

MISSOURI

(or, *My People Call it Maize*)

A Tragicomic Satire

By,

Paul Hufker

Dedicated to my mother, Barb Hufker, who gave me everything, and is nothing like these people. ☺

paulhufker@gmail.com

<https://paulhufker.wixsite.com/paulhufker>

TRIGGER WARNING: These characters are racist; they say and do racist things. There are also conversations of mass shootings.

Synopsis:

Missouri: a suburb near Ferguson. Paul SR and Diane are a happy, white couple, living a happy white life. Suddenly they feel compelled to demolish their existing, modest, ranch-style home, and in the same plot, build an ultra-modern, eco dream-home. Ballsy, in this small town. But their 12 year-old son Paul is extremely happy about this progressive leap into the future. The adults agree that, hey, it's the right time – the economy is stronger and the neighborhood may become even more...*ethnic*...but by god, we won't be pushed out – we've been here since NAFTA! They wonder if they should cancel their summer, all-Missouri vacation plans during the construction? Stay close to home? Nah, *nothing bad* happens to white people, so off they go! But the rains keep coming. There's a virus spreading. Protests are forming. The site is flooding. Not even the black or Mexican workers will continue to build. Protests are getting closer. So is the virus. Billy's dad is sick? The architect is in the *hospital*? What will happen to Paul SR and Diane's all-white dream home and their all-white future? What will happen to their only son?

Character Breakdown:

4M, 2W

PAUL – the 12-year-old white son of Paul SR and Diane, *and* an adult TV host

PAUL SR – the 51 year-old father of PAUL – white, thin

DIANE – the 49 year-old mother of PAUL – white

BILLY – sloppy white man, late 40's

BUDDHA – neat white man, late 40's – walks with a limp

One additional actress will play:

ARCHITECT – a white woman, twenty-eight or so

OPRAH – The TV host – purposefully played by a white woman

TICKET TAKER – The white ticket-taker at the St. Louis Arch

BECKY THATCHER – Tom Sawyer's fictitious girlfriend

WAITRESS – the kitschy, white, gum-chewing, 50's-style waitress at Crown Candy Kitchen, 30's

*You'll need an ANNOUNCER for the commercials; think both persuasive and capable of inciting fear.

*A Note on Casting:

Yes, these characters are all white, and so the actors playing them probably ought to be, too. Why? This is my attempt to explain the Trump voter; where they came from and how they formed. This is my offering in these evolving times. I am a white man. I wanted to put the privilege and ideas I grew up around on trial. To me, this play is what a lot of that privilege looked and felt like. I highly encourage an all of-color design, and production team.

***A Note on Accents:**

PAUL SR and DIANE's accents are an equal blend of "suburban St. Louis" (flat "A's", hard "R's") and "rural Missouri," (evident in the common catch-all phrase "sittin' there" which ends up sounding like "sittin' air"). The rural half of their accent is a "country" accent they retain from their parents. BILLY spent his early years in the Ozarks, and speaks with a slightly more pronounced "rural Missouri/country" accent, as does BUDDHA, who comes from tiny, rural, Moberly, Missouri. PAUL's accent is the slightest, and least pronounced of them all, especially when he's the TV host. Of the smaller characters, ARCHITECT, TICKET TAKER and WAITRESS may have slight regionalisms, but they should not be overwhelming; BECKY THATCHER has the thickest "country accent" of any character.

***A Note on Tone:**

This play is both a tragedy, and a satire; play it large but watch for opportunities to relish in any real and ugly moments.

***A Note on Timespan:**

The play takes place over the span of three weeks or so, from early June to the start of July.

Scene Description:

Note: Sets will change more seamlessly and quickly if they take the form of images of the places in the play, set against a bare, upstage wall.

Prologue:

A Commercial

Scene 1:

Outside the one-floor ranch home near Ferguson, MO.

Scene 2:

Kitchen of the old home. The family sits for breakfast.

Scene 3:

Outside the one-floor ranch home near Ferguson, MO.

Scene 4:

A computer model walkthrough of the house.

Scene 5:

Inside a small, local auto-repair shop, with a large confederate monument very near.

Scene 6:

Inside the modest onsite trailer at the construction site, the family's temporary home

Scene 7:

Cahokia Mounds, in Illinois, a massive, ancient, historic site of the Cahokia peoples. Think of two or three giant, grassy, manmade hills, with some wooden steps going up the side of each.

Scene 8:

Inside the onsite trailer.

Scene 9:

Inside the onsite trailer/Outside at the construction site

Scene 10:

Inside a modern eco-house.

Scene 11:

At the base of the St. Louis Arch.

Scene 12:

At the confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers.

Scene 13:

Outside Mark Twain's childhood home in Hannibal, MO.

Scene 14:

Inside the little onsite shed at the construction site.

Scene 15:

Inside the onsite trailer.

Scene 16:

At Michael Brown's death spot in Ferguson, MO.

Scene 17:

Outside the construction site in the middle of the greatest storm the country has ever seen.

Scene 18:

The Oprah Talk Show Set.

Scene 19:

Crown Candy Kitchen, an old-timey soda fountain and candy shop in St. Louis, MO.

Epilogue:

A Commercial

Prologue:

A commercial plays. Projected against a bare, white, upstage wall, we see: pictures of rising seawaters, floods, massive burning wild fires, hurricanes and tornadoes; all manner of natural disasters, attacking manmade neighborhoods.

ANNOUNCER

In a world that's changing fast, you need a home which lasts.

We see: A shiny, new, high-tech eco home in a shiny new, sunny, perfect neighborhood.

ANNOUNCER

You need the all-new *Navajo*, from Preserve, the leader in eco-defensive home-building technology.

We see: The exciting eco-defense elements of The Navajo – its water-tight seals, its ability to withstand flooding, fire, tornadoes. The home easily resists all the weather elements attacking it.

ANNOUNCER

The Navajo is a cutting-edge family living space, which uses reclaimed natural materials to create a waterproof, fireproof, tornado-resistant, 100% carbon-neutral living experience that you can pass from grandchild to grandchild. The all-new Navajo; when the world changes, what you need is to Preserve.

We see the logo for Preserve Homes, and a happy, smiling, white, family. Thumbs up!

The image and sound interrupt and distort the commercial. The picture goes to static and then changes to video of riots in the streets. We hear the sounds of angry protests; people by the thousands, chanting, marching. Pictures of fighting, groups clashing. Close up on black protestors. Sounds of intense anger. Extreme close up on the righteous fury in a black protestor's eyes.

Static again, followed by blackness and silence.

Scene 1

Filling the stage is an image of a one-floor, cookie-cutter, suburban, ranch-style house, near Ferguson, Missouri. The lawn is pristine, as is the large, white pickup truck out front, and though the house too is well-kept, nothing is fancy.

Sure, it's sunny, but in the distance, a storm cloud.

Theme music from a TV show (a la the English home-building reality program Grand Designs) plays.

PAUL walks in front of the house, and so, in front of the image. He's hosting the "show." A small TV camera light clicks on him. He wears sneakers, khaki pants, and a polo shirt. Here, PAUL is an adult TV host.

PAUL

Welcome back. Foundation. It's the one thing we can count on from design-to-design. From generation-to-generation. Someone may take a frame from, say, 1855, 1922 or, like this one, from 1963, and update it, alter it, but essentially keep it the same. Just make it a bit stronger. Take a *tiny* step forward. But every now and then, someone is inspired -- from whatever motivations -- to take a leap. And then, an old foundation can meet its modern times head-on.

DIANE and PAUL SR enter and stand on their lawn, assessing their house. She is 49, wears a red sweater and jeans, while PAUL SR is 51, wears a white t-shirt, jeans and work boots.

DIANE

I think I hate our house. TWO *youknowwho* families on *this block* are remodeling and now I think I hate our house.

PAUL

(to the camera)

This three-bedroom, ranch-style home is in Ferguson, Missouri...well, *near* Ferguson...you all remember that, right? No comment.

PAUL SR

Neighborhood won't stop *changing*. Sometimes I think it's up to *me* to stop it from going further downhill...

PAUL

See, I'd *love* to have a comment, but TV hosts of reality home-building programs aren't allowed comments. Sponsors. Preserve Homes doesn't pay me to "shoot my mouth off" with my *opinions*. The only comment I'm allowed to make is a trigger warning: what you're about to see can easily be called racist. There are also references to mass shootings. Hold on to your hats. (*cleansing breath*) This is the story of Paul SR, Diane and their son. When this Midwestern family woke up one morning and thought the neighborhood had changed a bit *too much* around them, the sense that they needed to do something about it started creeping in. What *will* they do? Let's find out. (*He points at the image of the house*) Ranch-style homes swept across the country in the 50's and 60's and became a popular, sturdy symbol of America. But, perhaps this one could use some updating?

DIANE

Grab a calculator. Crunch some numbers.

PAUL SR takes out a calculator and crunches numbers.

PAUL

They saw a commercial for Preserve Homes and they went to discuss remodeling. A keen, young architect was eager to help.

ARCHITECT has pamphlets and is immediately in their faces.

ARCHITECT

You need an eco-house.

PAUL SR

(*seen the commercial, but still clueless*)

Yeah, now what is that, exactly?

ARCHITECT

Eco-logic-al. You live in a floodplain. Heavy, heavy season of rains predicted. You need *The Navajo*.

PAUL SR

Were we thinking build new? I think we were thinking *remodel*.

DIANE

Yeah, tell us about echo thingies we can do to *our* house. I want my parents OUTTA Sissy's.

PAUL SR

Her folks lost their home to a tornado. They're gonna rebuild but they moved in with her sister. I'm lucky, my folks are dead, haha.

DIANE

Damn right you are -- Sissy lords it over me *every dang chance* she gets. Thinks she's the *belle of the ball* 'cause she has a finished basement she stuck a mattress in. I can do better'n that! There were tornadoes in the commercial. Can you make our *current* house tornado-proof?

ARCHITECT

No.

DIANE

Bummer. (*looking at a Navajo pamphlet*) Are these thingies really tornado-proof?

ARCHITECT

Roof and wall impact systems make *The Navajo* tornado resistant. But as I say, you're really more in a floodpla—

DIANE

(*WTF?*)

It's shaped like a *box*?

ARCHITECT

Integral to the weather-resistant design. Also helps keep heating and cooling costs waaaay dow—

DIANE

I don't wanna live in some goddang box. Do you hav—

ARCHITECT

(*ready for this*)

Here's another design. *The Navajo* "S".

DIANE

Oh, now, that's much more normal. Just sorta a big slanted roof. Why didn't you show me that first? Oh, wow, momma and daddy's bedroom would be on the *other side* of the house from us! Big plus. And they won't be in *no basement* either. And, look, an "open-plan" kitchen. I think I'm *pretty sure* I've always wanted an open-plan kitchen! Oo! Does the cute little greenhouse echo garden thingie come with it? I've got a green thumb; mom and Sissy's are shit-brown. Ha. OK, tornado-proof, big kitchen, cute garden, good, fine, but can we *afford* it? I mean...you can't do *any* of this stuff to the house we already got?

ARCHITECT

I cannot make an existing house fully-tornado-resistant, no. But if price is your concern, I have some good news. Districts around here recently expanded and now you all live in what's called an *enterprise zone*. Many states have them. Essentially, it means Preserve gets tax breaks from the state to build in areas like yours. Community revitalization. So, we're offering a *significant* discount if you build basically right where you are.

PAUL SR and DIANE look at each other; they are not quite convinced. ARCHITECT needs the sale, pushes harder.

ARCHITECT

And we're offering another *big, big* discount on construction costs. New techniques, gotta try 'em out somewhere. That's *two* big discounts...

PAUL SR is intrigued, turns to his wife, offers his help.

PAUL SR
(*a deep breath*)

I can do it. I can get the loan this time, Diane. If there's a *big discount*, I bet I can. Waddaya say? I mean, we *stayed*. All these years.

DIANE

Damn right! Even when all our friends saw the new *youknowwho* neighbors and ran like hell to St Charles. We *deserve* something nice.

ARCHITECT sticks a paper in their faces and points to a number.

ARCHITECT

That's all. If you do the standard down payment and per-month, that's *all* you pay to own *The Navajo*. Don't love the name, by the way. Asked them to change it a *number* of times. No dice. Ready? Let's talk in my office.

ARCHITECT tries to usher them inside. They stay put.

DIANE
(to ARCHITECT)

Hold yer horses. We heard something about "reclaim materials" on the commercial? Is this house gonna help us *reclaim* this neighborhood? If we're gonna rebuild *right where we are*, we need something which (*she thinks and then remembers the word from the commercial*) preserves.

ARCHITECT
(*innocently*)

Well yes, I mean, the aim of a revitalization loan is to revitalize.

DIANE

Great! Revital-whatever is good. (*lowers her voice*) White, is also good...

ARCHITECT
(*nodding*)

We make them in white.

DIANE
(*trying to make her get it*)

No, I, haha, no....look, are these *protest-proof*? Ya'll had protests on the commercial.

ARCHITECT
(*huh?*)
Protests?

DIANE

Weren't there like, violent protests on the commercial?

ARCHITECT

No.

DIANE

Oh. Haha. Why did I think there were? Well, what about it, are echo houses *safe*?

ARCHITECT

Absolutely. Cutting-edge. Security is a top priority. It's just not the *main* priorit--

DIANE

(rolling her eyes, just waiting to hear that)

Oohhh, I get it, mostly liberals want these.

ARCHITECT

No, no. A wide demographic of folks are concerned about security. Turns out, people are complex. Just look at our studies.

She shoves studies in their faces. PAUL SR looks at them.

PAUL SR

Well, there's more locks and cameras than we got now. This house *will* give us something solid to pass on to Paul.

DIANE

Yeah. And we *could* have my UDC meetings again. I wonder what Sissy and the United Daughters of the Confederacy will find to complain about when they don't have an *unfinished basement* to pick on! And I'll cook Momma and Daddy Thanksgiving dinner in the big kitchen! *(a happy discovery)* Twice as big as Sissy's!

PAUL SR

(an exciting thought)

Ya know what? I bet people like us, good people, will see us building the house and decide to move into the neighborhood!

DIANE

(happy clapping)

We'll make it like the ones when we were growing up! For Paul!

ARCHITECT

(she always has just the statistics to help)

Our studies show *The Navajo* will help raise home values *and* neighborhood unity. Just look at our studies.

She shoves different studies in DIANE's face.

DIANE

Oh, I dunno, Paul, I'm gettin into it! Is it enough to buy all the echo mumbo jumbo?

ARCHITECT

(trying not to blow the sale)

The eco mumbo jumbo is what makes it last!

DIANE turns to ARCHITECT and holds up the brochure, to do an important double-check.

DIANE

Are you *sure* these thingies are tornado-proof?

ARCHITECT pushes past her own uneasiness and decides to close the sale.

ARCHITECT

Yes.

DIANE looks at PAUL SR, like, 'Well, what should we do?'

PAUL SR

For a chance to pass down something lasting to my son, something which'll set him up on top in life the way I wish I'd have been set up? Well, I'd do just about anything on this earth.

DIANE

Me too. Couple'a heroic fighters, battling it out at the gates, until reinforcements arrive. Like the Alamo.

ARCHITECT

Didn't everybody die at the Alamo?

PAUL SR and DIANE lock eyes and get excited.

DIANE and PAUL SR

I think we deserve it.

DIANE and PAUL SR

Me too!

DIANE and PAUL SR.

I want it.

DIANE and PAUL SR

Me too! Hahahaha.

DIANE

(to ARCHITECT)

OK, let's do it!

ARCHITECT

Great! Let's chat in my office.

ARCHITECT tries again to get them to go with her; DIANE instead steps confidently into PAUL'S space and talks to the camera.

DIANE

Know *why* else we deserve it? Affirmative Action. Never forget.

PAUL SR

Still holdin us back *to-day!*

DIANE

Like a sore that's been bleeding since the 60's. Then NAFTA!

PAUL SR

Worst trade deal in *history*.

They lock eyes and chant.

PAUL SR and DIANE

Whose country? *Our* country! Whose country? OUR country!

A beat. PAUL looks at the camera.

PAUL

Did ya get all that?

He turns to ARCHITECT.

PAUL

Tell us, what is an eco house? A grass roof? Sunflowers growing just above your head?

ARCHITECT

Yes, but go further. Think: fully carbon-neutral. Think: *no footprint on this earth*. Pass the benefits down to your kids.

PAUL

I like that. I like that a lot. For me, *that's* the draw. Now, I'm not going to pretend Paul SR and Diane *understand* all this.

PAUL hands PAUL SR blueprints. He and DIANE look confusedly at them.

PAUL SR

What the fuck is this? The downstairs bathroom? Er no, it's a...*bloodstain?* Oh right, it's my blood! Duh. I cut myself making toast this morning. Haha. I'm usually pretty good with tools.

DIANE takes the blueprints away from him and puts a suit jacket on him. She straightens his collar and gives him finishing touches.

DIANE

You can get the loan, hm? OK, *why?* What's different about today?

PAUL SR

(hand on his heart)

Because. Today's the day I do my god's-honest best.

DIANE

(yeah, right)

Ok, we'll see, good luck! Bye! Bye, hon!

She waves PAUL SR off as he marches away. He takes two triumphant steps, and spins on his heel.

PAUL SR

Nope, they denied me.

He shrugs, defeated. She's pissed, arms folded. She softens.

DIANE

(rolling her eyes)

C'mere.

Head lowered, he crosses to her. She comforts him.

PAUL

Give them credit. They remained persistent. They imagined one day, giving their only son, *their only child*, a home which would recreate for him their pristine -- white -- childhoods. Hm.

ARCHITECT crosses to PAUL.

ARCHITECT

You're the kid, huh? How old?

The small camera light goes out on PAUL who is suddenly 12.

PAUL

Me? I'm 12.

ARCHITECT

You like eco stuff?

PAUL

Yeah! But like, I like the no-footprint stuff more than the tornado-proof stuff.

ARCHITECT

(smiles)

Me too. Pretty neat, to think all this can happen here in lil ol' Missouri, isn't it. You seem like a cool kid. Hey, if your dad gets that loan, you can have an *eco life!*

PAUL
Wow!

DIANE has rallied PAUL SR for another go at the bank. She stands behind him, ready to usher him into the void.

DIANE
This time, you've got it. This time it's yours. Now, go out there and get us our future!

PAUL
You can do it, dad!

She pats him on the back as he marches off again, offstage.

DIANE
And don't come back without it!

She watches him go, then turns to PAUL.

DIANE
Just kidding.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Image of the kitchen of the old home. The family sits for breakfast together, for one of the last times before demolition begins. The house is packed up. What remains are tacky knick-knacks. If you look closely, you can see ceramic Aunt Jemima figurines and other racist memorabilia like Betty Boop in blackface. DIANE cleans up breakfast while the men sit.

DIANE
(to PAUL)
Are you ready for your play tomorrow?

PAUL SR
Isn't tomorrow the last day of school?

DIANE
Next stop, junior high! Yeeeehaw! He's gearing up for his big end-of-year project.

PAUL SR
What did you end up doing?

PAUL
(proudly)
Our Native American play again. "My People Call it Maize."

DIANE
That one from November?

PAUL
(*nodding*)

The teacher wanted to end our year on a *super happy* part of our history, she said.

PAUL SR
One of the *happiest* times this country ever had!

DIANE
Your ol' dad will be there in the front row with his camcorder!

PAUL SR pretends to shoot PAUL from his camcorder.

PAUL
(*dad never comes*)
You *will*?

PAUL SR
I got away from work!

PAUL
That's great! But why not just use your *phone*?

DIANE
Shoot him from his *left*. That's his good side.

She engulfs her son in an over-the-back hug.

DIANE
Oh, *junior*, it's so exciting to see *my son* up onstage! Look more like a *distinguished Southern gentleman* than all Sissy's retard kids put together.

PAUL
Mom! Don't say the *r*-word. And I asked you not to call me junior. My name is Paul.

DIANE
But *his* name is Paul, and then things get confusing. I don't know what we were thinking the day you were born.

PAUL SR
Hey, don't you *want* to take after yer ol' ma and pa?

DIANE
(*suddenly, a lethally-serious correction*)
Ah-ah-ah. You're old, I'm not old.

DIANE lightens just as suddenly.

PAUL
Well, *of course* I want to take after you. Especially now that you're really *leaping* into the future.

DIANE

You bet! We're gung-ho! I'll can't wait to cook in a *real* kitchen. And thanks to my big Mr. Loan-Getter here, I can.

DIANE kisses PAUL SR's cheek. PAUL SR is as proud of himself as he can be.

PAUL SR

(beaming)

We're gung-ho, buddy! From our *blown-in cellulite wall insulation*—

PAUL

Isn't that *cellulose*?

PAUL SR

(bragging)

Or our *pedophilic* roof.

PAUL

I think you mean biophilic.

DIANE

What's my favorite one? Oh yeah, *mechanical ventilation with heat recovery*. MVHR.

PAUL

(never heard that one)

Wow! What does *that* mean?

DIANE

Oh, I have no idea. All I know is that it costs a pret-ty penny and nobody in my family has one. And I bet neither do them *youknowwhos*.

PAUL SR

But it's worth it, right? To give you something which lasts forever? *(tussles PAUL'S hair)* Of course it is! How do *you* know so much about all this?

PAUL

(shrugs)

I read up on important things.

PAUL SR hides a number of brochures behind his back. He cannot contain his grin.

PAUL SR

OK, family. It's a big, big day. I got something here...

DIANE

(clapping and bouncing with joy)

They came? *They came!* That means we saved enough? *Two years* we've been saving for this!

PAUL SR

Two long, vacation-less years come to an end with...our exciting summer vacation brochures!

PAUL SR reveals the brochures and spreads them out on the kitchen table. He's beaming. DIANE wraps her arms around PAUL SR.

PAUL

Oh, cool! But dad, why don't you use the laptop? It makes this *much* easier.

DIANE

When hard-working white people can't go on vacation for *two whole years*, something's wrong with the system. Remember that, junior.

PAUL SR

Now, I had the travel agency send me *every* landmark in Missouri.

PAUL

What's a "travel agency?"

A thought occurs to PAUL SR which stops his enthusiasm dead.

PAUL SR

Wait a minute – wait a *minute* -- should we still go? They'll be building the new house all summer. Shouldn't we be here for that?

DIANE

No, see, we *know* building.

DIANE faces out, and places her hand over her heart. An American flag drops down.

DIANE

I am a proud Daughter of the Confederacy! We *built* this whole country! Our traditions *go on*! We march ahead.

PAUL SR rises and faces out, with his hand over his heart.

PAUL SR

(with passion)

Neither rain, nor sleet, nor *something something* shall keep us from our appointed *something something*. That's from the Lakota Sioux.

PAUL

(that can't be right)

I think the mailman said that.

DIANE

(picking up brochures)

Where should we go first?

PAUL SR

That's the exciting part. It's all right here in our own backyard. We don't have to leave Missouri!

DIANE

I've *never* left Missouri!

PAUL SR

And now you never have to!

They do a happy little embrace. "EEeeee!"

PAUL

Will we *actually* get to Crown Candy Kitchen this year?

PAUL SR

This year, buddy, there's no stoppin us.

DIANE

I want to go! I've never been either.

PAUL SR

We'll all go!

PAUL

What's so great about it?

PAUL SR

It's old. And good. Old things are good things. And it's authentic. Real ice cream. Real dairy. Real fillings. Since 1913. My dad took me, and now, for real, actually, this summer, buddy, I'm gonna take *you!*

DIANE and PAUL look at each other and go YAY!

PAUL SR

I mean, the neighborhood is a *full-on ghetto* but you can avoid most of the shootings if you go for lunch.

DIANE

We'll go for lunch! We'll go and avoid *most of the shootings!* Where *else* should we go?

PAUL

I want to go to the St. Louis Courthouse.

PAUL SR

Then the courthouse it is! We can hit the baseball stadium! Can you believe, I'm a lifelong fan and I've *never* been.

DIANE

What's at the courthouse?

PAUL

I read that Dred Scott was an enslaved African American who sued for his freedom and lost. The decision was read on the steps of the courthouse. It said no black person was, or ever could be, an American citizen. Why do some people hate other people *so much*?

A beat.

PAUL SR

And *then* we can hit the baseball stadium!

Image disappears. Lights change.

Scene 3

A commercial plays.

We see: Fences of all types; wooden, metal, steel, etc. They stretch into the distance, segregating land as far as the eye can see.

We hear:

ANNOUNCER

Pesky animals invading your property? Pesky *people*? Sure, you can shoot them, but that's messy. Try a fence instead. Crazy Dave's Fence Depot. Just off I-70 near the prison.

Logo for Crazy Dave's.

Images changes to the old house at night. PAUL enters, hosting his Grand Designs show. Theme music swells.

Here again, he is the older TV host. Camera light clicks on.

PAUL

Welcome back. Fences. You may not even notice them any more, but private property is a relatively recent phenomenon. For the ultra-modern home Paul SR and Diane are building, fences are going to be important. They'll need to move their property one and-a-half feet into each of their surrounding neighbors' yards.

PAUL SR enters.

PAUL

The neighbors, as it turns out, were mostly cooperative. Paul SR got the Black family – a family of four white people – to agree to the process with nothing more than a handshake.

PAUL SR smiles, shakes an imaginary hand, waves, gives thumbs up, etc.

PAUL

For the Browns, a family of five black people, he told them he'd pay their neighborhood fees for the year -- \$187.

PAUL SR grudgingly writes a check, hands it off.

PAUL

And for the Whites, an elderly Latinx couple, he imagined standing in their kitchen and vaguely threatening them until they agreed.

PAUL SR glares menacingly, arms folded.

PAUL

Instead he wrote an angry note and almost didn't sign his name.

He writes a pretend note.

PAUL

But it worked.

PAUL SR smiles and dusts his hands; job done.

PAUL

Can I offer my opinion about that now? No? OK, moving on.

Image changes to inside the old house. PAUL SR crosses in to his den.

PAUL

With the fences shifted, Paul SR and Diane *should* have enough room to build their home. But the neighbors right *here*? The Greens? Well. They're holding out.

PAUL SR's den is normally filled to the brim with Native American stuff – a few authentic, interesting pieces, displayed around a bunch of tacky, racist, knick-knacks – but most of it is packed in large cardboard boxes. PAUL SR is dressed offensively in some Native American clothing/artifacts, including a full-on headdress. He is rummaging through a box, all worked up. PAUL enters, dressed normally. He's a kid again.

PAUL

(frustrated)

Mom's still using the VCR.

PAUL SR

(holding up a racist knick-knack)

You know, Indians never even had an *understanding* of private property.

PAUL
(*not correcting*)
You mean indigenous people?

PAUL SR
(*examining a weird-o artifact*)
Exactly. Indian. The feather, not the dot. They never would have had a conflict about fences. I oughta march over there and teach the neighbors a lil something about the people who were here *before*.

PAUL SR finally looks up and hears what PAUL said.

PAUL SR
So, yer mom's using the VCR, eh? Well, we'll watch your play later. I don't know why she didn't just record it on her phone.

PAUL SR stands and tries to comfort PAUL, who is sad his dad misses so much stuff.

PAUL SR
I'm sorry I missed it, buddy. A manager's job is never done. But that's what I am. Not just a regular 'man', but a man-a-GER. I hope one day you can understand what that means. But I'll be there for the next one, honest injun. Hey, *Dances with Wolves* is on soon. How many times have we plopped down in front of the ol tube to watch *that one* together, huh? *Huh, buddy? Huh?*

PAUL SR tickles PAUL. PAUL laughs, brightens.

PAUL
Dad, were *all* Native Americans like that? No property?

PAUL SR
Hard to imagine, isn't it. But even after the Choctaw integrated with the white man, they never even *created* a word for ownership.

PAUL
(*wide-eyed*)
Really?

PAUL SR takes the headdress off of his own head, and places it on PAUL'S. It's much too large and falls down over his eyes.

PAUL SR
See, if I was a Choctaw warrior, son, I'd march right up to the Green's front door and I'd *count coup*. Do you know what that is?

PAUL
(*remembering*)
Kinda like tag?

PAUL SR slaps his son playfully on the back of the head.

PAUL SR
You're it!

The headdress falls over PAUL'S eyes. PAUL SR fixes it.

PAUL SR
Oops, sorry. There ya go. But it's *noble*. I'd sneak right up to someone and simply touch them. That suits me, right down to the ground. I'm a *Choctaw*.

PAUL SR kneels down to his son, puts a hand on his shoulder, lock eyes. His tone goes grave.

PAUL SR
But we live in ugly times, son. We gotta defend what's ours. With violence, if necessary. Is that...look at me now son, is that...something you're prepared for...?

DIANE yells at the TV.

DIANE
Private property is a *constitutional right*!

PAUL SR
See? Your mother knows. That's a good woman in there.

PAUL
What are we gonna do if the Green's don't cooperate?

PAUL SR gives his son a big grin, then pulls out a spear he'd pre-hidden. He goes back down to one knee and reverently addresses his son.

PAUL SR
It's time, buddy. When you're askin questions like that, we know it's time. You're becomin a man now, movin up to the 7th grade. It's time.

PAUL
(wide-eyed)
It's really time!

PAUL SR
(reverently)
You're no Choctaw, son. *I'm* the peaceful Choctaw. But you. You're an Aztec. Who helps his tribe protect its territory. And buddy, this Aztec warrior spear, is for you.

He presents the spear to his son. PAUL tries to take it. PAUL SR pulls it back.

PAUL SR
Not so fast. We gotta present it to you correctly at your *warrior ceremony*.

PAUL
Wow!

From the family room, we hear OPRAH talking on the TV.

OPRAH (TV)

The riots have taken a toll on Los Angeles in a larger sense, but the communities of Compton, Oakland, and other predominantly black neighborhoods, are where the impact has been most vicious.

DIANE hollers to anyone who can hear her.

DIANE

Why do they burn down *their own* neighborhoods? *That's* what I've never understood!

PAUL SR

What's on fire?

PAUL

Dad. Oprah hasn't been on in years. It's one of her tapes. Sounds like the LA riots one.

PAUL SR

Your mother *loves* that Oprah.

OPRAH

The African American community is simply responding to the violence that's been coming at it for 400 years. I think that's what white America has a hard time understanding.

DIANE

(hollering)

Even Oprah thinks it's wrong to burn down *their own* neighborhoods!

PAUL SR

Pretty cut-and-dried to me. People pay in blood to *own* things. *Of course* they'll defend it with their life.

PAUL has a genuine question.

PAUL

What if *we didn't have* private property? Would we be better off?

PAUL SR pushes PAUL's fallen headdress back up, and bends down to his son. He applies "war paint" (motor oil) to his son's face.

PAUL SR

Well see, much as I respect the noble savage's spirit, son, there's a real...simpleness to him and his thinking. He fought for honor, we're fightin to *own* something. A home that's ours, and no one else's. Try as he might, the Indian couldn't fully grasp that concept. Tried to give away everything he had. So, ya look at the Indian, and where his freebies failed him, and march on accordingly. The trick is knowing what to carry along the way.

PAUL

I think I know, but, how will I *know* if I know?

PAUL SR

Just look around this country. How many white people did you meet this year? Ffifty zillion? How many Native Americans have you *ever* met?

PAUL thinks.

PAUL

Three came to my school one time.

PAUL SR

There ya go.

PAUL SR puts the spear in PAUL's hand and steps back to admire his fully-realized creation.

PAUL SR

We'll finish the rest at your real ceremony. You ready? Yeah you are. You look like Geronimo himself.

PAUL smiles and looks like a kid in a silly outfit.

Image disappears. Lights go dark.

Scene 4

The TV theme music plays over a simple computer model walkthrough of the new house. Once again, PAUL's the adult host.

The walkthrough shows off the house as a whole, then separate pieces of the home, zooming in on each for a moment, before returning to a view of the whole.

First we see the slanted roofing frame, which nearly touches the ground.

PAUL

The slanted frame of Paul Sr and Diane's new home will be constructed from super-durable, local wood, and will help the home resist water and wind. The shape also reduces heating and cooling costs, and helps to achieve the goal of zero carbon emissions.

The walkthrough sweeps around the house, allowing us to fully appreciate the frame.

PAUL

Next, the house will rise up on stilts to prevent the possibility of flooding because it sits very near the confluence of North America's two longest rivers: the Missouri and the Mighty Mississippi.

We see the house pop up on stilts.

PAUL

The stilts actually *help* the home survive strong winds.

The walkthrough shows us the home surviving the strong winds and rain.

PAUL

Another layer of protection is the eco-concrete for the walls. It keeps the frame resistant to tornadoes, while also insulating the home to help with achieving official eco-safe status. But here's an irony: making and pouring it is *terrible* for the environment.

The walkthrough shows us. Now we see the layout inside the house. We move up a staircase and turn to face a wall of windows.

PAUL

Large, triple-glazed windows in each upstairs bedroom create a *wall of light* which peers out onto the sleepy, suburban neighborhood.

We move to the roof.

PAUL

Finally, real-turf roof will sit atop the structure, planted with wild flowers, and dogwood, the state flower of Missouri. If you've ever been close to a dogwood, you know the smell it gives off...takes some getting used to. But Paul SR and Diane have always loved it. To them, it smells like home.

DIANE enters, smelling a dogwood flower as we sweep 360 around the house.

PAUL

A bold choice: an ultra-modern home in a small, conservative Missouri suburb. But Paul SR and Diane kept repeating "reclaim" to each other like it was a sacred code. And that made all this easier. Now, what do the neighbors think?

DIANE looks into the "camera," smelling her flower.

PAUL

Well, Paul SR and Diane say they don't care what *anyone* thinks. While most families have agreed, one still has some questions. The Greens. Younger couple. Interracial. High school teachers. They're holding out on approval. Paul SR and Diane cannot figure out why.

DIANE takes a big inhale of her flower and talks to the "camera."

DIANE

They have *questions*? About *what*? This home will give these silly, controlling people something to look up to! Something to set the new standard for them. We're America. We make the neighborhoods. My lineage goes all the way back. Do like us. Do what we do. Or get the fuck out.

The walkthrough disappears.

Image disappears. Lights change.

Scene 5

Image of the outside of a small, local auto-repair shop, with a large confederate monument very near.

Image changes to inside the repair shop.

PAUL SR is on his back, lying on a “creeper,” working under a car. He wears his mechanic’s overalls. PAUL stands near, goofing around with a socket wrench. Here, PAUL is 12.

PAUL SR

It’s all a great big hoax! That’s what you’ve got to understand.

PAUL SR rolls out, grease on his face reminiscent of war paint.

PAUL SR

The climate goes through cycles. These weather patterns are about as manmade as a rainbow. I can’t believe what they’re sittin there teachin in schools. I’m gonna stop paying taxes. On purpose this time!

PAUL

We have a foreign exchange student from the Philippines.

PAUL SR

(laughing)

What’s his name? Fong?

PAUL

Dad. No! His name is Rodrigo. Because they were a Spanish colony. He said his family’s land is underwater now from climate change. That’s not a hoax, is it?

PAUL SR stands, looks for a wrench.

PAUL SR

Not that the land is gone, no. But that humans are responsible. *That’s* the hoax. That we have to *change* everything we love. *That’s* the hoax.

PAUL

He was crying.

PAUL SR

(earnest)

Poor kid. The earth’s natural cycles screwed him.

PAUL

I want to help him.

PAUL SR

Well, I guess I do, too. But look, son, has any of this so-called “climate change” taken *our* land? Our little onsite trailer, is *that* underwater?

PAUL
No.

PAUL SR
Well, then. Help who’s closest to you, that’s the motto. And with the rest, (*shrug*) you’re only human.
PAUL thinks.

PAUL
But our new home will be *one* with the earth, right? In case something *does* happen here?
PAUL SR stands, finds his wrench; a Cheshire cat smile breaks out across his face.

PAUL SR
You bet! Guess who talked to the triple-glazed window guy today? They arrive in two weeks!

PAUL
(*he hasn’t quite had a moment to express this*)
Already? Dad, I’m just so proud of you for getting the loan.
PAUL hugs his dad hard, at the waist.

PAUL SR
Oof! Thanks, kemosabe! I guess I’m prouda me too. Got a big, *big* loan. Bank said, we’re giving you this loan cause Preserve is offering you a discount for building in an “enterprise zone.” And I said, “yeah, tell me again what that means,” and they said, “It means development,” and I said, “For *who*?” And they said for “diverse communities.” And I thought, *diversity*? That’s what the hell I’m tryna get away from! So you know what I did? I marched right back in there, asked for my loan form back, and checked ‘Native American’ for my heritage. Wrote in, “Choctaw.”

PAUL
Is that...OK?

PAUL SR
Of course! If they’re gonna use diversity as a weapon, then I’m gonna find a way to make it work for *me*.

PAUL
(*in dreamland*)
Wow! A one-hundred percent carbon-neutral home!

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!!!

To produce, contact: paulhufker@gmail.com