

Casting ROMEO & JULIET was both exciting and scary. Over 70 people auditioned, and the decision to cast 47 of them means a lot of extra work for everyone. Much more important, however, was the nature of the casting: for the first time in Cornerstone's history, we set aside our natural determination to make the casting as racially and ethnically mixed as possible. The Capulets are white; the Montagues are black. That the families are not racially mixed accurately reflects life in Port Gibson; the schools here are integrated by law but segregated by practice. With three exceptions, black students attend the public school and, across the street, white students attend the private military academy. Still, the open and violent antipathy between the Capulets and Montagues does not reflect race relations here, which means we have to work carefully to discover the tension and unknowingness that is at the root of the antipathy rather than the antipathy itself. Scarier still, if we don't do a damn good job of portraying all the subtleties and complexities of all the issues involved, our race-conscious casting may end up feeding racial tensions in the community.

We have our work cut out for us.

