

The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice

THEATRE & THOUGHT

We're so glad you're joining us for the first installment in Court's Theatre & Thought series: **The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice**. In this conversational, intimate look at August Wilson and the American Century Cycle, Dr. Kenneth Warren and Resident Artist Ron OJ Parson will examine how one of America's most essential classic playwrights has been influenced by and impacted generations of Black artists.

On the date of each session, you will receive a digital access link via email with login instructions.

You will be able to access all August Wilson sessions following their release date for up to 60 days.

You will not need to download any special software in order to access digital content — only an internet-enabled device with a web browser.

QUESTIONS? Call our Box Office at (773) 753-4472.



TUES
SEPT 8
7PM

August Wilson and The Great Migration

Featuring Dr. Kenneth Warren and Professor Sandra Shannon

In this session, Dr. Kenneth Warren and Professor Sandra Shannon will discuss urbanization, migration, and property ownership in Pittsburgh's Hill District as well as various theatrical trends that surface in August Wilson's work. Participants will also learn about how Wilson's work was received and the way Wilson's play tackles issues of historical representation and cultural history.

TUES
SEPT 15
7PM

August Wilson and The Civil Rights Movement

Featuring Dr. Kenneth Warren and Joel Rhone

In this session, Dr. Kenneth Warren will discuss the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s in relation to August Wilson's work. Also discussed will be the representational power of the family/familial struggle in Wilson's plays and his nostalgia for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

TUES
SEPT 22
7PM

August Wilson, Genealogy, and Tradition

Featuring Dr. Kenneth Warren and Dr. Honey Crawford

In this session, Dr. Kenneth Warren and Dr. Honey Crawford will expound on Wilson's engagement with heteronormative leadership hierarchies of the Civil Rights Movement and address the representation of slavery, genealogy, and patriarchy in the plays of August Wilson. Additional discussion will concern the performance of African American vernacular speech and other cultural traditions in Wilson's theatre and the social changes that sparked a renewed interest in African American folk culture in the 1980s and 1990s.

TUES
SEPT 29
7PM

The Ground on Which I Stand

Featuring Dr. Kenneth Warren and Resident Artist Ron OJ Parson

In this session, Resident Artist Ron OJ Parson and Dr. Kenneth Warren will explore Wilson's simultaneous commitments to Western and African traditions and Wilson's push for a "black theatre" in the speech "**The Ground on Which I Stand**". Participants will also learn more about the influences on Wilson from the Black Arts/Black Power movement and contemporary artists who identify Wilson as an influence.

Q&A

Following each session, participants are invited to engage in a live Q&A. If you would like to participate, make sure you attend the live sessions at 7pm on the dates listed above.

PANELIST PROFILES



DR. KENNETH WARREN's scholarship and teaching focuses on American and African American literature from the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century. Professor Warren is particularly interested in the way that debates about literary form and genre articulate with discussions of political and social change. His single-authored books, which include *What Was African American Literature?* (Harvard 2010), *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago, 2003), and *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (Chicago, 1993), explore how American literature by black and white writers helped consolidate, and subsequently responded to, Jim Crow America. Professor Warren is also a coeditor of two books, *Renewing Black Intellectual History: The Material and Ideological Foundations of African America Thought* (Paradigm 2010) and *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs* (Georgia 2013). His articles have also appeared in *Boston Review*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Jacobin*. At the University of Chicago, the various courses he teaches reflect his interest in genre, the politics of race, and the relation of culture to politics.



HONEY CRAWFORD is the Harper-Schmidt Fellow and Collegiate Assistant Professor in TAPS at UChicago. Her research interests include global feminisms, critical race theory, public spectacle, and protest. She specializes in Afro Brazilian cultural performance as both a scholar and practitioner, exploring intersections between ritual performance and self-making through a repertoire that includes carnival, media activism, radical theatre, and the performance of everyday life. She earned her PhD in theatre studies from Cornell University in 2017 where she was also a New York Public Humanities Fellow. Dr. Crawford is currently developing her dissertation into her book manuscript, *Negra Demais! Overwhelming Performances of Afro Brazilian Femininity*. This project takes an interdisciplinary approach, positioning women-driven spectacles of black consciousness in the 20th-21st century against prevalent discourse on the black diaspora and performance studies. Paying close attention to theatrical traditions that press against the bounds of propriety and indulge in an aesthetic of abundance, this book identifies a preoccupation with the transgressive potential held in performances of black feminine power.



RON OJ PARSON hails from Buffalo, New York and is a graduate of the University of Michigan's professional theatre program. He is a Resident Artist at Court Theatre, former co-founder and artistic director of the Onyx Theatre Ensemble, and co-founder of the Beyond the Stage Theatre Project. Ron is a company member of TimeLine Theatre, and associate artist at Writers Theatre and Teatro Vista. At Court Theatre, Ron directed *Fences*, *Gem*



FURTHER READING: To order books or scripts related to Court's digital programming, visit semcoop.com/court-theatre



of the Ocean, *Seven Guitars*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Jitney* by August Wilson; *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall; *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett; *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona; *Blues for an Alabama Sky* and *Flyin' West* by Pearl Cleage; and *Home* by Samm-Art Williams, among others. In Chicagoland, Ron has worked with Black Ensemble Theatre, eta Creative Arts Foundation, Chicago Dramatists, Congo Square, Oak Park Theatre Festival, Goodman, Victory Gardens, Northlight, Chicago Dramatists, Urban Theater Company, Steppenwolf, and City Lit Theatre. Regional theatres include American Players Theatre, Virginia Stage Company, Portland Stage, Studio Arena Theatre, Roundabout, Studio Theatre (DC), Baltimore Center Stage, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Geva, Signature, The Alliance Theatre, South Coast Rep, Kansas City Repertory, and Pasadena Playhouse, among others. In Canada, Ron directed the world premiere of *Palmer Park* at the Stratford Festival. Ron is a member of SAG-AFTRA, SDC, and Actors Equity.



JOEL RHONE is a PhD student at the University of Chicago. Joel earned his BA from Howard University in 2016, and after winning the Marshall Scholarship he received an MA from the University of Manchester in 2017. His

research interests include historical fiction, diaspora studies, and Black writers in exile. More broadly, he studies the performance of solidarity in African American letters. Joel was awarded honorable mention for the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship in 2019, and serves as an admissions assistant with UChicago GRAD.



SANDRA G. SHANNON is Professor of African American Literature in the Department of English at Howard University. She is a leading scholar on the works of playwright August Wilson with titles such as *The Dramatic Vision*

of August Wilson and *August Wilson's Fences: A Reference Guide* to her credit. She coedited the essay collection *August Wilson and Black Aesthetic* and is completing her work as coeditor of the forthcoming MLA Approaches to Teaching series volume *Approaches to Teaching the Plays of August Wilson*. Dr. Shannon has most recently published "An Intimate Look at Lynn Nottage," which appeared along with an in-depth interview of the playwright in the collection, *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights*. She is also the author of "Women Playwrights Who Cross Cultural Borders", which appears in the 2013 edition of *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre*. Dr. Shannon was part of an NEH award-winning team that will produced the PBS American Masters documentary on August Wilson in 2014. She was named a Fulbright Specialist and won a grant from the U. S. State Department to travel to Botswana to do archival research on the written correspondences of the country's most influential writer, the late Bessie Head. Dr. Shannon is the editor of the *College Language Association Journal*.

IMAGES: Sections of the August Wilson Mural at 2037 Centre Ave. in the Hill District, painted by a variety of artists including Kyle Holbrook and Edward Rawson (Rashaad Jorden).

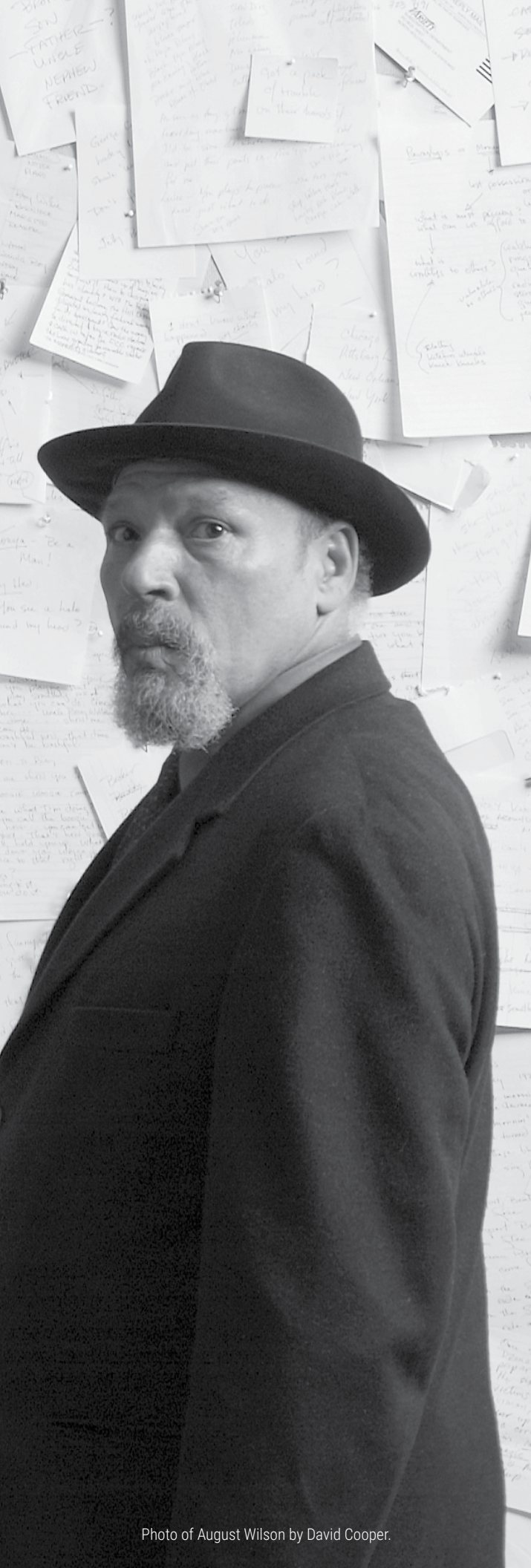


Photo of August Wilson by David Cooper.

Deepen Your Experience

Want to deepen your relationship with the material in **The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice**? Explore the following options for increasing your understanding and appreciation of the artists and academics bringing this Theatre & Thought series to life.

LISTEN:

Sandra Shannon discusses Wilson's life and work in this episode of "Against the Grain" for 94.1 KPFA.

<https://kpfa.org/episode/72874/>

READ:

"Pittsburgh's Place Within August Wilson's World." Learn more about Pittsburgh's role in Wilson's ten-play cycle in this interview with Laurence Glasco, an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh.

<https://www.courttheatre.org/about/blog/pittsburghs-place-within-august-wilsons-world/>

"August Wilson's Century Cycle." Haven't read or seen all of the plays in August Wilson's Century Cycle? This quick primer gives you an overview of each of Wilson's ten plays.

<https://www.courttheatre.org/about/blog/august-wilsons-century-cycle/>

"The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975)." Get a quick refresher on some of the major ideologies, artists, and activists in the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 70s.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-arts-movement-1965-1975/>

"The Ground on Which I Stand." Read the speech delivered by August Wilson on June 26, 1996, at the 11th biennial Theatre Communications Group national conference.

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/06/20/the-ground-on-which-i-stand/>

WATCH:

"The Ground on Which I Stand, Panel Discussion"

After showing highlights from *August Wilson: The Ground on Which I Stand* on February 9, 2015, the film's director and producer, Sam Pollard, moderated a panel with actors Phylicia Rashad and Ruben Santiago-Hudson; Constanza Romero, Wilson's widow; and costume designer, and Rich Blint, Ph.D., of Columbia University. Co-presented by THIRTEEN and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<https://www.pbs.org/video/american-masters-august-wilson-panel-discussion/>



THEATRE NEWS: KELVIN ROSTON, JR. RECEIVES 2019/20 NICHOLAS RUDALL CLASSIC ARTIST AWARD

Established in 2018 to honor Founding Artistic Director Nicholas Rudall, this award acknowledges an artist with a passion for and dedication to classic plays. Kelvin Roston, Jr. joins previous recipients Kate Fry and Allen Gilmore as a shining example of an artist upholding Rudall's vision for classic theatre's capacity to pose enduring and provocative questions that define the human experience.

"There aren't words that can adequately express how completely overwhelmed and honored I felt when I received the news," says Kelvin Roston, Jr. "It feels incredible to have your peers enjoy your work."

"Kelvin is masterful at making stories resonate with contemporary audiences thanks to his passion, intelligence, and extraordinary range as an actor," says Charles Newell, Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director. "I know Nick would have been dazzled by Kelvin's towering portrayals of two such different kings, Hedley and Oedipus."

Clare Lorrington, Nicholas Rudall's daughter, shared, "I am thrilled to hear about Kelvin as the recipient of the Nick Rudall award. He is a kind, thoughtful, and brilliant actor, and I know my dad would have been glad for Kelvin to receive this honor. I look forward to being able to see Kelvin at Court in the future."

Kelvin will play the title role in Court's spring 2021 production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. [Read an interview with Kelvin here.](#)

Photo of Kelvin Roston, Jr. in King Hedley II (Brosilow).

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