

= Pill Hill ( play ) =

Pill Hill is a three @-@ act play by American dramatist Sam Kelley . Set in a neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago known informally as Pill Hill , the play examines the failures , successes , and relationships of six African American steel mill workers as they transition from blue @-@ collar jobs to white @-@ collar professions between 1973 and 1983 . The play is regarded as an allegory of economic progress related to the American Dream .

Pill Hill debuted at the 1990 Yale Repertory Theatre Winterfest series of plays in progress , and was subsequently performed in several venues across the United States . The play was published by Dramatic Publishing Company in 1995 .

= = Characters = =

Charlie , a 20 @-@ year steel mill veteran who seeks a promotion to machine operator , maintains a perfect attendance record and eventually lives on his steel mill pension .

Eddie , a full @-@ time student who has surrendered his job at the mill and becomes a lawyer

Al , a night school student working at the mill to provide for his family who becomes a real estate agent

Tony , an encyclopedias salesman who is exploited by his company but becomes engaged to a professor and attempts to buy a house in Pill Hill .

Scott , a worker at the mill who was dismissed from college who becomes a Chicago Transit Authority employee before pursuing other career opportunities .

Joe , a steel mill worker who plans to leave the mill when his car note is paid , but ends up out of work , homeless and penniless .

= = Plot = =

The Pill Hill neighborhood was a popular residence for successful white physicians ( resulting in the nickname for the neighborhood ) . In the 1960s and 1970s , it was a symbol of affluence that represented the American Dream . For young blacks , this symbol was especially poignant , which provides for a subtext in this play .

The three @-@ act play examines the failures , successes , and relationships of six black steel mill workers in Chicago as they transition from blue @-@ collar jobs to the white @-@ collar professions . The time is 1973 , 1978 , and 1983 , and the scene is a Chicago basement apartment where the characters meet to socialize over cards and drinks . Racial themes relating to the disparity of life at the steel mill are presented , and dreams about possibilities represented by the upscale Pill Hill neighborhood in Chicago are examined . The conflicts are painful as the characters deal with leaving the comfortable life of the mill to embark on a road of uncertainty while pursuing professional aspirations .

= = Performance and publication history = =

The play debuted in the 1990 Yale Repertory Theatre Winterfest series of plays in progress . It was mounted as a full production in another Connecticut theater , before travelling as productions of the Philadelphia Theatre Company and the Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul , Minnesota . The play had a late @-@ 1992 production by the Hartford Stage Company , and a 2010 production at Coppin State University . Dramatic Publishing Company published the play on February 23 , 1995 . The publisher lists it as a full @-@ length drama intended for both high school and college / adult audiences .

= = Critical reception = =

John Beer of Time Out Chicago attended a performance in 2009 and wrote , " At its best , Pill Hill

draws a corrosive picture of individual lives caught within merciless social systems . Racism haunts the men 's periodic get @-@ together , most pointedly in a monologue about a Southern excursion gone terribly wrong . [ ... ] [ W ] riting at the height of the Reagan @-@ Bush years , Kelley saw clearly the impact of right @-@ wing policies on the urban working class . " He thought the individuality of the characters was undeveloped , but the play was " neatly structured to a fault " . He criticized what he perceived as a " heavy authorial hand " in the repetition of a conversation about one character 's self @-@ doubts throughout the play .

= = Analysis = =

Pill Hill is an allegory of economic progress told as tales of various pursuits of the American Dream . Kelley uses a spectrum of sociological types that he develops into complex , recognizable personalities in order to deliver his message in natural idioms . When the play was performed in 2005 at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University , the website description noted that a good life in Pill Hill was a common goal that was difficult to reach and when achieved , it was at a cost that could be one 's soul .

The conflicts range from economic difficulties to the proverbial glass ceiling common to blacks climbing the ladder of success . The changing professional situations coincide with relationship transitions that occurred in America as the hippie generation transformed into the yuppie generation . Four of the six characters become successful by 1983 : Al is a real estate dealer , Tony is Mercedes Benz salesman , Ed is a groundbreaking black lawyer and Scott has achieved financial success in a suspicious and mysterious way . The other characters are less successful with Charlie , who is the oldest of the characters , having stayed in the mill without progressing up the ranks , but earning a secure life through hard and dangerous work . Joe 's troubles at the mill lead to unemployment and a destiny with the homeless shelter . A 1994 Chicago performance elicited the following character descriptions from the Chicago Reader : Joe is boisterous ; Charlie is fatherly ; Al is the eternal runner @-@ up ; Tony is ingenuously amoral ; Scott is innocent and Eddie is the play 's " spokesman . "