

Purpose:

As a way to acknowledge, highlight, celebrate, uplift, and honor the past and present Black theatre artists who have contributed so much to our theatre canon, I thought it would be worthwhile in creating daily emails to be sent throughout the month of February which consisted of a fact, artist, and play of the day. These daily emails culminated in a Black History Month Play Exchange on February 27th, as an event and space for folks to come together to give and share presentations on their chosen play from the list of plays sent out over the course of the month. It is my hope that we take the spirit of widening our knowledge of our theatre history and work towards making known the contributions of all the marginalized groups who have been critical in cementing the foundation of the theatre we all enjoy today.

Acknowledgments:

Thank you to Adarian Sneed for helping me create this idea during those late zoom calls on those cold, lonely winter break nights where we just laughed, existed, and bolstered one another's creative thoughts. Thank you to the Anthony Aston Players for allowing me the space to use your listserv as a way to spread this knowledge and history. Thank you to Leslie Spencer and Sierra Browning for helping contribute some of the artist spotlights. I am forever grateful to all the kind emails I received from folks in support of this project as it truly made these emails an important part of my daily routine. Most importantly, thank you to the Black theatre artists, those I was able to uplift and those whose works and efforts are still not in the public spotlight, who continue to inspire me as I hope to spread their will, art, dreams, and fight for a more equitable, diverse, and revolutionary theatre for everyone.

Fact of the Day 1: The 1975 Broadway production of *The Wiz* (said to be one of, if not the, first mainstream African-American musical) featured an all-black cast and won seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical.



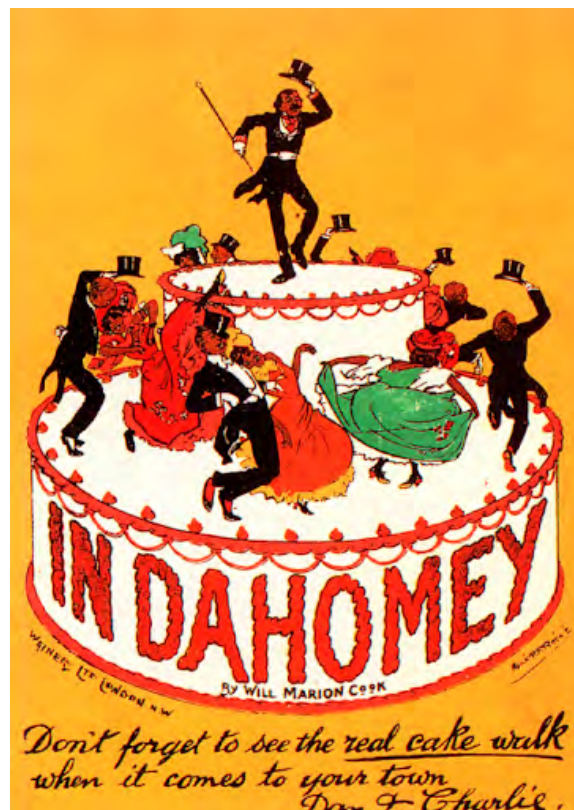
Fact of the Day 2: Instagram account @broadwayblack hosted the very first Antonyo Awards via Youtube Live. This event, hosted on Juneteenth to commemorate the emancipation of slaves in the United States, highlighted and awarded many thespians of color for their commitment to the theatre.



Fact of the Day 3: Garland Anderson's play *Appearances* (1925) was the first play of African American authorship to be produced on Broadway, but Black theatre did not create a Broadway hit until Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* (1935) won wide acclaim.



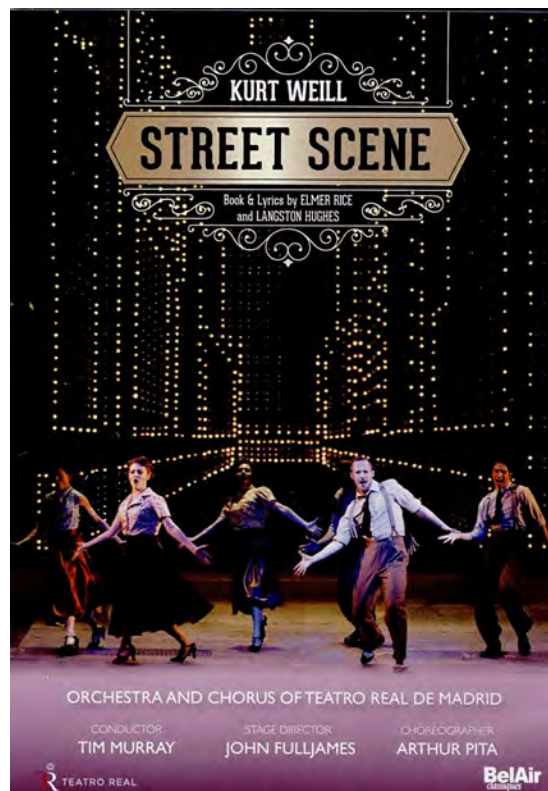
Fact of the Day 4: In 1903, Bert Williams and George Walker starred together in '*In Dahomey*', another Cook and Dunbar production and the first all-black musical comedy to play in a major Broadway theater.



Fact of the Day 5: The Federal Theatre Project, launched in 1935 with the aim of supporting racial integration, facilitated the opening of the American Negro Theater (ANT) by the actors Abram Hill and Frederik O’Neal. The ANT produced 19 plays in 9 years. The FTP’s Negro Unit also supported left-leaning playwright Theodore Ward as he created his first full-length production, *‘Big White Fog’*(1938), in Chicago.



Fact of the Day 6: In 1947, German composer Kurt Weill and Langston Hughes worked together on the first major interracial Broadway collaboration: *Street Scene* (1947). To ensure the authenticity of the music, Hughes took Weill to Harlem nightclubs and introduced him to the latest jazz and blues idioms. The black-themed musicals *Finian’s Rainbow* (1947) and *Lost in the Stars* (1949), another Weill production, also made the Broadway stage in this period.



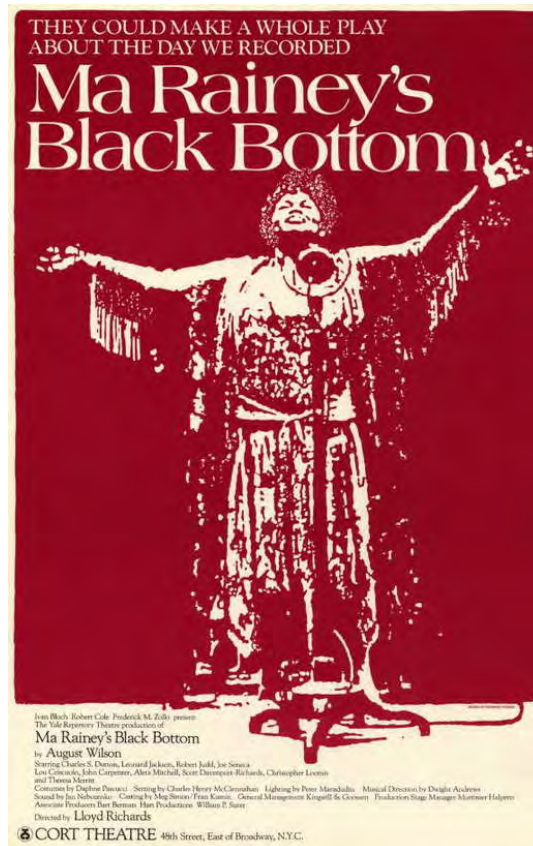
Fact of the Day 7: Two of the biggest names in black theater from the 1960s and 1970s were Everett LeRoi Jones and Ed Bullins who both became fierce proponents of the Black Arts Movement following the assassination of civil rights activist Malcolm X in 1965. Prior to this, Jones had won an Off-Broadway (Obie) award for his hard-hitting play *Dutchman and the Slave* (1964) which is set on a New York subway and centers on a dialogue between a white woman Lulu and black man Clay.



Fact of the Day 8: Following a drop in black musicals post-world war II, The 1970s saw black musicals return to Broadway with Melvin Van Peebles' *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (1971) and Charlie Smalls' *The Wiz* (1975) among the most popular. *The Wiz*, based on Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* ran for four years and won seven Tony awards, including that year's best musical.



Fact of the Day 9: During the late 1960s, BAM (Black Arts Movement) activist August Wilson co-founded the Black Horizons Theatre in Pittsburgh. It took until 1984 for Wilson to present a play on Broadway. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* showed at the Cort Theatre as the first of Wilson's 10-play Pittsburgh Cycle which charted the lives of various characters from the 1920s to the 1990s.



Fact of the Day 10: The August Wilson Theatre became the first Broadway theater to bear an African-American's name when the Virginia Theatre was renamed after him in 2005, two weeks after his death.



Fact of the Day 11: After August Wilson, another highly acclaimed African-American playwright to make his mark on Broadway towards the end of the 20th Century was George Wolfe. His first Broadway play, *'Jelly's Last Jam'* (1992) was performed at the Virginia Theatre. Wolfe is mainly associated with his Tony award-winning plays *'Angels in America: Millennium Approaches'* (1993) and *'Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk'* (1996).



Fact of the Day 12: In recent years, as conversations around colorblind and color-conscious casting have been in the public forum, black actors have been playing leading roles which have been traditionally portrayed by whites. These include Noma Dumezweni as Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2015); Christiani Pitts as Ann Darrow in *King Kong* (2018); Jelani Alladin as Kristoff in *Frozen* (2018) and Brittney Johnson as the first black woman to play Glinda the Good Witch in *Wicked* (2019).



Fact of the Day 13: Although *Shuffle Along* wasn't the first musical by African-Americans, it did make a huge splash in 1921. The show succeeded when no one thought it would, accumulating heavy debt and starring a creative team and cast who had never created anything for Broadway before. It was the first Broadway show to integrate audiences in the orchestra seating area. It also was the first musical to include heavy jazz influence and set the stage for a new formula of African-American musicals of the 1920s.



Fact of the Day 14: Juanita Hall was the first African-American to win a Tony Award. She won Best Supporting Actress in a Musical for her role in *South Pacific* as Bloody Mary. It is said that Rogers and Hammerstein hand-picked her for the role after seeing her perform.



Fact of the Day 15: Lloyd Richards was a Canadian-American who directed the plays of Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson on Broadway. He became the first African-American to direct a play on Broadway in 1959 when he directed Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. His partnership with writer August Wilson was legendary, and he directed six of his works: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Two Trains Running* and *Seven Guitars*.



Fact of the Day 16: Loftin Mitchell labels the years 1909 to 1917 as the First Harlem Theatre Movement. The first Black Theatre, The Crescent, was established in Harlem. Black shows were being moved from The Crescent to the now famous Lafayette Theatre, and The Drama Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Washington, DC (Laura B. Glenn, Clara B. Bruce, E. C. Williams, Anna J. Cooper, Carrie W. Clifford, Georgia Frazier, E. E. Just, Montgomery Gregory, and Alain Locke) produced the first successful drama written by a Black person and interpreted by Blacks, *Rachel* by Angelina Grimke. (Taken from Howard University's theatre history page)



Fact of the Day 17: Of the many outfits featuring fashionable black floor shows, the Cotton Club was undoubtedly the most iconic. But, opening a full year prior to the famed Harlem establishment in February 1922 and located in the Winter Garden building at the corner of Broadway and 50th, the most influential of nightclubs may well have been The Plantation. Its inaugural floor show proved so successful that it immediately transferred to Broadway that summer as *The Plantation Revue*. Not only was this “spontaneous outburst of song, dance, color, and buoyant spirits” instrumental in igniting the burgeoning trend of black song-and-dance revues, but the “snappy, speedy affair” also catapulted the careers of its star, Florence Mills, and its (white) producer, Lew Leslie.



Fact of the Day 18: In 1920, Charles Gilpin broke onto the scene as the lead in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* when the play premiered on Broadway. The Drama League named him as one of 10 people who impacted the American theater that year but didn't invite him to the awards dinner because of his race. After O'Neill led a protest for the League to do the right thing and invite Gilpin, the organization obliged.



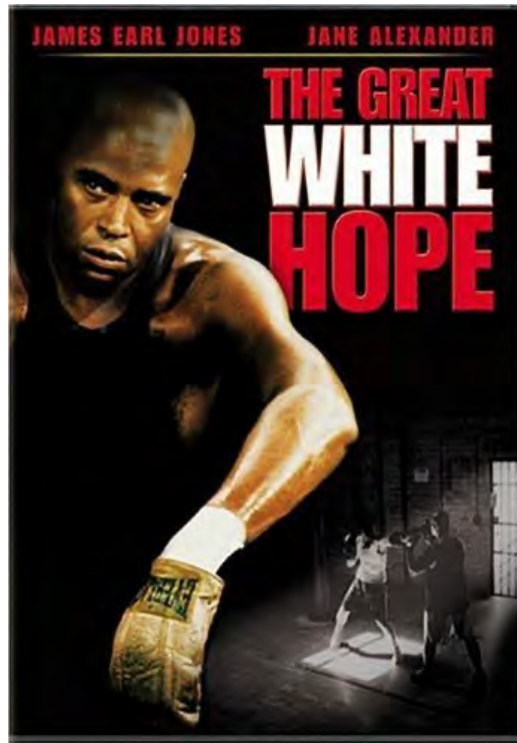
Fact of the Day 19: In 1935, George and Ira Gershwin penned the opera *Porgy and Bess*, featuring an all-black cast of classically trained singers. Even though it has been criticized for stereotyping African-Americans with depictions of drug abuse, poverty and prostitution, it has been revived on Broadway seven times, most recently in the 2012 Audra McDonald- and Norm Lewis-led production.



Fact of the Day 20: In what might be seen as a radical casting move even today, in 1967, the entire Broadway cast of *Hello, Dolly!* turned over to welcome an all-black cast, led by actress and singer Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi. The reviews for Bailey and the new cast were glowing, and the production ran for another two years. Bailey received a 1968 Special Tony Award for her performance.



Fact of the Day 21: For his leading turn in *The Great White Hope* (1969), James Earl Jones was awarded Best Actor in a Play at the Tony Awards, the first African-American winner in any play category. The acting legend is also one of the few artists to win an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony Award, giving him the status of EGOT.



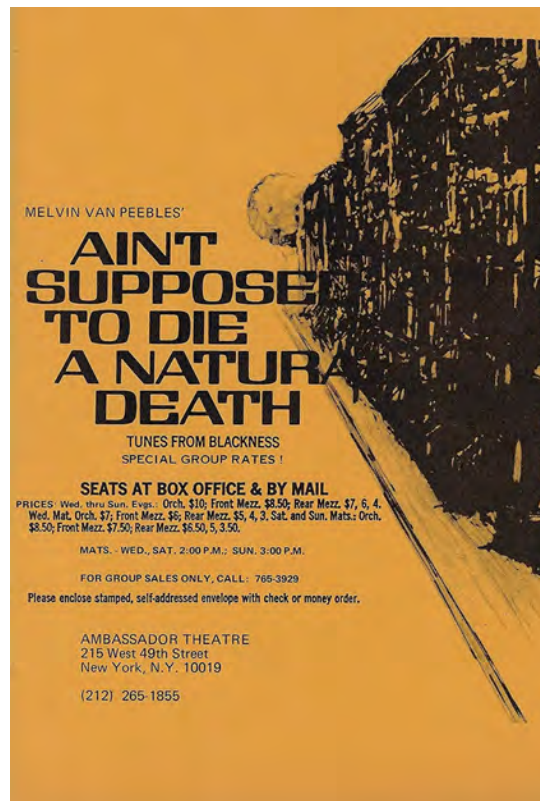
Fact of the Day 22: Whoopi Goldberg is the first and only black woman on the shortlist of EGOT achievers. She has an Emmy for the Hattie McDaniel documentary *Beyond Tara*, a Grammy for the recording of her 1986 Broadway solo show and an Oscar for her role in *Ghost*. After winning her first Tony in 2002 for producing *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, she completed her quadruple crown.



Fact of the Day 23: The musical *Hamilton* swept the 2016 Tonys, including wins for three of its leads: Renée Elise Goldsberry, Leslie Odom Jr. and Daveed Diggs. Cynthia Erivo, the standout talent from that season's revival of *The Color Purple*, joined the all-black acting winners circle with a trophy for Best Leading Actress in a Musical.



Fact of the Day 24: Annoyed that he wasn't seeing the kinds of black people and issues onstage that he saw on the streets, Melvin Van Peebles wrote the book, music and lyrics for a linked series of vignettes in which characters such as prostitutes, junkies, militants and everyday working stiffs lamented the drugs, homelessness, unemployment, police corruption and other ills of ghetto life. The show, *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (1971), famously ended with a female character facing the audience and intoning, "I put a curse on you."



Fact of the Day 25: As August Wilson said in his famous “The Ground on Which I Stand” speech at the 1996 TCG conference, the Black Power movement of the ’60s was “the kiln in which I was fired, and has much to do with the person I am today and the ideas and attitudes that I carry as part of my consciousness.” The same movement that bore Wilson also birthed most of the nation’s Black theatres, and many of them persist today, training artists of color, providing opportunities for marginalized artists to see their work onstage for the first time, filling in the gaps of arts education for their communities, and, most importantly, entertaining and enlightening audiences with powerful stories.



Fact of the Day 26: When Barbara Ann Teer founded National Black Theatre in Harlem in 1968, the neighborhood was reeling from the riots that were wreaking havoc across many Black communities after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Her mission was to create a space to celebrate Black liberation through art.



Fact of the Day 27: The need for diverse, soul-lifting narratives is what Nate Jacobs had in mind in 1999 when he founded Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe in Sarasota, Fla. At the time, the Florida A&M University graduate found that he and his friends were only getting cast in servant roles at Asolo Rep, as they rarely placed Black actors in principal roles in the classic plays that composed much of their programming. Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe thus became an outlet for African American artists to showcase their talents.



Fact of the Day 28: Eileen J. Morris, the executive director of the Ensemble Theatre in Houston, started an initiative called “Celebrating the Creative Journey” to offer working artists a space, light technical support, and a small stipend to develop new plays. She is also invested in developing the next generation of performers through the theatre’s Young Performers Program, through which they offer theatre camps to students of all ages during the summer, spring, and winter break.



Artist Spotlight Day 1: Suzan-Lori Parks



Born in Fort Knox, Kentucky on May 10, 1963, Suzan-Lori Parks grew up as a child who loved to write, whether it be songs or poems. Her love for writing led to her growing up to become a playwright, screenwriter, and novelist. She attended Mount Holyoke College and graduated in 1985 with her B.A. in English and German Literature. She even studied under James Baldwin, who encouraged her to become a playwright which would go on to lead her to become the first Black woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for drama (*Topdog/Underdog* in 2002). AND she has also won the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant. Some of her other plays works include *Fucking A* (2000), *In The Blood* (1999), *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2, & 3)* (2014), and so many more.

Artist Spotlight Day 2: Ira Frederick Aldridge



Ira Frederick Aldridge (1807-1867) was an American actor and later British actor who became the first African American actor to achieve international fame, often playing Shakespearean leads, including roles written for white actors. Outside of America and London, his international fame reached places across Europe such as Poland, Prussia, and Russia. At the sudden time of his death he left behind four daughters, two of which went on to become professional opera singers. He used his fame to campaign for an end to chattel slavery in the U.S.

Artist Spotlight Day 3: Garland Anderson



Garland Anderson (1886 - 1939) was an American playwright and speaker. Despite having no experience as a playwright or producer, self-educated, Anderson both wrote and produced *Appearances*, the first play by an African-American playwright to appear on Broadway. While the play was not a success, it was produced several times and even toured the US and the UK. Anderson went on to settle down in the UK, later marrying Doris Sequirra.

Artist Spotlight Day 4: Lorraine Hansberry



Lorraine Hansberry (1930 - 1965) was a socialist playwright and writer. She was the first African-American female author to have a play produced and performed on Broadway with the classic hit *A Raisin in the Sun*. She went on to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award at the age of 29. Hansberry, both in her works and in her personal life, committed to the undoing of injustices that enabled the culture of the elite. She believed that freedom from racism also required global freedom from capitalism, while also openly criticizing black leaders who neglected the poor to advance their own careers. After living a strong-willed life, she passed away from pancreatic cancer. Martin Luther King Jr. and James Baldwin went on to comment upon her passing, praising her for her dedication, creative abilities, and profound grasp of deep social issues that confronted the world.

Artist Spotlight Day 5: Audra McDonald



Born on July 3rd, 1970, Audra McDonald an American actress and singer. She is the first and only person ever to win a Tony Award in all 4 acting categories (she holds 6 Tony's in total, more performance wins than any other actor). She was trained at Juilliard and also holds two Grammy's, an Emmy, and she has been nominated five times for the NAACP Image Awards for her screenwork. In an interview with the New York Times, commenting upon her work for encouraging diversity in musical theatre casting, she stated "I refuse to be stereotyped. If I think I am right for a role I will go for it in whatever way I can. I refuse to say no to myself. I can't control what a producer will do or say but I can at least put myself out there."

Artist Spotlight Day 6: Lynn Nottage



Born on November 2nd, 1964, Lynn Nottage is an American playwright, centering her work around the lives of marginalized and oppressed peoples. Nottage holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama and she has even received honorary degrees from Julliard and Albright College. She currently teaches playwriting at Columbia University, and is the first woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice: first for *Ruined* (2009), then for *Sweat* (2017). Nottage was also included in Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2019.

Artist Spotlight Day 7: George C. Wolfe



Born on September 23rd, 1954, George Costello Wolfe is an American playwright and director. Holding an MFA in dramatic writing and musical theater from New York University, Wolfe has spent his career bringing to life stories of black and queer life. Wolfe won a Tony Award in 1993 for his directing of *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and another in 1996 for directing the musical *Bring in 'da Noise/Bring in 'da Funk*. One of his most recent works was directing the Broadway revival of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* in 2018, with Denzel Washington starring in the production. In 2013, Wolfe was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame.

Artist Spotlight Day 8: Norm Lewis



Born on June 2nd, 1963, Norm Lewis is an American actor and singer. Lewis is credited as being the first African-American actor to perform the titular role in *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway. He is also the first African-American actor to play Javert in a professional English production of *Les Miserables*. Lewis' career on the stage and on Broadway is extensive as his credits include: *The Who's Tommy* in 1993, *Miss Saigon* in 1995, *The Wild Party* in 2000, *Amour* in 2002, *Chicago* in 2004, *Les Miserables* in 2006, *The Little Mermaid* in 2007 (originating the role of King Triton), *Porgy and Bess* in 2011 (he was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance), and *Phantom of the Opera* in 2014. It should be noted that Lewis has an incredible amount of credits at various other prestigious theater's such as the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and The Public Theatre.

Artist Spotlight Day 9: Cicely Tyson



Cicely Tyson (December 19, 1942 - January 28, 2021) was an American actress and model. Having been birthed, as well as having become an ancestor, in Harlem, New York City, Tyson had an outstanding career that spanned more than seven decades as she was renowned for her depictions and portrayals of strong, brave, beautiful Black women. Some of her accolades include three Primetime Emmy Awards, one Tony Award, an honorary Academy Award, a Peabody Award, one Screen Actors Guild Award, and four Black Reels Awards. In 2020, she was given her roses and inducted into the Television Hall of Fame. Tyson was an honorary member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority Incorporated. Her memoir, *Just as I am*, was published on January 26, 2021, with her promoting the book during her final weeks, even saying to Gayle King that in how she wanted to be remembered, Tyson said, "I've done my best. That's all." She is survived by both her legacy and her daughter with the late reverend Kenneth Franklin.

Artist Spotlight Day 10: Debbie Allen



Born on January 16th, 1950, Deborah Allen is an American dancer, choreographer, actress, singer, and director. Allen has been nominated for an Emmy Award 20 whole times, having won three. She has also won two Tony Awards and a Golden Globe Award. She is a former member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and she received her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1991. With a B.A. in Greek Literature, speech, and theater from Howard University, Allen is most known for her role as Lydia Grant in the musical-drama television series *Fame* (1982-1987). It is also noteworthy that Allen holds *honoris causa* doctorates from Howard University and UNCSCA. Most recently Allen was named a 2020 Kennedy Center Honoree. Her sister is the famous actress Phylicia Rashad. Her contemporary works have been her long run on *Grey's Anatomy* as Dr. Catherine Avery Fox, she recently produced *Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker*, and she directed the musical film *Dolly Parton's Christmas on the Square*.

Artist Spotlight Day 11: *Paul Robeson*



Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was a Renaissance man, excelling at athletics and law, but he found his true calling on the stage. He was perhaps best known for his performances of Shakespeare's "Othello," which he reprised several times. He also performed songs in at least 25 languages and became one of the most famous concert singers of his time. Robeson was controversial because he used his celebrity to advance human rights causes. He was eventually ostracized for his pushes for social justice, and his songs disappeared from the radio for years. "The artist must elect to fight for freedom or slavery," Robeson once said. "I have made my choice. I had no alternative." (This biography was borrowed from CNN's newsletter)

Artist Spotlight Day 12: Condola Rashad



Born on December 11th, 1986, Condola Rashad is an American television and stage actress and daughter of Phylicia Rashad. Rashad's breakthrough performance was her portrayal of Sophie in the Off-Broadway production of *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage in 2009. Rashad is the youngest performer to have received four Tony Award nominations for her work on Broadway in the productions of *Stick Fly*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *A Doll's House, Part 2*, and *Saint Joan*. Rashad also starred as the female titular character in the 2013 Broadway production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Richard Rodgers Theatre.

Artist Spotlight Day 13: *Patina Miller*



Born on November 6th, 1984, Patina Miller is an American singer and actress. Having graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a BFA in Musical Theatre in 2006, Miller went on to originate the role of Deloris Van Cartier in both the 2009 West End and 2011 Broadway productions of *Sister Act*. Miller also went on to win the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her portrayal of Leading Player in the 2013 revival of *Pippin*. Her breakthrough roles in the world of television and film were her characters of Daisy Grant in *Madam Secretary* (2014-2019, appearing in 108 episodes) and Commander Paylor in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1 & Part 2*.

Artist Spotlight Day 14: Tituss Burgess



Born on February 21st, 1979, Tituss Burgess is an American singer and actor. Having graduated from the University of Georgia with a BA in Music, Burgess is known for his appearances in numerous Broadway productions (*Good Vibrations*, *Jersey Boys*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Guys and Dolls*) along with his incredibly notable high tenor voice and range. His breakout role has been his portrayal of Titus Andromedon in the Netflix show *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2015-2020) for which he has received five Primetime Emmy Award nominations. Most recently, Burgess was a part of the groundbreaking internet meme and crowdsourced musical turned musical *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical* in which he portrayed Remy the Rat in the charity benefit concert that streamed for 72 hours starting on January 1st, 2021. Here is a link to a compilation of his character's hilarious moments on *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, I must say it is even funnier without context because he is so out there!! <https://youtu.be/AOQIcU2Tluc>

Artist Spotlight Day 15: *Stephanie Mills*



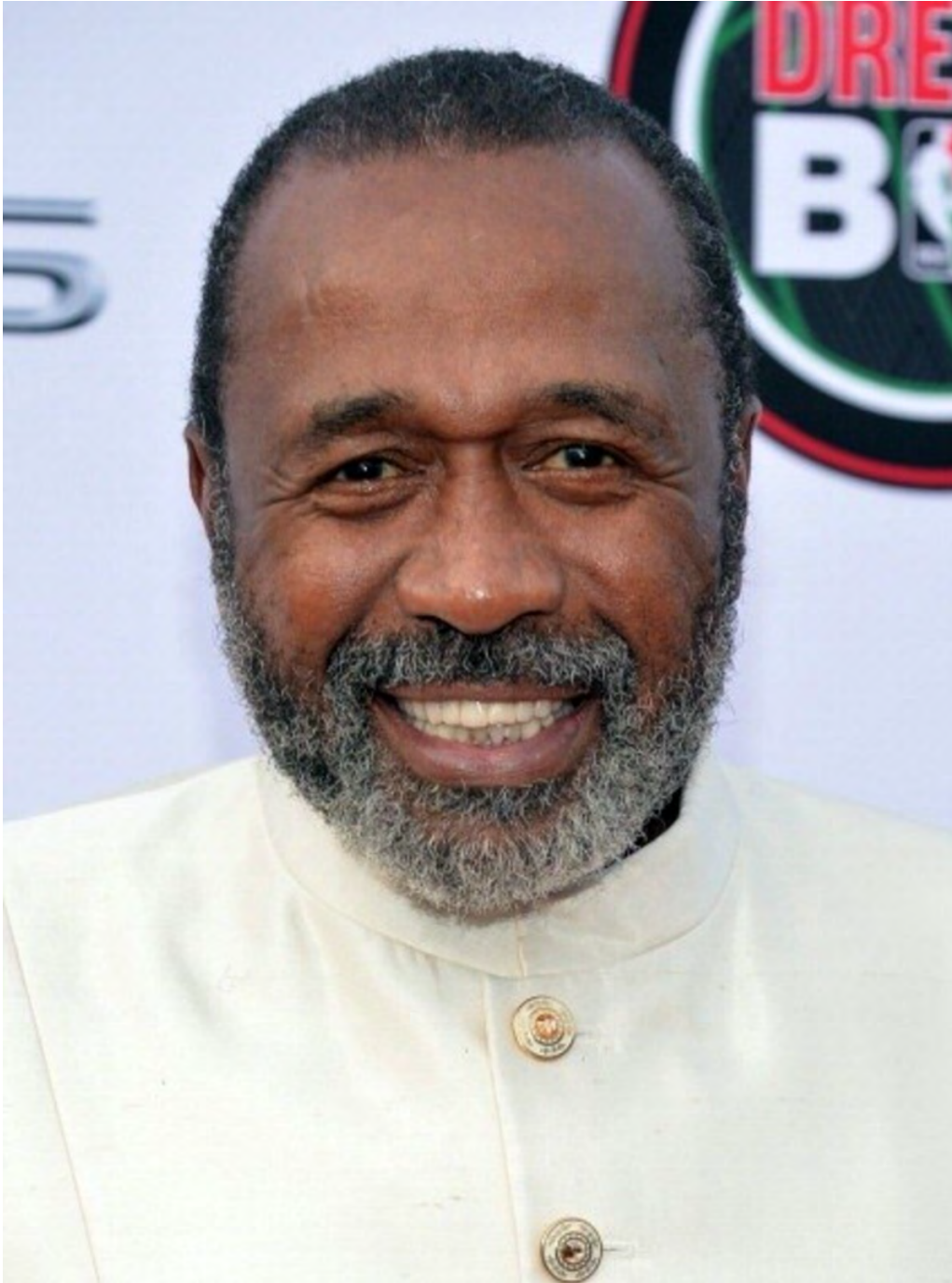
Born on March 22nd, 1957, Stephanie Mills is an American singer, songwriter, and actress. Mills rose to stardom in her origination of the role of Dorothy in the original run of the musical *The Wiz* in 1974. Mills has won a Grammy Award for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance for her 1981 hit song “Never Knew Love Like This Before.” In 2015, Mills was cast as Aunt Em in the NBC live musical production of *The Wiz*, forty years after her initial Broadway debut in the show. Some of Mills other noteworthy disco songs of the 70s and 80s include “Put Your Body In It,” “You Can Get Over,” and “What Cha Gonna Do with My Lovin’.”

Artist Spotlight Day 16: Gregory Hines



Gregory Oliver Hines (1946 - 2003) was an American actor, singer, dancer, and choreographer. Hines is one of the most successful and celebrated tap dancers of all time (starting at two years old and beginning semi professionally at five years old) as Hines starred in over forty films, while also leaving a mark on Broadway during his life. Hines won a Daytime Emmy Award, a Drama Desk Award, and a Tony Award while receiving nominations for other awards such as four Primetime Emmy Awards and a Screen Actors Guild Award. Hines' theatrical career involved him making his Broadway debut in *The Girl in Pink Tights* (1954), later starring in *Eubie!* (1979), *Comin' Uptown* (1980), and *Sophisticated Ladies* (1981), and he won the Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992). After his passing from liver cancer in 2003, the United States Postal Service honored Hines with a postage stamp as a part of its Black Heritage Series.

Artist Spotlight Day 17: Ben Vereen



Born on October 10, 1946, Benjamin Vereen is an American dancer, singer, and actor. Having graduated from the High School of Performing Arts, where he studied under world-renowned choreographers Martha Graham, George Balanchine, and Jerome Robbins, Vereen would go onto Las Vegas where he performed in Bob Fosse's production of *Sweet Charity* in 1967-68. Later returning to New York to play Claude in the Broadway production of *Hair* from 1968-72, Vereen's career started to take off as he received a Tony Award nomination for *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1972) and the following year would see him winning a Tony Award for his work in *Pippin* (1973). Vereen has gone on to star and appear in countless films, television shows, and staged productions, later being inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame in 2011.

Artist Spotlight Day 18: Savion Glover



Born on November 19, 1973, Savion Glover is an American actor, tap dancer, and choreographer. Glover came into the Broadway scene at the age of 11 as he took part in *The Tap Dance Kid* (1985), and later premiering in *Black and Blue* (1989) at the age of 15, Glover became one of the youngest performers ever nominated for a Tony Award. Glover went on to also be nominated for the Drama Desk Award as Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical in *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992) and nominated for the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical and Choreography for his performance and choreography of *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* (1996). More recently, Glover has choreographed the musical *Shuffle Along, or the Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* (2016) for which he was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Choreography and a Drama Desk Award. Glover has had an extensive career having both appeared in and choreographed countless films, television shows, TV specials, and musicals.

Artist Spotlight Day 19: *Donja R. Love*



Donja R. Love is an Afro-Queer playwright, poet, and filmmaker from Philadelphia. He writes specifically about Black and Queer folx, for Black and Queer folx. He's the recipient of the 2018 Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award, the 2017 Princess Grace Playwriting Award. Love is the Lark 2016 Van Lier New Voices Playwriting Fellow, The Playwrights Realm's 2016/2017 Writing Fellow, and the 2011 Philadelphia Adult Grand Slam Poetry Champion. His work has been developed at Manhattan Theatre Club, Rising Circle Theatre, The Lark, and The Playwrights Realm. He's the co host of OffBook, theater's only Black podcast; and he's the co-founder of The Each-Other Project, an organization that helps build community and provide visibility, through art and advocacy, for LGBTQ People of Color. Select stage plays include: *The Love* Plays*, and *soft*. (Biography provided by Julliard)

Artist Spotlight Day 20: Saycon Sengbloh



Born on October 23, 1977, Saycon Sengbloh is an American actress and singer. Sengbloh, having studied music, spanish, and acting, has gone on to star in multiple Broadway musicals such as *Aida*, *Wicked*, *The Color Purple*, *Hair*, *Fela!*, *Motown: The Musical*, and *Holler If Ya Hear Me*. Sengbloh's breakthrough came from her Off-Broadway, and eventually Broadway, work in Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* in 2015, for which she was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress while also winning the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Featured Actress in a Play and an Obie Award for Outstanding Performance. Some of her most recent work was in 2020 in which she starred opposite Jennifer Hudson in the biographical drama film *Respect*, portraying Emma Franklin, Aretha Franklin's older sister.

Artist Spotlight Day 21: Ron Cephas Jones



Born on January 8, 1957, Ron Jones is an American television and film actor. Having graduated from Ramapo College majoring in theater, Jones has gone on to have a lengthy career filled with lots of roles and appearances. He is best known for his role in the television series hit *This Is Us* which has earned him four consecutive Primetime Emmy Award nominations, winning twice for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series in 2018 and 2020. Jones' most recent works are his appearances in the Hulu teen drama series *Looking for Alaska*, along with the Apple TV+ crime drama series *Truth Be Told*.

Artist Spotlight Day 22: Alice Childress



Alice Childress (October 12, 1916 - August 14, 1994) was an American playwright, novelist, and actress. During her lifetime, Childress was regarded as the only African-American woman to have written, produced, and published plays for four decades. Childress, having not attended college, studied drama at the American Negro Theatre (ANT), performing there for 11 years. She moved to Broadway with the transfer ANT's hit *Anna Lucasta* (1944), which became the longest-running all-black play in Broadway history. In 1949 she began her playwright career with her one-act play *Florence*, going on to write hits such as *Trouble in Mind* (1955), *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* (1962), *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* (1975) and many more. After passing due to cancer at the age of 77, she is survived by her daughter Jean R. Childress. Childress described her work and career as her trying to portray the have-nots in a have society, exclaiming that "my writing attempts to interpret the 'ordinary' because they are not ordinary. Each human is uniquely different. Like snowflakes, the human pattern is never cast twice. We are uncommonly and marvellously intricate in thought and action our problems are most complex and, too often, silently borne." Childress is regarded as being one of the early black women playwrights to help create and carve a voice for black feminism in theatre.

Artist Spotlight Day 23: Regina M. Anderson



Regina M. Anderson (May 21, 1901 - February 5, 1993) was an American playwright and librarian. Despite Anderson's self-identification as being racially "American," others perceived her as African-American thus her history being a part of black theatre history. Anderson received her Master of Library Science degree from Columbia University before producing lectures, drama series, and art exhibitions from the 1920s to 1967 at the New York Public Library. Anderson's Harlem apartment is known as having been an important meeting space for African American writers, artists, and intellectuals in the early 1920s, Anderson even helped organize the dinner that helped launch the Harlem Renaissance. Anderson went on to help W. E. B. DuBois found the Krigwa Players, eventually the Negro Experimental Theatre (or Harlem Experimental Theatre), as a company of black actors performing plays by black playwrights. The company went on to perform Anderson's one-act play *Underground* (1932) as well as serving as an inspiration to small theatres around the country, encouraging the push for serious black theatre and black playwrights. Anderson was one of the ten African American women whose contributions were recognized and celebrated at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Going on to outlive the majority of the other members of the Harlem Renaissance, Anderson passed away in Ossining, a NYC suburb.

Artist Spotlight Day 24: Geoffrey Holder



Geoffrey Holder (August 1, 1930-October 5, 2014) was a true Renaissance Man of the entertainment industry. He attended Queen's Royal College in his home of Trinidad but he received most of his artistic training as a member of Holder Dance Company, founded by his brother. He moved to NYC in 1952 and taught at Katherine Dunham School of Cultural Arts. He first appeared on Broadway in *House of Flowers* in 1954 and became a principal dancer with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. In 1957, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship for his work as a painter and appeared in his first Broadway appearance for acting as Lucky in an all-black production of *Waiting for Godot*. He played the Genie in Cole Porter's television musical *Aladdin* in 1958. He won Tony awards for Best Direction and Best Costume Design for *The Wiz* in 1975 - the first black man to ever be nominated in either category. He co-starred in such blockbuster films as *Live and Let Die* as a villain Baron Samedi, as Punjab in *Annie*, and alongside Eddie Murphy in *Boomerang*. He choreographed for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Pennsylvania Ballet, and Dance Theatre of Harlem. His voice could also be heard in *Alice in Wonderland*, *Bear in the Big Blue House*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. He continued painting throughout his 70+ year career and published a book of his photography, *Adam*, in 1986.

Artist Spotlight Day 25: Shirley Prendergast



Shirley Prendergast (June 15, 1929-February 26, 2019) was the first black woman admitted to the United Scenic Artists' lighting division in 1969. Prendergast graduated from Brooklyn College in 1954 where she studied microbiology. After taking a lighting design class at the YWCA to improve her photography skills, she went on to study lighting at the Lester Polakov Studio & Forum of Stage Design. She received her BA in Drama from Howard University and her MFA in Lighting Design from the University of Michigan. Her first job was with the Negro Ensemble Company; their production of *The River Niger* went to Broadway in 1973, marking the first time an African-American woman's lighting design appeared on Broadway. Her career spanned 50 years, and she worked with Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, the New Federal Theatre, and numerous regional theatre companies. She won numerous awards throughout her career including a 1997 Obie award for Sustained Excellence in Lighting and USITT's Distinguished Achievement Award in Lighting Design in 2014. She was also a theatre professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Artist Spotlight Day 26: *Misty Copeland*



Born on September 10, 1982, Misty Copeland is the first African American principal dancer at one of the top ballet companies in the U.S., American Ballet Theatre. Raised in California, Copeland began ballet at age 13 at a free, weekly ballet class at her local Boys and Girls Club. The teacher, Cynthia Bradley, began taking Copeland to her class at the San Pedro Dance Center a few weeks later. Within 3 months, she was en pointe. At age 14, she won a national ballet contest and her first solo role. She received full scholarships to attend summer intensives at ABT and San Francisco Ballet School in 2000. In the Spring of 2001, she joined ABT as a corps de ballet, became a soloist in August 2007 and a principal dancer in August 2015. She was named National Youth of the Year Ambassador by the Boys & Girls Club in 2013. She was named to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition in 2014. In addition to her impressive dance career, Copeland has written three books and become a spokesperson and public speaker focusing on diversity in classical dance, positive body image, and health. The story of her overcoming her personal and professional challenges has made her a role model to millions.

Artist Spotlight Day 27: *Danai Gurira*



Born on February 14, 1978, Danai Gurira is an American-Zimbabwean actress best known for her roles as Michonne on *The Walking Dead* and Okoye in the MCU's *Black Panther* and *Avenger* series. But did you also know that she's an award-winning playwright? Though born in Iowa to immigrant parents, she spent her childhood in Zimbabwe until she returned to the U.S. for college. She credits her upbringing with giving her the unique perspective and opportunity to bring African stories to American audiences. In 2006, she won an Obie award for *In the Continuum*. She made her Broadway debut (for acting) in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* as Martha Pentecost. Her play about young women's lives in war-torn Liberia, titled *Eclipsed*, was nominated for the Tony award for Best Play in 2016. She has recently signed a development deal with ABC Studios.

Artist Spotlight Day 28: Langston Hughes



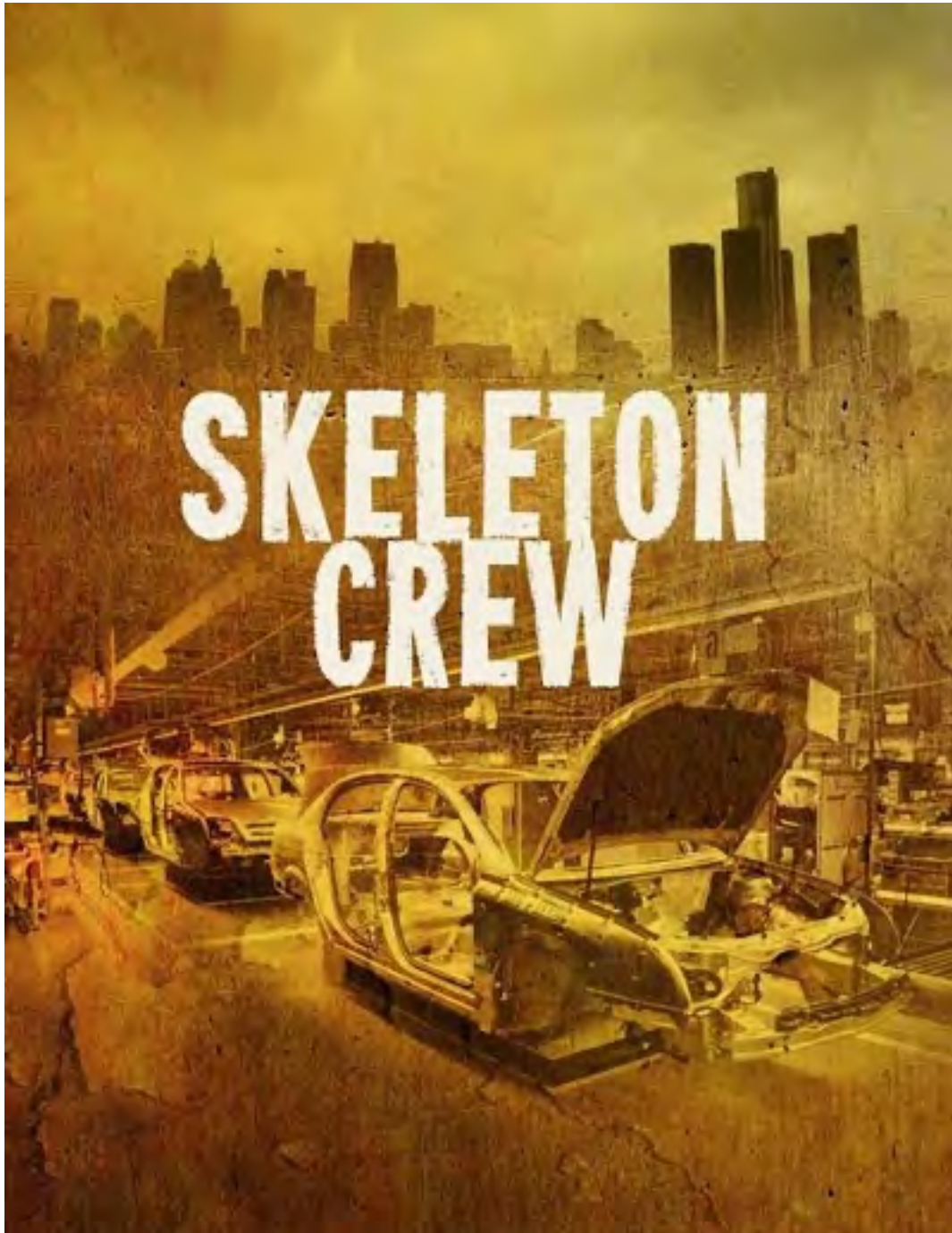
Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902-May 22, 1967), considered to be one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, was a poet, novelist, playwright, and social activist. One of the central threads in his works was the beauty and struggles of working-class black lives in America. He left Columbia University to travel the world and finished his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University. His first play, *The Gold Piece*, was published in 1921 while his first work on Broadway was *The Mulatto* in 1935. In 1937, he returned to Europe and became a war correspondent to several U.S. newspapers during the Spanish Civil War. Though he contributed several works in theatre, radio drama, musicals, and film, Hughes is best known for his work as a poet for which he won several awards and accolades. He taught creative writing at Atlanta University and was a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago.

Play of the Day 1: *Thoughts of a Colored Man* by Keenan Scott II



"Over the course of a single day in the pulsing heart of Brooklyn, the hopes, sorrows, fears, and joys of seven men reverberate far beyond the barbershops and basketball courts of their community. Vulnerable and vibrant, raw and alive -- these are the Thoughts of a Colored Man" ~ pulled from its website (you check it out [here](#)).

Play of the Day 2: *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morisseau



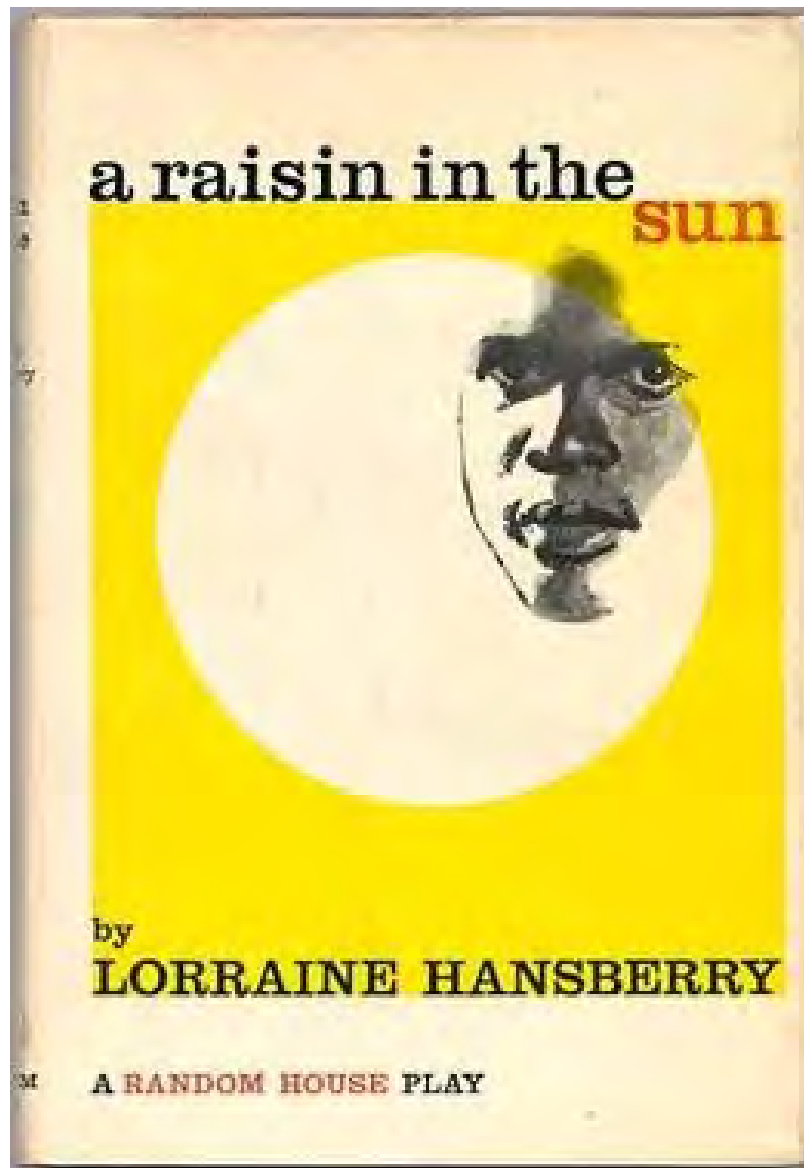
At the start of the Great Recession, one of the last auto stamping plants in Detroit is on shaky ground. Each of the workers have to make choices on how to move forward if their plant goes under. Shanita has to decide how she'll support herself and her unborn child, Faye has to decide how and where she'll live, and Dez has to figure out how to make his ambitious dreams a reality. Power dynamics shift as their manager Reggie is torn between doing right by his work family, and by the red tape in his office. Powerful and tense, *Skeleton Crew* is the third of Dominique Morisseau's Detroit cycle trilogy.

Play of the Day 3: *Father Comes Home From the Wars* by Suzan-Lori Parks



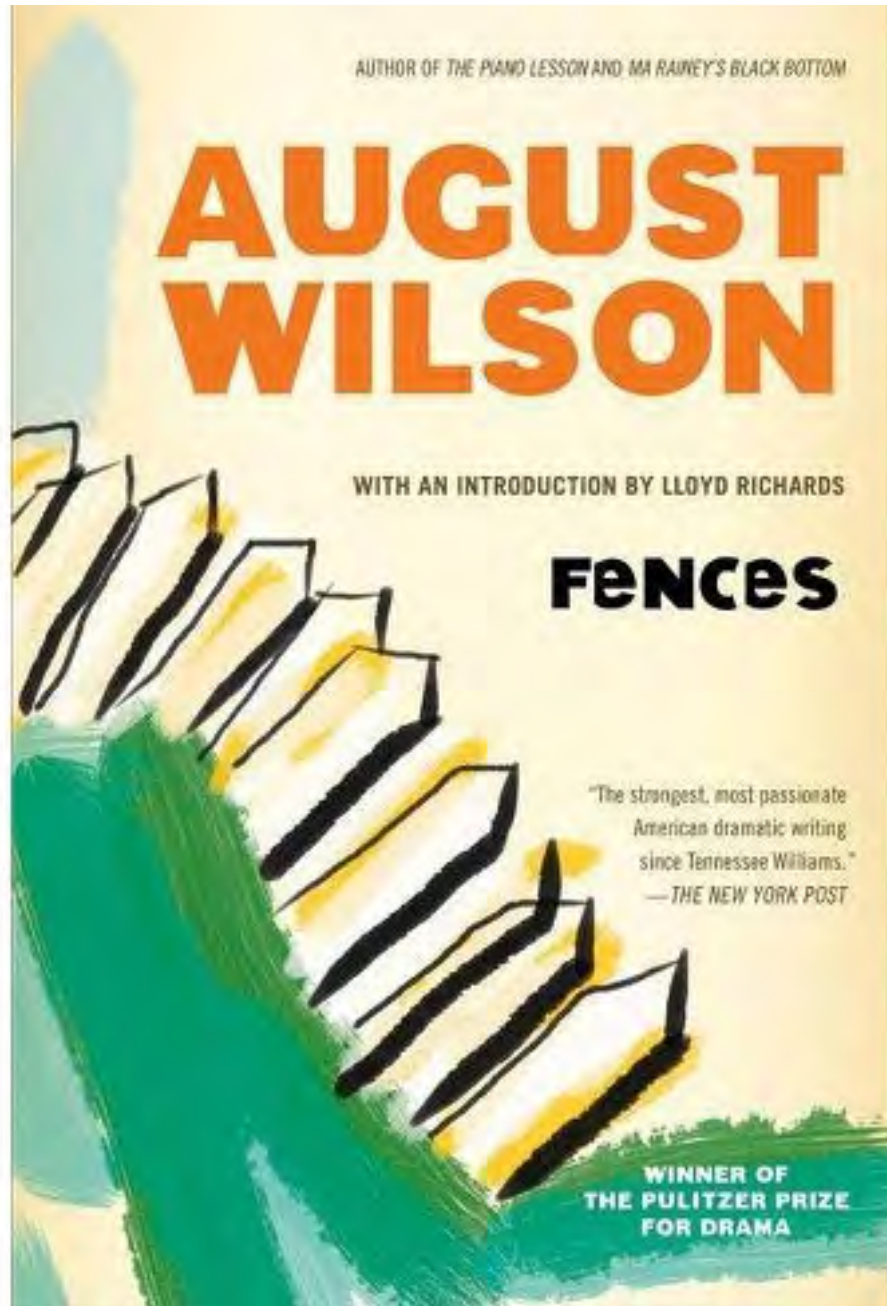
Offered his freedom if he joins his master in the ranks of the Confederacy, Hero, a slave, must choose whether to leave the woman and people he loves for what may be yet another empty promise. As his decision brings him face-to-face with a nation at war with itself, the loved ones Hero left behind debate whether to escape or wait for his return...only to discover that for Hero, free will may have come at a great spiritual cost. *Father Comes Home From the Wars* is an explosively powerful drama about the mess of war, the cost of freedom, and the heartbreak of love, with all three parts seen in one night. Part 1 introduces us to Hero. In Part 2, a band of rebel soldiers test Hero's loyalty as the cannons approach. Part 3 finds Hero's loved ones anxiously awaiting his return.

Play of the Day 4: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry



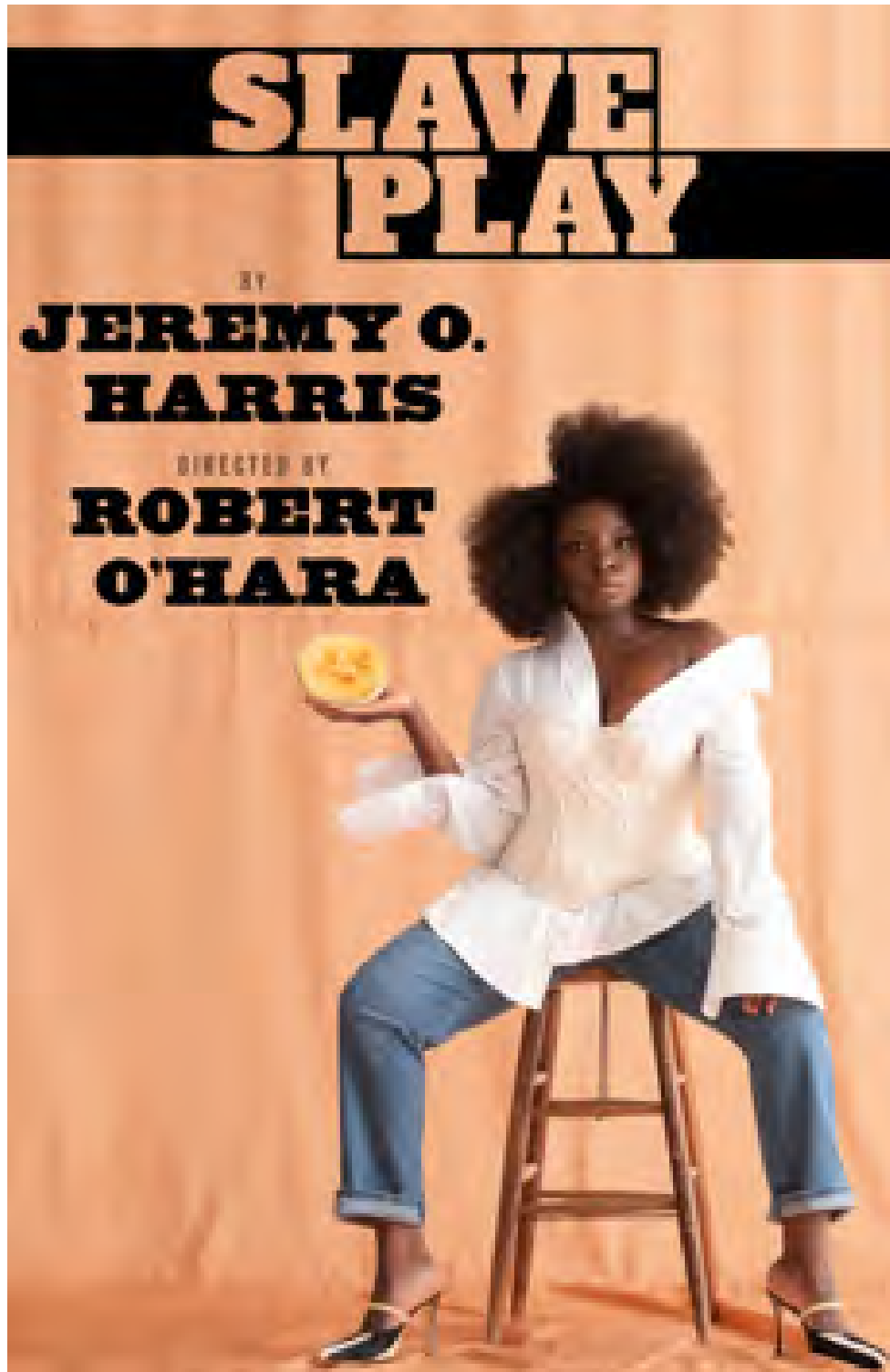
Set on Chicago's South Side, the plot revolves around the divergent dreams and conflicts within three generations of the Younger family: son Walter Lee, his wife Ruth, his sister Beneatha, his son Travis and matriarch Lena, called Mama. When her deceased husband's insurance money comes through, Mama dreams of moving to a new home and a better neighborhood in Chicago. Walter Lee, a chauffeur, has other plans, however: buying a liquor store and being his own man. Beneatha dreams of medical school. The tensions and prejudice they face form this seminal American drama. Sacrifice, trust and love among the Younger family and their heroic struggle to retain dignity in a harsh and changing world is a searing and timeless document of hope and inspiration. Winner of the NY Drama Critics Award as Best Play of the Year, it has been hailed as a "pivotal play in the history of the American Black theatre." by *Newsweek* and "a milestone in the American Theatre." by *Ebony*. It is also important to note that Hansberry always insisted that the play was not simply about black people's right to spend their money freely. It was also a critique of employment discrimination, Northern white racism, and American poverty.

Play of the Day 5: *Fences* by August Wilson



Set in the 1950s, *Fences* is the sixth in Wilson's ten-part "Pittsburgh Cycle". Like all of the cycle plays, *Fences* explores the evolving African American experience and examines race relations, among other themes. The play won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 1987 Tony Award for Best Play. If you've ever taken Intro to Theatre, then it is highly likely that you already know of this iconic work.

Play of the Day 6: *Slave Play* by Jeremy O. Harris



The Old South lives on at the MacGregor Plantation—in the breeze, in the cotton fields...and in the crack of the whip. Nothing is as it seems, and yet everything is as it seems. *Slave Play* rips apart history to shed new light on the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality in twenty-first-century America. At the 74th Tony Awards, *Slave Play* received 12 nominations, breaking the record set by the 2018 revival of *Angels in America* for most nominations for a non-musical play in Broadway history. The New York Times quoted that play as “the single most daring thing I’ve seen in a theater in a long time.”

Play of the Day 7: *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins



Playwright and 2016 MacArthur Fellow Branden Jacobs-Jenkins won the Obie Award for his radical, incendiary, and subversively funny riff on Dion Boucicault's once-popular 1859 mustache-twirling melodrama. Judge Peyton is dead, and his plantation Terrebonne is on the brink of foreclosure. George, the high-minded heir apparent, falls for the lovely Zoe, who's one-eighth black. But the bigoted belle Dora has eyes for George, and the dastardly overseer M'Closky plots to keep Zoe and Terrebonne for himself. A spectacular collision of the antebellum South and 21st-century cultural politics, *An Octoroon* is "This decade's most eloquent theatrical statement on race in America today," says the *New York Times*.

Play of the Day 8: *Fairview* by Jackie Sibblies Drury



Grandma's birthday approaches. Beverly is organizing the perfect dinner, but everything seems doomed from the start: the silverware is all wrong, the carrots need chopping and the radio is on the fritz. What at first appears to be a family comedy takes a sharp, sly turn into a startling examination of deep-seated paradigms about race in America. "Dazzling and ruthless...One of the most exquisitely and systematically arranged ambushes of an unsuspecting audience in years...A glorious, scary reminder of the unmatched power of live theater to rattle, roil and shake us wide awake." —Ben Brantley, *New York Times*

Play of the Day 9: *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage



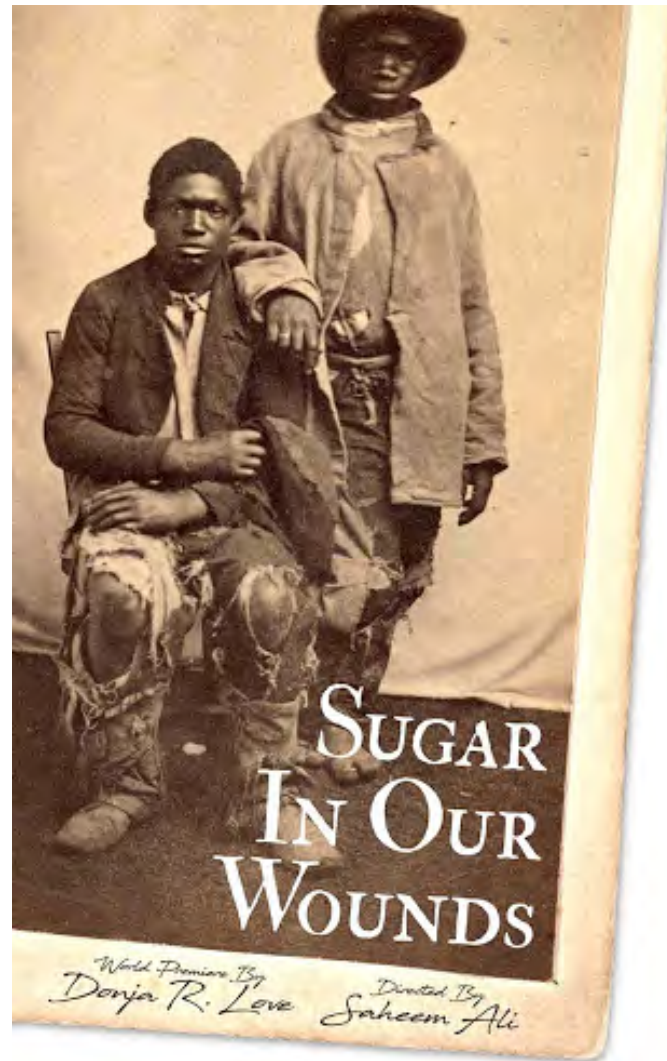
Filled with warm humor and tremendous heart, *Sweat* tells the story of a group of friends who have spent their lives sharing drinks, secrets, and laughs while working together on the factory floor. But when layoffs and picket lines begin to chip away at their trust, the friends find themselves pitted against each other in a heart-wrenching fight to stay afloat. Winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize. “Keenly observed and often surprisingly funny—but ultimately heartbreaking—the work traces the roots of a tragedy with both forensic psychological detail and embracing compassion. Ms. Nottage...is writing at the peak of her powers...” —NY Times. “...passionate and necessary...a masterful depiction of the forces that divide and conquer us...*Sweat* communicates its points with minimal fuss and maximum grit. Along with the rage, despair and violence, there’s humor and abundant humanity...a cautionary tale of what happens when you don’t know how to resist.” —Time Out NY. “Sharp and threatening as a box cutter blade...ferociously engrossing...*Sweat* never feels less than authentic—and crucial.” —Deadline.com.

Play of the Day 10: *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe



The Colored Museum has electrified, discomforted, and delighted audiences of all colors, redefining our ideas of what it means to be black in contemporary America. Its eleven “exhibits” undermine black stereotypes old and new and return to the facts of what being black means. “Mr. Wolfe is the kind of satirist...who takes no prisoners. The shackles of the past have been defied by Mr. Wolfe’s fearless humor, and it’s a most liberating revolt.” —NY Times. “Brings forth a bold new voice that is bound to shake up blacks and whites with separate-but-equal impartiality. True satire.” —Newsweek. “If Wolfe’s themes—of remembering the past and understanding stereotypes—are heavy, he wisely avoids didacticism in favor of lightness of tone. *The Colored Museum* turns out to be a fun house.” —Washington City Paper.

Play of the Day 11: *Sugar in our Wounds* by Donja R. Love



On a plantation somewhere down south, a mystical tree reaches up toward heaven. Generations of slaves have been hanged on this tree. But James is going to be different, as long as he keeps his head down and practices his reading. Moreover, as the Civil War rages on, the possibility of freedom looms closer than ever. When a stranger arrives on the plantation, a striking romance emerges, inviting the couple and those around them into uncharted territory.

“...throat-lumpending, nose-reddening, fantastically moving...*Sugar In Our Wounds* [is] written in lush, poetic dialect...its message is unimpeachable—that when we fail to treat one another as fully human, we invite tragedy...” —NY Times. “...Love’s desire to celebrate these characters and their stories...is accomplished. *Sugar In Our Wounds* is simple, timeless, magical storytelling at its finest...” —BroadwayBlog.com. “[An] ambitious drama...evocative...this is a play to celebrate what was beautiful in an ugly world, rather than dwell on tragedy or otherness.” —BroadwayWorld.com. “*Sugar In Our Wounds* implausibly manages to find love in the most terrible of circumstances. It searches for a queer history that passed without record, while simultaneously pointing toward a future in which our rigid taxonomy of sexual identities is no longer necessary to achieve political equality.” —TheaterMania.com.

Play of the Day 12: *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall



A gripping reimagination of events the night before the assassination of the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On April 3, 1968, after delivering one of his most memorable speeches, an exhausted Dr. King retires to his room at the Lorraine Motel while a storm rages outside. When a mysterious stranger arrives with some surprising news, King is forced to confront his destiny and his legacy to his people. “Even before the first flash of lightning—and there will be plenty of that before evening’s end—an ominous electricity crackles through the opening moments of *The Mountaintop*.” —NY Times. “[*The Mountaintop*] crackles with theatricality and a humanity more moving than sainthood.” —NY Newsday. “...as audacious as it is inventive...[a] thrilling, wild, provocative flight of magical realism...Hall keeps her audience guessing...This is playwriting without a net, a defiant poke in the eye of all historical conventions and political correctness...The King that is left after Hall’s humanization project is somehow more real and urgent and whole.” —Associated Press.

Play of the Day 13: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* by August Wilson



It's 1927 and Ma Rainey, the "Mother of the Blues," is recording new sides of old favorites in a rundown studio in Chicago. Fiery and determined, Ma Rainey fights to retain control over her music, while her cocky trumpet player Levee dreams of making his own name in the business. More than music goes down in August Wilson's riveting portrayal of rage, racism, self-hatred and exploitation. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was first presented at the Yale Repertory Theatre, directed by Lloyd Richards, on April 6, 1984. The play opened on Broadway at the Cort Theatre on October 11, 1984, starring Theresa Merritt and Charles S. Dutton, again under the direction of Richards. A Broadway revival starring Whoopi Goldberg opened at the Royale Theatre on February 6, 2003. On December 18, 2020, a film adaptation of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, directed by George C. Wolfe and starring Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman, premiered on Netflix.

Play of the Day 14: *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy



Funnyhouse of a Negro is a modern classic about the student Sarah, a young black woman living in New York City, and her search for her identity in a very complex, warring, and fractured world. This search is manifested in her many selves: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba, and Jesus Christ. Performed by colleges worldwide, this landmark play speaks to students trying to find a place in the world. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was first presented Off-Broadway at the East End Theater in New York City on January 14, 1964.

Play of the Day 15: *Dutchman* by LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka)

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DUTCHMAN

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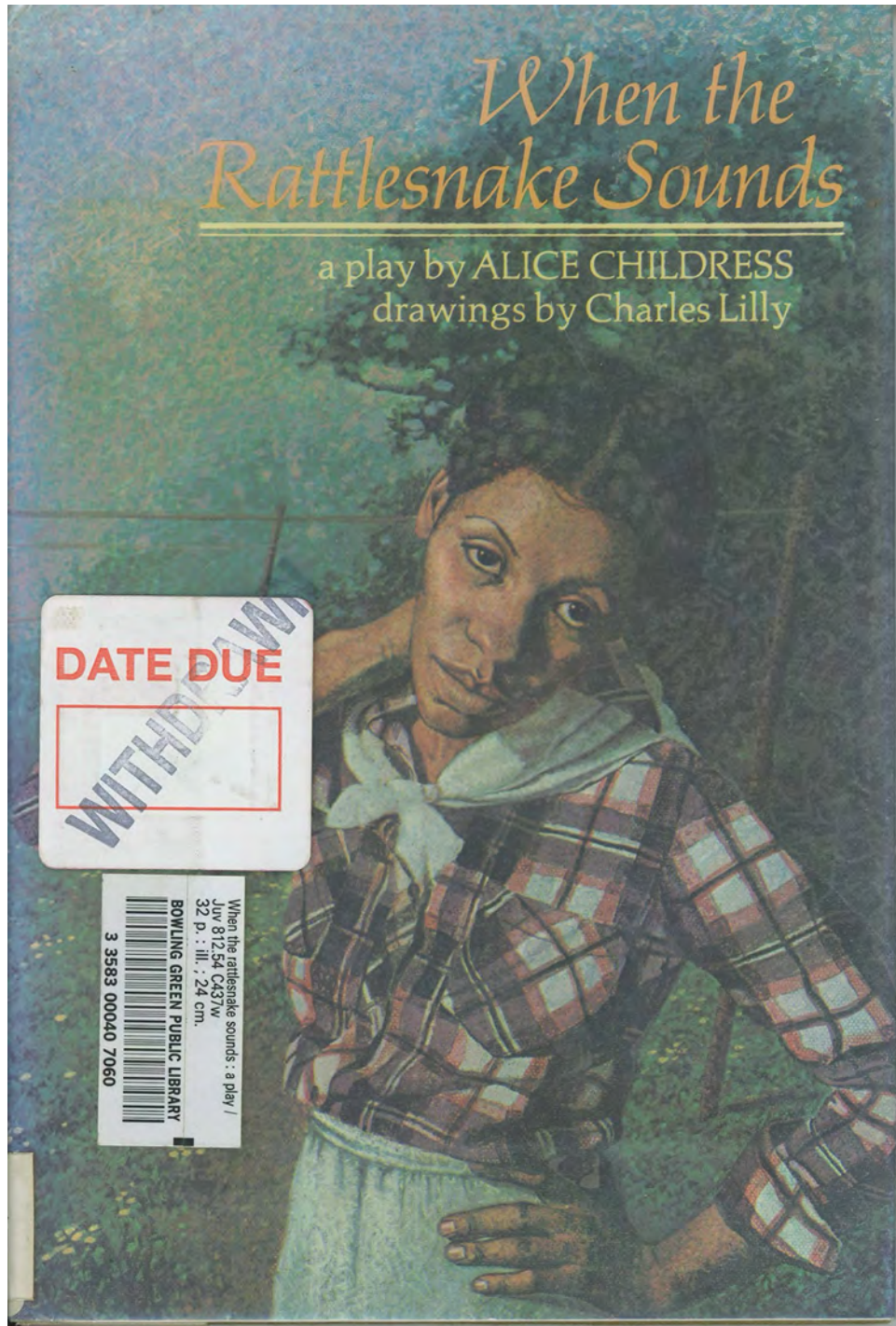
Dutchman is an emotionally charged and highly symbolic version of the Adam and Eve story, wherein a naive bourgeois black man is murdered by an insane and calculating white seductress, who is coldly preparing for her next victim as the curtain comes down. The emotionally taut, intellectual verbal fencing between Clay (the black Adam) and Lula (a white Eve) spirals irrevocably to the symbolic act of violence that will apparently repeat itself over and over again. Jones/Baraka's play is one of mythical proportions, a ritual drama that has a sociological purpose: to galvanize his audience into revolutionary action. *Dutchman* premiered at the Cherry Lane Theatre in Greenwich Village, New York in March 1964.

Play of the Day 16: *For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf* by Ntozake Shange



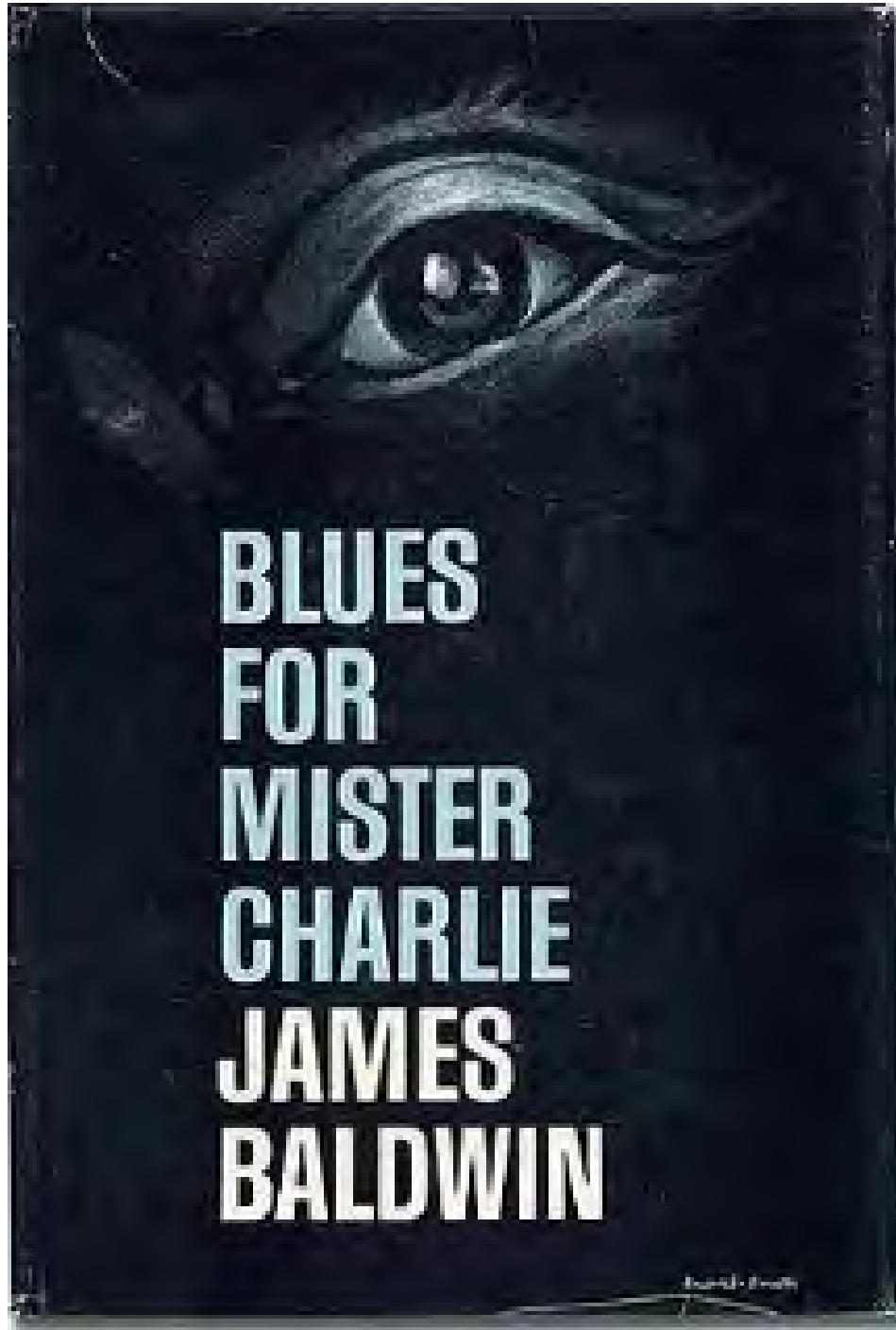
From its inception in California in 1974 to its highly acclaimed critical success at Joseph Papp's Public Theater and on Broadway, the Obie Award-winning *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* has excited, inspired, and transformed audiences all over the country. Passionate and fearless, Shange's words reveal what it is to be of color and female in the twentieth century. First published in 1975 when it was praised by The New Yorker for "encompassing...every feeling and experience a woman has ever had," *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* will be read and performed for generations to come. This revolutionary, award-winning play by a lauded playwright and poet is a fearless portrayal of the experiences of women of color—"extraordinary and wonderful...that anyone can relate to" (*The New York Times*) and continues to move and resonate with readers today more than ever.

Play of the Day 17: *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* by Alice Childress



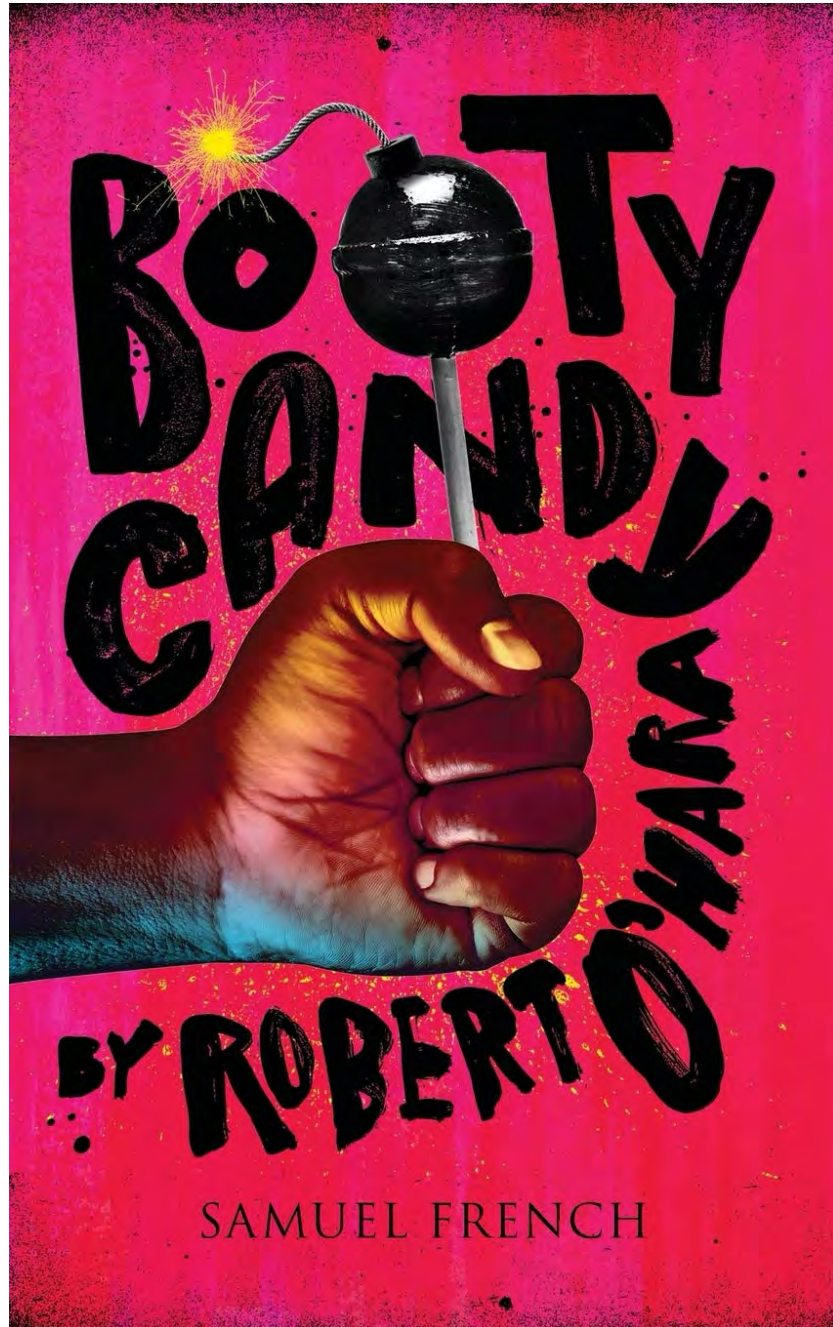
A short, strong, one-act play, set in a Cape May, New Jersey, summer hotel where Harriet Tubman and two younger women work as laundresses to get money for Harriet's Underground Railroad work. There's friction between Lennie, righteous and dedicated, and Celia, a minister's daughter who has joined Harriet impulsively and now finds the work and the danger more than she bargained for. But with Harriet's encouragement and her sympathetic reminder of what their commitment means, Celia takes heart and the three women end up singing a hymn together as they scrub.

Play of the Day 18: *Blues for Mister Charlie* by James Baldwin



For where once a white storekeeper could have shot a "boy" like Richard Henry with impunity, times have changed. And centuries of brutality and fear, patronage and contempt, are about to erupt in a moment of truth as devastating as a shotgun blast. In his award-winning play, Baldwin turns a murder and its aftermath into an inquest in which even the most well-intentioned whites are implicated--and in which even a killer receives his share of compassion.

Play of the Day 19: *Bootycandy* by Robert O'Hara



Sutter is on an outrageous odyssey through his childhood home, his church, dive bars, motel rooms, and even nursing homes. Playwright Robert O'Hara weaves together scenes, sermons, sketches, and daring meta-theatrics to create a kaleidoscopic portrayal of growing up gay and Black. Uproarious satire crashes headlong into the murky terrain of pain and pleasure and... *Bootycandy*. *Bootycandy* made its world premiere in June 2011 at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. The production was directed by playwright Robert O'Hara. On August 22, 2014, *Bootycandy* premiered Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons, starring Phillip James Brannon, Jessica Frances Dukes, Jesse Pennington, Benja Kay Thomas and Lance Coadie Williams, again under the direction of the author.

Play of the Day 20: *Beauty's Daughter* by Dael Orlandersmith



One woman's journey with many obstacles stacked against her. The heroine or "anti-heroine" can choose to be a victim of the violent cards life has dealt her or she can use her poetry and music as a creative means to deal. The audience sees the character's inability and ultimate ability to deal with other people and triumph in the end. Being paired up with *The Gimmick* and *Monster*, the award-winning writer and performer Dael Orlandersmith celebrates the power of words to rescue the young black women she portrays from their constricted worlds.

Play of the Day 21: *The Good Negro* by Tracey Scott Wilson



In *The Good Negro*, three emerging black leaders try to conquer their individual demons as the local KKK fights for its old way of life, and everyday black men and women must overcome their fears—all under the ever—watchful eye of the FBI. “Never one for half measures, Tracey Scott Wilson grapples with the entirety of the Birmingham civil rights movement in her thunderous new play “*The Good Negro*.” Wielding artistic license like a boning knife, the playwright shears away real names and angelic reputations, leaving only the essentials of the conflict: a woman defying institutional racism; a tomcatting activist minister and his infighting friends; a horrific Klan murder. If Wilson’s attempt to dramaturgically compress all that history into one multi-threaded narrative isn’t a complete success, her wonderful dialogue, sturdy characters and palpable passion are nonetheless stunning” Sam Thielman - Variety

Play of the Day 22: *Day of Absence* by Douglas Turner Ward



A satire about an imaginary Southern town where all the black people have suddenly disappeared. The only ones left are sick and lying in hospital beds, refusing to get well. Infants are crying because they are being tended to by strange parents. The Mayor pleads for the President, Governor, and the NAACP to send him “a jackpot of jigaboos.” On a nationwide radio network he calls on the blacks, wherever they are, to come back. He shows them the cloths with which they wash cars and the brushes with which they shine shoes as sentimental reminders of the goodies that await them. In the end the blacks begin to reappear, as mysteriously as they had vanished, and the white community, sobered by what has transpired, breathes a sigh of relief at the return of the rather uneasy status quo. What will happen next is left unsaid, but the suggestion is strong that things will never quite be the same again. Winner of the coveted Vernon Rice and Obie Awards. Coupled with *Happy Ending* in its successful Off-Broadway production, this clever and enormously amusing satire is described by the author as “A Reverse Minstrel Show. “Here the all-black cast, made up in white face, recount the uproarious emergencies which occur when a Southern town is faced with the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of all its black citizens. “Laughter can be as effective as anger in telling white America what [Douglas Turner Ward] has on his mind.” —NY Times. “...a gust of fresh air among racial plays.” —Life Magazine.

Play of the Day 23: *This Bitter Earth* by Harrison David Rivers



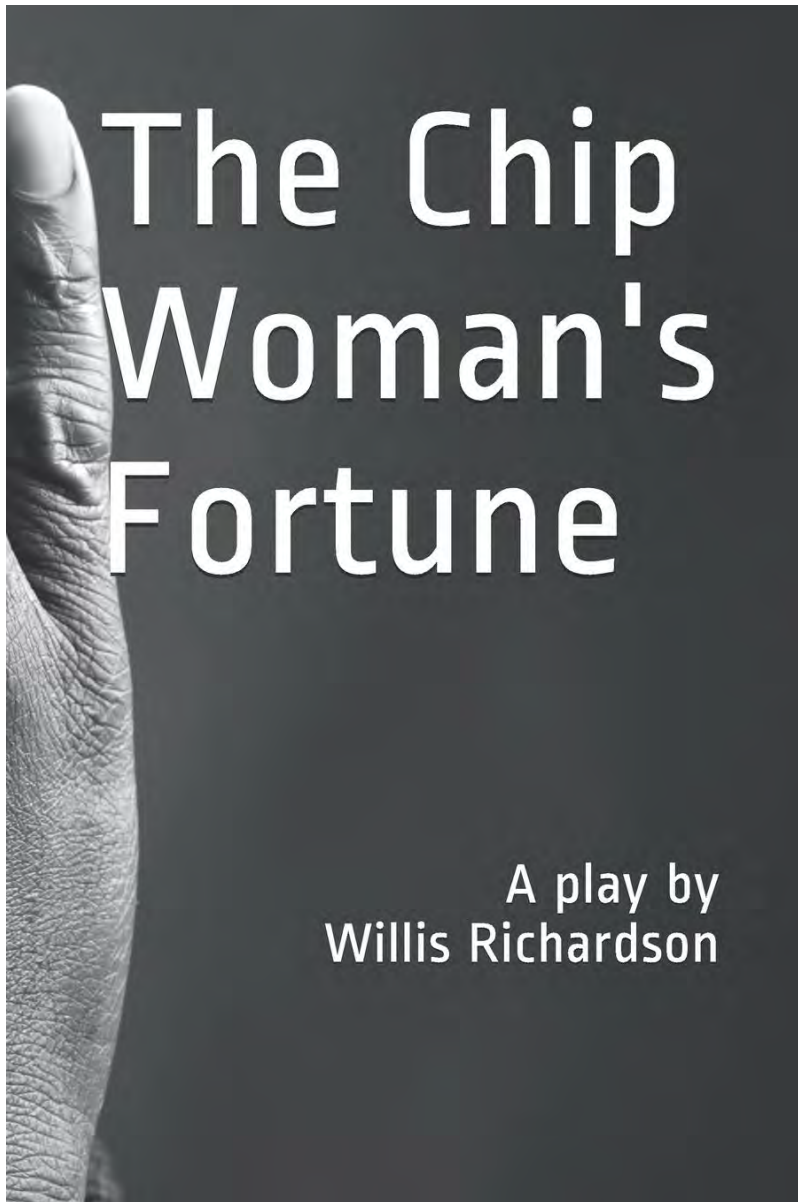
At the Million Hoodie March in 2012, Jesse, a young black man, encounters Neil, a young white man who has unwittingly found himself at the front of the crowd with a megaphone in his hand. Flash forward several weeks, and Jesse and Neil have begun dating. But as the months pass and Neill works his way further into the world of activism, Jesse never enters it. Over the years, Jesse and Neil negotiate the complex “firsts” of their relationship against a backdrop of political demonstrations and discord. With history unfolding around them every day, Jesse and Neil must contend with the fact that, no matter their response to social turmoil, they cannot remain untouched by it. “Gay black love isn’t depicted much on stage; interracial gay love less so. But more than portray it, Rivers’ work analyzes it, with key details of meeting the others’ families, and thoughtful considerations about why black men grow up so tough, ‘because maybe gentle gets you killed.’” –Roger Catlin, *Broadway World, Washington, D.C.*

Play of the Day 24: *Black Super Hero Magic Mama* by Inda Craig-Galvan



The greatest superpower is a mother's love. In a comic book world from the mind of a 14-year-old boy, Sabrina becomes superhero Maasai Angel to take on her arch villains. Enter Lady Vulture, Human Hyena and more. Compared to the pain of her real world, this battle is child's play. "What function do superhero stories play in American society? Are they merely escapist distractions for head-in-the-clouds teens, or could those same formats actually serve a practical function, providing useful tools for everyday life? Recognizing these comic book fantasies as by far the dominant form of contemporary mythmaking for a generation of young people, emerging playwright Inda Craig-Galván co opts the genre's pulp style and storytelling tropes to address another, more disturbing trend — the actual shooting of unarmed black youths by police officers — in her new play '*Black Super Hero Magic Mama*.'" - Peter Debruge, *Variety*

Play of the Day 25: *The Chip Woman's Fortune* by Willis Richardson



In 1922, Willis Richardson wrote *The Chip Woman's Fortune*. On January 29, 1923, the play was performed by the Ethiopian Art Players in Chicago. In April 1923, the play moved to New York. On May 7, 1923, *The Chip Woman's Fortune* had a short run at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem. Eight days later, it became the first play by an African American to reach Broadway. The chip woman, in *The Chip Woman's Fortune*, is named Aunt Nancy. She contributes to the household where she resides by picking up chips of wood and lumps of coal from the streets. We find her living with Silas and caring for his ill wife, Liza, whom we learn is making a steady recovery under Aunt Nancy's care. Silas learns that the family's greatest treasure, a Victrola record player, is about to be repossessed because of financial strain that has left him unable to make payments on the outstanding debt owed on the machine. After learning that, Aunt Nancy has managed to save some money from street donations she receives, Silas decides that it is time for her to contribute more than the nursing care provided to his wife, and the wood chips and coal lumps she collects for use by the family.

Play of the Day 26: *Take A Giant Step* by Louis Peterson



Seventeen-year-old Spence is an African American teenager who has been raised in a white middle-class neighborhood his whole life. When one of his high school classes starts talking about racial issues, Spence is confronted with some harsh realities and begins to question what it means to live as a person of color in a white world. Spence's confusion is nurtured by the family's sensible African American housekeeper, Christine, whose warmth and wisdom help Spence come to an understanding of who he really is.

Play of the Day 27: *Kill Move Paradise* by James Ijames



Four black men find themselves stuck in a waiting room for the afterlife. As they attempt to make sense of their new paradise, Isa, Daz, Grif, and Tiny are forced to confront the reality of their past, and how they arrived in this unearthly place. Inspired by the ever-growing list of slain black men and women, *Kill Move Paradise* illustrates the potential for collective transformation and radical acts of joy. "...urgent and hypnotic...[a] bleak and beautiful...drama by James Ijames...*Kill Move Paradise* is a singularly affecting contribution to a niche genre of theater that often comes across as labored and contrived. I mean plays set in an afterlife where the deceased see their time on earth through the prism of eternity." —NY Times. "Ijames has written a challenging and fine actor's play...*Kill Move Paradise* is bold, conceptual, living theater, demanding to be heard. Ijames [is] a vital voice in [our] politically seditious and most perilous time. It is also profoundly poetic in its dialogue and characters." —CultureVulture.net. "This haunting, elliptical play represents a breakthrough for [Ijames], and for art that considers the value of black lives in America..." —BroadStreetReview.com.

Play of the Day 28: *What To Send Up When It Goes Down* by Aleshea Harris



As lines between characters and actors – as well as observers and observed – blur, a dizzying series of vignettes builds to a climactic moment in which performance and reality collide, highlighting the absurdity of anti-Blackness in our society. Through facilitation and dialogue we must decide how to cope, resist, and move forward. Described by its author as both “an anger spittoon” and a means of creating “a space in the theater that is unrepentantly for and about black people,” this singular work combines song, dance, ritual, satirical sketches and monologues of mourning to conjure the mortal fear and loathing that rule black American lives in the era of Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland. A jubilant and scary exercise in catharsis.