

OBAMA-LOGY

By
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CHARACTER TRACKS

This was initially conceived of as a four-actor ensemble play. But I have seen as few as four and as many as 10 actors used to create the world and its characters. Some casting flexibility can be employed, but this play should have no fewer than four actors and probably no more than 12.

CLEVELAND TRACK ONE- early 20s, Black male

1. WARREN - young, idealistic, political wonk.

CLEVELAND TRACK TWO- late 20s, Black female

1. INSTRUCTOR #1 - helpful campaign guide. Narrator.

2. BARBARA - hard-nosed field organizer in East Cleveland.

3. RESIDENT #1 - annoyed Cleveland resident.

4. CECE - single mother looking to change her life.

5. CAITS - frustrated and troubled young woman.

6. NEIGHBOR - older woman on the block.

7. MOM - Warren's Mom.

CLEVELAND TRACK THREE- late 20s, White male

1. INSTRUCTOR #2- helpful campaign guide

2. SAM - East Cleveland Field Organizer

3. RESIDENT #2 - apathetic Cleveland resident

4. COP 1 - nervous, rookie officer

5. COP 2 - surly veteran traffic policeman

6. NIGHT COP - jittery rookie officer

7. BRAD - perky campaign volunteer

8. DAD - Warren's Dad (off-stage)

CLEVELAND TRACK FOUR - late 20s, White female

1. INSTRUCTOR #3 - helpful campaign guide

2. LAURA - East Cleveland campaign director

3. RESIDENT #3 - Stepford-type wife

4. STORE CLERK - racist store clerk

5. LAINEY - perky campaign volunteer

SETTING

The play takes place in the rental cars, street corners, and campaign offices of Cleveland during the 2008 election.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This is Brechtian comedic theatre. The transitions should match the brevity of this tone. The props should be minimal. The "Instructors" serve as guides for Warren throughout the play.

For door-to-door campaign scenes, an actual stand-alone door is not necessary. A simple spot of light to emphasize an opening should suffice. For door knocking, someone in the ensemble can provide sound effect by hitting a staff against the floor. An on-stage prop table might be an efficient and clear way to present the items to the audience. When finished with a prop, an actor can simply put the item back on the prop table. Warren's suitcase is something which can exist on-stage throughout the play. He lives from that suitcase and can pull things from it when needed.

SCENE ONE: The Journey Begins

Warren packs a suitcase.

INSTRUCTORS

Dear volunteer, this is bigger than you.

WARREN

I am ready.

INSTRUCTOR #1

Are you prepared to travel?

WARREN

Wherever you need me.

INSTRUCTOR #2

What about a swing state?

WARREN

Sunny, beautiful Florida? The shores of North Carolina?

INSTRUCTOR #1

You're a bit young to be an official, paid staffer.

WARREN

Yes, but this campaign is about the youth and I want to be a part of this moment. Now I know I'm very young but I graduated with honors at the top of my class. And I still believe.

INSTRUCTORS

Still believe in...

WARREN

America. Its people. This campaign.

INSTRUCTOR #1

You're right. You are very young.

INSTRUCTOR #2

Being a campaign staffer means being the face of a candidate.

INSTRUCTOR #2 (cont'd)

Why do you want to be the face?

WARREN

I think this election is about more than Obama.

INSTRUCTOR #3

Oh really?

WARREN

It's about what this country is and what it will be.

INSTRUCTOR #3

And what is that?

WARREN

I don't know. But I want to find out. And I'm packed. I'm fired up and ready to go.

INSTRUCTOR #1

Well okay, Warren. You got your sun tan lotion?

WARREN

Check.

INSTRUCTOR #2

Swim trunks?

WARREN

Double check.

INSTRUCTOR #3

Then follow our instructions and get ready for sunny, beautiful...Ohio. East Cleveland. You familiar with the city?

WARREN

I think Dante wrote about it.

LIGHTS SHIFT. Warren is
driving a rental car in East

Cleveland. SAM and BARBARA
are passengers.

SAM

You're excited?

WARREN

Yes, I always wanted to come to East Cleveland. We are doing
something important. Making history, you know?

BARBARA

(surly)

Mmmhmmmm.

SAM

Now we're going to be moving fast on this, Warren. You're sort
of coming in the middle of things but we're glad you could fly
out here on such short notice after graduating.

WARREN

Yes, and I'm not afraid of jumping in. I'm a fast learner.

BARBARA

Mmmhmmmm.

SAM

I know you'll do a great job. You'll be taking over for Phil who
had to take a leave of absence.

WARREN

What happened to him?

SAM

Gee...hmm, I think Phil just needed a breather.

BARBARA

Yes. Phil fucked up. Take this exit. We do a lot of work with
black churches in the area. What kind of church do you go to?

WARREN

Actually...ahh, no. I don't do church.

BARBARA

You don't do church? Did your parents forget to take you?

WARREN

Oh no, they...they certainly didn't forget to beat me over the head with the Bible. I just learned how to dodge their loving, Christian blows and find my own way. BUT I love and respect all kinds of religions.

BARBARA

So what does that mean? You're an atheist?

SAM

You don't have to answer that, Warren.

BARBARA

Sounds like another Phil.

WARREN

Well I promise not to fill Phil's shoes.

The joke lands flat.

SAM

I know you're going to do a great job. Right Barbara?

BARBARA

A lot of times we work 18 hours a day. No time off.

WARREN

I will cancel all my Brazilian wax appointments, Barbara.

BARBARA

51%. Take a right at the light.

WARREN

What's that?

SAM

The target we need to vote.

WARREN

Why that amount?

BARBARA

Because that's the target. Look, we don't have time to-

SAM

-Warren, East Cleveland is a predominantly black neighborhood so there's no competition from the other side for voters. All we have to do is find a way to push people to the polls. If we get a large enough percentage here, then we win all of Cleveland by a landslide. If we win Cleveland by a large enough margin we can counteract Cincinnati, which is conservative. And then if we off-set Cincy, we win Ohio. And if we win Ohio, then we win...

WARREN

Everything.

SAM

Exactly. East Cleveland is the tipping point of the political universe. We take this area, we take the country.

BARBARA

And if we lose this neighborhood, then we just screwed up a lifetime of work. Years of sweat, tears, and blood...for some of us.

SAM

51%. Right now we're tracking at significantly below that in most Black neighborhoods. Particularly in the ward you'll be managing. Your job will be to help bump up the early voting numbers, making sure voters have rides to and from the polls, and patrolling the streets.

BARBARA

Why did you want this job?

WARREN

It's a great opportunity. It's history.

BARBARA

So was Janet Jackson flashing her titty in the Super Bowl. But why did you want to be a part of *this* history?

WARREN

I don't know. The same reason as everyone else: to matter.

BARBARA

You're not understanding the question. Pull up here to this house. (Warren pulls up and parks the car.) You're going to be in the community. That means training the locals, knocking on doors, and working with the people. 'Black people.'

WARREN

Great. My parents are 'Black people.'

SAM

Funny.

BARBARA

Corny. College boy, what do you know about these people?

SAM

I know you're going to do a great job. Be sure to make friends. Make lots and lots of friends. Happy to have you on board.

BARBARA

Don't fuck this up.

SCENE 2: Office Training

INSTRUCTOR #3

Office. Wedged in the corner of a shopping plaza between a check-cash store and a discount dress shop is your headquarters. Occasionally you walk inside at 7 am and find workers curled up underneath the tables waking up from a 3 hour nap to go back to work. In the first 24 hours we expect you to get up to speed on training people for phone banks, door-to-door work, tabulation, and setting up GOTV: the "Get Out the Vote" drive. Each block has a community leader whose house serves as an organizing beacon for quick bursts of action. Get people to like you.

Split scene between Sam/Barbara,
and Warren. Warren is talking to a
volunteer.

BARBARA

I don't like him.

WARREN

Hello, I'm Warren Clayton. And I am so happy that you decided to show up. Even if it's in your pajamas and flip flops. Now I think we're all getting a feel for each other but I just want you to know that I relate to the...struggle and the urban blight, I mean plight. Plight. Okay let me just take out my roll...

SAM

...you'll grow to like him.

BARBARA

He's another one of those uppity, Black, political tourist looking to build his resume. We should've hired someone from the community. Let me make a few phone calls and I can find someone.

SAM

You find someone and then what?

BARBARA

We go to Laura as a united front and get him shipped off to some other place that's not as important as this time, this area.

SAM

There aren't a lot of people who have his skill set. He learned everything we threw at him.

WARREN

Worried about the GOTV software? I can help you. Computers are easy for me.

BARBARA

People aren't computers. I just don't see people relating to him.

SAM

I relate to him.

BARBARA

Sam, you'd relate to a potted plant. It's your White liberal guilt. You 'relate' so that you can pretend like you fit in. You see moss hanging from a tree and read its aura.

SAM

That was one time and I was tipsy.

BARBARA

And you use words like 'tipsy!' You're too nice to guys like Warren and it's because you think he's a precious minority.

SAM

What are you talking about?

BARBARA

Sam, I know you care. But you treat Warren like a lot of White liberals do: like delicate little flowers that must not be put under any stress or have their integrity questioned. And that's how we end up with people like Clarence Thomas: Unqualified, narcissistic buffoons who have no connection to the community, to history, or sense of obligation.

WARREN

(talking to someone leaving)

Uh, excuse me...where are you going? If you're looking for the

WARREN (cont'd)

bathroom...(volunteer is gone) Must've had an emergency.

INSTRUCTOR #3

Your first wave of volunteers will be your toughest.. There may be some 'language issues' but handle it with a cool, calm, professional manner.

WARREN

What? No we don't have a break yet. Now I've got it. Daily roll call. Here we go...hmmm...(reading name) La-quil-vel-ve-ta? (listening) What? It's pronounced how? Oh, how about I call you...Velma? Now if you could just quiet down a bit...um please. Quiet down!! Hmmm....look how do you expect to get ahead if you can't pay attention for 30 seconds? Listen, I am your friend.

BARBARA

Talking to them like they're barbarians in the wild. Is this how he's gonna relate to Black people? Church-going, Cleveland-raised, direct, no-bullshit folks.

WARREN

Why don't we take a break? We got donuts in the back. Go...shove food in your faces. Go go go. (to Instructor) What is this?

INSTRUCTOR #3

This is America. Land of the free.

SAM

He'll adjust. Just like the training. He's a quick learner.

BARBARA

You can't learn soul.

SAM

And if I said that about him you'd call me racist.

BARBARA

Yes, but I've earned the right to judge him. You haven't. These people will look at him and see a shallow, snobby Black traitor. And they'll associate our campaign with that type of person. And

BARBARA (cont'd)

it's this very same suspicion in the Black community that Obama has fought against his whole career. You can do whatever you want, Sam, and no one will judge all White people by that. But a Black man in this city today has to be held at a higher standard because everyone is going to come after him. A Black man has to better. And he isn't.

SAM

Barbara, don't you think you're being a bit...relentless.

BARBARA

I just want the best.

SAM

And maybe his best is something he'll have to discover. But he's not going to get there if you stomp on him.

WARREN

These aren't residents. They're survivors.

SAM

Let's give him a week. See if he meets his outreach targets, gets volunteers to come out for him, and if people are connecting to him.

SCENE THREE: 'X' Marks the Spot

INSTRUCTOR #1

The street. This is your stomping ground, volunteers. You have to own your turf like its tribal land. All those in-office scenarios can only give you a taste of the real thing. Okay, now let's knock on some doors.

Warren is walking around the neighborhood with clipboard of voter information.

INSTRUCTOR #2

You want to check the address before exiting the car. If you don't see your house there is a good chance the house was knocked down, foreclosed, or abandoned. Like many houses around the country. Now if you are well-dressed, some residents might yell things at you. Things like...

INSTRUCTOR #1

Uncle Tom!

INSTRUCTOR #3

They might also yell things like 'punk!'

INSTRUCTOR #2

Retard!

INSTRUCTOR #1

Do-Boy!

INSTRUCTOR #2

Bitch!

INSTRUCTOR #3

Faggot!

INSTRUCTOR #1

Faggot-ass nigga!

WARREN

And I'm supposed to just-

INSTRUCTOR #2

-stay cool and calm in those situations. Keep a professional tone and keep it moving...bitch. Just kidding.

WARREN

Ok. Cool and calm. Keep it moving.

Warren knocks. Then he pushes door bell. He pushes doorbell again and is shocked. He rubs his hand.

INSTRUCTOR #3

Most doorbells won't be working and can give a nasty shock from the old wiring so don't even bother trying. If someone pulls a weapon on you...

WARREN puts his hands in the air.

INSTRUCTOR #1

Immediately, but slowly back away from the property. But don't turn your back to the owner.

Warren backs away.

INSTRUCTOR #2

And volunteers: never go inside someone's house. Attempted kidnapping and volunteers being held hostage have happened. Your safety should come first.

Warren moves on to another house.

INSTRUCTOR #3

And before you knock on each door remember...

INSTRUCTORS

Smile. Have fun and make friends. You are representing hope.

Warren knocks on the door.

Resident, Black female, doesn't
open the door.

RESIDENT #1

WHO IS IT?!?!

WARREN

Hi, ma'am? My name is Warren Clayton and-

RESIDENT #1

Who the fuck is that?!?

WARREN

...tha-that's me. Ma'am. And what's your name?

RESIDENT #1

What's my name? My name is Diana Motherfuckin' Ross. What the
fuck does it matter what my name is? Do I know you like that?

WARREN

Uh...I'm with the Obama campaign.

RESIDENT # 1

Oh, Lord. Get your toilet paper out cause it's diarrhea time on
this bullshit.

WARREN

No, ma'am. It is not diarrhea time. This will only take a
second.

RESIDENT #1

You got Obama out there with you?

WARREN

Only in spirit. I was looking for a Eunis Ray? Are you-

RESIDENT # 1

Nah, nigga. Have a nice day-

WARREN

-well ma'am I would like to leave you with some lit-

RESIDENT # 1

-nigga, I said have a nice day!

INSTRUCTOR #3

(to volunteers)

The key to these door-to-door campaigns is persistence. You will get rejections. Just mark them down as 'not home' and we will get back to them. Let's try another door.

Warren knocks on the door. Dog starts barking.

RESIDENT #2

(coming to door)

Shut up! Sit! Fucking Christ, this better not be a campaign worker knocking at my door.

Dog continues barking. Barks intermittently throughout.

WARREN

Hello, I was looking for a Mr. Frederick Jones.

RESIDENT #2

It's Fred. Fefe! Get back!

WARREN

(offering hand)

Hi, Fred. My name is Warren Clayton. How are you today?

RESIDENT #2

Aww shit, you're from one of those campaigns, aren't you?

WARREN

I'm with the-

RESIDENT #2

-Well you're wasting your time cause I ain't voting.

WARREN

Are you sure, sir? Because this is a really important election-

RESIDENT #2

-they say that every year. This is important. And ain't nothing changed. (yelling at dog) Hey, Fefe! Shut the fuck up! (closing door) You have a nice day.

INSTRUCTOR #1

If someone says they're not voting you mark down 'not voting' and we'll try to get someone to speak with them over the phone. You don't have to do the work of a salesman. Let's try a nicer looking home.

Warren knocks on another door. Resident #3 is a female. Well-dressed, middle-class. Smiling.

RESIDENT #3

(swings door open)
Good afternoon.

WARREN

Good afternoon ma'am. How are you doing?

RESIDENT #3

I'm fine. How are you?

INSTRUCTOR #2

You see: we are establishing a friendly jovial rapport with the resident. You introduce yourself.

WARREN

My name is Warren Clayton. What's your's?

RESIDENT #3

Beth Frazier.

WARREN

Well Miss Frazier...

RESIDENT #3

Mrs. Dr. Frazier.

WARREN

Mrs. Dr. Frazier I'm with the Obama campaign. And we are reaching out to the community to get people to vote early.

RESIDENT #3

I'm going the first day of early voting. This election is very very important to me.

WARREN

Well good. We're in agreement.

RESIDENT #3

Yes.

WARREN

And may I ask: are you voting for Obama?

RESIDENT #3

No, I'm not.

WARREN

Oh. Well may I ask why?

RESIDENT #3

Simple: we don't vote for Blacks in this house. Have a nice day.

INSTRUCTOR #2

Remember volunteers: persistence is the key. You will face many different types of people. But you can't take it personally. As much as you might want to, you just can not take it personally. Move on to the next door and keep knocking.

BEAT

ALL INSTRUCTORS

I said, you move on and keep knocking.

Warren knocks on another door.

CECE

(entering)
Hello?

WARREN

Oh, hi? How are you?

CECE

I'm fine. How are you?

WARREN

I'm...I've had better days. But still we must go on. Right...
sister?

CECE

I guess.

WARREN

My name is Warren Clayton and I'm with the Obama campaign.

CECE

I'm CeCe.

WARREN

Hello CeCe. That is a lovely name. I was looking for Vanessa
Robinson.

CECE

That's my mom. She at work.

WARREN

Oh okay. Let me just mark that down on the sheet...like so. Do
you know when she'll be back so I can make a note of that?

CECE

She working a double shift so it'll probably be after midnight.

WARREN

Then maybe over the weekend, I can stop by again.

CECE

She working at that time as well. Maybe you can call her when she gets home.

WARREN

We're not allowed to call people that late, CeCe. But thank you. Would you like some paraphernalia?

CECE

What?

WARREN

Some Obama stuff. I got bumper stickers.

CECE

I don't have a bumper to stick it on.

WARREN

You can put it on a folder or your door.

CECE

Sure. Obama is cool.

WARREN

Oh, you think so, huh? CeCe, how old are you?

CECE

27. I got two babies: Reggie and Jamaar.

WARREN

Umm...all right, thanks for sharing. You know I think you would make your boys proud if you could be a part of this historic moment: getting Barack Obama elected. How would you like that?

CECE

Sure. What can I do?

WARREN

Well the first thing you can do is vote. Have you registered?

CECE

No, can I still do that?

WARREN

You can and we can help you fill all that out. And you can also volunteer. I will just take out my new volunteer forms like so. And then I will ask you to fill this out. Easy.

Warren puts new volunteer form on clipboard and hands it to her.
CeCe takes it and stands there for a moment.

CECE

Oh...well. I left my reading glasses inside.

WARREN

That's okay. I can wait right out here for you to go get them.

BEAT

WARREN

Is everything all right?

CECE

I don't think I'll be able to find them. (hands forms back)

WARREN

You know what, that happens to me all the time. I can fill this out for you with your permission.

CECE

Sure.

WARREN

Okay, I just need you to sign your name.

CECE

Well I don't have my glasses so why don't you sign it?

WARREN

I think that would be illegal.

CECE

Look, maybe this isn't going to work.

WARREN

(writes on form)

No, no, no. How about this: I can write your name in there, date it. And you can mark it with an 'X.' It's what they would do in old days when people couldn't....when they had to speed things up. X marks the spot.

Cece takes the pen and marks
the document with an 'X.'