushner.html](http://barclayagency.com/Kushner.html))



In "After Angels," a profile of Tony Kushner published in *The New Yorker*, John Lahr wrote: "[Kushner] is fond of quoting Melville's heroic prayer from *Mardi* and *Voyage Thither* ("Better to sink in boundless deeps than float on vulgar shoals"), and takes an almost carnal glee in tackling the most difficult subjects in contemporary history – among them, AIDS and the conservative counter-revolution (*Angels In America*), Afghanistan and the West (*Homebody/Kabul*), German Fascism and Reaganism (*A Bright Room Called Day*), the rise of capitalism (*Hydriotaphia, or the Death of Dr. Browne*), and racism and the civil rights movement in the South (*Caroline, or Change*).

Born in New York City in 1956, and raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Kushner is best known for his two-part epic, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Kushner has translated and adapted Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion*, S.Y. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Sezuan* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*; and the English-language libretto for the children's opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krása. He wrote the screenplays for Mike Nichols' film of *Angels In America*, and Steven Spielberg's *Munich*. His books include *But the Giraffe*, *a Curtain Raising*, and *Brundibar: the Libretto*, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak; *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present*; and *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict*, co-edited with Alisa Solomon.

Kushner is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Emmy Award, two Tony Awards, three Obie Awards, an Oscar nomination, an Arts Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the PEN/Laura Pels Award for a Mid-Career Playwright, a Spirit of Justice Award from the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, and a Cultural Achievement Award from The National Foundation for Jewish Culture, among many others. Most recently, *Caroline or Change*, produced in the autumn of 2006 at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, received the Evening Standard Award, the London Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Olivier Award for Best Musical. He is the subject of a

documentary film, *Wrestling with Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner*, made by the Oscar-winning filmmaker Freida Lee Mock. He is working on a screenplay about Abraham Lincoln. He lives in Manhattan with his husband, Mark Harris.

## COMPOSER-JEANINE TESORI

(Source: [mtishows.com/bio.asp?bID=3343](http://mtishows.com/bio.asp?bID=3343))



Jeanine Tesori has written three Tony-nominated scores for Broadway; *Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (lyrics, Dick Scanlan) at the Marquis, and *Caroline, or Change* (lyrics, Tony Kushner) at the Eugene O'Neill. The production of *Caroline or Change* at the National Theater in London received the Olivier Award for Best New Musical. Her first off-Broadway musical, *Violet*, written with Brian Crawley, received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1997. She has been the recipient of many other honors including Drama Desk and Obie awards, and was cited by ASCAP as being the first woman composer to have two new musicals running concurrently on Broadway.

Ms. Tesori has composed concert material for Kristin Chenoweth, Sutton Foster, and Audra MacDonald. Her composition, *The River is Wide*, was hailed by the New York Times as a remarkable interplay of music, dance and words both requiem and celebration, reflecting the cross-currents of emotion that hang in the air of Lower Manhattan. She composed the music for The New York Shakespeare Festival's production of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, as translated by Tony Kushner and starring Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline. She has written songs for the movie *Shrek The Third*, and is the composer for the forthcoming Dreamworks Broadway production of *Shrek The Musical*.

Her film scores include *Winds of Change* for ABC, *Show Business*, and *Wrestling With Angels*. She has composed songs for Disney DVD releases *Mulan II*, *Lilo and Stitch II*, and *Little Mermaid III*. She has produced sixty CD's for Silver-Burdett Ginn's *Making Music* and the original cast albums for *Twelfth Night*, *Violet*, and *Caroline, or Change*.

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### THE UNITED STATES: 1963

#### Cost Of Living

Average Cost of new house: \$12,650.00

Average Income per year: \$5,807.00

Gas per Gallon: 29 cents

Average Cost of a new car: \$3,233.00

Loaf of bread: 22 cents

Bedroom Air Conditioner: \$149.95

#### Notes:

In 1963, a woman with less than 9 years of education, like Caroline, would only make about \$953 a year. That was \$4854 less than the average person.

Money today is worth 6 to 7 times more than in 1963. For example: \$20 in '63 would be valued at \$135 today. That means that Caroline would only make about \$5700 in 2008.

#### What Events Happened In 1963?

- World Religions status: 890 million Christians, 200 million Buddhists, 365 Hindus, 13 million Jews and over 100,000 Black Muslims.
- Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates President John F. Kennedy, often referred to by his initials JFK and the 35th President of the US, on November 22.
- Jack Ruby murders John F. Kennedy's suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald live on television.
- The Vietnam War

#### Politics

President Kennedy answers questions about Vietnam on CBS television September 2 and 9: "I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the government to win popular support that the war can be won out there," he says. "In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Vietnam—against the communists."

#### Human Rights and Social Justice

- "I have a dream," says Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the March on Washington ceremony held at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28.

- NAACP leader Medgar Evers, 37, is shot to death June 12 in the doorway of his home at Jackson, Miss.
- On August 1, The United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit rules that New Orleans must desegregate all of its public parks, playgrounds, community centers, and cultural facilities.
- On September 25 in Alabama, four African American girls are killed and 19 people injured when a bomb explodes at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church.

### **Prominent Figures**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Malcolm X

John F. Kennedy

Robert Kennedy

### **Prominent Organizations:**

SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee)

CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

## **CAROLINE, OR CHANGE: THE MUSIC**

By Jack Tamburri

Jeanine Tesori's brooding, complex score for CAROLINE, OR CHANGE is packed with recurring themes and motives. Unlike the traditional Broadway song structure (play a pleasing melody, then play it six more times), Tesori's music is interested in communicating a constant stream of precise emotional events. The score to CAROLINE is always building tension--achingly beautiful melodies surface and submerge, then return transformed, with new orchestrations and new associations to characters and feelings. Here is a quick guide to some of the play's common musical gestures.

In the play's opening, listen for Caroline's line "there is only under water." The "under ground/under water" antithesis occurs in the lyrics throughout the play, and you'll notice that every time it comes up, there is a musical callback to this first moment.

The score uses rhythms, structures, and melodies from a wide variety of musical sources, including early 60s Motown pop, Delta blues, Klezmer, slave spirituals, and even Broadway musicals (in the Radio's first number, a major-key modulation that wouldn't be out of place in a Broadway finale is abruptly cut off by Caroline repeating "Nothing ever happens").

A roiling, driving bass groove, introduced by the moaning Dryer in the play's first scene, comes back in the transcendent "Lot's Wife." In the opening, Caroline is lamenting "Thirty dollars ain't enough." This rhythm is going to underscore moments of similar crisis



throughout the show.

Dottie, Caroline's neighbor, regales Caroline with some choice lyrics about her caustic attitude. A sly 3-note bass figure accompanies Dottie's initial attempts at pleasant conversation, and this chord structure returns in the low woodwinds when she begs Caroline to change herself, and acknowledges the pain that comes with change in a complimentary scene late in the play.

Stuart's clarinet is a feature not only of his own passages of song, but those of his son, Noah, as well. Noah's personal ensemble also often includes his mother, the bassoon, and occasionally his own abandoned cello. The seesaw arpeggios we come to associate with the clarinet actually occur first under Noah's entrance, and return again and again under the Gellman family's domestic scenes. Finally, the squeaky woodwind exercise turns into a wave-like motive in the piano when Stuart, the Moon, and Emmie have their trio in the show's second half.

The two major musical "worlds", that of the Gellmans' chamber music and Klezmer-inflected woodwinds and that of Caroline's bluesy, pop-song basement come together at the Hannukah party, where Mr. Stopnick's didactic recitative eventually gives way to Emmie's spirited rhythm and blues.

This is just a taste of the kind of richly associative and evocative musical language to be found in *CAROLINE, OR CHANGE*. Tesori's layered score is as concerned as Kushner's script with the theme of change, the tension of transformation, and the pleasure of emergence in a new form. As you watch the show, you'll hear countless other examples of melodies, themes, and rhythms that establish and then change, one character's iconic theme becoming the backdrop to an unrelated scene, and then splitting into rhythmic and harmonic components to inform other musical moments throughout, as well as references to popular tunes and traditional songs, again transformed into something new through orchestration, deft re-writing, or simply by being placed in this new context. In the end, it's impossible to say who's more responsible for telling the stories of Caroline, Noah, Rose, Emmie, and their families--Kushner or Tesori. The power of each is entirely beholden to, and invigorated by, the other.

## JEWISH AMERICANS

### SOUTHERN JEWS & THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



The civil rights movement rocked the nation for more than a decade. The core years, 1954-1964, witnessed the greatest cooperation between blacks and whites. No white ethnic group in the United States contributed as much to support the movement, both in terms of money given to the cause and individuals expending human energy, as did northern Jews. The conventional wisdom is that southern Jews, fearful for their own safety and for the safety of the Jewish community, did little or nothing.

Northern Jews made personal decisions about how involved they wished to get in the civil rights movement; how the world felt about their decisions played only a small role in the action that they took. To behave similarly in the South, one would have to have been almost totally oblivious to public opinion and walk cautiously, if at all. Throughout much of the 1950s and early 1960s, northern Jewish organizations proudly announced their support for and involvement with the movement; during that same period most southern Jews and Jewish organizations denounced their northern counterparts, asked them to suppress their outstanding presence in the forefront of the civil rights cause, and to keep in mind the consequences of northern Jewish activity to the welfare of southern Jews.

Unfortunately, it seems that this lack of activity was present in the female Jewish community of the South as well. It seems that while northern Jewish women took risks, the southern Jewish women did not. Women raised in southern Jewish communities, knew that they had to be more careful because their behavior reflected on all Jews in the region and in an area like the South where taking a stand could hurt your family and business, many people knew their limits.

It is important to recognize the pressure under which southern Jews lived and to show how southern values affected the behavior of southern Jews. One northern rabbi, Philip Bernstein, noted after touring the South in October 1936, "...In their languid drawls, their intense southern patriotism, their contempt for 'nigger lovers,' they are . . . obviously a

product of their environment. "

Southern Jewish merchants, on the other hand, were caught between their ideas of what was right and what the consequences of acting upon their beliefs would be. Author Charles Webb says, "the one characteristic which best defines the response of Jewish merchants to desegregation was fear: fear of personal, political, and commercial repercussions."

## JEWISH AMERICAN LIFE

Jewish Americans are Jews who are American citizens or resident aliens. The United States is home to the largest or second largest Jewish community in the world.

The Jewish community in the United States is composed predominantly of:

- Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern
- Sephardic Jews from Western Europe and North Africa
- Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia
- Ethiopian Jews,
- Indian Jews

### **Politics and Civil Rights**

- While the first group of Jewish immigrants from Germany tended to be politically conservative, the second wave that started in the early 1880s was generally more liberal or left wing.
- In the 1960 election, Jewish Americans voted over 80% for Catholic Democrat John F. Kennedy.

Jewish Americans have been very active in:

- The Civil Rights Movement
- Women's Rights Movement
- Gay Rights Movement.

### **Religious Practice**

- Jewry is generally considered an ethnic and religious identity.
- Among the 4.3 million American Jews described as "strongly connected" to Judaism, over 80% report some sort of active engagement with Judaism.

### **Language**

- Although almost all American Jews are today native English-speakers, some American Jews are bilingual with Modern Hebrew.
- Many of America's Hasidic Jews are raised speaking Yiddish, a language that has had a major influence on American English.

## HANUKKAH



The Menorah

"Hanukkah," from the Hebrew word for "dedication" or "consecration", marks the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem after its desecration by the forces of Antiochus IV and commemorates the "miracle of the container of oil." According to the Talmud, at the re-dedication following the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated olive oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate fresh olive oil.

### Name

- Some say the word was derived from the Hebrew verb "חנך" meaning "to dedicate" or to "educate."
- Hanukkah is also the Hebrew acronym for "ח' תורה תיבכ הכלהו תורנ' ח" meaning "eight candles as determined by House of Hillel" Hillel, a rabbinical school of thought, argued in favor of starting with one candle and lighting an additional one every night. Jewish law adopted the rule.

### Kindling the Hanukkah lights

Hanukkah is celebrated by a series of rituals that are performed every day throughout the 8-day holiday:

- There are special additions to the daily prayer service, and a section is added to the blessing after meals.
- The primary ritual is to light a single light each night for eight nights.
- An extra light called a Shamash, meaning guard or servant, is also lit each night, and is given a distinct location, usually higher or lower than the others.

The reason for the Hanukkah lights is not for the "lighting of the house within", but rather for the "illumination of the house without," so that passers-by should see it and be reminded of the holiday's miracle.

**Hanukkah Music, Foods & Gelt**



There are several songs associated with the festival of Hanukkah. The most well known in English-speaking countries include "Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel" and "Chanukah, Oh Chanukah."

Potato pancakes, known as latkes in Yiddish, are traditionally associated with Hanukkah, especially among Ashkenazi families. There is a custom of eating foods fried or baked in oil as the original miracle of the Hanukkah menorah and the consecration oil that lasted for 8 days.

Hanukkah gelt (Yiddish for "money") is often distributed to children to enhance their enjoyment of the holiday. The amount is usually in small coins, although grandparents or other relatives may give larger sums as an official Hanukkah gift

## CAROLINE, OR CHANGE POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are the various types of music, heard in CAROLINE, OR CHANGE, important to the show?
2. How was the music in the show reflective of the change going on in the world in 1963?
3. Why does Noah idolize Caroline? Why is he drawn to her?
4. Why doesn't Caroline return Noah's affections?
5. Was Rose trying to break up Caroline and Noah's relationship with the "change in the pocket" rule?
6. What does Caroline mean when she says, "Nothing ever happen underground in Louisiana. Cause there ain't no underground in Louisiana. There is only underwater,"
7. "Consequences unforeseen" is repeated multiple times in the play. What consequences are unforeseen?
8. Would Caroline's problems change if she had more money?
9. Dotty tells Caroline not to "...drown in that basement. Change or sink. Let go, forget, move on." How does Caroline's unwillingness to change affect her interactions with others like Dotty and Emmie?
10. How is Emmie embracing the change happening in the world around her?
11. What is Caroline asking for in the song "Lot's Wife"? Why does she want to be turned into a "...pillar of salt"?
12. Caroline says that change is a danger for a woman "...caught between the devil and the muddy brown sea", a woman like her. What does she mean? What is the devil in her life? What is she caught between?
13. What does the word "change" in the title mean?
14. What does the bus represent in the play?
15. Why does Caroline give human like characteristics to the Domestic appliances? What roles do they play in her daily life?
16. If JFK is the President of the United States, why does Noah refer to Caroline as the President? What does he mean when he says that she "...runs everything"?

**CAROLINE, OR CHANGE**: Related Images



African American maid and young girl (1958)



Two young African American maids in Mississippi (1961)



An African American family in Louisiana (1960's)



Louisiana bus (1960s)





Southern Jewish Family celebrating Hanukkah



Home in Lake Charles, Louisiana



State Library of Louisiana (<http://www.state.lib.la.us>)

Maid in front of a Louisiana home in late 1950s

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