

'The Divide' delivers power, grit, with Philly flavor

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With its first scripted series, WE makes a bold bid to expand beyond its identity as a cable channel for women.

The Divide, premiering Wednesday at 9 p.m., is a powerful, gritty series with a satisfying Philly flavor. Set and shot in the City of Brotherly Love, it focuses on two compelling characters who become legal antagonists in a case clouded by the miasma of race.

The commonwealth is a fortnight away from carrying out its first execution of this century. (This fits reality, since Gary Heidnik's was the last execution, in 1999. In Pennsylvania, 197 men remain on death row, the fourth-highest total in the United States.)

Marin Ireland (*Homeland*) plays an impassioned intern at the Innocence Initiative trying desperately to win a stay of execution for Jared Bankowski (*True Blood*'s Chris Bauer). (The Initiative is based on the Innocence Project, founded in 1992 by Barry Scheck, which uses DNA testing to exonerate wrongfully convicted inmates.)

Bankowski was convicted of the brutal slaying of a well-off African American couple and their teen daughter in 2004. The case inflamed racial tensions in the city, with the African American community screaming for the death sentence.

Adam Page (Damon Gupton) is the city's popular district attorney, who tried the case as a young prosecutor. He's more than a little upset to see the conviction challenged just days before Bankowski's execution.

As he protests, "If the verdict had gone the other way, this city would have burned to the ground." But what seemed to be an open-and-shut case proves surprisingly complicated as the eight-episode series evolves.

The Divide was created by Richard LaGravenese (*Behind the Candelabra*) and Tony Goldwyn (who plays the randy president in *Scandal*). Goldwyn directed the 2010 Hilary Swank film *Conviction*, which was based on a true story. That plot also grew out of the Innocence Project's work.

The excellent cast in *The Divide* includes Nia Long, Ann Dowd (*The Leftovers*), Paul Schneider, and a couple of alumni from *The Wire*, Clarke Peters and Isiah Whitlock Jr.

But the leads are extraordinary. Ireland brings a nery and riveting conviction to the role of the advocate. For Gupton (NBC's *Prime Suspect*), this is a charismatic, career-making role, and the most potent inducement to watch *The Divide*.

Read more at <http://www.philly.com/philly/entertainment/267093711.html#LCHTr9h3GdqSbE4M.99>