

AUGUST WILSON'S FENCES



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

FENCES

written by August Wilson

directed by Monty Cole

FEATURING



Kamal Angelo
Bolden



Manny
Buckley*



Shanésia
Davis



Ajax
Dontavious



Martel
Manning



William Anthony
Sebastian Rose II



Riley
Wells

This is the sensational drama about Troy Maxson, a former star of the Negro Baseball League, who now works as a garbage man in Pittsburgh. Troy and his wife Rose want the American Dream – to own a house with a white picket fence that keeps the family safe and trouble out. When mistrust builds and secrets are revealed, this iconic Black family begins to crumble in America’s embrace. Director Monty Cole’s innovative and intimate production explodes Wilson’s masterful text with raw emotion. You’ve never seen *Fences* like this before!

**Ensemble member of American Blues Theater*

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

American Blues Theater is located in Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations. City of Chicago was founded by the son of an enslaved African woman who was regarded as the first non-Indigenous settler. His name was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable.

Many other nations including the Myaamia, Wea, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Thakiwaki, Meskwaki, Kiikaapoi, and Mascouten peoples also call this region home. This land has long been a center for Indigenous people to gather, trade, and maintain kinship ties.

Today, Chicago is home to one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States, and the country’s oldest urban-based Native membership community center, the American Indian Center Chicago.

American Blues Theater makes this acknowledgment as part of our commitment to dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.

To learn more about land acknowledgments visit nativegov.org.

To learn more about & engage with the American Indian Center Chicago (AIC), visit aicchicago.org.

NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**



We are thrilled to welcome you to August Wilson’s *Fences*. Wilson is one of the greatest voices of American theater. His masterpiece script *Fences* debuted in 1985 and won the Pulitzer Prize for drama, among many other theater honors. Wilson created the seminal ten-play “American Century Cycle”, of which *Fences* was the third work.

Wilson’s language, emotional potency, and relevance make his plays sought after by patrons and artists alike. It’s exciting to present the next generation’s vision of this important work. We’re honored to share Director Monty Cole’s bold staging as it illuminates the language anew.

August Wilson famously asked, “What do you do with legacy, and how do you best put it to use?”

Numerous generations - from Wilson historians, collaborators that knew him personally, returning audience members, to those experiencing his work for the first time – know exactly what to do with his legacy.

We pass it on.

We share.

We reflect our humanity past, present, and future.

- Gwendolyn Whiteside



Playwright August Wilson in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, in front of his childhood home.

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT AUGUST WILSON

AUGUST WILSON (April 27, 1945 – October 2, 2005) authored *Jitney*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, *King Hedley II*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and *Radio Golf*. These works explore the heritage and experience of the descendants of Africans in North America, decade by decade, over the course of the twentieth century, forming the compilation entitled *The American Century Cycle*.

His plays have been produced on Broadway, at regional theaters across the country, and all over the world. Mr. Wilson's works garnered many awards including: the Pulitzer Prize for *Fences* (1987) and for *The Piano Lesson* (1990); a Tony Award for *Fences*; Great Britain's Olivier Award for *Jitney*; and seven New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. Additionally, the cast recording of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* received a 1985 Grammy Award, and Mr. Wilson received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for his screenplay adaptation of *The Piano Lesson*.

Mr. Wilson received many fellowships and awards, including the Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwriting, the Whiting Writers Award and the 2003 Heinz Award. He was awarded a 1999 National Humanities Medal by President Bill Clinton and received numerous honorary degrees from colleges and universities, as well as the only high school diploma ever issued by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. He was an alumnus of New Dramatists, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a 1995 inductee into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and on October 16, 2005, Broadway renamed the theater located at 245 West 52nd Street "The August Wilson Theatre."

Mr. Wilson was born and raised in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and lived in Seattle, Washington at the time of his death. He is immediately survived by his two daughters, Sakina Ansari and Azula Carmen Wilson, and his wife, costume designer Constanza Romero, who is the executor of his estate.



NOTE FROM DIRECTOR MONTY COLE

Hello and Welcome to American Blues Theater's production of *FENCES*,

In 2018, I directed a production of *Hamlet* at The Gift Theatre in Chicago. At the center of it was an astounding performance by Daniel Kyri playing a young black man wrestling with the weight of losing his father. Only three months before, I had lost my own father and was now directing this production while living in my family home, haunted by memories. When I create work with folks, it comes from a place of personal questioning. It's usually a question that I can't answer for myself. I need collaborators, artists, audiences to ask the question with me. Losing my dad so suddenly left me with questions that have permeated my work - questions of family, of duty and responsibility, of how to love, of how to be a father, of how to move forward together.

While re-reading *Fences*, I saw my father again in the character of Troy Maxson. I saw someone who was charming, funny, blunt, and taking swings at the unfair pitches thrown to him as a Black man. I saw someone who loved in his own way. I saw my father and I saw myself.

I sit somewhere between Troy and his older son Lyons so I can remember how it felt to laugh with my dad, to ask and be asked for money, and to confront him for the first time. However, as my wife and I consider having children of our own, I also understand the fears of raising a young black boy in today's America, to not know if you have enough to raise a child the way you want to. I know the need to reach higher in order to give something better to the generations that come after us. And I know what it feels like to pursue the American Dream while feeling trapped by it.

The Maxsons are pursuing the American Dream too. They build a white picket fence in the hopes of keeping love in and danger out. The Maxsons know the game is rigged against them, but as Black folks, they have to play the game anyway to prepare a better future for their children. Troy reaches for something better in his own self interest, shoving down others for his own success and happiness. Despite all his talk of duty and responsibility to his family, his actions, his constant sacrifices to a devilish capitalist system lead to an eventual spiritual rot. *Fences* questions whether the pursuit of the American Dream amounts to freedom or does it wall us in, creating division in the pursuit of our own individual upward mobility.

There was a time before my dad passed when my parents considered getting a new fence around our yard to replace the chain link one. My mom refused to get the wooden fence - she wanted to see her neighbors. It's that seeking of community that brings joy, growth and empathy. And it's in those glorious moments when our black skin glows from the joy and love of each other's company, stepping together in time instead of stepping alone, it feels like the walls of Jericho have fallen down and we're one step closer to salvation.

Monty Cole
Director

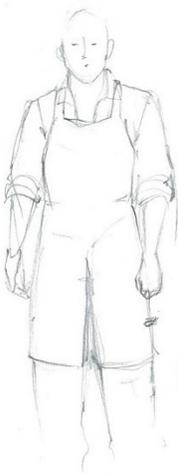


COSTUME DESIGN: SKETCHES AND RESEARCH

Below are Costume Designer Stephanie Cluggish's preliminary sketches and research images for the roles of Troy, Rose, and Gabriel in *Fences*.

fences - troy - kamal angelo bolden

split leg
work apron



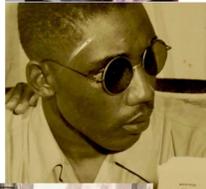
C.D. 11879
COSTUME DESIGNER
SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

-work shirt over undershirt
add glasses and/or hat

fences - rose - shanesia davis



fences - gabriel - manny buckley



C.D. 11879
COSTUME DESIGNER
SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE WHITE PICKET FENCE AND BLACK PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

In August Wilson's *Fences*, Troy and his wife Rose want the American Dream – to own a house with a white picket fence that keeps the family safe and trouble out. Below is a look at the symbolism of the white picket fence and the history of Black property ownership in the United States.

The term "American Dream" was coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931, saying that "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. In the United States, home ownership is often used as a proxy for achieving the promised prosperity of the "American Dream."

THE WHITE PICKET FENCE

Hand in hand with home ownership, the white picket fence holds iconic status in America, symbolizing the ideal middle-class suburban life, with a family and children, large house, and peaceful living. This stems from the fact that houses in quiet, middle-class neighborhoods often have yards enclosed by picket fences.

As Michael Dolan explains in ["How Did the White Picket Fence Become a Symbol of the Suburbs?"](#): picket fences first appeared in America during the colonial era when colonists installed fences of rough pickets, bare or painted white, to demarcate and defend their land. In the 19th century, mass production made fence parts cheaper and fancier, and the picket fence became fashionable from New England to Key West. The modest totem of middle-class prosperity stood even through the 1930s, when many American households couldn't afford to whitewash a fence, let alone an entire house.

The white picket fence declined in popularity during the Cold War, as many '50s-era suburbanites chain-linked their lots. But the symbolism of the white picket fence was inescapable, and it slid into popular culture as a visual shorthand for the good life. A kind, gentle America posed behind the pickets in television fantasies like "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver"—an imaginary all-white realm in which the worst thing that could happen was Eddie Haskell teasing the Beaver.

BLACK PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Black individuals and families have been largely excluded from this home ownership "American Dream" throughout



the majority of American history.

When slavery was abolished in 1865, Black Americans began seeking out land of their own, which led to Special Field Order 15. The order issued freed Black people 40 acres of land that lay on the coastline of Georgia and South Carolina. In addition, the mules that had been used in the war and were now idle were expected to be offered to these Black Americans for use in farming, leading to the phrase "forty acres and a mule."

Approximately 40,000 freed slaves were settled in over 400,000 acres of land, but their claims were contested by rice plantation farmers who claimed to own the land. After Lincoln's assassination in April 1865 the Presidency was assumed by Vice-President Andrew Johnson, who overturned Special Field Order 15. The new presidential order required Black landowners to return the land to the white rice plantation farmers, a move that was vehemently opposed by the Black landowners.

At one point during the Reconstruction era, Black people had gained ownership over about 15 million acres, which meant that they were also in control of 14% of the farms located in the United States (that is 925,000 farms owned by Black people). However, this number is drastically different from 20th century figures; in the 20th century Black people not only owned far less land in general but also owned only 2% of the farms located in the U.S.

Following the Reconstruction era and upon the institution

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE WHITE PICKET FENCE AND BLACK PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

of Jim Crow laws, it became increasingly difficult for Black Americans to own property.

Through the discriminatory practice of redlining, many banks in the U.S. denied mortgages to Black people for decades, preventing them from buying a home in certain neighborhoods or getting a loan to renovate their house. The practice—once backed by the U.S. government—started in the 1930s and took place across the country. That includes in many of the nation's largest cities, such as Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Tampa and others with large populations of Black Americans.

As a result, banks and other mortgage lenders commonly rejected loans for creditworthy borrowers based strictly on their race or where they lived. As part of that practice, financial firms, real estate agents, and other parties demarcated geographic areas that were effectively off limits for issuing loans.

The implementation of redlining accelerated the decay and isolation of inner-city neighborhoods through withholding of mortgage capital, making it even more difficult for neighborhoods to attract and retain families able to purchase homes. The discriminatory assumptions in redlining exacerbated residential racial segregation in the United States.

Scholars who study housing discrimination point to redlining as one factor behind the gulf in wealth between Black and white families in the U.S. today. The typical family living in a redlined area has lost out on at least \$212,000 in personal wealth over the last 40 years, according to [the real estate app Redfin](#).

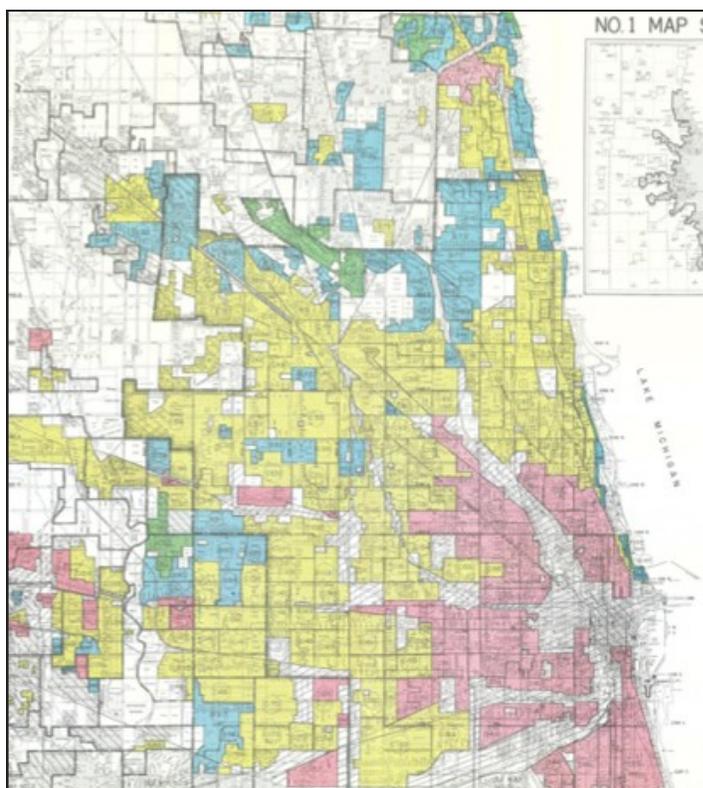
Federal law began prohibiting home lending discrimination with the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the 1977 Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). The first of these laws bans discrimination based on someone's race when the person is trying to rent or buy a home, as well as apply for a mortgage. The act also makes it illegal to impose predatory interest rates or fees.

However, the legacy of redlining hasn't disappeared.

Today, lenders engage in reverse redlining, which are predatory lending practices in the same neighborhoods that were once marked as off limits for borrowers. For example, in the years leading up to the 2008 housing crash, mortgage lenders peddled hundreds of thousands of risky subprime loans, including "no doc" and balloon-payment loans, to low-income borrowers.

There are also many other cases of applicants being denied a home loan because of their race, said Nikitra Bailey, executive vice president at the Center for Responsible Lending. Bailey pointed to a 2018 investigation by the advocacy group finding that Black, Latinx, and Asian applicants were turned away for loans at a higher rate than whites in many U.S. cities.

Without being able to build the generational wealth that comes with property ownership, many Black families have been shut out of the "American Dream" that the white picket fence symbolizes.



In this digital image of a map used decades ago for redlining in Chicago, areas marked in the faded pink show where lenders were discouraged from issuing mortgages. Map from University of Richmond.

"DON'T I COUNT?" RACISM BETWEEN THE NEGRO LEAGUE AND THE MAJORS

The protagonist of *Fences*, Troy, is a former star of the Negro Baseball League. Below is a brief history of the baseball color line, the Negro Leagues and the integration of the Major Leagues.

The color line, also known as the color barrier, in American baseball excluded Black players from Major League Baseball and its affiliated Minor Leagues until 1947 (with a few notable exceptions in the 19th century before the line was firmly established). Because Black players were not being accepted into the major and minor baseball leagues due to the racism which established the color line, they formed their own teams and had professional teams by the 1880s.

THE EARLY YEARS OF BLACK PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL

Immediately after the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and during the Reconstruction period that followed, a Black baseball scene formed in the East and Mid-Atlantic states. Comprising mainly ex-soldiers and promoted by some well-known Black officers, teams such as the Jamaica Monitor Club, Albany Bachelors, Philadelphia Excelsiors and Chicago Uniques started playing each other and any other team that would play against them.

By the end of the 1860s, the Black baseball mecca was Philadelphia. Two former cricket players, James H. Francis and Francis Wood, formed the Pythian Base Ball Club. They played in Camden, New Jersey, at the landing of the Federal Street Ferry, because it was difficult to get permits for Black baseball games in the city. Octavius Catto, the promoter of the Pythians, decided to apply for membership in the National Association of Baseball Players, normally a matter of sending delegates to the annual convention; beyond that, a formality. At the end of the 1867 season, "the National Association of Baseball Players voted to exclude any club with a Black player."

The first nationally known Black professional baseball

team was founded in 1885 when three clubs, the Keystone Athletics of Philadelphia, the Orions of Philadelphia, and the Manhattans of Washington, D.C., merged to form the Cuban Giants. Because the original Cuban Giants were a popular and business success, many similarly named teams came into existence—including the Cuban X-Giants, the Genuine Cuban Giants, the Columbia Giants, the Brooklyn Royal Giants, and so on. The early "Cuban" teams were all composed of Black Americans rather than Cubans; the purpose was to increase their acceptance with white patrons as Cuba was on very friendly terms with the U.S. during those years.

In 1888, Frank Leland got some of Chicago's Black businessmen to sponsor the Black amateur Union Base Ball Club. Eventually his team went pro and became the Chicago Union Giants (later renamed the Leland Giants). When pitcher Andrew "Rube" Foster joined the Leland Giants, he demanded that he be put in charge of not only the on-field activities but the bookings as well. Foster immediately turned the Giants into the team to beat. As early as 1910, Rube Foster started talking about reviving the concept of an all-Black league. The one thing he was insistent upon was that Black teams should be owned by Black men.

THE NEGRO LEAGUES

In February 1920, talks were held in Kansas City, Missouri that established the Negro National League and its governing body, the National Association of Colored Professional Base Ball Clubs. Foster was named league president and controlled every aspect of the league.

The NNL survived until 1932, primarily in the midwest, accompanied by the major Eastern Colored League for



The two opposing teams line up at the 1924 Colored World Series.

"DON'T I COUNT?" RACISM BETWEEN THE NEGRO LEAGUE AND THE MAJORS

several seasons. The Negro Southern League operated consecutively from 1920, usually at a lower level.

Gus Greenlee, a reputed gangster and numbers runner, purchased the Pittsburgh Crawfords in 1931. On August 6, 1931, Satchel Paige made his first appearance as a Crawford. In 1933, Greenlee, riding the popularity of his Crawfords, became the next man to start a Negro league. The name of the new league was the same as the old league, as the Negro National League had disbanded a year earlier in 1932.

In the 1940s, millions of Black Americans were working in war industries and, making good money, they packed league games in every city. Business was so good that promoter Abe Saperstein started a new circuit, the Negro Midwest League, a minor league similar to the Negro Southern League.

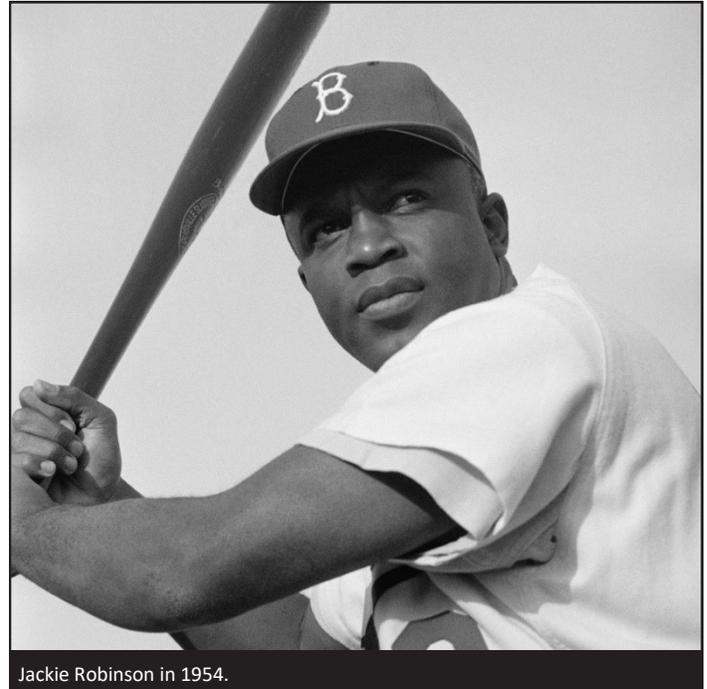
The Negro World Series was revived in 1942, this time pitting the winners of the eastern Negro National League and midwestern Negro American League. It continued through 1948 with the NNL winning four championships and the NAL three.

THE INTEGRATION OF THE MAJOR LEAGUES

After Baseball Commissioner Judge Keneshaw M. Landis died in 1944, Happy Chandler was named his successor. Chandler was open to integrating the game, even at the risk of losing his job as Commissioner.

The color line was broken for good when Jackie Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. On April 15, Robinson made his major league debut at the age of 28 at Ebbets Field before a crowd of 26,623 spectators, more than 14,000 of whom were Black.

Robinson's promotion met a generally positive, although mixed, reception among newspapers and white Major League players. However, racial tension existed in the Dodger clubhouse. Some Dodger players insinuated they would sit out rather than play alongside Robinson. Robinson was also derided by opposing teams. According to a press report, the St. Louis Cardinals threatened to strike if Robinson played and spread the walkout



Jackie Robinson in 1954.

across the entire National League. After it was published, National League President Ford Frick and Commissioner Chandler let it be known that any striking players would be suspended.

After the integration of the Major Leagues in 1947, interest in Negro League baseball waned. Black players who were regarded as prospects were signed by Major League teams, often without regard for any contracts that might have been signed with Negro League clubs. Negro League owners who complained about this practice were in a no-win situation: They could not protect their own interests without seeming to interfere with the advancement of players to the majors. By the late 1950s, the percentage of Black players on Major League teams matched or exceeded that of the general population.

LEGACY OF THE NEGRO LEAGUES

In December 2020, Major League Baseball announced that based on recent decades of historical research, it was adding to the six historical "Major League" designations it made in 1969. It classified the seven "Major Negro Leagues" as additional major leagues, thus recognizing statistics and approximately 3,400 players who played from 1920 to 1948.

BLACK MASCULINITY IN AMERICA

The theme of Black masculinity and the pressures that come with it are prominent in Wilson's writing. Below is a brief summary on the history of Black masculinity in America and how certain stereotypes about it are perpetuated through media and pop culture.

Black masculinity is an amalgamation of both Black and male identities. Over the past 400 years in America, Black masculinity has been shaped by historical perceptions of Black men, influenced by a long history of slavery, racism, and oppression. Black masculinity "is situated at the intersection of masculine entitlement and devalued Blackness" ([Black Masculinity Under Racial Capitalism](#)).

HISTORY AND STEREOTYPES

The contemporary construction of Black masculinity can be traced to the legacy of slavery beginning in 1619. Chattel slavery diminished Black people to profit-making bodies, stripped of both their autonomy and dignity. The commodification was gender specific, as Black men and Black women assumed different roles of objectification. Black men specifically performed physical activities requiring strength utilized in forms of inhumane manual labor. To justify the brutal working conditions, society constructed racist narratives that Black men were big, strong, unintelligent, and violent.

In response to these kind of stereotypes, a culture of respectability politics was born in the decades following the abolishment of slavery. In the context of Black American history, respectability politics was practiced as a

way of attempting to consciously set aside and undermine cultural and moral practices thought to be disrespected by wider society, especially in the context of the family and good manners.

In placing the blame of oppression on the oppressed individuals instead of on structural racism, respectability politics asserts that "by adopting a certain lifestyle, Black people can inoculate themselves from discrimination" ([NPR](#)).

In the context of Black masculinity, respectability politics creates pressure for Black men to dress, speak, and act in a way that complies with white, middle-class cultural norms.

Today, the Black Lives Matter movement is an example of a movement against respectability politics. The movement formed in response to a number of police killings of unarmed Black men that gained broad national attention and motivated a conversation about racial stereotypes, and why certain racial stereotypes came to imply Black men are "dangerous." The Black Lives Matter movement argues that people are deserving of rights regardless of their appearance or behavior. Instead of acknowledging and shying away from negative Black stereotypes, the Black Lives Matter movement works to expand the



Striking members of Memphis Local 1733 in the sanitation workers' 1968 campaign.

BLACK MASCULINITY IN AMERICA

concept of what it means to be "respectable" and argue that negatively stereotyped behavior should not be met with deadly force.

REPRESENTATIONS IN POP CULTURE

Popular culture often feeds upon displays forms of hyper-masculine Black men in literature, film, music, and sports entertainment, and often pushes a narrative of Black masculinity as violent, sexualized, and/or criminal.

MUSIC

Hip-hop and rap music are common expressions of Black masculinity in America. Hip-hop was created as a tool of expression for Black men in the inner cities of America during the latter half of the 20th century. The stories in rap songs have showcased the experiences of Black men in America since the 1980s.

SPORTS

Since the 1960s, when institutions of professional sports were "white only," Black men have risen to represent a large portion of professional athletes. According to the 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card of the NBA, 74.4% of the players in the league are Black. Black men in the NFL and NBA are lauded for their incredible strength and athleticism. However, racist stereotypes of inhumanly physical dominance and academic incompetence have contributed to constructions of hegemonic masculinity which confine Black men to one dimensional identities.

For example, when LeBron James appeared on the *Vogue* cover in 2008, it was the first time a Black male graced the cover of the magazine. The cover's resemblance to a famous image of King Kong sparked conversations of how Black professional athletes are understood in society, and portrayed by the media.

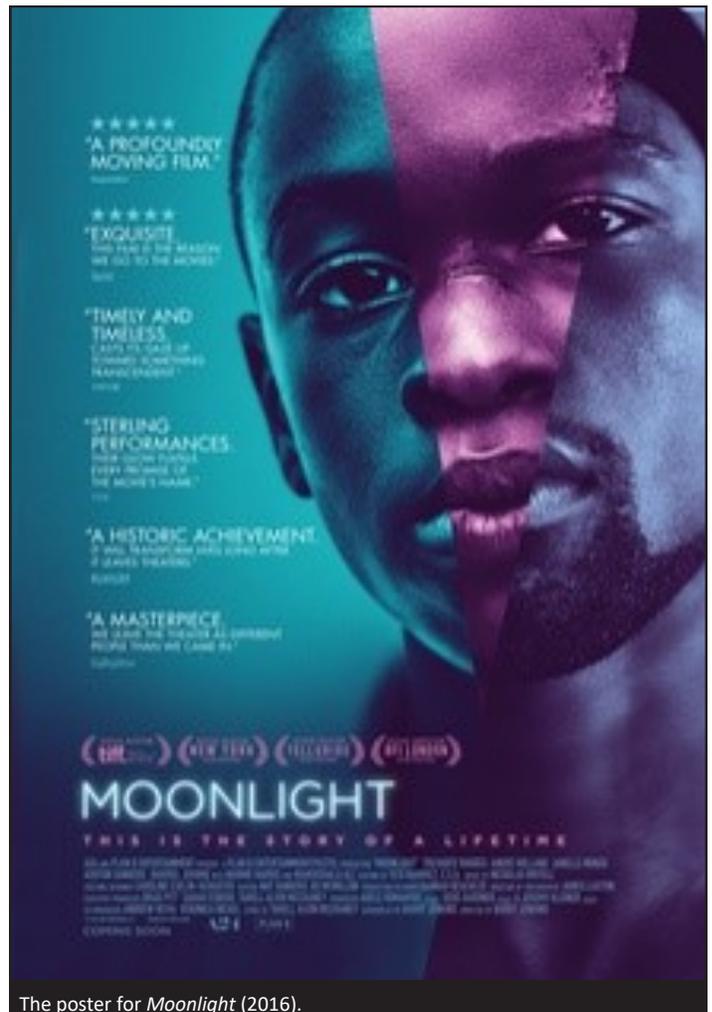
REFRAMING BLACK MASCULINITY IN POP CULTURE

The authors of *Crossroads, Directions, and a New Critical Race Theory* write that the way to subvert the messages of the dominant culture is by "challenging stereotypes and presenting and representing people of color as complex and heterogeneous." This can be done through illuminating counter narratives to hegemonic Black

masculine identities, as well as diversifying images of Black masculinity in the public eye.

One example of an alternative narrative of Black masculinity in pop culture is the 2016 film *Moonlight*. It tells the story of a gay Black man and showcases sexual fluidity and emotional vulnerability, which contrasts with the dominant stereotypes about Black masculinity.

In addition, a new generation of hip-hop music has played a pivotal role in combatting hegemonic forms of Black masculinity consumed by American popular culture. Hip-hop icons such as Frank Ocean, Kid Cudi, Kendrick Lamar, and Lil Nas X have opened avenues for alternate expressions of masculinity.



The poster for *Moonlight* (2016).

BLACK CHRISTIANITY AND THE HEALING POWER OF GOSPEL MUSIC

Black Christianity and gospel music are central components of *Fences*. Throughout the play, characters sing songs to balm the pain or send out their hopes. Below is a brief overview of the origins and power of Black Christianity and gospel music.

BLACK CHRISTIANITY

The origins of Black Christianity in America can be traced to the late 18th century, when Evangelical Baptist and Methodist preachers traveled throughout the South to appeal directly to enslaved Black people. A few thousand enslaved people converted due to these efforts, and Black individuals found opportunities to have active roles in new congregations. This was especially true in the Baptist Church, where they were appointed as leaders and preachers. They were excluded from such roles in the Anglican or Episcopal Church.

As they listened to readings, enslaved people developed their own interpretations of the Scriptures and found inspiration in stories of deliverance, such as the Exodus out of Egypt. Nat Turner, an enslaved Baptist preacher, was inspired to armed rebellion against slavery, in an uprising that killed about 50 white people in Virginia.

Following this and other rebellions against slavery in the early 19th century, Virginia passed a law requiring Black congregations to meet only in the presence of a white minister. Other states similarly restricted exclusively Black churches or the assembly of Black people in large groups unsupervised by whites. Nevertheless, the Black Baptist congregations in the cities grew rapidly and their members numbered several hundred each before the Civil War. While mostly led by free Black people, most of their members were enslaved.

Following the Civil War, Black churches created communities and worship practices that were culturally distinct from other churches, including forms of Christian worship that derived from African spiritual traditions, such as call and response. These churches also became the centers of communities, serving as school sites, taking up social welfare functions, and establishing orphanages and prison ministries. As a result, Black churches were particularly important during the Civil Rights Movement.

One formalization of theology based on themes of Black liberation is the Black liberation theology movement. Black liberation theology was first systematized by James

Cone and Dwight Hopkins. They are considered the leading theologians of this system of belief, although now there are many scholars who have contributed a great deal to the field. In 1969, Cone published the seminal work that laid the basis for Black liberation theology, *Black Theology and Black Power*. In the book, Cone asserted that not only was Black power not alien to the Gospel, it was, in fact, the Gospel message for all of 20th century America. In 2008, approximately one quarter of Black churches followed a liberation theology.

The Black church continues to be a source of support for members of the Black community. When compared to American churches as a whole, Black churches tend to focus more on social issues such as poverty, gang violence, drug use, prison ministries and racism. A study in 1996 found that Black Christians were more likely to have heard about health care reform from their pastors than were white Christians.

GOSPEL MUSIC

Black gospel music is rooted in the conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity starting with work songs sung in the fields and, later, with religious songs sung in various church settings. These religious songs were later classified as Negro spirituals, which shaped much of traditional Black gospel.

Black gospel music has roots in the Black aural tradition—the passing down of history via the spoken word rather than in writing. In colonial America, where enslaved Black people were prevented from being formally educated, oral and otherwise non-written communication became the method not only for cultural patrimony, but for virtually all communication.

Some of this communication (including work songs sung in the fields) was used to organize, including plans for retaliation against their enslavers and for escape. This eventually led to the banning of drums in many parts of colonial America. As such, most Black churches relied on hand-clapping and foot-stomping as rhythmic

BLACK CHRISTIANITY AND THE HEALING POWER OF GOSPEL MUSIC

accompaniment. West African dance and ring shout traditions developed among early Black Christians into shouting, in which fast-paced gospel music is accompanied by equally rapid (often frenzied) dancing. This, along with the repetition and call and response elements familiar to West African music, helped to engender an ecstatic state and to strengthen communal bonds. These elements also enabled illiterate members the opportunity to participate.

Negro spirituals were the earliest form of Black gospel. Music, religion, and everyday life are inseparable in the spirituals, and through them, religious ideals were infused into the activities of everyday life. As Thomas Barker explains in "Spatial Dialectics: Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song," the spirituals provided some immunity protecting the African American religion from being colonized, and in this way preserved the "sacred as a potential space of resistance."

Spirituals were not simply different versions of hymns or Bible stories, but rather a creative altering of the material; new melodies and music, refashioned text, and stylistic

differences helped to set apart the music as culturally distinct.

Jubilee songs and sorrow songs were two types of spirituals that emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries. Jubilee songs, also known as "camp meeting songs," are fast-paced, rhythmic, and often syncopated. They are spiritual songs which looked forward to a time of future happiness, or deliverance from tribulation.

W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "Sorrow Songs" in his book, 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Sorrow songs are spirituals, such as, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" that are intense and melancholic and are sung at a slower pace.

Black Gospel music has been traditionally concerned with the Black quest for freedom. It has provided both spiritual and communal uplift, first in the fields, and later in the Black church. During the 1960s era in the South, it was described as the "soundtrack of the struggle for civil rights," helping create unity and faith for the work.



Worshippers at Holy Angel Catholic Church on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois in 1973. Photo by John H. White.

BLACK MEN IN WORLD WAR II AND THE TREATMENT OF BLACK VETERANS

In *Fences*, Troy's brother Gabriel has a metal plate in his head due to a World War II injury. Below is a brief summary of the service of Black men in World War II and the treatment of Black veterans, both then & now.

When the Selective Training and Service Act became the nation's first peacetime draft law in September 1940, civil rights leaders pressured President Franklin D. Roosevelt to allow Black men the opportunity to register and serve in integrated regiments.

Although Black men had participated in every conflict since the Revolutionary War, they had done so segregated, and FDR appointee Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, was not interested in changing the status quo. With a need to shore up the U.S. Armed Forces as war intensified in Europe, FDR decided that Black men could register for the draft, but they would remain segregated and the military would determine the proportion of Black men inducted into the service.

The compromise represented the paradoxical experience that befell the 1.2 million Black men who served in World War II: they fought for democracy overseas while being treated like second-class citizens by their own country.

In 1942, the Black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*—in

response to a letter to the editor by James G. Thompson, a 26-year-old Black soldier, in which he wrote, "Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?"—launched the Double V Campaign. The slogan, which stood for a victory for democracy overseas and a victory against racism in America, was touted by Black journalists and activists to rally support for equality for Black people. The campaign highlighted the contributions the soldiers made in the war effort and exposed the discrimination that Black soldiers endured while fighting for liberties that they themselves didn't have.

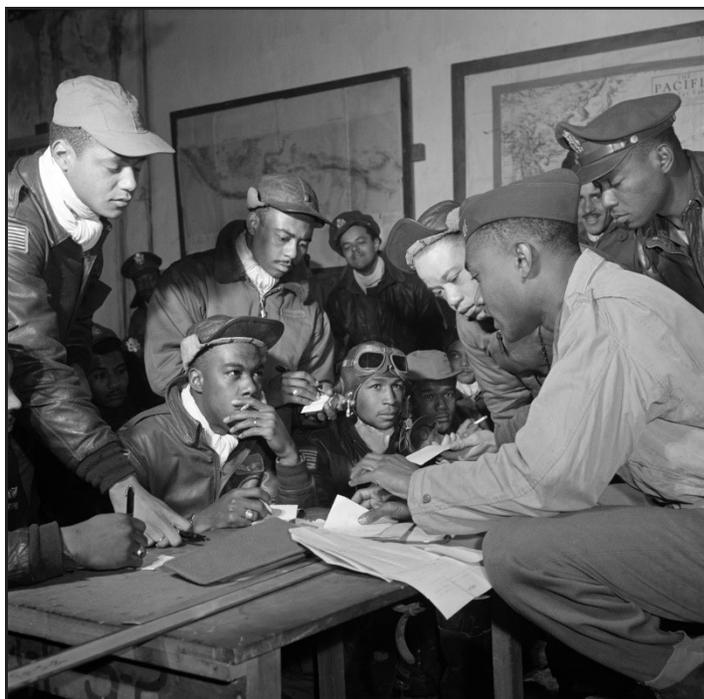
Black service men fought in the Pacific, Mediterranean, and European war zones, including the Battle of the Bulge and the D-Day invasion.

As casualties mounted among white soldiers toward the final year of the war, the military had to utilize Black men as infantrymen, officers, tankers, and pilots, in addition to remaining invaluable in supply divisions.

From August 1944 to November 1944, the Red Ball



Battery A of the 452nd AAA Battalion. November 9, 1944



Several Tuskegee airmen at Ramitelli, Italy. March 1945.

BLACK MEN IN WORLD WAR II AND THE TREATMENT OF BLACK VETERANS

Express, a unit of mostly Black drivers, delivered gasoline, ammunition, food, mechanical parts and medical supplies to General George Patton's Third Army in France, driving up to 400 miles on narrow roads in the dead of night without headlights to avoid detection by the Germans.

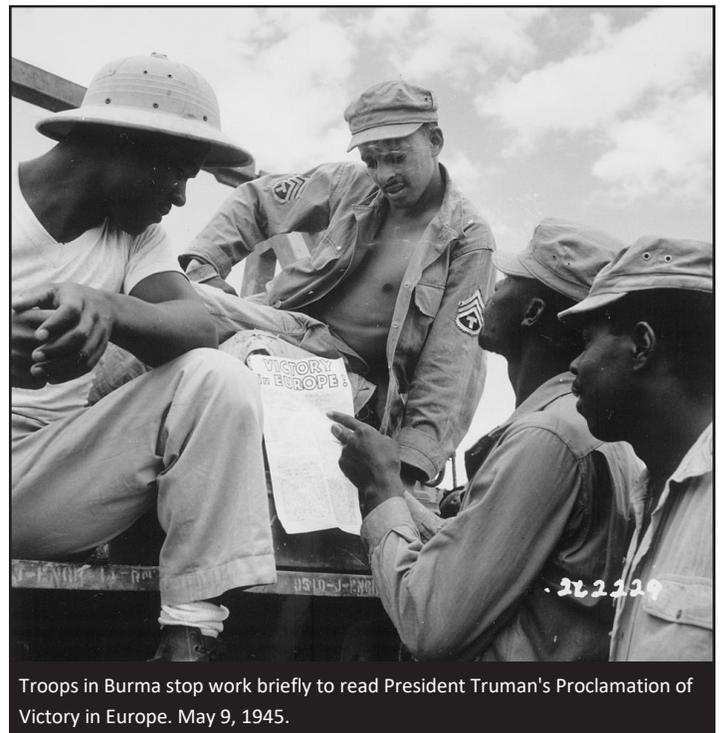
The 761 Tank Battalion, became the first Black division to see ground combat in Europe, joining Patton's Third Army in France in November 1944. The men helped liberate 30 towns under Nazi control and spent 183 days in combat, including in the Battle of the Bulge. The Tuskegee Airmen, the all-Black fighter pilot group trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, escorted bombers over Italy and Sicily, flying 1600 combat missions and destroying 237 German aircraft on ground and 37 in air.

After World War II officially ended on September 2, 1945, Black soldiers returned home to the United States facing violent white mobs of those who resented Black men in uniform and perceived them as a threat to the social order of Jim Crow.

In addition to racial violence, Black soldiers were often denied benefits guaranteed under the G.I. Bill, the sweeping legislation that provided tuition assistance, job placement, and home and business loans to veterans.

As civil rights activists continued to emphasize America's

hypocrisy as a democratic nation with a Jim Crow army, and Southern politicians stood firmly against full racial equality for Blacks, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces in July 1948. Full integration, however, would not occur until the Korean War.



Troops in Burma stop work briefly to read President Truman's Proclamation of Victory in Europe. May 9, 1945.

TREATMENT OF BLACK VETERANS TODAY

Unfortunately Black veterans today still face discrimination, a lack of access to resources, and other barriers when they leave the military. Below are a few statistics from [Black Veterans Project](#) that illustrate the experiences of many of Black veterans today.

2M

There are more than 2 million Black veterans in the United States.

33%

Black veterans account for a third of our nation's homeless veteran population.

2X

Black veterans are twice as likely to live in poverty than their white counterparts.

RESOURCES FOR HEALING FROM EMOTIONAL AND RACIAL TRAUMA

For those seeking counseling or a safe space to heal from emotional or racial trauma, below are some resources that can help provide you with the tools and information that you may need.

ASSOCIATION OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS SELF-CARE TOOL KIT

A self-care tool kit for families & communities. Written in English and Spanish.

BLACK EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH COLLECTIVE

A national training, movement building, and grant making institution that is dedicated to the healing, wellness, and liberation of Black and marginalized communities.

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH - MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

List of Chicago-area resources compiled by the Chicago Department of Public Health, including local support groups, treatment programs, therapy, and more.

THE FAMILY INSTITUTE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Family Institute brings together a diverse group of leading therapists to provide behavioral health care to children, adults, couples and families across the lifespan.

THE LOVELAND FOUNDATION—LOVELAND THERAPY FUND

With the barriers affecting access to treatment by members of diverse ethnic and racial groups, Loveland Therapy Fund provides financial assistance to Black women and girls nationally seeking therapy.

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA

Information about racial trauma, as well as therapist directories and other resources.

NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. They promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care, and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.

RESOURCES FOR BLACK HEALING

Black healing resources from the University of North Carolina Wilmington Counseling Center.

SAFE BLACK SPACE

Creates opportunities for Black people to heal and thrive.

VERY WELL MIND

An extensive collection of mental health resources and organizations for the Black community.

ABOUT **AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.**

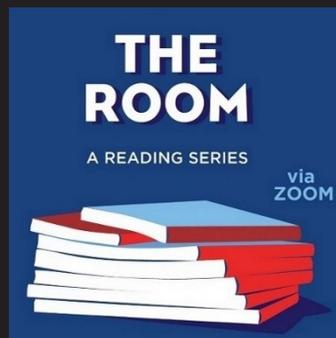
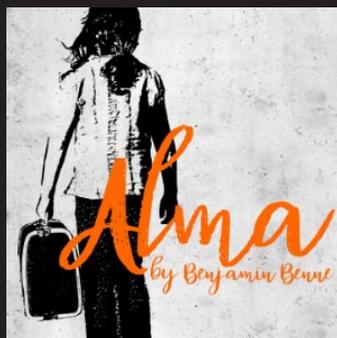
We are Chicago's **second-oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater**. As of 2022, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays. Our Arts Education offerings include acclaimed programming in Chicago Public School classrooms, artist-led instruction for all ages through *Classes for the Masses*, and being a Chicago-anchor for the national *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* program.

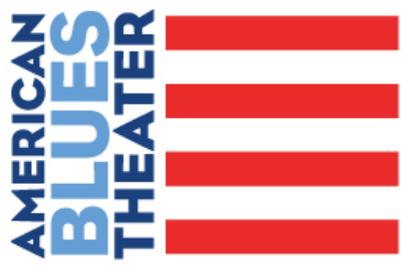
We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**

UPCOMING EVENTS AT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER



Visit AmericanBluesTheater.com to learn more.



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