

AUGUST WILSON'S
JITNEY

directed by
Resident Artist
Ron OJ Parson

Characters & Plot

Characters

- **Youngblood:** Jitney driver in his mid-twenties. Veteran of the Vietnam war.
- **Rena:** Youngblood's girlfriend and mother of his young son.
- **Booster:** Becker's son, recently released from prison. In his early 40s.
- **Turnbo:** A jitney driver who is always interested in other people's business.
- **Becker:** The manager of the Jitney station. Well-respected in the community.
- **Philmore:** A Local hotel doorman and recurring jitney passenger.
- **Shealy:** Numbers-taker (similar to a bookmaker) who uses the jitney station as his base of operations.
- **Fielding:** Jitney driver and former tailor. Suffers from alcohol dependency.
- **Doub:** A long-time Jitney driver and a veteran of the Korean war.

Plot Synopsis

Jitney is August Wilson's first play, written in and about the late 1970s in Pittsburgh's Hill District. The action takes place in a run-down station of a gypsy cab company. Becker, who runs the station, is a world-weary man of a certain age who has just received a pair of bitter blows. Not only has he learned that the city is about to tear down the decaying building that houses the station, but his estranged son, Booster, who went to prison 20 years before for killing a woman, has served out his term and come back to Pittsburgh. Booster's return triggers a confrontation with his father centered on the high price of pride and the suffering that often accompanies it. Like many of the installments in Wilson's Century Cycle, much of the drama in *Jitney* springs from the differing personalities of the characters, illuminated in this case by varying levels of compliance with Becker's four rules: "no overcharging, keep your car clean, no drinking, and be courteous."

The historical scene, in Wilson's words:



August Wilson

“There were a lot of jitney stations in Pittsburgh, located in storefronts with a pay phone. It was a perfect place for a play because you had a set and a community of players who work together and have created something out of nothing, having no jobs. They are generally older men who had jobs working in the steel mills and on the railroad. If they were lucky enough to have a pension, there was a need to supplement with additional income, so they drove jitneys. And I think they do it because they enjoy the company of each other; they have something to do and it’s a place to belong. They are a microcosm of the community at large.” -August Wilson

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and sewing machines, a thousand butcher shops and bakers’ ovens, a thousand churches and hospitals and funeral parlors and moneylenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true.

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. They came strong, eager, searching. The city rejected them, and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar-paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quiet desperation and vengeful pride, they stole and lived in pursuit of their own dream: That they could breathe free, finally, and stand to meet life with the force of dignity and whatever eloquence the heart could call upon.

- August Wilson’s introduction to *Fences*

August Wilson's Century Cycle

August Wilson's "Century Cycle" (also referred to as the "Pittsburgh Cycle") consists of ten plays, each set in a different decade, that together encapsulate the African American experience in the 20th century. Wilson's lifework, completed just before his death in 2005, has been called "one of the most ambitious dramatic projects ever undertaken" (*New York Times*)

- **The Century Cycle:**

- 1900s - *Gem of the Ocean* (2003)
- 1910s - *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1984)
- 1920s - *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982)
- 1930s - *The Piano Lesson* (1989) - Pulitzer Prize
- 1940s - *Seven Guitars* (1995)
- 1950s - *Fences* (1985) - Pulitzer Prize
- 1960s - *Two Trains Running* (1990)
- 1970s - *Jitney* (1983)
- 1980s - *King Hedley II* (2001)
- 1990s - *Radio Golf* (2005)



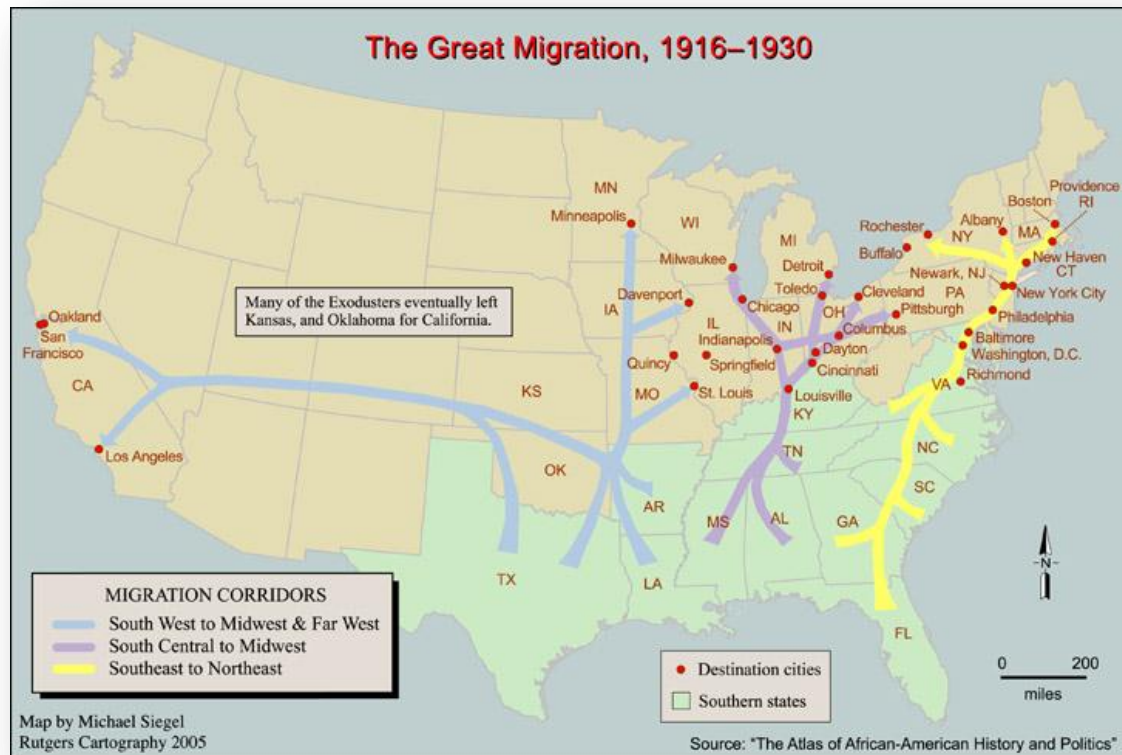
"Art is beholden to the kiln
in which the artist was fired.
Before I am anything,
a man or playwright,
I am an African American."
—AUGUST WILSON

The Great Migration

The “Great Migration” is a term that describes the movement of two million African Americans out of the Southern United States to the Midwest, Northeast, and West from 1910 to 1930; most migrated to escape racism and seek employment opportunities in industrial cities. While estimates of the number of migrants vary, it is believed that the First Great Migration (1910–40) saw 1.6 million migrants leave the South, while at least five million left during the Second Great Migration (1940–1970).

In the Second Great Migration, many migrants moved from Texas and Louisiana to California to find jobs in the defense industry. From 1965–70, 14 southern states – most notably Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi – contributed to a large net migration of African Americans to the Northeast, Midwest, and West. By the end of the Second Great Migration, African Americans, more than 80 percent of whom lived in cities, had become an urbanized population. At this point, 53 percent of African Americans remained in the Southern United States, 40 percent lived in the Northeast and Midwest, and seven percent lived in the West.

At the end of the 20th century, scholars noted that a reverse migration had begun. Data collected between 1963 and 2000 depicts the movement of African Americans back to the South following the de-industrialization of several Northeastern and Midwestern cities; the growth of high-quality jobs in the South; and improving racial relations throughout the country. Many people moved back because of family and kinship ties. From 1995-2000, Georgia, Texas, and Maryland attracted the most African American college graduates, and although California was for decades a destination for African American migrants, in the late 1990s it lost more African Americans than it gained.



The Pittsburgh Hill District

A Brief History of the Hill District:

Source: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njml/hillhist.htm>

Pittsburgh's Hill district began on "farm number three", a piece of land owned by William Penn's grandson and later sold to General Adamson Tannerhill, a Revolutionary War veteran, for \$20 an acre. In the late 1840s, Thomas Mellon bought a tract of farmland on the slope nearest the city. He subdivided the tract into smaller plots and sold them for a tidy profit. Thus began the Hill's development as a settled community.

The Hill is actually composed of several smaller hills, which were inhabited by three communities. Haiti was on the lower hill, inhabited by runaway slaves, the middle portion was called Lacyville, while the upper hill was called Minersville. The latter two areas were populated predominately by Germans and Scotch-Irish until the 1880s when central and eastern Europeans began to settle there.

Blacks began arriving from the South between 1880 and 1910. During the years leading to World War I, blacks were urged to come by industry recruiters who promised relief from the segregation laws of the South. New arrivals swelled the area and the Hill became an ethnic and racial melting pot of Russians, Slovaks, Armenians, Syrians, Lebanese, Greeks, Poles, Chinese and Jews. The races wove a rich and vibrant tapestry for Pittsburgh city life. Hill District residents supplied the labor for mines, mills, business and government. They toiled, raised their children and contended with each other; they established a community that left an indelible mark upon Pittsburgh's religion, politics and economy.

The ethnic diversity of the Hill produced a bustling business community. Wylie and Bedford avenues and Logan Street were lined with neighborhood stores. Their vibrancy lasted through the hard times of the Depression. It was through these difficult times that the Hill remained a place for music. The Hill was known on the National Jazz Circuit with places like the Crawford Grill, Hurricane Lounge, Savoy Ballroom and Musicians Club. Celebrities like Rudy Vallee and Paul Whiteman came to the Hill after performing at Downtown theatres and clubs to hear black musicians play. Later black musicians like Ramsey Lewis, Oscar Peterson, Cannonball Adderly, Billy Eckstine and Lena Horne entertained nightclub patrons. In the 1940s and '50s the Hill was brimming with interracial bars and clubs. There were blocks that were filled with life and music, with people going from club to club.

Although the Hill District continued to be a vibrant, politically active community, a deteriorating neighborhood infrastructure began to take hold. In 1943, George E. Evans, a member of city council, wrote that "approximately 90 percent of the buildings in the area are sub-standard, and have long outlived their usefulness, and so there would be no social loss if these were all destroyed." Local residents, however, suspected that the officials were using this as an excuse to create a "neutral zone" between the city's black and white areas.

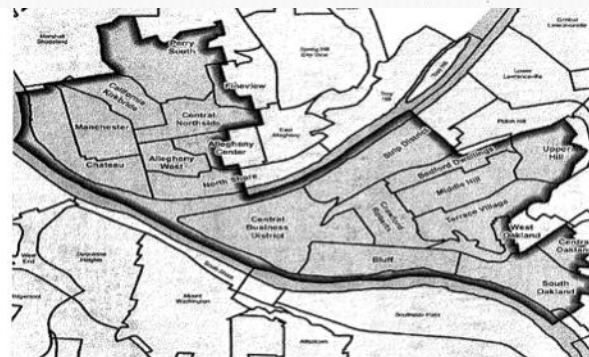
In September 1955 the federal government approved the lower Hill redevelopment plan, making available \$17.4 million in loans and grants. Ninety-five acres were slated for

clearing, with the demolition of the first of 1,300 structures to be razed set for June 1956. Redevelopment displaced more than 8,000 residents; 1,239 black families, 312 white. Of these, 35 percent went to public housing, 31 percent to private rentals, and 8 percent bought homes. About 90 families refused to move and ended up in substandard housing. Relocatees received little compensation, with maximal benefits coming from the federal government.

A cultural district known as the "Center for the Arts" was originally proposed to replace lower Hill homes and businesses. The ambitious plan failed, as it was perceived as too far from the Downtown core. The construction of the Civic Arena (1961), although an engineering wonder, had met with limited success, and was abandoned by all those organizations, which originally were supposed to thrive under its dome.

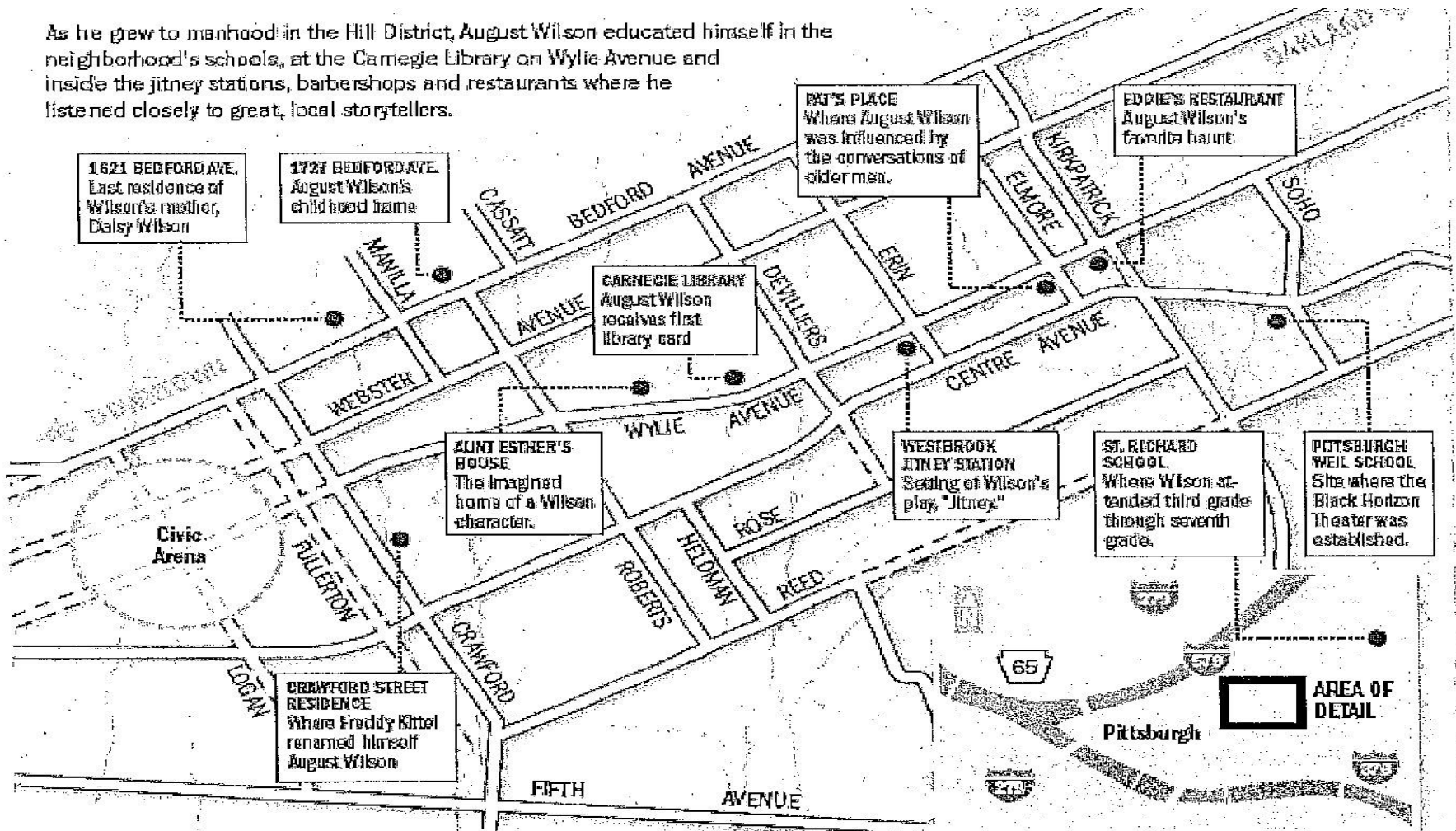
The Hill's fortunes took a downturn and struck bottom during the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968. The riots began on April 5, 1968 and lasted until April 12. That week of rage saw 505 fires, \$620,000 in property damage, one death and 926 arrests.

The Hill District's rich legacy had been leveled by botched redevelopments and riots, but it was black Pittsburghers who met and transcended these problems, and who are striving to rebuild; that gives us confidence that the Hill District will be revitalized. Crawford Square has returned over more than residential homes to the area with plans for retail developments, and the restoring of the New Granda Theatre as a Jazz Center. We can all hope that the Hill District again will have a bright future.



August Wilson's Hill District

As he grew to manhood in the Hill District, August Wilson educated himself in the neighborhood's schools, at the Carnegie Library on Wylie Avenue and inside the jitney stations, barsbershops and restaurants where he listened closely to great, local storytellers.



Only selected streets are shown.

Source: Adapted from evidence in *August Wilson: Pittsburgh Places in His Life and Plays* by Christopher Rawson and Laurence Glasco James Hilton/Post-Gazette

Urban Renewal in Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The story of urban renewal

Sunday, May 21, 2000 | By Dan Fitzpatrick, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Four decades after promising to give East Liberty "one of the finest residential and shopping complexes in the United States," Bob Pease is back in the neighborhood he tried to save from ruin, talking about how some of his plans went awry. He points to an abandoned gas station marred by graffiti and trash. "You can see what happened to that," said Pease, 75, who was director of the Urban Redevelopment Authority in the late 1950s and 1960s. "It ought to be torn down."

Circling the business district on a one-way loop, Pease pulls his car into parking lot after parking lot, pointing to the places where store owners promised to build back-door entrances but never did. He drives down Negley Run Boulevard, a road he widened, and points to deserted grass patches that failed to lure wealthy shoppers from Point Breeze and Fox Chapel. Pease passes trash-choked Broad Street, where the vacant Bell-Stern Furniture store, a bar and a fitness center sit amid litter. On Penn Avenue, he passes the East Mall Apartments, a 17-story, low-income housing complex that is a host to drug dealers, crime and vandalism.



The old Wabash Terminal being demolished for a Gateway Center office building. A flatiron train station built in 1904, the Wabash was part of New Yorker Jay Gould's attempt to build a transcontinental railroad empire. On the night of March 22, 1946, the terminal and its maze of sheds and overpasses burned in a fire near The Point. David Lawrence, the new mayor, watched happily from the roof of the nearby Pittsburgh Press building. The fire made it easier for the city to acquire the building and the land from the Pittsburgh and West Virginia Railroad. The Wabash building and the nearby Wabash Bridge came down in the early 1950s. The Press building, seen in the background, is now the Post-Gazette building.

"Right or wrong?" said Pease, looking at the high-rise. "I don't know."

After the URA demolished 1,200 homes, reduced the size of the shopping district by 1 million square feet and closed the middle of East Liberty to automobiles, the neighborhood lost hundreds of small businesses, according to one report. In the four decades that followed, it lost more than 4,500 people. Pease's URA got most of the blame. "They ruined East Liberty," said Floyd Coles, 75, who has lived in the neighborhood most of his life. It may be easy to lay blame for what happened. But Pease's story -- and that of urban renewal -- defies easy explanation. To pin East Liberty's demise on one person or one agency is to ignore the influence of the federal government, the growth of suburbs and a post-war faith in institutions and planning.

What East Liberty illustrates is how sprawling urban renewal projects rarely live up to their promises and how delicate the line is that separates good intentions from unintended consequences. "It seemed like a perfect plan," said Dave Craig, 75, who was city solicitor in the 1960s. "It just didn't work the way we planned. I feel, in a measure, guilty."

Urban redevelopment, the city's dominant public policy tool of the last 50 years, rescued Pittsburgh from the maw of pollution, floods and decay. In doing so, it swallowed more than 1,000 acres of land, razed more than 3,700 buildings, relocated more than 1,500 businesses and uprooted more than 5,000 families. The city deflected challenges from angry property owners, demolished old buildings that no

longer served their original uses and landed the story of Pittsburgh's transformation in the pages of The Saturday Evening Post, Life and Time magazine.

Slowly, though, public opinion began to turn. When the city ignored advice not to demolish homes and businesses in the Lower Hill District, it raised new questions about the government's power to alter a neighborhood's social, racial and economic fabric. When it replaced old buildings with utilitarian-style shopping complexes and office towers, it raised new questions about the relationship between architecture and people. When it ignored warnings that a pedestrian mall would doom the retail trade in East Liberty, it raised questions about the weakness of conventional wisdom.

But Pease, one of the few living people who participated in Pittsburgh's mid-century transformation, stands by his work. Critics, he said, "weren't there." Demolishing buildings and relocating people "are hard things to do. These are things that when you do them, really serious and good people question you. You have doubts, but you do the best you can to achieve the results you want to achieve. Things are never perfect." Many historians and preservationists are not as kind. "As fond as I am of Pease and the others," said University of Pittsburgh professor Jim DeAngelis, "they still have to justify what they did, at least in their own minds." Yet, "That's the thing about urban renewal," DeAngelis added. "We never know what would have happened if we didn't do it."

The ball swings

It began with a parade. With thousands watching, two college bands marched Downtown in the early afternoon of May 18, 1950, tooting their horns and tapping their boots. The men in the crowd wore fedoras and white shirts, and the women sported long dresses and dark shoes. Once the music stopped, the crowd gathered around a 103-year-old brick warehouse on Penn Avenue. To get a better view, some people stood on railroad tracks. Some leaned against parked cars, staring into a warm and cloudy sky.

Empty buildings, unused railroad yards and saloons surrounded the Penn Avenue warehouse. Within view were the old home of 19th-century iron entrepreneur John Shoenberger, the old Mayfair Hotel, the Pittsburgh Club and the abandoned flatiron Wabash Terminal building, built in 1904 by New York railroad baron Jay Gould. Rising in the distance was Exposition Hall, a building of arches and spires once known as the city's convention center. Few people in the crowd knew these surroundings better than Mayor David L. Lawrence.

This day had special meaning for Lawrence, an Irishman who spent his boyhood only blocks away, at Penn and Greentree Alley. The neighborhood of his youth was a refuge for the city's working-class Irish -- a loud, dirty, vibrant place tangled with iron factories, machine shops, railroad yards, gambling houses and brothels. The Point was where Lawrence learned to box, play sandlot baseball and swim out to passing boats with his friends, all of them coasting the wake back to shore. In 1950, he returned to tear it all down. After speaking to the crowd, Lawrence watched as a one-ton wrecking ball slammed into the 103-year-old warehouse. Within hours, it was a pile of bricks. "This is a great day for Pittsburgh," he said.

The Penn Avenue warehouse was the first of 133 buildings to crumble near The Point, leaving 59 acres flat and empty. It took two decades to fill the space with stainless-steel office towers, a hotel, an underground garage and a luxury apartment building. At The Point's edge, two bridges were removed, making way for a new state park and a fountain.

The project was the first of its kind in the country. It was successful, too. Of the \$118 million in costs, only \$600,000 came from public coffers. By 1967, 22,000 people worked in the area, compared with 4,000 before 1950. The project, which spurred a mid-century transformation known as the "Renaissance," elevated Lawrence from a political boss into a big-city mayor and governor, landed multimillionaire banker Richard King Mellon on the cover of *Time* and thrust Pittsburgh into the national spotlight for the first time since the age of Andrew Carnegie, George Westinghouse and Henry Clay Frick.

Wrote *The Saturday Evening Post*: "There is good reason to believe that Pittsburgh is in the beginning of one of the most dramatic periods of municipal renaissance that any great American city is likely to undergo in the next decade." Wrote *Fortune* magazine: "Pittsburgh is the test of industrialism everywhere to renew itself, to rebuild upon the gritty ruins of the past a society more equitable, more spacious, more in human scale."

Before the light



Democrat David Lawrence, here wielding a sledgehammer at a demolition of the old City Hall at Smithfield Street and Oliver Avenue, won his first mayoral election in 1945 by 14,000 votes. To the surprise of Republicans, Lawrence endorsed a plan to redevelop The Point into a state park. Lawrence's subsequent partnership with the conservative Allegheny Conference on Community Development irked both Democrats and Republicans. But, it allowed Pittsburgh to renew itself after World War II.

Only a few years earlier, writers were penning Pittsburgh's obituary. In 1943, the *Chicago Tribune* dismissed Pittsburgh, saying it wasn't a major city. In 1944, *The Wall Street Journal* rated Pittsburgh as a "class D" city, with little hope for recovery. Smoke clogged the air, sewage roiled the waters and rats combed the fringes of Downtown. Homes were crowded, poorly built and ill-maintained. In the Golden Triangle, where floods were a constant hazard, property values were dropping by \$10 million a year, and 40 percent of the office space was empty. Several of the largest corporations – Alcoa, Westinghouse and U.S. Steel – had purchased real estate in New York with intentions of moving east.

Between World War I and World War II, Pittsburgh was a favorite target of muckraking journalists. H.L. Mencken wrote of "unbroken and agonizing ugliness" and the "sheer revolting monstrosity of every house in sight." *Harper's Magazine* ran a story in 1930 headlined "Is Pittsburgh Civilized?" Another magazine, *Forum*, published a story in 1938 titled "Pittsburgh: What a City Shouldn't Be." Business leaders, who had a difficult time attracting employees to the city, tried to tackle Pittsburgh's problems. Organization after organization formed, each with its own group of important CEOs. All were failures.

One group brought famed New York Parks Commissioner Robert Moses to Pittsburgh in 1939, asking him to study the city. Moses suggested the city build a new park at The Point, build several new highways and clear the Lower Hill District, a neighborhood of blacks and immigrants plagued by overcrowding, faulty sanitation and absentee landlords. But Pittsburgh was unable to act on Moses' recommendations, or any others. A succession of Republican governors in Harrisburg denied the city's Democratic mayors any funds.

Hoping to reverse Pittsburgh's run of bad luck, a silver-haired, chain-smoking New Dealer named Wallace Richards began whispering in the ear of R.K. Mellon, a publicity-shy executive who controlled a vast banking empire and held together one of the world's richest families. Richards, who in the early 1930s helped the federal government restore land ravaged by flooding, was a big believer in the power of "applied civics."

Mellon, to the surprise of his fellow Republicans, listened to Richards. They became close friends. Midway through World War II, Mellon and Richards sat down to discuss the future of Pittsburgh over breakfast in Washington, D.C., where Mellon was stationed. Mellon said, "We've either got to do something about that place or give it back to the Indians."

The king and his lair

After the war ended, Mellon returned to Pittsburgh. On their first night back, he and his wife took a room at the top of the William Penn Hotel. Connie Mellon looked out the window, gazing below at the soot and the smog. "Dick, I just cannot ever come back and live in Pittsburgh again," she said. Years later, Connie Mellon told an author, "He always said afterward that I was the one that started him thinking."

There are several theories about why Mellon, an aloof, private man, became interested in saving Pittsburgh. Maybe it was his wife. Maybe it was family history. Maybe it was business. "Let's say selfish interests are involved," he once said. "We have a lot of property here. We can't very well move out the banks." Mellon, though, was a reluctant leader. Always shy, he spent his childhood in a mansion of 65 rooms and 11 baths that towered above the formal gardens of what is now Mellon Park. He loved riding horses and hunting at his father's 18,000-acre estate in Ligonier. He did not like school. He left Princeton University his sophomore year and took a few courses at Carnegie Tech before joining the family business as a messenger.

As a young man, he disliked finance, too. When his father, R.B. Mellon, gave him \$50,000 as a teen-age investment account, Mellon refused to use it. "There was never a touch of rebellion in R.K., never a hint of the intellectual," wrote author David Koskoff, in an unauthorized biography of the Mellon family. "R.K. was conventional man, luxury model." But his father's death, in 1933, apparently changed him. At the funeral, Mellon told a reporter: "Father revered Pittsburgh." He reminisced about past trips to New York, where his father would drive him past the Fifth Avenue mansions and say: "Nearly all of these fine homes are owned by former Pittsburghers. And there isn't a one of them, who, if he could, would not gladly sell and return to Pittsburgh."

After his father's death, Mellon assumed control of the family's banking empire. With \$3 billion in assets, Mellon had connections to nearly every large company in Western Pennsylvania, including Gulf Oil, Koppers, Alcoa, Pittsburgh Consolidated Coal, U.S. Steel, Westinghouse Air Brake and Pittsburgh Plate Glass. Once he had control of the family business, Mellon also lent his quiet support to a fledgling organization called the Allegheny Conference on Community Development.

Formed in 1943, the conference looked at first like yet another civic booster group with a long, dry name. Its original title, after all, was the Citizens Sponsoring Committee on Post-War Planning for the Metropolitan Area of Allegheny County. The conference's big priorities of smoke and flood control and redevelopment of The Point had been tried before, always unsuccessfully. But the conference gained power unexpectedly in 1945, when Lawrence won his first mayoral election.

The Allegheny Conference had rooted against Lawrence, hoping to deal instead with his Republican opponent. Lawrence, after all, was a populist politician who railed against the city's elite. When Lawrence squeaked out a 14,000-vote victory, though, a bespectacled attorney named Arthur Van Buskirk suggested that Mellon meet with Lawrence. Van Buskirk was a close adviser to Mellon in the years after World War II. Yet, Mellon resisted the Lawrence meeting. Van Buskirk suggested he use a gift to break the ice. Mellon relented. He walked over to Lawrence's office and offered him 13.5 acres of land at Fifth Avenue and Beechwood Boulevard, as a park. Mellon, 46, and Lawrence, 56, had never before met or spoken.

"Few more incongruous meetings had perhaps ever taken place," wrote Michael Weber, author of "Don't Call Me Boss," a Lawrence biography. They saw each other only a few times after that first encounter. Although never friendly, their relationship evolved into a partnership. In Lawrence, Mellon found a politician willing to back the Allegheny Conference's ideas and play the role of thug. The unspoken bargain was Lawrence would get much of the publicity.

In Mellon, Lawrence found someone willing to poke the business community with a sharp stick. When coal companies resisted new smoke controls, Mellon leaned on Consolidated Coal, the city's largest coal company. Mellon could do that because he was Consolidated's largest stockholder. When the Pennsylvania Railroad balked at the new regulations, Mellon dialed up the railroad's president. Mellon could do that because he was a director at the company.

His phone call implied the threat that other railroads would be only too happy to carry the goods of Mellon-owned companies. "This became Mellon's part," wrote "The Mellon Family" author, Burton Hersh. "That low, definite voice on the long-distance telephone which hinted of recourses nobody preferred to consider. The bank held paper on just about everybody." Mellon's heft allowed his deputies, Richards and Van Buskirk, to spread their fingers everywhere, creating a shadow Mellon government. In 1945, they lobbied the state to approve the Urban Redevelopment Authority, a powerful tool that allowed Pittsburgh to seize private properties through eminent domain. Van Buskirk convinced Lawrence to be the URA's first chairman, and Van Buskirk became its first vice chairman.

Van Buskirk used his position as finance chairman of the Republican County Committee to push legislation favorable to Pittsburgh, persuading the governor to create a new parking authority, establish county smoke controls, release money for a new parkway and allow insurance companies to invest in center-city real estate. Van Buskirk also convinced the state to buy land and provide funds for the new Point State Park. New York insurer Equitable Life Assurance Society agreed to buy land east of the park, provide the URA with annual fees of \$50,000 and build a series of stainless-steel office buildings known as Gateway Center. It was a gamble.

To get Equitable, Van Buskirk guaranteed a clean piece of land. He also agreed to fill 60 percent of the projected space. Mellon asked companies such as Westinghouse Electric, Pittsburgh Plate Glass and Jones & Laughlin Steel to commit to space that had yet to be built, for rents higher than other buildings Downtown and on land prone to flooding. Originally, Equitable talked to the city about building 11 office towers. But the first three did not fill quickly, holding at 70 percent occupancy. "There was not anything like the demand for space to fill the rest of the buildings," one Equitable executive told Hersh, the author. "It's not a big city. The thing about Pittsburgh is that its appetite exceeds its digestion. We were stuck with it." Image is what counted, though.

Conference member and Falk Foundation Director J. Steele Gow would later say that Mellon got more credit for the Renaissance than he deserved and that, "All the extravagant language that was used about Dick at the time of his death is an illustration. It just wasn't so that he did everything." Yet Mellon, who never served on the Allegheny Conference's board, became the organization's most identifiable public figure. In 1956, *Life* magazine referred to Point State Park and Gateway Center as "Mellon's Miracle." Late in life, Mellon could see the new buildings from his office on the 39th floor of the Mellon-U.S. Steel Building. Through tall windows, the "city spread out so far below it looked like a museum model," wrote one journalist. "All looked like toys."

Sprawling with Uncle Sam

In the second half of the 20th century, public and private officials spent more than \$5 billion trying to repair Pittsburgh and its old neighborhoods. Yet, the city's population never again moved higher than 676,806 -- its head count at mid-century. People began fleeing Pittsburgh, using new automobiles and new highways to find new homes. It was the thing to do. As automaker Henry Ford predicted, "We shall solve the city problem by leaving the city."



In the late 1950s, when the URA demolished 1,300 buildings and cleared 95 acres in the Lower Hill District, it was the largest attempt in the nation to redevelop a city neighborhood. This picture shows the neighborhood before the URA began demolition work. The shaded part of the photograph shows the area slated for demolition to make way for a silver-domed Civic Arena, an apartment tower, the Crosstown Boulevard and Chatham Center. (Photo courtesy of URA)

President Dwight D. Eisenhower led the way. As a young tank corps observer, Eisenhower noticed how difficult it was to travel the country by car. Between World War I and World War II, a trip from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco took 62 days. West of Illinois, pavement was hard to find. Eisenhower recommended his bosses build a national highway system, to protect cities in case of attack. Military planners, in turn, sold Congress on a 40,000-mile system. After Eisenhower became president in 1953, the federal government began using gas taxes and other fees to pay up to 90 percent of the costs for new highways across the country.

In Pittsburgh, officials tapped federal funds to build sections of the Parkway East, which gave drivers an easy route from the new Greater Pittsburgh International Airport to the new Pennsylvania Turnpike. Another early highway funded by the federal government was Interstate 79, which linked the Parkway to Washington and Butler counties. Planners thought the new roads would alleviate congestion and make cities more attractive. But the opposite occurred.

People left Pittsburgh for new suburbs such as West Mifflin, Mount Pleasant, Shaler, Penn Hills and Oakmont. Monroeville, which stood at the junction of the turnpike and the parkway, exploded in the 1950s and 1960s. Middle-class workers from the city and Turtle Creek gravitated to its new homes and a shopping strip known as the "Miracle Mile." People could afford a move to the suburbs because of The G.I. Bill, which gave World War II veterans access to long-term mortgages backed by the Veterans Administration. Between 1947 and 1957, a new home appeared every three days in Pleasant Hills.

The city did not fare as well. The federal government provided Pittsburgh with money to clear "slums," and it agreed to cover two-thirds of any loss. Though it wasn't the original plan, the city would spend this public money first on clearing the Lower Hill District.

The Politician and The Hill

Lawrence, a boxer, rarely backed down from a fight. When some of The Point's property owners demanded higher prices for their buildings, Lawrence threatened tax increases. When property owners tried to challenge him in court, saying the project represented an unconstitutional use of the city's land-taking powers, Lawrence called them "morally unacceptable," declaring that only the "meanest-spirited citizens" would work against the city's goals.

There was one confrontation that Lawrence avoided, however. It led, indirectly, to one of Pittsburgh's biggest urban renewal projects -- the clearance of the Lower Hill District. In 1949, the city decided it wanted a new Civic Auditorium, and department store owner Edgar Kaufmann wanted it to have a retractable roof for Civic Light Opera concerts. An Allegheny Conference committee looked at 15 sites. The Hill was one, but the committee ruled it out because the area's density presented a "rehousing problem." The first choice was in Highland Park, along North Negley Avenue. Most of the land belonged to Robert King, an uncle of Richard King Mellon. As a child, R.K. Mellon rode ponies on King's estate, the sprawling grounds framed by English parapets. King's home was capped with a mansard roof and tower.

Highland Park's middle- and upper-class homeowners hated the idea. As Lawrence put the Highland Park condemnation before City Council, 1,000 people signed a petition fighting the project. More than 300 citizens showed up at a public hearing to argue against it. An attorney decried the "terrible power of eminent domain." A councilman criticized Lawrence's closed-door decision making and his collusion with the Allegheny Conference. But the hearing reached its climax when the 74-year-old King walked to the stand leaning on a cane, dressed in "black tie and hard collar," according to the biographer Weber. "I am in favor of light opera and musical comedy," King said, "but I am against the proposal by promoters who may think that this particular site, which is now a refuge for birds and wildlife, can be manmade by destruction into something better than God made it." If the city backed off, King said, he would donate his land as a park. At first, Lawrence refused to budge. However, after King's attorney challenged the move with an injunction, Lawrence changed his mind.

Why? Opposition from local residents was part of it, Weber said. More likely, though, Lawrence could smell defeat. Taking land from a Mellon relative in a wealthy neighborhood may have posed a serious legal threat to Lawrence's larger urban redevelopment plans. In looking for alternative sites, Lawrence eventually settled on the Lower Hill District, a popular neighborhood for Italians, Jews, Eastern Europeans and blacks. Politically, it was a better choice. "There was not a lot of opposition," Weber said, in an interview. "Was that easier? Absolutely."

It was a lively neighborhood, bulging with shops, nightclubs, restaurants and small businesses. But it had problems, too. There were more than 1,000 tuberculosis cases reported in 1933. A 1953 building's inspector's report, cited in Weber's book, rated 681 of the 901 homes as "substandard." "You could smell urine," said Pease, URA director at the time. "It was a bad, overcrowded neighborhood." The URA's demolition, which began in 1956, forced out 1,239 black families. About 800 relocated to the nearby Third, Fourth and Fifth wards -- predominantly black neighborhoods. And the relocation did not go well.

The federal government, at the time, did not provide displaced homeowners with relocation money, as it does today. Also, homeowners had no contact with the city until the acquisition had been made. They got a notice in the mail. "Chaos. It was absolute chaos," URA official Irving Rubinstein told an interviewer in 1974. "We didn't know what to do." In the end, the city Housing Authority found standard-rated housing for 1,218 families. But about 80 families had to settle for substandard homes, according to a Chatham College study. "They were trying to do a good job," Pease said. "Was it perfect? No. Was it as good as we could do? I think yes."

The population of the Lower Hill dropped from 17,334 in 1950 to 2,459 in 1990. People forced to leave the integrated area moved mainly to neighborhoods that reflected their own race, thus worsening the city's segregation problem. By 1960, Pittsburgh was one of the most segregated big cities in America. Also, that redevelopment project never lived up to some of its promises. Early on, there was talk of a cultural district -- an "Acropolis" on the Hill. The \$22 million Civic Arena opened in 1961. An apartment building and the Crosstown Boulevard opened in 1963. Chatham Center opened in 1966. But when the Heinz family decided to build a new symphony hall Downtown instead, the cultural center evaporated. So did some of the glow of the Renaissance. A 1968 editorial in *The Pittsburgh Press* read, "The men of the Renaissance have been unable to produce anything but a crop of weeds on 9.2 acres of prime public land next to the Civic Arena." The land remains a parking lot today.

Back to the Future

On November 6, 1998, Mayor Tom Murphy stood on Fifth Avenue, his back to a new Lazarus department store. He looked at the other buildings on Fifth that he wanted to demolish and replace with new shops, restaurants and a movie theater. Pointing to some of the buildings, Murphy made a noise that sounded like the crumbing of brick, concrete and glass. He laughed.

The moment, meant to diffuse some of the tension surrounding Murphy's \$480 million redevelopment plan, revealed how controversial his project had become. Almost a year later, Murphy stood at the same corner, unveiling his proposal to a large crowd of people and television cameras. "Dump Murphy!" someone shouted. With his Downtown plan, Murphy is returning to a model developed by Lawrence, Mellon and the Allegheny Conference. He wants to buy land, demolish buildings and sell the real estate to Chicago developer Urban Retail Properties. Downtown property owners, like Burt in 1950, consider the plan to be an unconstitutional use of the city's land-taking powers. Like Burt, they say they are willing to take the city to court to stop the project.

Lawrence once told author Stefan Lorant that Pittsburgh "took pleasure in the swing of the headache ball and the crash of the falling brick." Murphy does not have such leeway. People now are suspicious of any plan involving government aid, bulldozers and the threat of eminent domain. Murphy is up against preservationists and planners who don't want to lose any more historic buildings and who don't want to sacrifice the local character of Downtown to out-of-town retailers. He also stands in front of 50 years of history and the mixed legacy of urban renewal in Pittsburgh. "Interventions always have unintended consequences," said Moe Coleman, a University of Pittsburgh professor and former mayoral aide. With Murphy's Downtown plan, "Are we working out of conventional wisdom or are we trying to think about the world that might be here 10 years from now?"

One of the few people left to defend the past is Pease, who had the longest tenure of any director in the URA's history. After growing up poor in Atkinson, Neb., dreaming of a life as an engineer and helping fighter planes navigate Europe during World War II, Pease joined the URA at 28. He

became its director at 32. "It was a very exciting time," he said. "I was a young guy with a lot of responsibility." One of several young planners who had access to a lot of federal money and political power, Pease did what he thought was fair, smart and equitable. Pease is proud of what happened. Gateway Center, he said, kept several big companies in Pittsburgh.

The Hill, he said, was a bad area that needed help. When redevelopment stalled in the 1960s, Pease pressed for more anti-poverty programs and brokered neighborhood meetings between black leaders and Allegheny Conference executives. The redevelopment of the North Side, he said, "was a great project." In East Liberty, he added many new homes and apartments for people who needed them. The shopping district did not collapse because of the renewal project, Pease said. Instead, the suburban malls killed it. "I guess it is a feeling of sadness," he said. "You put a lot of work in, and when something doesn't work, it is just too bad. But I am not staying awake at night crying about it."

But a bigger question remains, said Aldo Colautti, 73, who was Mayor Barr's chief aide from 1959 to 1967. "What would Pittsburgh be like today if nothing was done and no effort was made to preserve the Downtown, improve the housing supply and extend the benefits of urban renewal into the neighborhoods?" "I think we would have slipped," he added. "I think we would have slipped even faster than we have the last 40 years." Put yourself in Pease's shoes. "If you had all that money to spend, would you spend it better and could you have had better results than you have now?" Coleman asked. "If you could, how would you do it? What would you have done differently?"

Cost of Living 1977 – United States

How Much things cost in 1977

Yearly Inflation Rate **USA 6.5%**
Year End Close Dow Jones Industrial Average **831**
Interest Rates Year End Federal Reserve **7.75%**
Average Cost of new house **\$49,300.00**
Average Income per year **\$15,000.00**
Average Monthly Rent **\$240.00**
Cost of a gallon of Gas **65 cents**
Bikini **\$9.00**
Renault Gordini **\$6998,00**
BMW 320i **\$7990.00**

1975 Chevrolet Bel Air, Impala, and Caprice Facts

(For reference, in case Yonngblood has a '75 Chevy)

Model	Weight range (lbs.)	Price range (new)	Number built
Bel Air	4,179	\$4,345	15,871
Impala	4,190-4,265	\$4,548-\$4,901	211,708
Caprice	4,275-4,360	\$4,819-\$5,113	122,339
Station Wagon	4,856-5,036	\$4,878-\$5,351	71,766

IN PITTSBURGH – The Economic Reality for Working Class African-Americans:

Between the end of World War I and the early 1980s, Pittsburgh’s share of national steel production fell from 25 percent to 14 percent, and its manufacturing employment declined from 338,000 to 240,000, a loss that proportionally was larger than in all but one of the nation’s major manufacturing centers.

The consequences of this decline were serious for most Pittsburghers, but were devastating for working class blacks. By the 1980s black families lived on an income that was only 57 percent that of local whites and suffered an unemployment rate of 35 percent, 3.5 times the white rate. Pittsburgh blacks also lost ground relative to blacks elsewhere: in 1987 a national consultant ranked Pittsburgh forty-first out of forty-eight metropolitan areas in terms of the comparative economic status of local blacks and whites.

From the chapter “Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh,” *The Transformation of the Black Community, 1945-1985* – remained of chapter attached

About the Playwright

August Wilson (April 27, 1945 – October 2, 2005) was an American playwright. His literary legacy is the ten play series, **The Pittsburgh Cycle** (also known as **The Century Cycle**), for which he received two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Each play in the cycle is set in a different decade and depicts the African American experience in the twentieth century.

Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel, Jr. in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the fourth of six children to German immigrant baker, Frederick August Kittel, Sr. and Daisy Wilson, an African American cleaning woman, from North Carolina. His mother raised the children alone by the time he was five in a two-room apartment above a grocery store at 1727 Bedford Avenue. The economically depressed neighborhood in which he was raised was inhabited predominantly by black Americans and Jewish and Italian immigrants. Wilson's mother was remarried to David Bedford in the 1950's when he was a teen, and the family moved from the Hill to the then predominantly white working class neighborhood, Hazelwood, where they encountered racial hostility and were soon forced out.



Wilson was the only African American student at the Central Catholic High School in 1959 before he was driven away by threats and abuse. He then attended Connelley Vocational High School, but found the curriculum unchallenging. He dropped out of Gladstone High School in the 9th grade in 1960 after his teacher accused him of plagiarizing a 20-page paper he wrote on Napoleon I of France. Wilson hid his decision from his mother because he did not want to disappoint her. At the age of 16, he began working menial jobs and that allowed him to meet a wide variety of people, some of whom he later based his characters on, such as Sam in *The Janitor* (1985). By this time, Wilson knew that he wanted to be a writer, but this created tension with his mother, who wanted him to become a lawyer. She forced him to leave the family home and he enlisted in the United States Army for a three-year stint in 1962, but left after one year and went back to working various odd jobs as a porter, short-order cook, gardener, and dishwasher.

August Kittel changed his name to August Wilson to honor his mother after his father's death in 1965. That same year he bought his first typewriter for \$10.00. In 1978 Wilson moved to St. Paul, Minnesota at the suggestion of his friend director Claude Purdy, who helped him secure a job writing educational scripts for the Science Museum of Minnesota. In 1980 he received a fellowship for the Minneapolis Playwrights Center. Wilson had a long association with the Penumbra Theatre Company of St Paul, which gave the premieres of some Wilson plays. Wilson's best-known plays are *Fences* (1985) (which won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award), *The Piano Lesson* (1990) (a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

In 1994 Wilson left St Paul for Seattle, where he would develop a relationship with Seattle Repertory Theatre. Seattle Rep would ultimately be the only theater in the country to produce all of the works in his ten-play cycle and his one-man show *How I Learned What I Learned*. Wilson succumbed to liver cancer on October 2, 2005 and passed away in Seattle at the age of 60.

Discussion Questions

- In the final paragraph of “The Story of Urban Renewal,” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*), Aldo Colautti raises the question of what would have happened if “Urban Renewal” had never taken place. What do are the merits of a project such as Pittsburgh’s Urban Renewal? What are the downfalls? What do you think would have happened if the city had been “left to its own devices?”
- In *Jitney*, a father and son are at odds over the future of their business. What might the business signify for their relationship? Do you think they’re only fighting about the Gypsy Cab Station, or is there something deeper at play? Why?
- August Wilson described *Jitney* as the play in which he “discover[ed] his voice.” What does this mean, and why do you think he described *Jitney* this way?
- What does money represent in *Jitney*? Do Wilson’s characters have to sacrifice anything to obtain it? Why or why not?