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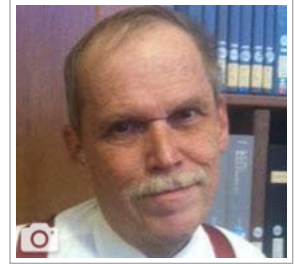
Introduction

This LibGuide was created to accompany the Visions & Voices event: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. On Wednesday, October 12th, USC students will attend the acclaimed Mark Taper rForum presentation of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. [Read more about the event at the Visions & Voices website.](#)



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Subject Guide



Anthony Anderson

Subjects:

Africa, Europe, History, Holocaust & Genocide Studies, Languages & Literatures, Performing Arts, United States & Canada

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The Plot

In a Chicago-based recording studio, Ma Rainey's band players, Cutler, Toledo, Slow Drag, and Levee turn up to record a new album of her songs. As they wait for her to arrive they banter, tell stories, joke, philosophise and argue. As the play unfolds it becomes clear that the tension is between the young hot-headed trumpeter Levee, who has dreams of having his own band, and veteran players Cutler and Toledo.

By the time Ma Rainey does turn up in full regalia and entourage in tow, the recording schedule is badly behind, throwing the white producers Sturdyvant and Irvin into more and more irate disarray. Ma's insistence that her stuttering nephew Sylvester should do the voice intro to the title song causes more havoc. As the band waits for various technical problems to be resolved, the conflict between Levee and Cutler reaches boiling point and violence ensues. Finally, when Levee is simultaneously fired from the band by Ma for his insubordination and then rejected by Sturdyvant who had offered to record his songs his anger becomes too much and he stabs Toledo, killing him, thus destroying any possibility of a future for himself.

Characters

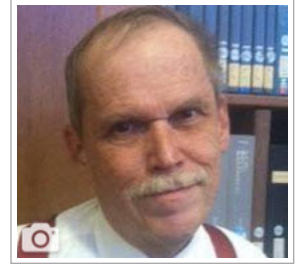
- Ma Rainey, blues singer
- Cutler, trombonist
- Dussie Mae, Ma's girlfriend
- Irvin, Ma's manager
- Levee, trumpeter
- Policeman
- Slow Drag, bassist
- Sturdyvant studio owner
- Sylvester, Ma's nephew
- Toledo, pianist

--Wikipedia



(Lillias White in August Wilson's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," directed by Phylicia Rashad at the Mark Taper Forum/)

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August Wilson

August Wilson (April 27, 1945 – October 2, 2005) was an American playwright whose work included a series of ten plays, *The Pittsburgh Cycle*, for which he received two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Each is set in a different decade, depicting the comic and tragic aspects of the African-American experience in the 20th century.

Childhood

Wilson's maternal grandmother walked from North Carolina to Pennsylvania in search of a better life. Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel, Jr. in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the fourth of six children, to Sudeten-German immigrant baker/pastry cook, Frederick August Kittel, Sr. and Daisy Wilson, an African-American cleaning woman, from North Carolina. Wilson's mother raised the children alone until he was five in a two-room apartment above a grocery store at 1727 Bedford Avenue; his father was mostly absent from his childhood. Wilson would go on to write under his mother's surname. The economically depressed neighborhood where he was raised was inhabited predominantly by black Americans and Jewish and Italian immigrants. Wilson's mother divorced his father and married David Bedford in the 1950s, and the family moved from the Hill District to the then predominantly white working-class neighborhood of Hazelwood, where they encountered racial hostility; bricks were thrown through a window at their new home. They were soon forced out of their house and on to their next home.

In 1959 Wilson was one of fourteen African-American students at the Central Catholic High School, where he dropped out after one year. He then attended Connelley Vocational High School, but found the curriculum unchallenging. He dropped out of Gladstone High School in the 10th grade in 1960 after his teacher accused him of plagiarizing a 20-page paper he wrote on Napoleon I of France. Wilson hid his decision from his mother because he did not want to disappoint her. At the age of 16 he began working menial jobs, where he met a wide variety of people on whom some of his later characters were based, such as Sam in *The Janitor* (1985).

Wilson made such extensive use of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh to educate himself that it later awarded him an honorary high school diploma, the only diploma it has ever bestowed. Wilson, who had learned to read at the age of four, began reading black writers at the library when he was 12 and spent the remainder of his teen years educating himself through the books of Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and others.

Career

Wilson knew that he wanted to be a writer, but this created tension with his mother, who wanted him to become a lawyer. She forced him to leave the family home and he enlisted in the United States Army for a three-year stint in 1962, but left after one year and went back to working various odd jobs as a porter, short-order cook, gardener, and dishwasher.

Frederick August Kittel, Jr. changed his name to August Wilson to honor his mother after his father's death in 1965. That same year he discovered the blues as sung by Bessie Smith, and he bought a stolen typewriter for \$10, which he would often pawn when money was tight. At 20 he decided he was a poet and submitted his poetry to such magazines as Harper's. He began to write in bars, the local cigar store and cafes, longhand on table napkins and on yellow notepads, absorbing the voices and characters around him. He liked to write on cafe napkins because, he said, it freed him up and made him less self-conscious as a writer. He would then gather the notes and type them up at home. Gifted with a talent for catching dialect and accents, Wilson had an "astonishing memory," which he put to full use during his career. He slowly learned not to censor the language he heard when incorporating it into his work.

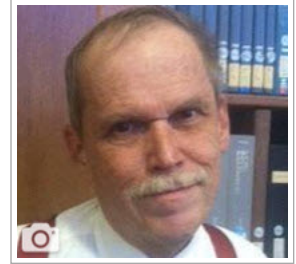
Malcolm X's voice would influence his life and work (such as *The Ground on Which I Stand*, 1996). Both the Nation of Islam and the Black Power spoke to him regarding self-sufficiency, self-defense and self-determination, and he appreciated the origin myths that Elijah Muhammad supported. In 1969 Wilson married Brenda Burton, a Muslim, and Wilson converted to Islam in order to sustain the marriage. He and Brenda had one daughter, Sakina Ansari-Wilson, and divorced in 1972.

In 1968, he co-founded the Black Horizon Theater in the Hill District of Pittsburgh along with his friend Rob Penny. Wilson's first play, *Recycling*, was performed for audiences in small theaters, schools and public housing community centers for 50 cents a ticket. Among these early efforts was *Jitney*, which he revised more than two decades later as part of his 10-play cycle on 20th-century Pittsburgh. He had no directing experience. He recalled: "Someone had looked around and said, 'Who's going to be the director?' I said, 'I will.' I said that because I knew my way around the library. So I went to look for a book on how to direct a play. I found one called *The Fundamentals of Play Directing* and checked it out."

In 1976 Vernell Lillie, who had founded the Kuntu Repertory Theatre at the University of Pittsburgh two years earlier, directed Wilson's *The Homecoming*. That same year Wilson saw *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* at the Pittsburgh Public Theater, his first professional play. Wilson, Penny, and poet Maisha Baton also started the Kuntu Writers Workshop to bring African-American writers together and to assist them in publication and production. Both organizations are still active.

In 1978 Wilson moved to Saint Paul, Minnesota, at the suggestion of his friend director Claude Purdy, who helped him secure a

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job writing educational scripts for the Science Museum of Minnesota. In 1980 he received a fellowship for The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. He quit the Museum in 1981, but continued writing plays. For three years, he was a part-time cook for the Little Brothers of the Poor. Wilson had a long association with the Penumbra Theatre Company of St Paul, which gave the premieres of some Wilson plays. *Fullerton Street* which has been unproduced and unpublished, was written in 1980. It follows the Joe Louis/Billy Conn fight in 1940 and the loss of values attendant on the Great Migration to the urban North.

In 1987, Saint Paul's mayor George Latimer named May 27 "August Wilson Day." He was honored because he was the only person to both come from Minnesota and win a Pulitzer Prize.

In 1990 Wilson left St Paul after getting divorced and moved to Seattle. There he would develop a relationship with Seattle Repertory Theatre, which would become the only theater in the country to produce all of the works in his ten-play cycle and his one-man show *How I Learned What I Learned*.

Although he was a writer dedicated to writing for theater, a Hollywood studio proposed filming Wilson's play *Fences*. He insisted that a black director be hired for the film, saying: "I declined a white director not on the basis of race but on the basis of culture. White directors are not qualified for the job. The job requires someone who shares the specifics of the culture of black Americans." The film remained unmade until 2016, when a film adaptation directed by Denzel Washington and starring Washington and Viola Davis began filming.

Wilson received many honorary degrees, including an honorary Doctor of Humanities from the University of Pittsburgh, where he served as a member of the University's Board of Trustees from 1992 until 1995.

Wilson maintained a strong voice in the progress and development of the (then) contemporary black theater, undoubtedly taking influences from the examples of his youth, such as those displayed during the Black Arts Movement. One of the most notable examples of Wilson's strong opinions and critiques of what was black theater's state in the '90's, was the "On Cultural Power: The August Wilson/Robert Brustein Discussion"—being just one of the times where Wilson spoke plainly for the progression of black theater. Here, Wilson engages in a fairly heated discussion with Robert Brustein. As with all debate neither truly came out 'right', however both played a hand in calling attention to a huge issue, and shedding light on how poor of a state the form was in. Undeniably, Wilson left an everlasting imprint on Black Theater's development.

Work.

Wilson's best known plays are *Fences* (1985) (which won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award), *The Piano Lesson* (1990) (a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

Wilson stated that he was most influenced by "the four Bs": blues music, the Argentine novelist and poet Jorge Luis Borges, the playwright Amiri Baraka and the painter Romare Bearden. He went on to add writers Ed Bullins and James Baldwin to the list. He noted: "From Borges, those wonderful gaucho stories from which I learned that you can be specific as to a time and place and culture and still have the work resonate with the universal themes of love, honor, duty, betrayal, etc. From Amiri Baraka, I learned that all art is political, although I don't write political plays. From Romare Bearden I learned that the fullness and richness of everyday life can be rendered without compromise or sentimentality. "He valued Bullins and Baldwin for their honest representations of everyday life."

Like Bearden, Wilson worked with collage techniques in writing: "I try to make my plays the equal of his canvases. In creating plays I often use the image of a stewing pot in which I toss various things that I'm going to make use of—a black cat, a garden, a bicycle, a man with a scar on his face, a pregnant woman, a man with a gun." On the meaning of his work Wilson stated "I once wrote this short story called 'The Best Blues Singer in the World,' and it went like this—"The streets that Balboa walked were his own private ocean, and Balboa was drowning." End of story. That says it all. Nothing else to say. I've been rewriting that same story over and over again. All my plays are rewriting that same story."

The Pittsburgh Cycle

Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle, also often referred to as his Century Cycle, consists of ten plays—nine of which are set in Pittsburgh's Hill District (the other being set in Chicago), an African-American neighborhood that takes on a mythic literary significance like Thomas Hardy's Wessex, William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, or Irish playwright Brian Friel's Ballybeg. The plays are each set in a different decade and aim to sketch the Black experience in the 20th century and "raise consciousness through theater" and echo "the poetry in the everyday language of black America." He was fascinated by the power of theater as a medium where a community at large could come together to bear witness to events and currents unfolding.

Wilson noted:

"I think my plays offer (white Americans) a different way to look at black Americans," he told *The Paris Review*. "For instance, in *Fences* they see a garbageman, a person they don't really look at, although they see a garbageman every day. By looking at Troy's life, white people find out that the content of this black garbageman's life is affected by the same things – love, honor, beauty, betrayal, duty. Recognizing that these things are as much part of his life as theirs can affect how they think about and deal with black people in their lives."

Although the plays of the cycle are not strictly connected to the degree of a serial story, some characters appear (at various ages) in more than one of the cycle's plays. Children of characters in earlier plays may appear in later plays. The character most frequently mentioned in the cycle is Aunt Ester, a "washer of souls". She is reported to be 285 years old in *Gem of the Ocean*, which takes place in her home at 1839 Wylie Avenue, and 322 in *Two Trains Running*. She dies in 1985, during the events of *King Hedley II*. Much of the action of *Radio Golf* revolves around the plan to demolish and redevelop that house, some years after her death. The plays often include an apparently mentally impaired oracular character (different in each play)—for example, Hedley Sr. in *Seven Guitars*, Gabriel in *Fences* or Hambone in *Two Trains Running*.

Chicago's Goodman Theatre was the first theater in the world to produce the entire 10-play cycle, spanning from 1986 to 2007. Two of the Goodman's productions—*Seven Guitars* and *Gem of the Ocean*—were world premieres. [Israel Hicks produced the entire 10-play cycle from 1990 to 2009 for the Denver Center Theatre Company. Geva Theatre Center produced all 10 plays in decade order from 2007 to 2011 as August Wilson's *American Century*. The Huntington Theatre Company of Boston has produced all 10 plays, finishing in 2012. During Wilson's life he worked closely with The Huntington to produce the later plays. Pittsburgh Public Theater was the first theater company in Pittsburgh to produce the entire Century Cycle, including the world premiere of *King Hedley II* to open the O'Reilly Theater in Downtown Pittsburgh.

The Actors' Group, in Honolulu, Hawaii, produced all 10 plays in the cycle starting in 2004 with *Two Trains Running* and culminating in 2015 with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. All shows were Hawaii premieres, all were extremely successful at the box office and garnered many local theatre awards for the actors and the organization.

Two years before his death in 2005, August Wilson wrote and performed an unpublished one-man play entitled *How I Learned What I Learned* about the power of art and the power of possibility. Recently produced at New York's Signature Theatre and directed by Todd Kreidler, Wilson's friend and protégé, *How I Learned* explores his days as a struggling young writer in Pittsburgh's Hill District and how the neighborhood and its people inspired his amazing cycle of plays about the African-American experience.

Personal Life

Wilson was married three times. His first marriage was to Brenda Burton from 1969 to 1972. They had one daughter, Sakina Ansari, born 1970. In 1981 he married Judy Oliver, a social worker; they divorced in 1990. He married again in 1994 and was survived by his third wife, costume designer, Constanza Romero, whom he met on the set of *The Piano Lesson*. They had a daughter, Azula Carmen Wilson. Wilson was also survived by siblings Freda Ellis, Linda Jean Kittel, Donna Conley, Barbara Jean Wilson, Edwin Kittel and Richard Kittel.

Wilson reported that he had been diagnosed with liver cancer in June 2005 and been given three to five months to live. He died on October 2, 2005, at Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, and was interred at Greenwood Cemetery, Pittsburgh, on October 8, 2005, aged 60.

Legacy

The childhood home of Wilson and his six siblings, at 1727 Bedford Avenue in Pittsburgh was declared a historic landmark by the State of Pennsylvania on May 30, 2007.[19] On February 26, 2008, Pittsburgh City Council placed the house on the List of City of Pittsburgh historic designations. On April 30, 2013, the August Wilson House was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

In Pittsburgh, there is an August Wilson Center for African American Culture.

On October 16, 2005, fourteen days after Wilson's death, the Virginia Theatre in New York City's Broadway Theater District was renamed the August Wilson Theatre. It is the first Broadway theatre to bear the name of an African-American.

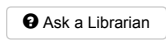
In Seattle, WA along the south side of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, the vacated Republican Street between Warren Avenue N. and 2nd Avenue N. on the Seattle Center grounds has been renamed August Wilson Way.

- Wikipedia





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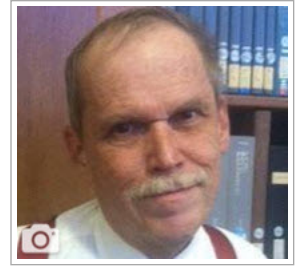
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(MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM -- Mark Taper Forum)

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"Ma" Rainey

"Ma" Rainey (born Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett, c. April 26, 1886 – December 22, 1939) was one of the earliest American professional blues singers and one of the first generation of blues singers to record. She was billed as the Mother of the Blues.

She began performing as a young teenager and became known as Ma Rainey after her marriage to Will Rainey, in 1904. They toured with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and later formed their own group, Rainey and Rainey, Assassimators of the Blues. Her first recording was made in 1923. In the next five years, she made over 100 recordings, including "Bo-Weevil Blues" (1923), "Moonshine Blues" (1923), "See See Rider Blues" (1924), "Black Bottom" (1927), and "Soon This Morning" (1927).

Rainey was known for her powerful vocal abilities, energetic disposition, majestic phrasing, and a "moaning" style of singing. Her powerful voice was never adequately captured on her records, because she recorded exclusively for Paramount, which was known for its below-average recording techniques and poor shellac quality. However, her other qualities are present and most evident in her early recordings "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues".

Rainey recorded with Louis Armstrong, and she toured and recorded with the Georgia Jazz Band. She continued to tour until 1935, when she retired and went to live in her hometown.

Life and career

Gertrude Pridgett claimed to have been born on April 26, 1886 (beginning with the 1910 census, taken April 25, 1910), in Columbus, Georgia. (This can be questioned, however, as the 1900 census indicates she may have been born in September 1882 in Alabama.[5]) She was the second of five children of Thomas and Ella (née Allen) Pridgett, from Alabama. She had at least two brothers and a sister, Malissa, with whom Gertrude was later confused by some writers.

She began her career as a performer at a talent show in Columbus, Georgia, when she was about 12 to 14 years old. A member of the First African Baptist Church, she began performing in black minstrel shows. She later claimed that she was first exposed to blues music around 1902. She formed the Alabama Fun Makers Company with her husband, Will Rainey, but in 1906 they both joined Pat Chappelle's much larger and more popular Rabbit's Foot Company, in which they were billed together as "Black Face Song and Dance Comedians, Jubilee Singers [and] Cake Walkers". In 1910, she was described as "Mrs. Gertrude Rainey, our coon shouter". She continued with the Rabbit's Foot Company after it was taken over by a new owner, F. S. Wolcott, in 1912.

Beginning in 1914, the Rainey's were billed as Rainey and Rainey, Assassimators of the Blues. Wintering in New Orleans, she met numerous musicians, including Joe "King" Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet and Pops Foster. As the popularity of blues music increased, she became well known. Around this time, she met Bessie Smith, a young blues singer who was also making a name for herself. A story later developed that Rainey kidnapped Smith, forced her join the Rabbit's Foot Minstrels, and taught her to sing the blues; the story was disputed by Smith's sister-in-law Maud Smith.

From the late 1910s, there was an increasing demand for recordings by black musicians. In 1920, Mamie Smith was the first black woman to be recorded. In 1923, Rainey was discovered by Paramount Records producer J. Mayo Williams. She signed a recording contract with Paramount, and in December she made her first eight recordings in Chicago, including "Bad Luck Blues", "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues". She made more than 100 other recordings over the next five years, which brought her fame beyond the South. Paramount marketed her extensively, calling her the "Mother of the Blues", the "Songbird of the South", the "Gold-Neck Woman of the Blues" and the "Paramount Wildcat".

In 1924 she made some recordings with Louis Armstrong, including "Jelly Bean Blues", "Countin' the Blues" and "See, See Rider". In the same year she embarked on a tour of the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA) in the South and Midwest of the United States, singing for black and white audiences.[16] She was accompanied by the bandleader and pianist Thomas Dorsey and the band he assembled, the Wildcats Jazz Band. They began their tour with an appearance in Chicago in April 1924 and continued, on and off, until 1928. Dorsey left the group in 1926 because of ill health and was replaced as pianist by Lillian Hardaway Henderson, the wife of Rainey's cometist Fuller Henderson, who became the band's leader.

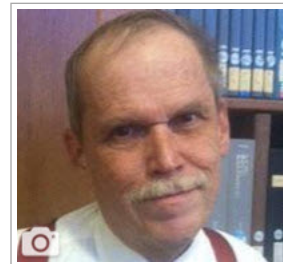
Some of Rainey's lyrics contain references to lesbianism or bisexuality, such as the 1928 song "Prove It on Me":

"They said I do it, ain't nobody caught me. Sure got to prove it on me. Went out last night with a crowd of my friends. They must've been women, cause I don't like no men."

According to the website queerculturalcenter.org, the lyrics refer to an incident in 1925 in which Rainey was "arrested for taking part in an orgy at [her] home involving women in her chorus." "Prove It on Me" further alludes to presumed lesbian behavior: "It's true I wear a collar and a tie... Talk to the gals just like any old man."

The political activist and scholar Angela Y. Davis noted that "'Prove It on Me' is a cultural precursor to the lesbian cultural movement of the 1970s, which began to crystallize around the performance and recording of lesbian-affirming songs." Towards the end of the 1920s, live vaudeville went into decline, being replaced by radio and recordings. Rainey's career was not immediately affected; she continued recording for Paramount and earned enough money from touring to buy a bus with her name

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on it. In 1928, she worked with Dorsey again and recorded 20 songs, before Paramount terminated her contract. Her style of blues was no longer considered fashionable by the label.

In 1935, Rainey returned to her hometown, Columbus, Georgia, where she ran three theatres, the Lyric the Airdrome, and The Liberty Theatre until her death. She died of a heart attack in 1939, at the age of 53, in Rome, Georgia.

Legacy

Rainey was inducted into the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.

Bob Dylan referred to Rainey in the song "Tombstone Blues" on his 1965 album Highway 61 Revisited, pairing her with Beethoven, perhaps as symbols of great art, a compliment to Rainey's stature as an artist ("where Ma Rainey and Beethoven once unwrapped their bedroll").[citation needed]

In 1981 Sandra Lieb wrote the first full-length book about Rainey, *Mother of the Blues: A Study of Ma Rainey*.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, a 1982 play by August Wilson, is a fictionalized account of the recording of her song of the same title in December 1927.

Sterling A. Brown wrote a poem, "Ma Rainey", in 1932, about how "When Ma Rainey / comes to town" people everywhere would hear her sing.

In 1994, the U.S. Post Office issued a 29-cent commemorative postage stamp honoring her.

In 2004, "See See Rider Blues" (written in 1925) was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame and was added to the National Recording Registry by the National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress.

Academy Award winner Mo'Nique played Rainey in the 2015 film *Bessie*.

The first annual Ma Rainey Blues Festival will be held in April 2016 in Columbus, Georgia, near the home that Rainey owned and lived in at the time of her death.

--Wikipedia



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Books of Interest

August Wilson and Black Aesthetics

"This book offers new essays and interviews addressing Wilson's work, ranging from examinations of the presence of Wilson's politics in his plays to the limitations of these politics on contemporary interpretations of Black aesthetics. Also includes an updated introduction assessing Wilson's legacy since his death in 2005."

August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle: Critical Perspectives on the Plays

"Providing a detailed study of American playwright August Wilson (1945-2005), this collection of new essays explores the development of the author's ethos across his twenty-five-year creative career--a process that transformed his life as he retraced the lives of his fellow 'Africans in America.' While Wilson's narratives of Pittsburgh and Chicago are microcosms of black life in America, they also reflect the psychological trauma of his disconnection with his biological father, his impassioned efforts to discover and reconnect with the blues, with Africa and with poet/activist Amiri Baraka, and his love for the vernacular of Pittsburgh."

Conversations with August Wilson

"collects a selection of the many interviews Wilson gave from 1984 to 2004. In the interviews, the playwright covers at length and in detail his plays and his background. He comments as well on such subjects as the differences between African Americans and whites, his call for more black theater companies, and his belief that African Americans made a mistake in assimilating themselves into the white mainstream. He also talks about his major influences, what he calls his "four B's"-the blues, writers James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka, and painter Romare Bearden. Wilson also discusses his writing process and his multiple collaborations with director Lloyd Richards."

Gem of the Ocean: Essays on August Wilson in the Black Diaspora

"The National Black Theatre Festival (NBTF) has become a fixture of the Winston-Salem, North Carolina community since its inception in 1989. At the 2007 NBTF International Colloquium presenters including Wole Soyinka, Kwame Dawes, Ed Bullins and over a dozen other scholars and writers shared works on the impact of August Wilson, on his plays, and on the state of African and African American theatre. Conference coordinator, Olasope O. Oyelaran, has gathered these essays in this volume, *Gem of the Ocean: August Wilson in the Black Diaspora*, which pays tribute to both August Wilson and NBTF founder Larry Leon Hamlin. With this collection, Oyelaran adds to the already expanding canon of writing that celebrates Wilson's contributions to the world stage."

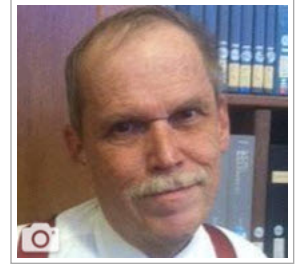
Ma Rainey and the Classic Blues Singers

"This book is filled with information about Ma Rainey and other female blues singers. It is lavishly illustrated with black and white photos and illustrations. It is a critical discussion of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and the 'classic' women singers of the 'twenties who first put blues on record and established its relationship to jazz."

Understanding August Wilson

"August Wilson counts among America's greatest playwrights--having garnered commercial success on Broadway and critical acclaim including New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, Drama Desk Awards, Tony Awards, and two Pulitzer Prizes. This revised edition of *Understanding August Wilson* provides a comprehensive view of the thematic structure of Wilson's plays, the placement of his work within the context of American drama, and the distinctively African American experiences and traditions that he dramatizes. Mary L. Bogumil argues that Wilson gave voice to disfranchised and marginalized African Americans who were promised a stake in the American dream but find their access blocked. The author maintains that Wilson wished not only to portray the predicaments of African American life but also to shed light on the atavistic connection African Americans have to their African ancestors. Bogumil explains that the playwright's work both perpetuates and subverts the tradition of American drama in order to expose the distinct differences between white American and African American experiences..."

Subject Guide



Anthony Anderson

Subjects:

Africa, Europe, History, Holocaust & Genocide Studies, Languages & Literatures, Performing Arts, United States & Canada





(MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM - Mark Taper Forum)

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August Wilson

"A conversation between television journalist, Bill Moyers, and playwright, August Wilson, in which they discuss Wilson's plays and the Black experience in America."

August Wilson: The Ground on Which I Stand

"Explore the life and legacy of August Wilson, the playwright some call America's Shakespeare, who chronicled the twentieth-century black experience. Features James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, Laurence Fishburne, Viola Davis, new dramatic readings, and rare footage."

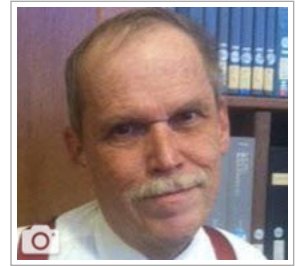
The Piano Lesson

"August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning tale of a family caught between their heritage and a dream for the future. The Charles family clashes over the fate of a magnificent, carved piano that carries their family's story from their days as slaves. Boy Willie wants to sell the piano to buy a farm--the same fields their family worked as slaves. But his sister, Berniece, refuses to part with it. For her, the piano is their very soul, a legacy of pride and struggle that symbolizes their survival as a family. To resolve the conflict they must first deal with the past."



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