

THE THIRD CHAIR

About the Play

Cast & Production Details

Cast: 3 actors (2M, 1F)

Characters: SAM MORRISON (62, retired Army Sergeant Major and construction business owner), ALEX HARPER (49, political science professor), and MS. CHEN (court administrator, brief appearance)

Running Time: 70 minutes, no intermission

Setting: A mediation room, present day, real time

The Setup

After a physical confrontation at a school board meeting over teaching slavery in the founding documents, two men—Sam and Alex—were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and assault. The prosecutor offered a mediation agreement: complete this session by 6:00 PM and charges are dropped. Fail, and both face trial tomorrow morning.

They arrive at the mediation room and discover the court-appointed mediator has a family emergency and won't be coming. They have seventy minutes. Alone. To produce a signed agreement. Sam will lose his concealed carry permit and his construction business with a conviction. Alex will lose his job due to a morals clause. Neither can afford to fail.

Why This Play Matters

THE THIRD CHAIR examines what happens when two people with genuine, irreconcilable differences are forced to choose, over and over, whether to stay human to each other.

This isn't a play about resolution or common ground. It's about the brutal, uncomfortable work of acknowledging someone's humanity even when you see them as dangerous, even when everything they believe terrifies you. It's about the moment before violence and the cost of certainty.

The play is designed to make both sides of the political divide equally uncomfortable. Both characters make arguments that sound reasonable before revealing what lies underneath. Neither is a caricature. Neither wins. The emotional intensity is sustained and unrelenting—both men leave the room destroyed, not just tired. This is visceral confrontation, not intellectual debate.

The Characters

SAM MORRISON (62): Retired Army Sergeant Major. Owns Morrison Construction. Raising his grandson Tyler after his son Michael gave up custody. Lost Michael (gay) fifteen years ago when Sam told him he couldn't affirm his sexuality. Still misses him every day. Believes moral standards and discipline are what made America strong. Fear drives his certainty.

ALEX HARPER (49): Political science professor at State University. Married with a seven-year-old son. His son came home crying after another kid told him he wasn't a "real American" because they don't go to church. Spends his life teaching why restraint and process matter. Terrified of Sam's America. Commitment drives his certainty.

Production Notes

The play features two men navigating fatherhood and what it means to protect the children in their care—they just disagree profoundly about what protection looks like and what America should be.

The debates at the center—immigration, elections, gun control, federal force, moral authority—are never resolved. What matters is what these positions represent to each man: saving civilization for Sam, defending democracy for Alex. Both make cases that challenge the audience.

This production demands actors who can sustain maximum emotional intensity for 70 minutes. Both characters experience moments of private doubt and devastating exposure. Both leave visibly damaged.

The play requires physical commitment—shaking hands, broken voices, white-knuckled grips on chairs. This is not comfortable work.

Minimal technical requirements: three chairs, one table, basic lighting. The play's power comes from performance and text. The empty third chair should be visible throughout—a constant presence, waiting.

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