

August Wilson's Radio Golf

Directed by Jude Sandy





Education

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Prepared by Joi Wright & Trinity Rep's Education Department
Designed by Jessica Thomas

Performance photos by Mark Turek from Trinity Rep's 2020 production of *Radio Golf*

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Theater Audience Etiquette & Discussion

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND GO OVER WITH YOUR CLASSES BEFORE THE SHOW

TEACHERS

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is ESSENTIAL. Students should be aware that this is a live performance and that they should not talk during the show. If you do nothing else to prepare your students to see the play, please take some time to talk to them about theater etiquette in an effort to help the students better appreciate their experience. It will enhance their enjoyment of the show and allow other audience members to enjoy the experience. The questions below can help guide the discussions. Thank you for your help and enjoy the show!

ETIQUETTE

What is the role of the audience in a live performance? How is it different from seeing a film? Why shouldn't you talk during the play? What can happen in live theater that cannot happen in cinema?

Reiterate that students may not talk during the performance. Please make sure all cell phones and alarms are turned off. Recording devices and cameras are strictly prohibited. If there is a disturbance, they will be asked to leave and the class may not be invited back to the theater. Students may not leave the building during intermission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW AT TRINITY REP

What are the differences between live theater and cinema? (Two dimensional vs. three dimensional; larger than life on the screen vs. life-size; recorded vs. live, etc.) Discuss the nature of film as mass-produced, versus the one-time only nature of live performances. Talk about original art works vs. posters. Which do they feel is more valuable? Why? What is the responsibility of an audience when watching a play? What is the responsibility of an audience when watching a Shakespeare play?

Observation #1

When you get into the theater, look around. What do you see? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.

Observation #2

Discuss the elements that go into producing a live performance: The lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the "behind the scenes" elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students' eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast?

Pay attention to when you're excited about something on stage. What excited you? Pay attention to when you're bored. Why were you bored? What would you have done differently to make the play more interesting? **Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students' reactions to the play.** Ask the students to write letters to the actors about the characters they played and to ask questions of the actors.

Send these letters to: Trinity Repertory Company, c/o Education, 201 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903 or email to: education@trinityrep.com.

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A Letter from Associate Education Director Matt Tibbs

Welcome to Trinity Rep and the 54th season of Project Discovery! The education staff at Trinity Rep had a lot of fun preparing this study guide and hope that the activities included will help you incorporate the play into your academic study. It is also structured to help you to introduce performance into your classroom through the following elements:

- **COMMUNITY BUILDING IN YOUR CLASSROOM**
- **INSPIRATION AND BACKGROUND ON THE ARTIST**
- **ENTERING AND COMPREHENDING TEXT**
- **CREATING TEXT FOR PERFORMANCE**
- **PERFORMING IN YOUR CLASS**
- **REFLECTING ON YOUR PERFORMANCE**

Trinity Rep's Project Discovery student matinées help high school students in the following common core areas (for more information on the National Core Arts Standards, visit

<http://nationalartsstandards.org/>):

- Initiate and participate effectively in a ranges of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively (CCS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1)
- Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme (CCSS.RL.9-10.3)
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (CCSS.RL.9-10.4)
- Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work (TH: Cn10.1.I.)
- Analyze and compare artistic choices developed from personal experiences in multiple drama/theatre works (TH: Re8.1.I.)
- Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices (TH: Re7.1.I.)
- Evaluate and analyze problems and situations in a drama/theatre work from an audience perspective (TH: Re9.1.I.)

Enjoy the show!



Matt Tibbs, Associate Education Director



2019–20 Season at the Lederer Theater Center

under the direction of

Curt Columbus

Tom Parrish

The Arthur P. Solomon and

Executive Director

Sally E. Lapidés Artistic Director

August Wilson's **Radio Golf**

THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Directed by **Jude Sandy**

Set Design by **Michael McGarty & Baron E. Pugh**

Costume Design by **Yao Chen**

Lighting Design by **Amith Chandrashaker**

Sound Design by **Larry D. Fowler, Jr.**

Production Stage Managed by **Meg Tracy Leddy***

January 30 – March 1, 2020

in the Sarah and Joseph Dowling, Jr. Theater

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PICTURED ON THE COVER: JOE WILSON, JR.
COSTUME BY AMANDA DOWNING CARNEY • IMAGE BY MICHAEL GUY

THE CAST

Harmond Wilks **Joe Wilson, Jr.****

Mame Wilks **Tonia Jackson***

Roosevelt Hicks **Omar Robinson***

Sterling Johnson **Dereks Thomas***

Elder Joseph Barlow **Ricardo Pitts-Wiley***

Understudy for Mame Wilks **Jackie Davis***

Time and Place: **1997, The Hill District, Pittsburgh, PA**

Radio Golf is performed **with one intermission.**

Production Director **Laura E. Smith**

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors & stage managers
‡ Trinity Rep Resident Acting Company member
Understudies never substitute for a listed player unless a specific announcement is made at the time of performance.

Originally produced on Broadway by Jujamcyn Theaters, Margo Lion, Jeffrey Richards/Jerry Frankel, Tamara Tunie/Wendell Pierce, Fran Kirmser, Bunting Management Group, Georgia Frontiere/Open Pictures, Lauren Doll/Steven Greil & The AW Group, Wonder City, Inc./Townsend Teague in association with Jack Viertel and Gordon Davidson

First produced in New Haven, CT in April 2005 by Yale Repertory Theatre (James Bundy, Artistic Director; Victoria Nolan, Managing Director)

PLEASE TURN OFF cell phones and alarms during the performance. Texting and cell phone use are limited to intermission, outside the theater. **Photography, videotaping, and/or other video or audio recording of the performance by any means are strictly prohibited.**

Unit 1 Background

A Conversation with the Director: Jude Sandy

Joi Wright: In your own words could you walk us through the story of August Wilson's *Radio Golf*?

Jude Sandy: *Radio Golf* is the story of an upper middle class Pittsburgh couple by the name of Harmond and Mame Wilks. They are very successful professionals living in Pittsburgh in the 90s. They are on the verge of making a big leap in their economic fortunes and in their political participation. Harmond is about to run for mayor at the same time he is spearheading a big development that is going to bring urban renewal to the neighborhood, called the Hill District where he grew up. Basically the story is about what our success costs us. He discovers that one of the houses that he bought, by not exactly perfect means, is owned by someone in the community who is now at threat of losing their home. The face of gentrification. So the question for him becomes should he continue to pursue his success, both his financial and political success or should he make the difficult choice and return the house to its original owner. Which will certainly bring political and economic cost for him and his family.

JW: Thus far, what excites you most about this production of *Radio Golf*?

JS: I think what we've all been finding most exciting about this play is the incredible attention with which August Wilson creates these characters and guides us through the central conflict of the play of whether or not we should pursue success or be faithful to our communities. The language is incredible. It's so beautiful there are moments with just exquisite poetry in the play. Every one of the five characters in the play get to at least have one moment of really wonderful poetry where they bear their souls and they really share their humanity

with the audience. We've had this really deep experience of living with these people who feel at once really recognizable but also very heightened and the kind of ways in which they express themselves. Something else that's been really exciting about the play is that because it's his last play, the last play August Wilson wrote in his Century Cycle, it in some ways contains all of the themes and all of the history of the plays in that final play. There's a kind of homecoming you experience in the play that feels really momentous. I think both for those of us working on the play and for the audience as well.



Jude Sandy, Director

JW: What has been one of your greatest challenges thus far with working on this production, especially with executing August Wilson's later work?

JS: Perhaps the biggest challenge as a director in dealing with August Wilson's work is to really trust the magnitude of his genius. Directors want to direct, they want to do spectacular things on stage, they want to be very theatrical. You kind of have to resist the impulse to think of yourself as a co-author of the play and rather understand and accept that August Wilson himself has written this incredible work and we just need to hear it. You just have to get out of the way of the play and let the play happen. The only way that you can, as a director be successful is in the ways in which you support the play happening. There is no bells and whistles that you can add that's going to make it any better because it's already magnificent.

JW: When reading the play identity and masculinity really stood out to me as some of the major themes, especially in Harmond Wilks' life. What would you say are some of the major themes of *Radio Golf*?

JS: I think identity and masculinity are themes that run through all of August Wilson's work. Certainly you see these four men who are in four different stations of life in the play and they all have separate concerns but they all deal with what does it mean to be a full man, a successful man. I think success is a huge theme in the play. What success cost us and what we lose when we chase after certain symbols of success. The kind of success we've been taught in our culture to chase after. Capitalism is a huge theme as well because we see

characters who are trying to play by the rules of capitalism and not all of them are winning. Themes like fidelity are big in the play as well. Harmond, the central character who is very faithful in his relationship with his wife has to decide whether he's faithful to his values, whether he's faithful to this spirit of American capitalism, or whether he's faithful to the community that has already been ravaged in the late 20th century by certain aspects of capitalism. Lastly, I think a big theme of the play is what does it mean to do the right thing. I think everyone in this play, each of the five characters they all have their own specific ideas of what's right. They all fight for their idea of what's right, really passionately. We as the audience have to decide what we believe the right thing in this conflict is.

JW: Out of the five characters, who would you say you identify most with? If there is more than one, what are some characteristics that you identify with of the five characters

JS: As a director your job is to sort of fall in love with every single one of the characters, so it's impossible for me to choose a favorite. I'm in love with Mame's loyalty. Her loyalty to her husband, at the same time she's a very very independent person. She has to negotiate her independence and her loyalty when her husband makes the decision to follow a path that she can't follow with him. I'm in love with Harmond's desire to do good, that his intentions are pure. He has to make a decision about how his actions follows his intentions, so he has a real moral dilemma that he has to solve. I'm in love with the Roosevelt's ambition and his belief that if you work hard

enough that you can get anywhere. I'm in love with Old Joe's spirit and his level of memory. The way that he holds the memory of the community with him wherever he goes. I'm in love with Sterling and the way that he believes in community action. Sterling discovers his own power in the play when he decides to lead the protest and that power is found when he decides to do good on behalf of someone else. That kind of selflessness is something that I also really find admirable.

JW: What are some things you would like a student audience to take away from this production of August Wilson's *Radio Golf*?

JS: I think what more than anything else that I want students to get out of this production is a deep understanding of the fact that we are all human beings. We may look a little different we may sound a little different but that fundamentally we have the same needs. We want to be loved, we want to be part of a community and we don't want to be left behind or forgotten. We want to be seen as valid and valuable by other people. These were the things that August Wilson himself wanted his audience to see in his work. He wanted his audience to understand African-American people as a people. As a people that have their own culture, their own history that is distinct from other people. Within that specificity they are ultimately no different than anyone else because they love and they care and they get frustrated and they celebrate and they mourn just as everyone and just as deeply as anyone else does.

Biography of the Playwright: August Wilson



Playwright August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on April 27, 1945. He was the fourth of six children. His mother, Daisy Wilson, was of African-American heritage. His father was a German immigrant named Frederick Kittel. As a child, August attended St. Richard's Parochial School. When his parents divorced, he, his mother, and his

siblings moved from the poor Bedford Avenue area of Pittsburgh to the mostly white neighborhood of Oakland. After facing the relentless bigotry of his classmates at Central Catholic High School, he transferred to Connelly Vocational High School, and later to Gladstone High School. When he was 15 years old, Wilson pursued an independent education at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, where he would earn his high school diploma.

Following his father's death in 1965, 20-year-old Kittel, adopted the pen name "August Wilson," paying homage to his mother, declaring himself a poet. In 1968, Wilson and a friend, Rob Penny, co-founded the Black Horizon Theater. The following year, Wilson married Brenda Burton. The couple welcomed a daughter, Sakina, in 1970; they divorced two years later. Wilson remained primarily focused on succeeding as a poet until moving to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1978.

August Wilson wrote his first notable play in 1979, *Jitney*, earning a fellowship at the Minneapolis Playwright Center. In 1981 Wilson married his second wife Judy Oliver. The following year, his new play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, was accepted at the Eugene O'Neill Playwright's Conference. The year 1982 was particularly fruitful for Wilson, as it marked his introduction to Lloyd Richards, who went on to direct Wilson's first six Broadway plays.

Wilson's play *Fences* premiered on Broadway in 1987, earning the playwright his first Pulitzer Prize as well as a Tony Award. Set in the 1950s, *Fences* explored the themes of the ever-evolving black experience and race relations in

America. *Fences* was the sixth of the playwright's 10-part series called The American Century Cycle also known as The Pittsburgh Cycle, which defined each "part" by decade. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the second part in the cycle, opened on Broadway in 1988. Wilson divorced Judy Oliver in 1990. He took home another Pulitzer Prize that same year, this time for *The Piano Lesson*, following its Broadway premiere. A collection of Wilson's work, titled *Three Plays* by August Wilson, was published in book form in 1991. The following year brought the Broadway premiere of *Two Trains Running*.

In 1994, Wilson married for the third time to a costume designer named Constanza Romero. *Seven Guitars* made its way to the Broadway stage two years later, followed by the birth of Wilson's and Romero's daughter, Azula, in 1997. *King Hedley II* made its Broadway debut in 2001, and *Gem of the Ocean* premiered in Chicago roughly a year later. In 2003, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was revived on Broadway. *Gem of the Ocean* premiered on Broadway in 2004, where it had a run of 72 performances. August Wilson died of liver cancer on October 2, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. His new play, *Radio Golf*, had opened in Los Angeles, California, just a few months earlier.

Other Readings: American Century Cycle by August Wilson

- 1900: *Gem of the Ocean* (2002)
- 1910: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986)
- 1920: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984)
- 1930: *The Piano Lesson* (1989)
- 1940: *Seven Guitars* (1995)
- 1950: *Fences* (1985)
- 1960: *Two Trains Running* (1990)
- 1970: *Jitney* (1982)
- 1980: *King Hedley II* (2001)

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Harmond Wilks is going to change things in this town.

With his wife, Mame, at his side, Harmond is hoping to be the first Black mayor in Pittsburgh. With his day-job in real-estate, Harmond is working on a large redevelopment project in the Hill District. Harmond's best friend, Roosevelt Hicks, hates his job as a high-up Vice President at a bank, but has invested a lot of time and money into this redevelopment project – and they all agree that this could lead to an amazing future for the neighborhood – and for the three of them.

Then, there's a hiccup. Joseph "Old Joe" Barlow is found painting an abandoned house at 1839 Wylie, a house he claims is his own – which is in the middle of the new development. The house is a decaying an eye-sore, but Old Joe maintains that it's his house. Thinking that he's crazy, Harmond and Roosevelt dismiss him at first. But Old Joe keeps returning, each time with a new problem, each time saying that he owns this property.

Roosevelt is invited to go in on a deal to buy a radio station and is convinced that he's now set for life because of the financial prosperity it will bring him. Harmond tries to explain to him that the only reason he's being offered the deal to buy the radio station is that he's Black. Roosevelt ignores this and continues on with his plan to purchase the station. Harmond's wife, Mame, is also in line for a new job – working high up for the Governor of Pennsylvania. Success seems to be abundant for everyone involved, with the only problem being Old Joe's persistence about the house.

Based on his persistence, Harmond decides to look into the history behind the house. Harmond produces sale papers for the house to Old Joe and explains to him multiple times that he bought the house because it was abandoned. Upon doing some research, Harmond finds that he did, in fact, buy the house illegally – a move that could cost him the entirety of his campaign. When he presents this information to Old Joe, it becomes apparent that they have a lot in common, not just the house. Harmond explains that he will not allow for Old Joe's property to be demolished.

Mame and Roosevelt confront Harmond soon after he submits a redesign to the commercial and residential investors for the redevelopment project. He explains that Old Joe's house must be left in since he doesn't want to sell. Furious with him, Mame and Roosevelt try to explain that if this project goes south, they may lose all the investment money that they have secured. Harmond refuses to budge and explains that the house cannot be demolished. Mame is furious and insists that if Harmond had stuck to their plan that he would be mayor. She loses her job opportunity with the governor and tells Harmond that he is on his own. At the same time, Roosevelt goes behind Harmond's back and has his investor, the one who helped him buy the radio station, purchase Harmond's real-estate firm. Roosevelt throws Harmond out of his own office and Harmond goes to join the protestors trying to stop the demolition.

*Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks &
Ricardo Pitts-Wiley as Elder Joseph "Old Joe" Barlow*




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The View from The Hill

By Joi Wright

The Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania attracts people from all over the world for its art, culture, history, and attractions — one being the home of playwright August Wilson.

Wilson was born and raised in the present Crawford-Roberts neighborhood, known as the lower Hill District before the 20th century. Even though the playwright and his family moved out of the Hill District by the time he turned 13, he still considered it home. In later years Wilson paid homage to his home by setting nine of the ten plays in his American Century Cycle there.

A collection of historically African American neighborhoods, the Hill District was made up of three areas: lower, middle, and upper. Early in the 19th century, the neighborhood contained country estates, working farms, coal mines, and a village of black freedmen. By 1929 the Hill District was populated by many ethnic groups and was divided into areas that reflected the ethnic makeup of that neighborhood. Some of these areas were called Little Italy, Polish Hill, Athens, Little Syria, Jewish “Ghetto,” and the Black Belt.

The city’s first black district was once a center of arts and culture, with a strong sense of community. During the 20th century, the older ethnic and Jewish populations moved away, and the Hill District became known as the Harlem of Pittsburgh, a place where the best jazz could be heard. It was known by many names: Little Harlem, Little Haiti, and “the crossroads of the world.” After the demolition of the lower Hill in the name of urban renewal in the 1950s, the District was then divided into five census tracts: Crawford Roberts, Bedford Dwellings, Middle Hill, Upper Hill, and Terrace Village.

Currently, there is a growing feeling that the neighborhood is on the cusp of resurgence, thanks to the relentless work of a web of community-focused residents, nonprofit organizations, churches, and foundations. The August Wilson house is slated to be the site of a multidisciplinary arts center, with an artist-in-residency program.

Over its very long history, the Hill District has ranged from vibrant to distressed. Existing almost as long as the city itself, this area has undergone many transformations that have made it the place it is today. While enduring the changes brought by migration, industrialization, urban renewal, and de-industrialization, the number and composition of the residents have changed, but the neighborhood itself has survived. Unlike some past efforts, though, the present renewal is no top-down overhaul — today the community has a powerful seat at the table and is using it.



Character Analysis



Harmond Wilks
Joe Wilson, Jr.

Harmond Wilks presents the audience with some unique challenges. Wilks wants the audience to root for him to have it all: the money, the development deal, and the mayoralty, all the while keeping his identity and cultural heritage intact. Essentially, Harmond is a man who simply wants too much. His wife, Mame, points out to him that life has always gone his way. If Harmond has a character flaw, it is his inability to fathom a world over which he cannot exert his control. He is arguably the warmest character in the play, expressing patience with other characters' shortcomings while genuinely celebrating their successes. Furthermore, he brings out the warmer sides of the other characters; he draws out their stories and finds their senses of humor. In short, Wilson makes Harmond a man whom you would like to see succeed. The most crucial aspect of his character is his drive. Although the hints about his past are subtly placed, it is clear that Harmond has something to prove. His dead father's weight as a shrewd businessman is felt throughout. Similarly, his need to fulfill the potential of both himself and his late brother is palpable. Harmond must embody his family's legacy.



Mame Wilks
Tonia Jackson

Mame Wilks Harmond's wife, is presented as a kind of foil to Harmond. If Harmond is idealistic to the point of naiveté, Mame remains firmly rooted in the practical. Mame has an acute understanding of how the world does and does not work. She has little patience for the men around her who want to change the world to suit their own needs. Mame is also the most giving character in the play. Almost all of her actions are attempts to help Harmond get what he wants. While the men around her bluster self-importantly, Mame plays the role of nurturer. It is not that she does not have goals of her own; she just achieves them differently. Her potential job at the governor's office is just as prestigious as Harmond's mayoral aims. What is different is their feeling about these opportunities. Mame sees her success as a result of her own hard work, not some divine right. In her last scene with Harmond, she notes how this discrepancy cost her the job. When she suggests she can no longer stand by him, it is not because of a lack of a moral center or a material need for success. Instead, it comes from a realization that for all of his good qualities, Harmond has not been an equal partner in their relationship.



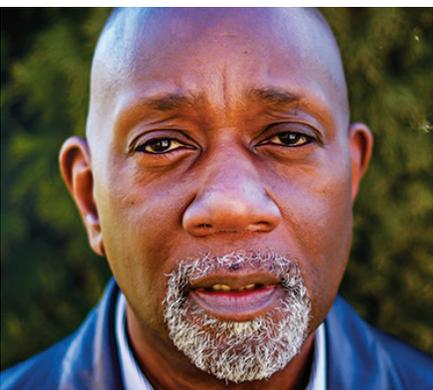
Roosevelt Hicks
Omar Robinson

Roosevelt Hicks Harmond's best friend, is set up in opposition to Sterling. In many ways, the two act as good and bad angels on Harmond's shoulder (each whispering in his ear). Roosevelt is defined by an overwhelming sense of self-interest, and it does not matter to him what he has to sacrifice to get ahead. Both Sterling and Harmond accuse Roosevelt of allowing himself to be used for his race by unseen white characters. For Roosevelt, race is just another card to play. In his world, material gain erases any harmful side effects to his dignity or cultural identity. Roosevelt's point of view might almost be considered liberated in its race-free vein were it not for his willingness to divest himself of his origins.



Sterling Johnson
Dereks Thomas

Sterling Johnson presents an interesting counterpoint to Mame. In many ways, they serve similar purposes in the play, and tellingly, they share almost no stage time together. Like Mame, Sterling provides Harmond with a reality check. Sterling's point of view is unabashedly working class, and he has little time for Harmond's political attempts to finesse those around him. Wilson presents Sterling as a kind of alternate reality for Harmond. They are the same age, went to the same high school, and yet took very different paths in life. Sterling, despite his shortcomings, is more genuinely in touch with his roots than Harmond is.



Elder Joseph "Old Joe" Barlow
Ricardo Pitts-Wiley

Old Joe is a character who is all about his origins. He lives so firmly in the past that he almost functions as a ghost. Generationally, Old Joe has a clear connection to a period in history when African-Americans' rights were more restricted. When it is revealed late in the play that Old Joe has a criminal background, Harmond quickly dismisses it. His crimes are presented as a symptom of the malaise of racial inequality. Old Joe's history, compounded by the fact that he turns out to be part of Harmond's family, fuels Harmond's need to fight against a system of thinking so ingrained that even the other African-American characters in the play subscribe to it.

Vocabulary

Urban blight: part of a city fails

Gentrification: improving a neighborhood to fit the middle class

Labor union: an organized group of workers

Fraud: a crime where you pretend to be someone else

Infrastructure: the physical and organized structures needed for the operation

Rendering: a work of visual art that is detailed

Acquisition: buying an object

Compensate: give something, typically money, in recognition of loss, suffering, or injury incurred; recompense.

Salvage: save or rescue

Abandoned: having been deserted or cast off

Injunction: an authoritative warning or order

Sophisticated: having a great deal of worldly experience

Vagrancy: homelessness

Demolition: the action or process of tearing down or being torn down

Corruption: dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power

Playwright: a person who writes plays

Protagonist: the leading character in a drama, movie, novel, or other fictional text

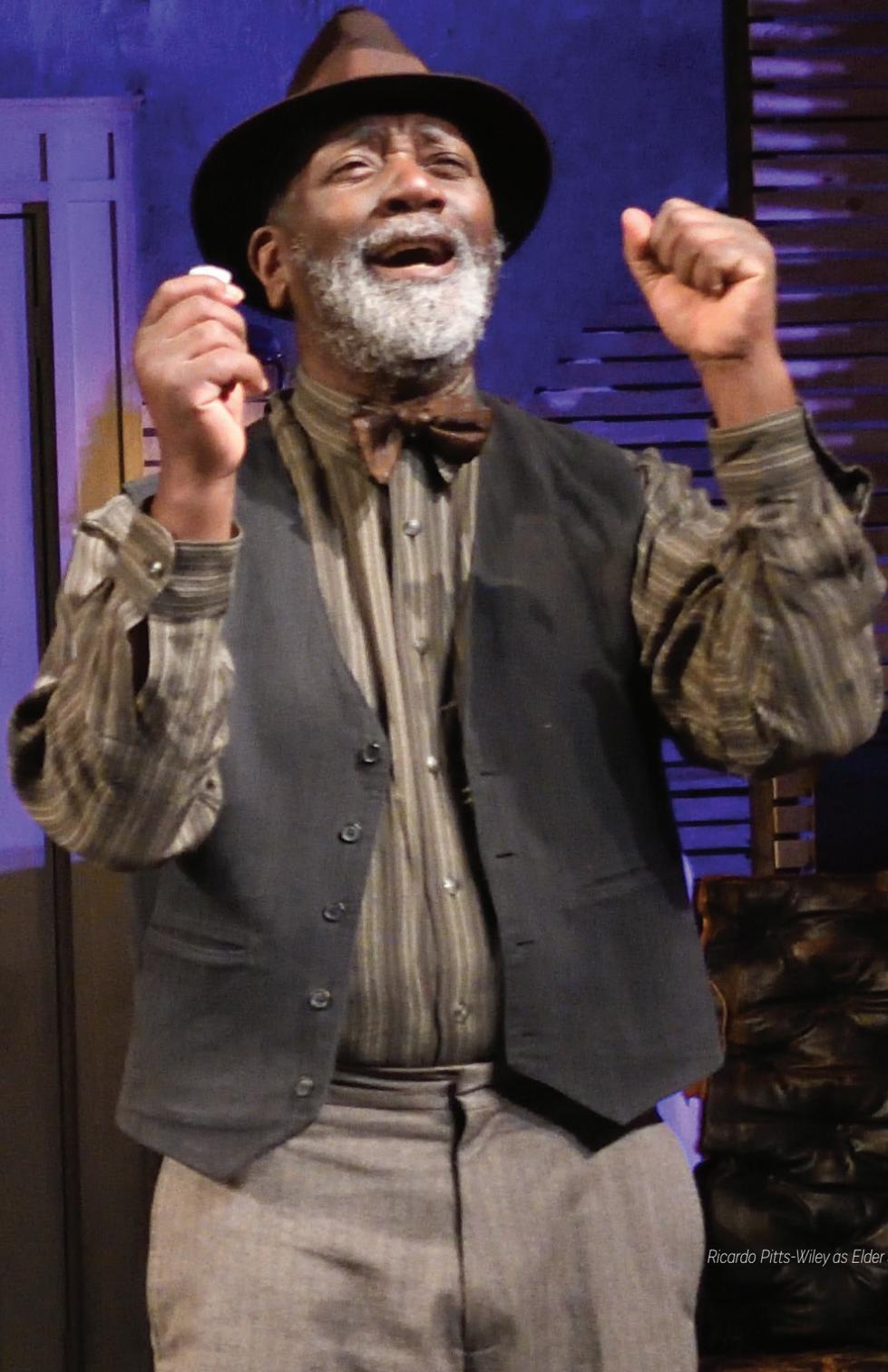
Antagonist: a character, group of characters, institution, or concept that stands in or represents opposition to the protagonist

Acts/scenes: An act is a part of a play defined by elements such as rising action, climax and resolution. A scene is a part of an act defined with the changing of characters.

Dialogue: a conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play, or movie

Monologue: a long speech by one actor in a play or movie

Stage directions: an instruction in the text of a play that describe movement, position, or tone of an actor, or the sound effects and lighting



Ricardo Pitts-Wiley as Elder Joseph "Old Joe" Barlow

Unit 2 Entering the Text

Major Themes

Identity

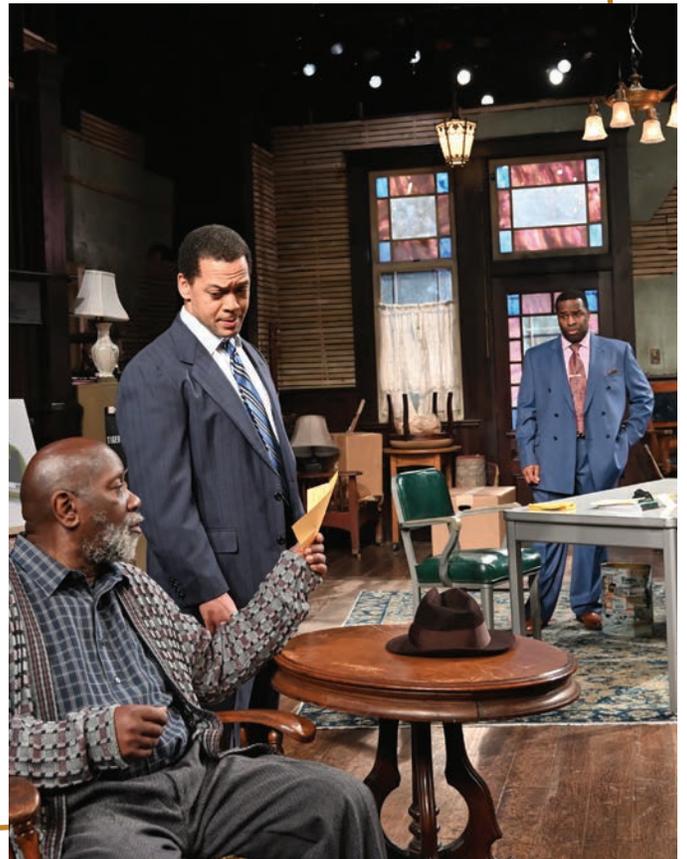
Identity is one of the most important themes in *Radio Golf*. More specifically, African-American identity lies at the center of this play, and Wilson presents five distinct variations of that identity. For Sterling, identity has a clear moral code, and despite his past brushes with the law, he defines both himself and others in terms of what is right and wrong. For three of the other characters, identity is closely linked to the notion of time. Mame's identity is tied to the future: how to build toward goals not yet reached. For Roosevelt, identity is rooted firmly in the present: what he can get out of life right now. Old Joe's identity is intertwined with the past: he rarely speaks of himself or his life in the present. Finally, Harmond's identity is an intersection of all of the other four. Unsurprisingly, he is the character who changes the most over the course of the play.

Masculinity

The theme of masculinity is also notably linked to the notion of identity. Both Roosevelt and Sterling talk about their genitals in very frank language. For both of them, being "a man" is defined largely in sexual and biological terms. Harmond, in describing his attraction to Mame, notes that she could be hard and soft at the same time. In essence, he sees both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities in her, and he praises her for possessing the right balance of the two. Since Mame is the only female character in the play and has a relatively minor role, Wilson is clearly placing his question about African-American identity in a male context.

Money

Money is also an important theme in *Radio Golf*. Throughout the play, money not only dictates the characters' actions but often defines the characters themselves. Roosevelt and Sterling both brag about money in their final stand off. The central plot of the play revolves around monetary transactions: Old Joe's back taxes, the money needed from various sources to fund the development project, and the illegal sale of Aunt Ester's house. One of the principal characters even works for a bank. As a result, the difference in class between the characters of Old Joe, Sterling, Mame, Roosevelt, and Harmond is keenly felt throughout.



Ricardo Pitts-Wiley as Elder Joseph "Old Joe"
Barlow, Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks and
Omar Robinson as Roosevelt Hicks

Exercise 1: Radio Golf in the Classroom

ELECTION

Age Range: Good for Grades 7 - 12

Materials Needed: Poster boards, cameras (optional), stickers (optional)

Number of students: 6 - 30 (or school-wide!)

Description: Model good civic engagement by running an election in your classroom or school. Students can engage as the candidate or support staff. Have fun with it - using campaign platforms that are school specific or entirely wacky.

Instructions: Split the class into teams of 3 - 4 students. Have them nominate a candidate who will represent them in the election. The other team members are researchers, pollsters, chiefs of staff and public relations/social media managers.

Instructions:

- Come up with a catchy slogan for the candidate.
- Create three talking points which define their campaign
- Write an "elevator pitch" (30 seconds long) to introduce their candidacy

- Design and make posters to hang around the classroom or hallways
- Film a commercial (including citizens who support the candidate) and play on your smartboard or TV
- Hold a debate between the candidates - have the moderator come up with questions that can be as serious or light-hearted as you want
- Vote!

Helpful Tips:

- If running as themselves is too scary, encourage your students to make a character with a distinct voice, mannerisms and values. Perhaps use literary characters as inspiration, like Harmond Wilkes from *Radio Golf*.
- The support staff could poll classmates around the school to find out issues important to them
- Use social media to your advantage - what does the candidate's instagram look like? Could you create a meme to make them go viral?
- If you are in a high school, consider running a voter registration drive in the cafeteria during this process. Create a public service announcement about getting out the vote.



Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks



Exercise 2: Open Response & Writing Assignments

Instructions for students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.

Open Response Assessments

1. Most plays have a protagonistic and antagonistic force. Define these two terms. Who or what is the protagonist in this play? Who or what is the antagonist? Justify your choices.
2. Both Harmond and Roosevelt are avid golfers in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*. In fact, Harmond says, "you teach the kids how to play golf and they have all the rules they need to win at life." Roosevelt turns the local radio station into a talk station devoted to golf. Why did August Wilson choose golf as an important sport in this play? What does golf represent to you?
3. How does *Radio Golf* deal with the sometimes-conflicting commitments to personal success, the law, family/ heritage, and community?
4. After Harmond's hopes of becoming mayor are dashed, Mame explains her disappointment. She suggests that he could have made important social changes after winning the election, rather than telling the truth about the house when he did. Do you agree or disagree?
5. Why do you think Wilson named this play *Radio Golf*?

Writing Assignments

1. Designating a building as a historic landmark legally protects it from demolition or alteration. Choose a building in your community that you believe should be designated as a historic landmark and write a persuasive letter to your local landmark commission arguing for this designation.
2. Imagine that you are running for mayor in your town. Write a speech that you will present to the class as a mayoral candidate. What issues are of most concern to you and/or your community? What issues will you discuss in the speech? What will you leave out? How will you construct this speech in order to get the votes you need to win?
3. Imagine that a large corporation like Wal-Mart plans to move into your town or community, bringing jobs and inexpensive goods. In order to make room for the store and parking lot, the corporation plans to tear down 15 homes and demolish a park. Imagine that you are a local political leader, and draft a letter to this corporation either in favor of or against this development plan. Be creative about your response and feel free to conduct research about these types of developments in other communities
4. Sterling says, "Some things you ain't got to study up on. You ain't got to study up on right and wrong." Do you agree? How do we distinguish right from wrong? What does it mean to "do the right thing?" How do we know or learn this? Who decides what the right thing is?

Exercise 3: August Wilson's Legacy

Note to Teachers: Use the following ideas to engage your class in thinking about August Wilson, introducing them to Radio Golf and its major themes.

Research the life, work, and legacy of August Wilson. Have students choose one aspect of Wilson's life they find particularly relevant or inspiring and write essays describing why or how this is so for them. Topics to consider might include:

- Family History
- Youth in Pittsburgh's Hill District
- Education
- Development as a Playwright
- Influence on American Theatre
- Attitudes and Reflections on Playwriting
- Thirteen-year Collaboration with Lloyd Richards
- Collaboration with Marion McClinton and Kenny Leon
- Awards and Honors

Family History and Heritage

Wilson's work asserts that the only way for African-Americans to gain control of their existence is to dig deeper into the past; to remember and connect the stories of Africa, slavery, the U.S. civil war, emancipation, the Harlem Renaissance, and the civil rights movement, to the present. In August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, Harmond uncovers a secret family connection when he meets "Old Joe" that changes his life.

Ask students to investigate their own heritage by interviewing an older family or community member.

1. How were things different for them when they were growing up?
2. How does their past affect the way this person lives their life or views the world today?
3. What events or memories from their past are most powerful for them today?
4. Encourage students to think about pivotal events from their own lifetime and how these events have affected them. How do the experiences of the older generation relate to their own?

Exercise 4: Media Assessment

Scene Study

Have students act out a scene from *Radio Golf*. They should use props and elements of costumes, if possible. Have them consider their placement on stage, blocking (who moves where and when), gestures, vocal tone, music, and the intended emotional impact of the scene. If you have time, have the students act out the scene a second time, testing the effects of changing something about the performance, such as the tone of voice, a character trait, or blocking.

Discussion Questions

1. How does such a change affect the selected moment?
2. How does pacing or posturing of an actor affect the dramatic or comedic timing of the piece?

Hold a Debate

1. Choose two characters in August Wilson's *Radio Golf* that have differing opinions about a central issue in the play, like the demolition of 1839 Wylie St. or the larger issue of race and politics.
2. Ask for two volunteers and conduct a debate of this issue. Give the first pair a chance to argue their case for at least two minutes.
3. Next, ask the other members of the class if anyone would like to "tap in" and take over one or both of the characters by entering the scene silently and gently tapping the actor they wish to replace.
4. Give these two a chance to debate, and then allow others to "tap in" again. Continue this process as long as there are students who wish to participate in the debate. This allows students to hear different perspectives.

Exercise 5: 101 Ways to Read a Monologue

A monologue, or soliloquy, is a long speech made by one person. Sometimes it can be a challenge for a young actor to take on a piece of text and perform it on his or her own, so this activity is a way to get your students to forget their inhibitions and have fun with it. Pick one or more of the monologues below, and hand them out to your students. You can assign or let them choose which monologue they want to do, and give them a few minutes to read it over a few times and familiarize themselves with it.

- In partners, let them read it out loud to one another a few times in whichever way they want to.
- After this, using your own suggestions and those of your students, throw out different ways to read the monologue. Feel free to be as wacky as you want -- this is supposed to be fun. You can filter the suggestions, and pick one that you think would work and let them do it that way. Some examples of different ways to read it include (but are definitely not limited to): an aerobics instructor, an army general, a drunk, someone who desperately has to go to the bathroom, a squirrel, the laziest person in the world, singing it, whispering it, telling it like it's a scary story, like an interpretive dancer, like they are in a musical, like a President, or a King...you can even use celebrity names and have them imitate them using the monologue.
- This can be done with all of the students working in partners or on their own at the same time. If this is a particularly brave group, you can challenge them to take your suggestions and perform individually in front of the class.
- After every willing student has performed, take some time to talk about what they got from it. Did it help them understand the monologue better? If so, how? Did they find that any of the interpretations, as silly as they may have been, actually worked and made some sense? Which ones, and why? How does this help them as actors?



Tonia Jackson as Mame Wilks

Monologues and Scenes

HARMOND

You striking out in the dark and there's nobody there but yourself. You're all alone. I used to walk around in the dark complaining 'cause I couldn't find a woman. I didn't understand. I had everything a woman could want. I had money, I had confidence, I was doing something with my life. They all used to tell me I was too intense. Too serious. That I needed to enjoy life. Shouldn't worry so much about the things I couldn't change. Then I met Mame. The first time I saw Mame it was raining. I thought she was gonna melt. The rain look like it hurt her. Like the two wasn't supposed to go together. You couldn't mix them up. That's what made her stand out. She had a frown on her face and the rain was beating on her. She hurt from the injustice of it. That's what made me like her. She could be strong and soft at the same time. I said I like that. I wished I had an umbrella but I didn't. I went and stood and blocked the rain. I told her she looked too pretty to be getting all wet. That's how we got talking. She called the rain some names I ain't gonna repeat.

ROOSEVELT

I signed up two more kids last week. That makes eighteen. I just want these kids to know what it feels like to hit a golf ball. I hit my first golf ball I asked myself where have I been? How'd I miss that? I couldn't believe it. I felt free. Truly free. For the first time. I watched the ball soar down the driving range. I didn't think it could go so high. It just kept going higher and higher. I felt something lift off of me. Some weight I was carrying around and didn't know it. I felt like the world was open to me. Everything and everybody. I never did feel exactly like that anymore. I must have hit a hundred golf balls trying to get that feeling. But that first time was worth everything. I felt like I had my dick in my hand and was waving it around like a club. "I'm a man! Anybody want some of this come and get it!" That was the best feeling of my life.

STERLING

Why didn't you punch me back? It wasn't nothing but some fisticuffs. Raymond punched me back. Hey man, I was sorry to hear about Raymond. I felt like crying when I heard that. Somebody told me say, "Raymond Wilks got killed in Vietnam." That made me feel real bad. You remember me and Raymond used to play together? We used to play cowboys and Indians. Raymond didn't like to die. You say, "Bang! You dead." Raymond would say, "You missed." We used to argue over who was going to be the Indians. We used to take turns. Yeah, I miss Raymond. We was on the football team together. Didn't nobody throw a football like Raymond. He'd throw a perfect spiral every time. Raymond told me he was going to go to Grambling. I was looking for him to make it to the pros. Next thing I know somebody say he got killed in Vietnam. You didn't got to Vietnam, did you?



OLD JOE

I know you. You one of the Wilks brothers. I knew your daddy and I knew your brother. You had a brother named Raymond. A twin brother. Everybody know the Wilks Twins. Harmond and Raymond Wilks. You probably got places to go and people to see. That's what I told my mama when I left home. And I been some places and I seen some people. I seen Muhammad Ali. In Louisville, March 5, 1978. I left Nashville with forty-six dollars and eighty-four cents. And ended up in Louisville with a hundred and sixty-eight dollars. I ain't gonna tell you how that happened. I thought I was a rich man. That was like a perfect day. A perfect day is the saddest day. You know why? 'Cause it has to come to an end. I've had many perfect days. I thought they were going to last forever. But they all come to an end. The only problem is you never know if you're going to have another one. I had a nice little old ride on that hundred and sixty-eight dollars till I ended up broke and in the poorhouse. I been in the poorhouse ever since. You got green money but I never did turn my money green. That's just the way it turned out but it could have turned out another way. You sure ain't a lawyer? I need a lawyer like you. We got a nice rapport.

MAME

We need him at the groundbreaking ceremony. Do you understand how important this is? If the commissioner doesn't come, we throw away our police support. Then we lose the firemen and the labor unions will start to worry. Who wants a mayor who can't protect the city? Commissioner Bell needs to be at the groundbreaking and you're going to have to play it. Smile. Shake hands. Let the commissioner get his picture with holding the silver shovel.

MAME

I have a center too. What happens when that caves in? I have questions too. You're acting like a kid who because things don't go his way takes his ball and goes home. That's what your problem is. You've always been the kid who had the ball. You're the one with the glove and the bat. You had the bike when nobody else had one. All your life you always had everything go your way.

HARMOND

Not many speak well of my father. He was a hard businessman. You shook his hand on a deal knowing he always got the better end of it. But he was an honest man. My father talk a lot about family. He said that family was the most important thing. Yet when my brother got killed in Vietnam he didn't go to his funeral. He planned for Raymond and me to go to Cornell, then take over Wilks Realty. But Raymond didn't follow the plan. He wanted to go to Grambling and play football. My father said he wouldn't pay for it. Raymond joined the Army to pay for it himself. I followed the plan and went to Cornell. They sent Raymond to Vietnam and he got killed. My father turned blood into vinegar. He didn't even go to Raymond's funeral. I could never look at my father the same after that. Even though he betrayed those values I still clung to them. But what I can't figure out is why my family was paying the taxes on your house.



*Omar Robinson as Roosevelt Hicks &
Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks*

Tonia Jackson as Mame Wilks

Scene 1

MAME: This is it? This isn't anything like the way you described it. This ceiling's what you were so excited about?

HARMOND: Look close. See the embossing on the tin.

MAME: Harmond, it looks raggedy.

HARMOND: See those marks. It's all hand tooled. That's the only way you get pattern detail like that. That tin ceiling's worth some money.

MAME: Then take it down and sell it. At least put some new paint on it. I wouldn't want to do business here.

HARMOND: This is a construction office. It's not to impress anybody.

MAME: Your campaign office cannot look like this.

HARMOND: I'm going to put the campaign office in Reese's old wallpaper and paint store up on the corner of Centre and Kirkpatrick. It's got a lot of windows. People can see inside.

MAME: We decided to open your office in Shadyside. What's wrong with Shadyside? Right there on Ellsworth where that old bookstore used to be. That's got a lot of windows too. What's wrong with Shadyside?

HARMOND: I'm from the Hill District.

MAME: The population of the Hill isn't but thirty-five hundred people. And it's hard to get them to vote.

HARMOND: You don't understand. Politics is about symbolism. Black people don't vote but they have symbolic weight.

MAME: That's what Thomas Brown said when he ran for mayor. You see what he's doing now. Fixing parking tickets.

HARMOND: I have a plan. Thomas Brown didn't have a plan.

Scene 2

ROOSEVELT: (To Old Joe) What you doing here?

OLD JOE: I'm talking to this gentleman right here. He's my lawyer.

ROOSEVELT: You should be in jail. Defacing private property. You're going to need two lawyers. Harmond, this is the man who was painting the house. Try and get some sense out of him.

HARMOND : You were painting our house up on Wylie? Why were you painting our house?

OLD JOE: My daughter say she wanna live there. I was fixing it up for her.

ROOSEVELT: I told you we're tearing down that house. That's abandoned property. That house belongs to Bedford Hills Redevelopment.

OLD JOE: That's my house. I got the deed on record down at the courthouse. My mother put it down there in 1925.

ROOSEVELT: You going to jail. They got a senior citizen jail near Harrisburg. That's where you heading. Defacing private property. What the police tell you?

OLD JOE: They say, "How you doing, sir? If anybody mess with you ... you just call us, sir. We here to serve and protect, sir." That's what it say on their cars: "Serve and Protect." They must have thought I was a white man.

ROOSEVELT: See what I'm talking about, Harmond? What's your name?

OLD JOE: I'll take the Fifth Amendment. I know my rights.

ROOSEVELT: But do you know your name? That's the question.

OLD JOE: I don't know yours. If I knew yours maybe I'd tell you mine. Then we'd be even.

ROOSEVELT: My name is Roosevelt Hicks.

OLD JOE: Pleased to meet you.

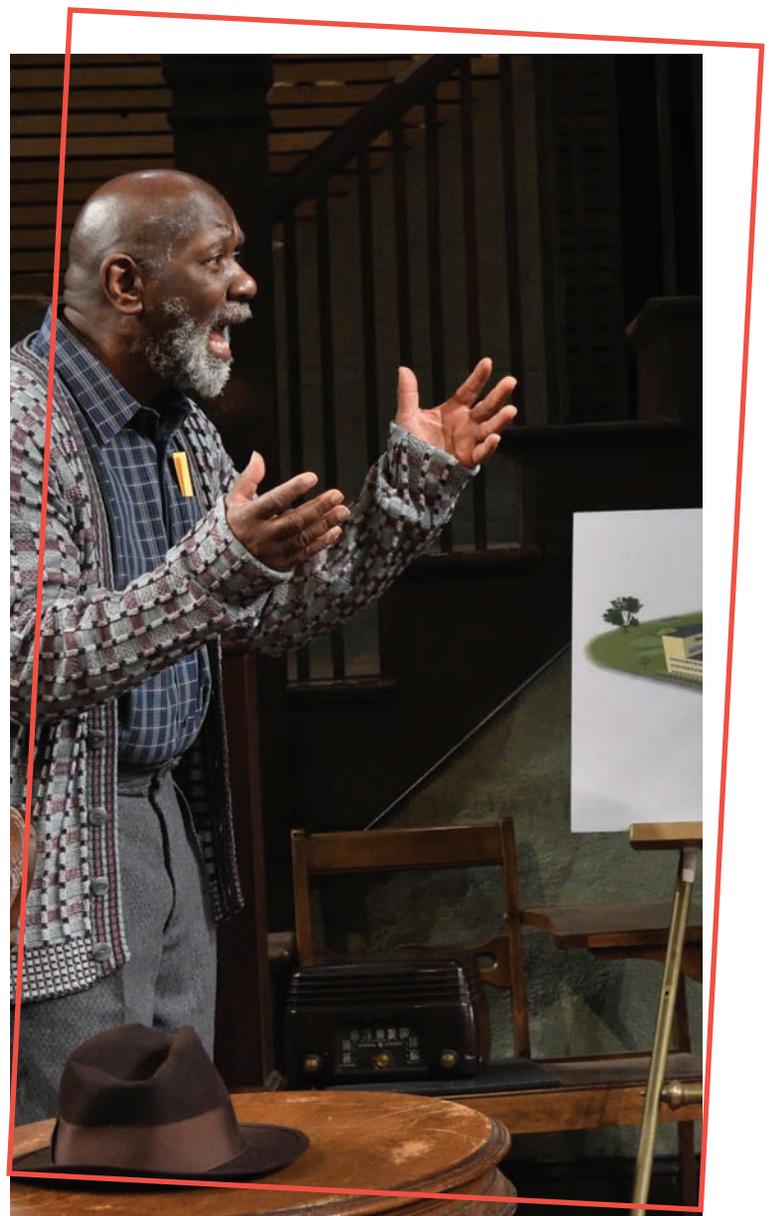
ROOSEVELT: What's your name?

OLD JOE: I ain't got to tell you. If you was the police I'd have to tell you. I know my rights. If my lawyer ask me I'd tell him. But I ain't got to tell you nothing.

HARMOND : What's your name?

ROOSEVELT : Harmond, you can't get no sense out of him.

OLD JOE: My name is Elder Joseph Barlow, but the people call me Old Joe. They been calling me that since I was ten. My mama called me Old Black Joe but I don't let nobody else call me that. I ain't never ran into anybody that special.



Ricardo Pitts-Wiley as Elder Joseph "Old Joe" Barlow

Scene 3

HARMOND: How come you didn't pay the taxes?

OLD JOE: I didn't know I supposed to pay them. My mother say we didn't pay no taxes.

HARMOND: Everybody has to pay taxes.

OLD JOE: My mother said she didn't pay none.

HARMOND: You know you have to pay taxes. The president has to pay taxes.

OLD JOE: The Barlow family didn't pay no taxes. Never did. Every time she went to pay them they was already paid.

HARMOND: Who was paying them?

OLD JOE: I don't know. She didn't say that part. I don't know if she knew.

HARMOND: Anybody delinquent in their property taxes and abandons the property, the city can seize the property and sell it at a sheriff's auction.

OLD JOE: Don't they have to give me a notice or something? If you was gonna buy my house at least you'd think you'd tell me about it.

HARMOND: The notice of a sheriff's sale should've been posted in the paper.

OLD JOE: What am I gonna do?

HARMOND: There's nothing you can do. It's the law. The law protects you when you pay your taxes. But the law protects the city when a property's abandoned.

OLD JOE: But I didn't abandon the house. I'm right here. People act like I'm invisible. If somebody asks me I'll tell them I'm right here.

HARMOND: I don't know what to tell you other than your daughter will have to live somewhere else.

OLD JOE: Is this the kind of mayor you're gonna be? Just like your daddy. Put the big man on one side and the little man on the other.

HARMOND: Tell you what, Mr. Barlow. I'll look into this for you but I can't promise anything. This sounds like a straightforward case to me.

OLD JOE: How much you charge? I can't pay but a little bit.

HARMOND: You don't have to pay me anything.

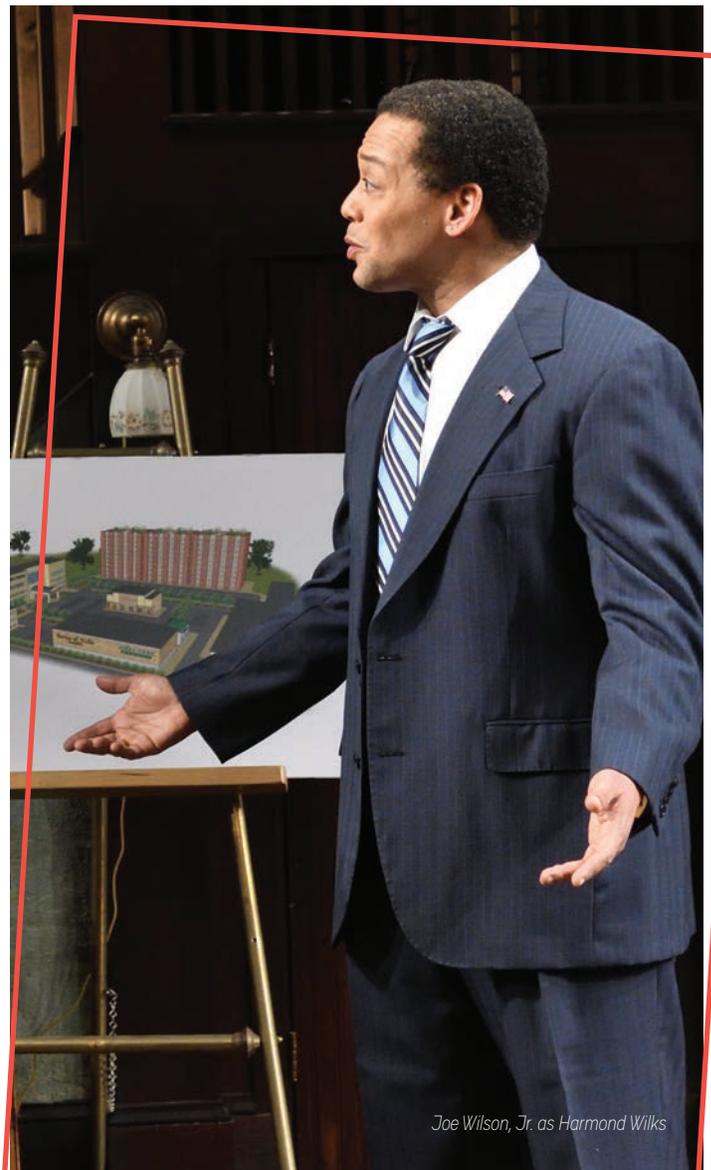
OLD JOE: I got to pay you a little bit.

(Roosevelt enters dressed in his golf clothes. He is excited.)

ROOSEVELT: Hey Harmond, you should have seen it. I made two birdies on the back nine. I shot my best round ever. I couldn't believe it. The ball kept falling for me.

OLD JOE: Did I say I was leaving? I got to take care of some important business. I got places to go and people to see.

(Old Joe exits.)



Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks

Scene 4

ROOSEVELT: What did you tell him?

MAME: I told him we wanted to talk with him. He said he was on the way.

ROOSEVELT: I never seen him this way before. He's been talking a lot about his father and his brother. He's got to let that go.

MAME: All Harmond talked about last night was that old man being some cousin of his. He stayed up all night. I don't know what time he came to bed.

ROOSEVELT: He's lost sight of what's important. I'm worried. He's working too hard.

MAME: He wants to move to the Hill. Wants to move back in the house he grew up in. Harmond hasn't lived in the Hill in twenty-five years. I can't move back here, Roosevelt. I don't want to go backward. I wasn't born backward. You'd be surprised how many white people think all black people live in the Hill.

(Harmond enters.)

HARMOND: You been waiting long? I would've been here earlier but I got a call back from Starbucks in Seattle. They still need to see the new drawings but they love the idea. They think it will make great publicity about preserving the house, preserving part of the community. At the Grand Opening they're going to give Mr. Barlow free Starbucks coffee for life.

MAME: Harmond ... Slow down. We want to talk with you. You're working too hard. I think we should go away for the weekend. You've always talked about going to San Francisco. This would be a good time to go. Not too many tourists. The hotels will be half empty.

HARMOND: What about the groundbreaking? I can't go away till after the campaign. Then we can go to San Francisco. Whether it's a good time to go or not.

ROOSEVELT: Herman's got a place in the Caribbean. You can go down there for a few days. Play some golf. Go sailing. Just get your mind off everything. I can deal with things till you get back.

MAME: We can postpone the groundbreaking. Things will smooth over. When you come back you'll be fresh.

HARMOND: Why? Everything's coming together. I'm staying on top of everything. Plans change and you got to roll with them. Bedford Hills is on schedule. Everything's still set for the groundbreaking next week. There's no reason to change that.

ROOSEVELT: Harmond, man, you need to step back. Get some perspective. I've been putting out fires all day, cleaning up after you. You made a mess. At ten o'clock this morning, there was no Bedford Hills. The project collapsed. I've been dancing on the phone for hours trying to bring it back.

HARMOND: What are you talking about?



Joe Wilson, Jr. as Harmond Wilks

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