

# Gangs clash on stage in 'Trouble'

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It's not hard to find a film or play that exposes the problems of today's urban youth. The trick is finding one that offers a solution. And that is exactly what Ujima Theatre's production "What Color Is Trouble" offers.

In this case, the solution put forth by playwrights Ron Pitts and the Reverend Raymond Wise is faith. Throughout the production, we are told that there are many things that can bring an end to the violence in the streets, but without faith, we're fighting a losing battle.

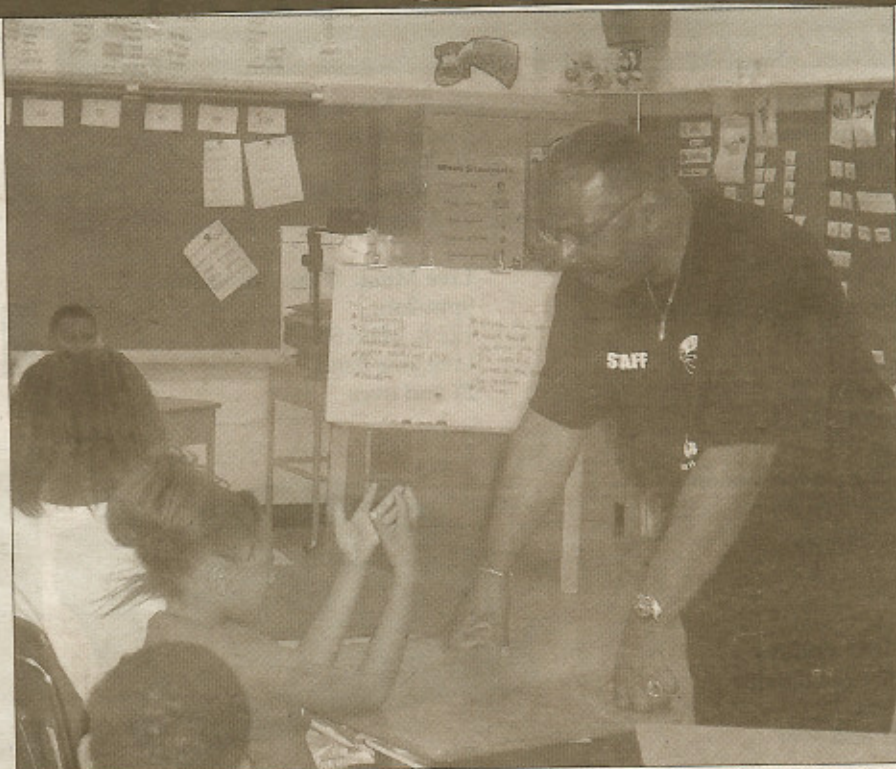
Described as "a gospel drama musical" by Pitts, "What Color Is Trouble" is a parable for today that examines a wide range of issues - both good and bad - facing African American families today. In an age when color defines a person more than ever before - from the color of our skin to gang colors to whether we live in a "red state" or a "blue state" - our children are learning the wrong ways to separate ourselves.

The program begins in a classroom 1,000 years in the future, with kids learning how people used to divide themselves by color. We're then slammed into present day with a street scene of prostitutes, evangelists and gang violence.

There's also an awesome dance number by rival gang members as the first act opens. Reminiscent of "West Side Story" with less ballet flair and more krumping, the number really gets the show off to a great start.

As the story moves on, we see many levels of class in today's society. Some choose to make their living honestly; others choose the criminal path. We see a father who loses his job for no better reason than the boss wants to hire a friend of a friend. We see his friend who chose a life of drug dealing, following a different path in life. We see a young man who had gone to prison for avenging the assault of his mother. All of these stories come together at the end with simultaneously tragic and joyful results.

As promised by Pitts, he upped the level of intensity by bringing together some gifted singers to really bring the message home. While "What Color Is Trouble" tells a touching story of loss and love in the city, the most powerful



Ron Pitts (right) brings alternatives to gangs and violence to youth in urban areas through theater." [File Photo]

moments come in song. Stand-out solos come from RayShawn Brown as a wino diamond-in-the-rough, Paul Brewer with a call to renew faith in Jesus, and Crystal Payne singing a song of forgiveness with on-stage husband Deric Anderson.

The power behind "What Color Is Trouble" is the heart and soul of its cast and crew. While the play falters with some scenes that run too long at times, there is a sincerity that shines through. And the message come through loud and clear: We all just need a little faith.