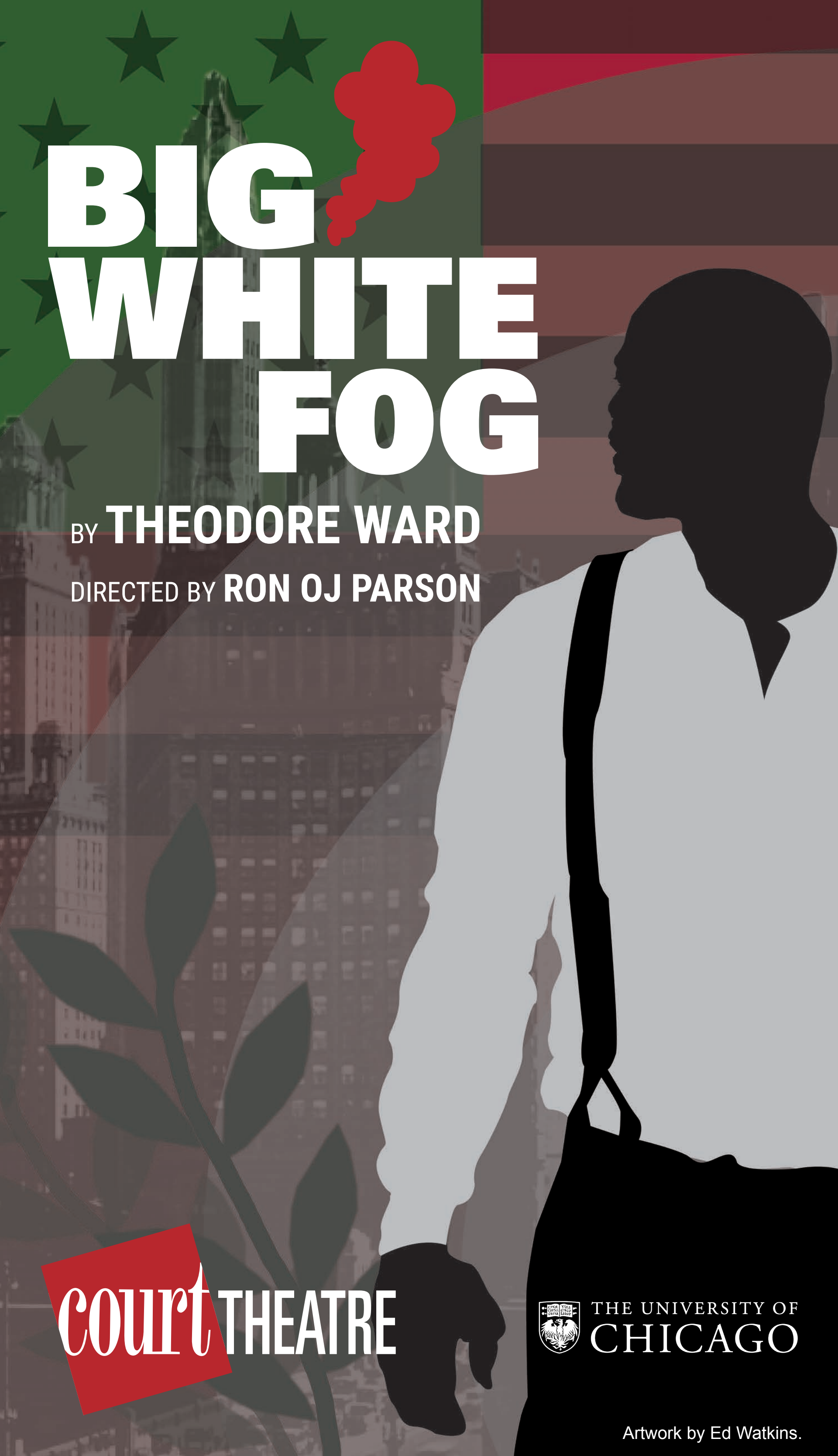
BIG WHITE FOG

BY **THEODORE WARD**

DIRECTED BY **RON OJ PARSON**



court THEATRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Artwork by Ed Watkins.

WELCOME

Dear Friends,

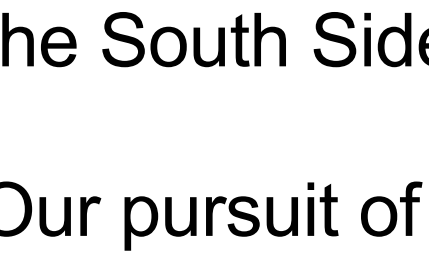
We open the 2025/26 season with *Big White Fog,* Theodore Ward's masterful and sweeping tale of aspiration, hope, despair, and clashing ideologies spanning decades and generations.

First completed in 1938, funded by the Federal Theatre Project, and influenced by the South Side Writers Group which nurtured iconic voices like Richard Wright and Margaret Walker, *Big White Fog* is a crucial and often overlooked component of the South Side's rich artistic legacy. Much like Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, it is set a few blocks from where the theatre is located and elevates daily life—specifically Black daily life—to the ranks of epic storytelling. Through Ward's vivid characters, we hear the perspectives of different generations and ideologies on the South Side, almost exactly one hundred years ago, in a moment that is socially, politically, and economically precarious. We bear witness to the difficulty and necessity of coalition building, and we come to understand that each of us plays a role in our collective progress. Its massive scale equates the quotidian to the mythic, making the case that the pursuit of the American Dream is as legendary as the dream itself.

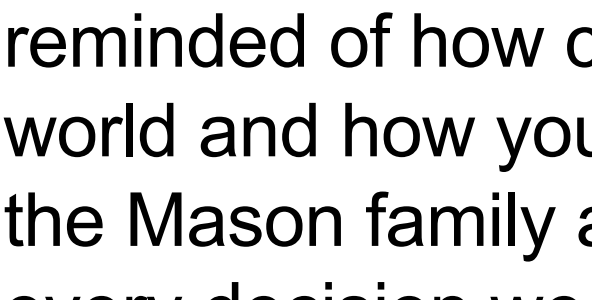
It is an ambitious start to an ambitious season. We welcomed a new Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director, Avery Willis Hoffman, who will begin her tenure later this fall; we will stage our first world premiere musical, *Out Here,* in the spring; we will continue reimagining what classic theatre can be through adaptations, translations, and commissions; and we will further deepen and enrich our relationship with the South Side.

Our pursuit of artistic excellence, truth, and transformation is relentless, and we dream that every time you come to Court Theatre, you're reminded of how classic theatre can expand your world and how you see your place in it. Much like the Mason family at the center of *Big White Fog*, every decision we make is in service of this dream.

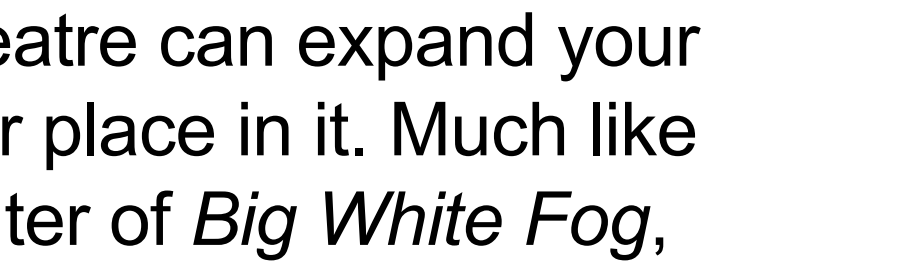
Thank you for attending *Big White Fog* and dreaming alongside us. Welcome to the 2025/26 season.



Angel Ysaguirre
Executive Director



Gabrielle Randle-Bent
Senior Artistic Producer



Heidi Thompson Saunders
Senior Managing Producer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Letter >>

Title Page >>

Cast >>

Production Team >>

Staff >>

Articles and Interviews:

- A Note from Director Ron OJ Parson >>
- In Conversation: Ron OJ Parson and Ayanna Bria Bakari >>
- Fading into Obscurity: Theodore Ward's *Big White Fog* >>
- Meet Court's New Artistic Director: Avery Willis Hoffman >>
- Staging the Clash of Ideologies in Depression-Era Black America >>
- Up Next: *The Taming of the Shrew* >>

Cast Profiles >>

Artist Profiles >>

About Court Theatre >>

Donor Recognition >>

court THEATRE

Avery Willis Hoffman
Incoming Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director

Angel Ysaguirre
Executive Director

Gabrielle Randle-Bent
Senior Artistic Producer

Heidi Thompson Saunders
Senior Managing Producer

BIG WHITE FOG

BY THEODORE WARD

DIRECTED BY RON OJ PARSON

Jack Magaw U.S.A., Scenic Designer
Yvonne L. Miranda U.S.A., Costume Designer
Lee Keenan, Lighting Designer
Christopher Kriz U.S.A., Sound Designer & Composer
Khalid Long, PhD, Production Dramaturg
Becca McCracken C.S.A., Casting Director
Jaclynn Joslin,* Production Stage Manager
Lauren Peters,* Assistant Stage Manager

SEP 12 - OCT 12, 2025

Setting: The home of Victor and Ella Mason on Dearborn Street, on Chicago's South Side, from 1922 to 1932.

There will be a 15-minute intermission.

Please note: Production contains gunshots and simulated smoking.

Sponsored by Allstate®

Ron OJ Parson's residency is made possible by The Joyce Foundation

An original production of the Federal Theatre Project, *Big White Fog* was first produced in 1938 at the Great Northern Theatre in Chicago.

United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE is the union representing scenic, costume, lighting, sound, and projection designers in Live Performance.

*Denotes a member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

The videotaping or making of electronic or other audio and/or visual recordings of this production and distributing recordings or streams in any medium, including the internet, is strictly prohibited, a violation of the author's rights, and actionable under United States copyright law.

Court Theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. Court Theatre is a constituent of the League of Resident Theatres and the Illinois Humanities Council. Court Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the American Theatre, and the League of Chicago Theatres.

This project is partially supported by a CityArts Grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events. Court Theatre acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION 1913

Illinois ARTS Council

SDC The Director is a member of the STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY, a national theatrical labor union.

LOCAL USA 829

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

CAST

Victor Mason, *a Garveyite leader* ..... Joshua L. Green*
Ella Mason, *Victor's wife*..... Sharriese Hamilton*
Lester (Les) Mason, *their elder son*.....Patrick Newson Jr.*
Wanda Mason, *their elder daughter* .....Ayanna Bria Bakari*
Caroline Mason, *their younger daughter* ..... Jada Jackson
Phillip Mason, *their younger son* ..... John McBeth III
Daniel Rogers, *their brother-in-law*..... Amir Abdullah*
Juanita Rogers, *Ella's sister and Daniel's wife* ..... Alanna Lovely*
Martha Brooks, *mother of Ella and Juanita* ..... Greta Oglesby*
Percy Mason, *brother of Victor* ..... Ronald L. Conner*
Claudine, *friend of Wanda* ..... Saran Bakari
Nathan Piszer, *a student* .....Artem Kreimer
Marks, *a used-furniture man*.....Artem Kreimer
Count Strawder, *Garveyite* ..... Anthony Irons*
Count Cotton, *Garveyite* .....Lionel Gentle
Sister Gabrella, *a Black Cross nurse*..... Saran Bakari
Lieutenant.....Brandon Dahlquist*
Bailiff..... Nathan Daniel Goldberg
Patrolman .....Michael B. Woods

Understudies

Bridget Adams-King (u/s Ella Mason/Juanita Rogers)
Mikha'el Amin (u/s Percy Mason/Count Strawder/Count Cotton)
Cereyna Bougouneau (u/s Wanda Mason/Claudine)
Anthony J. Harris (u/s Lester Mason/Phillip Mason)
Keshia Kimbrough (u/s Martha Brooks)
Emma Linderman (u/s Caroline Mason)

*Denotes a member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

court THEATRE

2025/26 SEASON

NOV/DEC 2025

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

by William Shakespeare
adapted and directed by Marti Lyons

FEB/MAR 2026

MISS JULIE

by August Strindberg
directed by Gabrielle Randle-Bent

APR/MAY 2026

WORLD PREMIERE

OUT HERE

Concept by Leslie Buxbaum, David J. Levin, and Erin McKeown
Book and Lyrics by Leslie Buxbaum
Music and Lyrics by Erin McKeown
Dramaturgy by David J. Levin
Directed by Chay Yew

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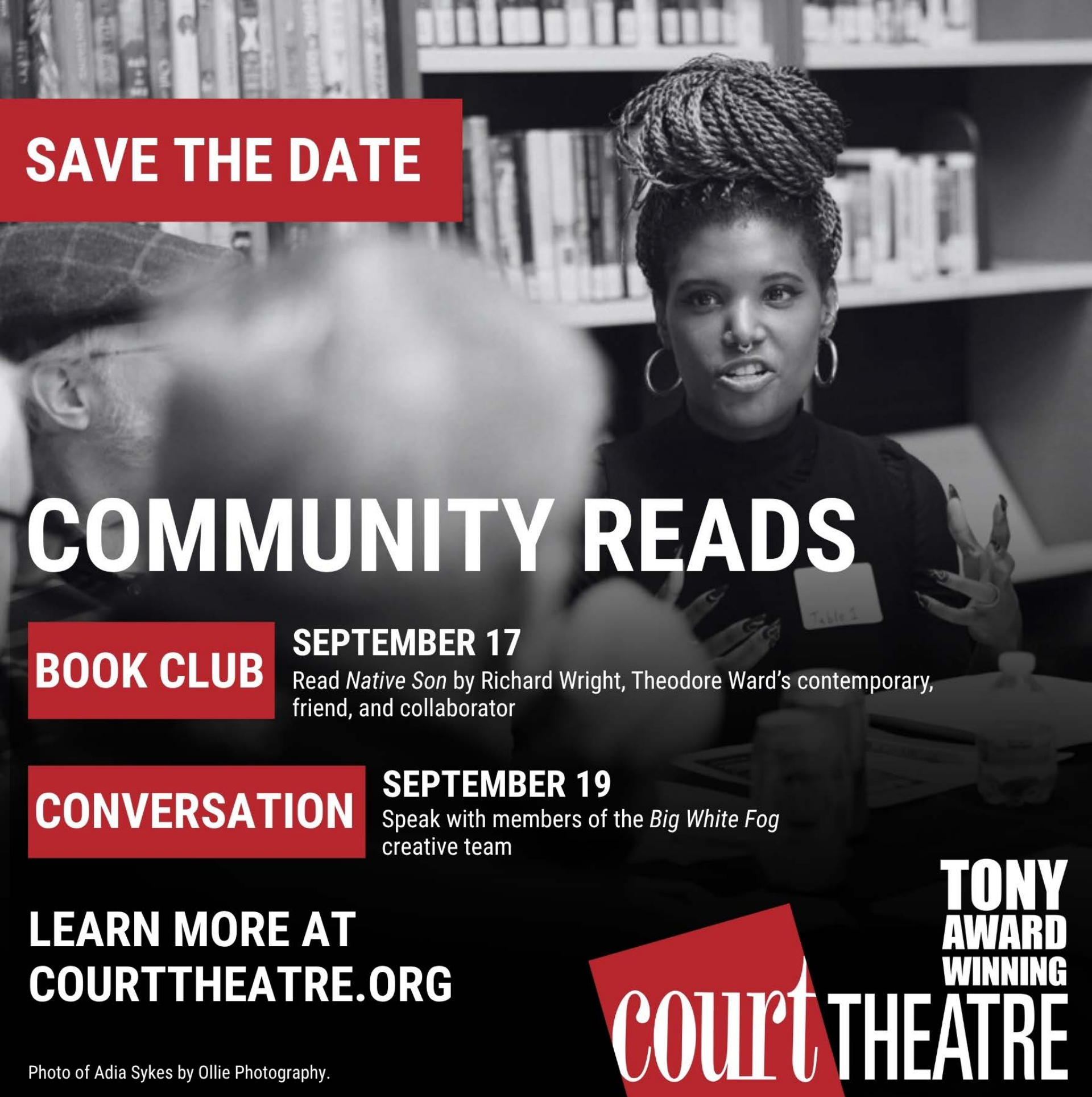
PRODUCTION TEAM

Company Culture Manager ..... Sheryl Williams
Vocal & Dialect Consultant ..... Sammi Grant
Associate Casting Director ..... Celeste M. Cooper
Assistant Director ..... Jamaque Newberry
Literary Fellow ..... Marissa Fenley
Assistant Scenic Designer ..... Nora Brooks-Slauter
Scenic Artists ..... Sarah Lewis U.S.A., Lindsay Maiorano
Carpenters .... Jordan Krsnak, Sean Moore, Tseela Sokolin-Maimon
Assistant Properties Manager ..... Persephone Lawrence
Properties Assistant ..... Jamie Auer
Assistant Costume Designer ..... Janelle Lynn Smith
Costume Shop Assistants ..... Jess Donaldson, Emma Smith
Stitchers ..... Raquel Buriani, Ari Casas, Delaney Gosse
Draper ..... Eric Guy
Wardrobe Tech/Deck Crew ..... Sierra Clark, Sebastian Van Horn
Wig and Hair Coordinator ..... Megan E. Pirtle
Assistant Lighting Designer ..... Chelsea Strebe
Assistant Lighting Supervisor ..... Eli McEwan
Electricians ..... Emily Brown, Juni Cruz,
Jonah White, Garvin Van Der Noot
Audio Engineer ..... Stefanie Senior
Floor Manager ..... Alex Umekubo

Scenic Artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E. Local USA829, AFL-CIO, CLC.

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS



SAVE THE DATE

COMMUNITY READS

BOOK CLUB

SEPTEMBER 17
Read *Native Son* by Richard Wright, Theodore Ward's contemporary, friend, and collaborator

CONVERSATION

SEPTEMBER 19
Speak with members of the *Big White Fog* creative team

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Photo of Adia Sykes by Ollie Photography.

TONY AWARD WINNING
court THEATRE

COURT THEATRE STAFF

Incoming Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director	Avery Willis Hoffman
Executive Director	Angel Ysaguirre
Senior Artistic Producer	Gabrielle Randle-Bent
Senior Managing Producer	Heidi Thompson Saunders
Resident Artist	Ron OJ Parson
Director of Casting and Artist Cultivation	Becca McCracken C.S.A.
Executive Assistant	Tyler Calhoun
Casting/Archival Intern	Avery Echols
New Canon Cultivation Assistant	Claudia Roth Hesson
Director of Engagement	Kamilah Rashied
Director of Education	Jarrett King
Engagement Programs Manager	Kelcie Beene
Education Programs Manager	Kate Wiseman
Education Coordinator	Sonia Goldberg
Teaching Artists	India Nicole Burton Monet Felton Willow James Jamaque Newberry
Interim Production Manager and Company Manager	Lorenzo Blackett
Technical Director	Luke Lemanski
Assistant Technical Director	Kelly Lesniak
Scene Shop Foreperson	Cordell Brown
House Carpenter	Tony Cooper
Head of Props	Lara Musard
Costume Shop Manager	Erica Friesen
Wardrobe Supervisor	Jody Schmidt
Lighting Supervisor	Andrei Borges
Technical Director of Sound and Video	Josh McCammon
Director of Development	Leah Cox
Associate Director of Major Gifts	Dakota Williams
Senior Assistant Director of Development	Jean Osberger
Assistant Director of Development	Cara Peterson
Director of Marketing	Traci Brant
Associate Director of Marketing for Content Creation	Camille Oswald
Associate Director of Marketing for Audience Services	Matthew P. Sitz
Audience Development Associate and House Manager	Phillip H. Lewis
Box Office and Ticketing Software Manager	Heather Dumdei
Associate Box Office Manager	Abbey Freestone
Assistant Box Office Managers	Jordan Brown Camryn D'Angelo
Front of House Assistants	Ashley Charles Tirzah Cobb Samuel Garwal Ryan Isdonas Anya Moseke
Public Relations	Cathy Taylor Public Relations
Captions	CaptionPoint
Audio Description	Martin Wilde
Director of Artistic Sign Language	Hershella Ashford
ASL Interpreters	So'mone Bowman Julikka LaChe Benny Llamas
ASL Coordination	Mosaico Interpreting Company
Volunteer Ushers	Courtesy of The Saints
Volunteer Coordinator	Rick Babcock

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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A NOTE FROM DIRECTOR RON OJ PARSON

Ron OJ Parson shares remarks at the first rehearsal of *Big White Fog* (Photo: Joe Mazza).

> *"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots."*
>
> –Marcus Garvey

This Marcus Garvey quote still rings true over one hundred years later, and is more important than ever.

First of all, I would like to thank Court Theatre—my artistic home where I have been Resident Artist for the last twenty years—for helping me tell this story. *Big White Fog* is a play I have been trying to do for many years, most recently as part of the Spotlight Reading Series originated by me and my colleague Aaron Mays. It was always in the back of my mind that this play would get done, and it is finally happening.

In my over fifty years of acting and directing plays—including works by Ibsen, Strindberg, Ionesco, Beckett, Pirandello, and Tennessee Williams, to name a few—and in over thirty-two productions of August Wilson's plays, nine of them staged here at Court, I always find the plays of my own culture immensely gratifying. Plays for and about my own community, so to speak. Plays for my people: my friends, family, colleagues, and of course, my ancestors. Stories that tell a small part of what we have endured. Stories of a past that has made us who we are today, shining a light on the positive and the negative effects of our history. This is an American story.

Big White Fog was originally funded by a federal grant in 1938. In today's political climate, that would probably not happen. It was an important project in Chicago theatre history in the 1930s, and I feel it is an important project today. Unfortunately, the Big White Fog still exists—and is growing.

I'd like to thank Pemon Rami, Chuck Smith, Luther Goins, Runako Jahi, Charlie Newell, The Late Paul Carter Harrison, Brother Cimarron Reed, and Brother Mwariama Kamau.

Thank you for taking this journey with us to 51st Street and Dearborn in 1922, over a hundred years later, on the South Side of Chicago. Appreciate you all.

Ron OJ Parson

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

BIG® BRAINS

PODCAST

THE MINDS BEHIND THE **BREAKTHROUGHS**

IN CONVERSATION
RON OJ PARSON AND AYANNA BRIA BAKARI

Ayanna Bria Bakari and Ron OJ Parson at rehearsal (Photo: Joe Mazza).

Despite being set almost exactly one hundred years ago, Big White Fog *is far from a relic. It remains as relevant as ever, skillfully bringing private conversations about family, race, and politics onto a public stage. It is a reckoning, a tightrope of hope and despair, and an unapologetically ambitious start to the 2025/26 season.*

Director Ron OJ Parson and actor Ayanna Bria Bakari (playing Wanda Mason) recently met with Associate Director of Marketing Camille Oswald to discuss Theodore Ward's masterpiece and its legacy. What followed was a conversation rich with admiration, depth, and urgency that perfectly set the stage for this sprawling, multigenerational family drama.

Below is an excerpt of their conversation.

Can you tell me about your familiarity with each other's work?

AYANNA BRIA: This is our fourth show together. We've done *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*, *Relentless* at TimeLine and Goodman, *Stick Fly* at Writers, and then this one.

RON: I had seen Ayanna Bria perform as a student at DePaul before we ever worked together. I like to get around and see young actors when they're on the way up, the same way that Marcus Garvey talks about us knowing who we are, and paying it forward. I try to mix experienced and inexperienced performers so people can learn from each other. It's a big cast—you don't get to do big casts in Chicago theatre—but again, that's the spirit of paying it forward, as Garvey said. Those things are important; that's part of the journey for me as a director when I've been doing this a long time. It's important to do that—for us as a people, and us as thespians.

AYANNA BRIA: It's also a part of who you are, Ron. You are an amazing artist and amazing director, yes, but you're also a teacher and a holder of so much wisdom and so many stories. It is important to you that you bring in young people to share these stories, and this knowledge, and this history. Most of the plays you do are so historical, so important to Black people, and some of the time, this is the first time young Black people are getting this information. Because of you, and because of directors like you, young Black people who aren't getting this education finally get to get in touch with something they've never had access to.

RON: Yeah, it keeps it alive. Stephen McKinley Henderson was that person for me, along with people like Anthony Chisholm, Paul Butler, Paul Carter Harrison, and Vivi H. Washington—not to mention being around August Wilson and Marion McClinton. I was surrounded by people like that, who I watched and learned from as a young actor, which is why I want to pay it forward myself.

AYANNA BRIA: And that's what Ron's good at, too. He's good at finding families. I don't think I've ever done a show directed by him where I haven't walked away with a best friend, or somebody that I can call on forever. I have my actual sister with me on this one, so that's really dope. Bakari sisters on stage together!

Big White Fog is massive. It spans decades, and features a cast of almost twenty characters. Can you talk about your preparation for such a monumental undertaking?

AYANNA BRIA: I've been preparing for this play my entire life. A lot of the work that I've done, or that I'm asked to be a part of, is in direct alignment with how I was raised, how I was brought up. I really feel like my purpose as an actor is to tell stories that highlight and educate people about the Black experience, and the variety within it. The themes in *Big White Fog* are thoughts and ideologies I've heard growing up my whole life.

RON: Life has prepared us. There's a Marcus Garvey quote here: he talks about how if we don't know our past, we can't progress and move forward, and Ted Ward—and *Big White Fog*—are a part of that past, and everything that came after.

If you look at Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, you can see his influence. Every writer that came up during the Negro Theatre Movement was influenced by Ted Ward—Ed Bullins, Joseph Walker, Lorraine Hansberry, PJ Gibson.

We need to know where we came from, and we still need to educate—now more than ever—because of what's going on in the country. This play was funded by a federal grant. That would not happen today. We have to hold on to these kinds of works because they're being diminished. They're being wiped out. Plays like this, that talk about freedom, that talk about education, that talk about racism—need to be continued. Those stories need to be told.

AYANNA BRIA: This play is the blueprint. Theodore Ward was born in 1902, so the things he's discussing, the things he's writing about, are things he knows from his own life experience and his window. It's not a recollection; it's current. There are some very, very hard conversations in this play that some would argue white people shouldn't be privy to. These are conversations that are held in Black households, and when you have family arguing, you don't want to argue "in front of company." That's what this play feels like, and that's why it's so hard, and so poignant and strong. It puts the argument in all of our households. Conversations about being of mixed blood versus being just a generation removed from slavery—these are private conversations that he must have experienced, or he must have known somebody who had these conversations, and documented them for us.

And this is why the history Ron was talking about is so important, because I could not tell you who my great, great, great, great, great-grandparents were. Ron couldn't tell you who his great, great, great, great-grandparents were. We were cargo; that's how we were coming into this country, and our names were even jotted down. So, thank you, Theodore Ward, for writing the stories and the conversations that were happening at this time. For giving us a record.

So many of the themes in the play can be directly traced to slavery. Slavery did an incredible number on Black people, to this day. The way we look at Black people, the colorism, the constant conversation of light-skinned versus dark-skinned—Theodore Ward talks about that. It's the house and the field. Under slavery, there was a master who decided that the light-skinned enslaved folk were superior to the darker-skinned enslaved folk, and the lighter you were, the closer you were to the house, the closer you were to success. That is all because of an education that the master, the white man, the overseer, inflicted on his "property." An ideology of whitehood that was birthed through colonialism and raised on the plantations. Just another of the oppressor's many ways to control us.

Generations have been filtered through that system, have been born into it. By the time the play takes place, slavery is over, but that thought process still exists—except for those who take on the Garveyism, and the Black nationalisms, and the Pan-Africanisms. Those who were able to hold onto hope, despite all the trauma, because they knew that all Black people are beautiful and believed in our nobility. We see each of those different schools of thought in different characters onstage. I mean, Theodore Ward's father was born into slavery, so that trauma was passed directly to him—he was *this close* to being enslaved himself—so, all of those ideologies at that time were valid because these people were all in survival mode.

RON: Bringing the comparison up to today, that history of inequality still shows up. I mean, I got into the University of Michigan because of affirmative action. There's a myth that affirmative action means universities are bringing in less intelligent people. No, I still had to have good grades, but all it meant was that they looked at me when they wouldn't have looked at me before. And that's the thing about the character Leader Mason in *Big White Fog*. When the college finds out that he's quote, unquote, "colored," and takes that scholarship away—that still happens.

AYANNA BRIA: That's why a lot of Black parents give their children Anglo names, like Emily, Martha… that's why I use my full name. I'm about everything Black. You ain't got to have it, but somebody will take it.

RON: And Les's disillusionment. He was so pumped up: "America is the way… I'm not African, I'm American." *Big White Fog* deals with all of that. It's intricate, and there's a lot going on—even in moments where nothing is going on! I always say that the silence in a play speaks just as loud as the words, and this play has a lot of that—a lot of what's going on in our psyche.

AYANNA BRIA: The children are everywhere, taking in these conversations. Like you said, the silence and the psyche.

RON: Exactly. Another thing is that we're rehearsing three blocks from where the house is on 51st and Dearborn. It's all just land now because they demolished it to build the throughway, but still, that spirit is there. It's in the ground, it's in the air.

AYANNA BRIA: It's kind of like this play is just a big foreshadowing, yeah? Because you have Reverend [Rogers], who basically invents the first projects.

RON: All of that. Yes. I once had someone tell me that, because I don't live [on the South Side], it's not my community. The community is us. It's all of us. It's the ancestors. It's my colleagues. It's my family, blood, and friendship. It's the universe of us as a people. The South Side has been a very important part of who I am, even though I'm not from Chicago. That's why I thank Charlie [Newell] and the Joyce Foundation, because they put me in a vein. As we progress, and as the theatre has progressed over the years… to culminate with a play like this about the South Side of Chicago—feels like a full circle moment. These are the kinds of plays that fulfill you as an artist. This will be part of Court's lasting legacy.

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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FADING INTO OBSCURITY: THEODORE WARD'S *BIG WHITE FOG*

BY KHALID LONG, PHD, PRODUCTION DRAMATURG

A poster for Federal Theatre Project presentation of *Big White Fog,* staged by Kay Ewing (Library of Congress).

When *Big White Fog* premiered in 1938, it was produced by the Negro Theatre Project, a division within the Federal Theatre Project. Although the play was among the more successful productions from the Federal Theatre Project, especially in Black drama, it has remained relatively obscure for several reasons. The script was not widely available to the public until 1974, when it was published in *Black Theatre USA*, and to this day, there have only been a few professional productions, including a 1995 staging at the Guthrie Theater and a 2007 production at the Almeida Theatre in London. Nonetheless, *Big White Fog* marked a crucial moment in the early history of African American theatre.

In an essay I wrote for the *Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* (2nd Edition) titled "Staging Black Lives Matter," I stated that a "survey of African American theatre history will illustrate how Black theatre artists have always used the stage as a space to confront social crises of the moment." For Ward, the crisis was the loss of hope for Black Americans who, already facing racial discrimination, were on the brink of economic deprivation. Serving as a prelude to Black dramas that addressed the devastating impacts of anti-Blackness and capitalism, including Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Ward pioneered a genre of plays that showcased the various ways African Americans responded to race and class oppression.

Big White Fog, however, is not about African Americans as victims. Instead, Ward has written a play where his characters, especially the Mason family, engage in meaningful discussions about the struggles and potential of their race. In doing so, Ward demonstrates how the "domestic setting," according to theatre scholar Harry J. Elam, Jr., acts as "a microcosm of the social and cultural concerns impacting African American life. Within such Black family dramas, the personal lives of the family have been most evidently political." A historical survey of the African American dramatic canon supports Elam's point, with plays as early as *Rachel* (1916) by Angelina Weld Grimké to more contemporary works, including *Purpose* (2024) by Brandon Jacobs Jenkins, which won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Besides focusing on the Black family, Ward's *Big White Fog* also documents African American history. In other words, the play, like many Black dramas, offers a look into a specific period, giving today's audiences a chance to understand historical moments as they are depicted on stage. In the case of *Big White Fog*, audiences see several key moments in American history overall, and African American history in particular. These moments include the Great Migration, when Blacks moved from the South to the North in search of a better life, the rise of Black Nationalism through Garveyism, and the economic struggles faced by African Americans during the Great Depression.

Court Theatre's production of *Big White Fog* emphasizes the importance of African American dramas as classic theatre and honors Chicago's own Theodore Ward. A play that still resonates today, this production introduces new audiences to a prominent playwright in American theatre history, helping to prevent him and his works from fading into obscurity.

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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HYDE PARK

This elegant hotel features a sophisticated restaurant and is ideally situated in the heart of Hyde Park. Conveniently located near the lake, the Metra station, the University of Chicago, and the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, this hidden gem offers a perfect retreat. We invite you to take a moment to relax in what is often referred to as the "Living Room" of Hyde Park.

10% off for ticket- holding Court Theatre patrons on the day of the show throughout 2025/26 season.

"Ticket(s) - either digital or printed - must be presented to server for discount."

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MEET COURT'S NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: AVERY WILLIS HOFFMAN

Photograph by TeQoa Griffith | BlaqPearl Photography.

We are thrilled to introduce the next Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director of Court Theatre: Avery Willis Hoffman.

Avery brings extraordinary depth as an artistic leader, along with a rich academic background in classical languages and literature. Her grounding in ancient texts, combined with a passion for bold, contemporary interpretation, aligns powerfully with our mission to reimagine classic theatre to illuminate our current times.

"I am deeply honored to join Court Theatre and the University of Chicago at this pivotal moment in the history of both Court and our nation," Hoffman says. "Like the ancient Greeks, I believe theatre belongs at the center of civic life, with the transformative power to illuminate human nature, challenge assumptions, and inspire resilience. I'm excited to build on the legacy of my predecessors, Nicholas Rudall and Charles Newell, and to collaborate with Court and University leadership, staff, and faculty to reimagine how we understand and stage the classics."

We invite you to learn more about Avery here. We look forward to the exciting work ahead—and to sharing it with you.

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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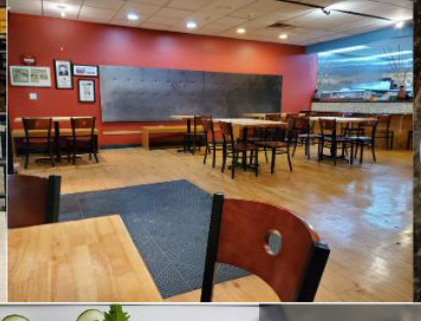

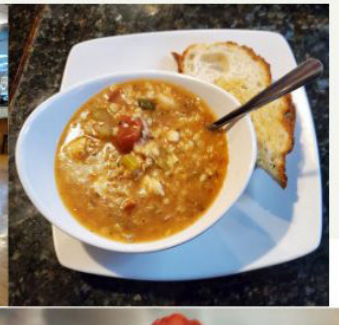

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STAGING THE CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES IN DEPRESSION-ERA BLACK AMERICA

BY WILLIAM L. BALAN-GAUBERT

A view of South Dearborn Street in the 1930s ("Chicago Black Renaissance Literary movement," Chicago.gov).

Spoiler alert! *This article reveals some major plot points of* Big White Fog. *If you don't want to know the ending, we recommend reading this piece after you see the production.*

When *Big White Fog* premiered in 1938 under the auspices of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), Theodore Ward brought to the American stage one of the most complex portraits of a working-class Black family ever dramatized. Set on Chicago's South Side in the depths of the Great Depression, the play transforms the domestic space of the Mason household into a crucible for competing visions of racial and economic uplift—Garveyism, capitalism, communism, and gradualist reform. Ward's staging, both intimate and politically charged, renders the Mason family a microcosm of broader African American debates in the interwar years, debates sharpened by economic collapse and the looming specter of political repression in what would become the Red Scare era.

The Family as Ideological Battleground

At the center stands Victor Mason, a charismatic Garveyite whose worldview is rooted in racial separatism and the belief that dignity can only be reclaimed through a "Back to Africa" movement. His commitment is both a political conviction and a deeply personal moral anchor, shaped by Marcus Garvey's call to "emancipate ourselves from mental slavery." Yet the play does not romanticize Victor's politics. Ward allows us to see both the nobility of his self-determination and the impracticality of his vision in the harsh realities of Depression-era Chicago.

Opposite Victor stands Dan Rogers, his brother-in-law, a small-business advocate of the "American Dream." Dan's integrationist capitalism is premised on self-reliance within existing economic structures—structures that the Depression has rendered fragile, if not entirely illusory, for Black entrepreneurs. His gradualism and faith in economic advancement echo the philosophies of Booker T. Washington, filtered through the more precarious conditions of the 1930s.

Victor's son, Lester Mason, represents a third ideological pole: communist internationalism. Denied a scholarship because of his race, Lester gravitates toward the Communist Party and its vision of interracial working-class solidarity. His political awakening aligns with actual Depression-era history, when the Communist Party in Chicago organized unemployed councils, led integrated anti-eviction protests, and defended the Scottsboro Boys. In Lester, Ward stages the appeal of radical class politics to disenfranchised Black youth.

Finally, Ella Mason, Victor's wife, is the voice of pragmatic reform. Her politics are grounded less in ideological purity than in the daily struggle to keep her family fed and sheltered. She is not apolitical—her gradualism reflects a belief that progress can be made incrementally—but she views survival as the prerequisite for any broader political program. Ella's stance resonates with the historical reality of Black women's labor and civic engagement during the Depression, when navigating relief agencies, churches, and mutual aid networks often took precedence over party politics.

The Federal Theatre Project and the South Side Stage

Ward's *Big White Fog* was produced within the FTP's "Negro Units," part of a New Deal program that sought to employ theatre professionals during the Depression. The FTP's sponsorship was politically charged; while it offered unprecedented opportunities for Black playwrights, directors, and actors, it also operated under the scrutiny of a federal government wary of "radical" content. Ward's decision to stage a multi-sided ideological conflict—without offering a simple resolution—was daring. It suggested that African American political life could not be reduced to a single orthodoxy and that the state itself was implicated in both the possibilities and the limits of these debates.

The play's setting on Chicago's South Side underscores this complexity. In the 1930s, the South Side was both a hub of Black cultural life and a site of severe economic marginalization. The Masons' cramped home becomes a metaphor for the constricted space in which Black political futures must be imagined. Ward's staging—dialogue-laden confrontations at the kitchen table, private spousal arguments spilling into public disputes—collapses the boundary between personal and political, showing how national ideologies are refracted through the lived experiences of ordinary people.

The Climax: Death and Protest

The ideological tensions erupt in two key events. First, Victor's fatal confrontation with police during an anti-eviction action dramatizes the lethal repression faced by Black nationalist leadership. While historically Garveyism's decline was due to multiple factors—internal division, economic collapse, and Garvey's deportation—Ward condenses this history into a single, searing act of state violence. Victor's death is not only a personal tragedy but also a symbolic curtailment of militant separatism.

Second, the multiracial crowd that gathers to resist the Masons' eviction—largely through Lester's organizing—momentarily embodies the possibility of interracial solidarity. This scene mirrors the historical reality of communist-led anti-eviction campaigns in Chicago, where Black and white neighbors sometimes stood together against landlords and police. Yet Ward resists portraying this as a final victory; it is an emergency coalition born of shared precarity, not a fully realized political realignment.

The Metaphor of the "Big White Fog"

The title's metaphor operates on multiple levels. On one level, it refers to the Depression's economic blight, the "fog" that obscures the path forward for working-class families. On another, it names the political uncertainty of African American life in the 1930s—a landscape where no ideology offers a clear and certain route to liberation. Ward's staging captures this uncertainty not as a failure of vision, but as the lived reality of communities navigating conflicting demands for survival, dignity, and justice.

Relevance in 2025

Eighty-seven years after its premiere, *Big White Fog* remains uncannily relevant. The ideological conflicts it stages—between nationalism and integration, capitalism and socialism, immediate survival and long-term transformation—still animate debates within African American communities and across the broader United States. In an era marked by widening wealth inequality, resurgent racial nationalism, renewed labor organizing, and political polarization, Ward's microcosm of the Mason family continues to speak to the dilemmas of coalition-building, the persistence of systemic barriers, and the challenge of imagining freedom under constraint.

In 2025, as in 1938, the "big white fog" has not lifted. The metaphors Ward staged—ideological collision within the intimacy of a family home, solidarity born in moments of crisis, and the shadow of state repression—remain urgent reminders that the struggle over the direction of political life is as much about our households and neighborhoods as it is about the halls of power.

WILLIAM L. BALAN-GAUBERT *is a Haitian-born writer, historian, and philosopher who has studied in Haiti, France, and the United States. A former scholar-in-residence and lecturer at the University of Chicago, he has written extensively on Haitian history, political thought, Vodou as ethical life, and the geopolitics of empire. His work is informed by a lifelong commitment to critical thinking, intellectual clarity, and the pursuit of justice for Haiti and its people. He also has a keen interest in theatre and the theatricality of politics.*

RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

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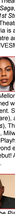
CAST PROFILES

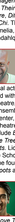
AMIR ABDULLAH (*Daniel Rogers*) is an award-winning actor, narrator of over 90 audiobooks, and writer. He was last seen at Court in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. TV work includes *Chicago Med*, *Empire*, *The Odd Couple*, *Radiolândia*, *Trish*, and more. On stage, he has performed at the Geffen, Chicago Shakes, Cal Shakes, Writers Theatre, Indiana Rep, Milwaukee Rep, A Noise Within, and other venues. His first full-length play, *Pray To Bad*, had its world premiere at Skylight Theatre. BFA: University of North Carolina School of Performing Arts. amir-abdullah.com.



AYANNA BRIA BAKARI (*Mrs. Mason*) is making her Court Theatre debut. Chicago credits: *Purpose*, *Last Night at the Night Before* (Steppenwolf); *Relentless*, *Too Heavy for Your Pockets* (Trap Door); *Relentless*, *How to Catch Creation* (Goodman); *Jar Talk*, *A Tale Untold* (Shakespeare); *Two Wolves* (Black Theater Alliance Award) and *Stick Fly* (Writers); *Intimate Apparel* (Lifeline); *Intimate Apparel* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); *The Colored Museum* (Studio Theatre); *The Wiz* (Signature); *Fly* (Arena Stage); *Fly* (Repertory Theatre); *Clyde's* (TheaterWorks Hartford); *Sunflowers* (Pittsburgh Public Theater); *Midsummer* (Peninsula Players); *The Originalist* (Indiana Repertory Theatre); *Twelfth Night* (Writers); *Ain't No Mo'* (American Stage, *The Ch*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Chicago Fire*, *Empire*, *61st Street*, Film: *Holiday Heat*, *Education*, *TA*, The Theater School at DePaul University). Ayanna Bria is a governing ensemble member of The Theatre School at DePaul University. IG: @BLACKLIVESMATTER. Instagram: @ayannabakari.

SARAN BAKARI (*Claudine/Jada/Sister Gabriella*) is a native of Washington, D.C. She attended Duke Ellington School of the Arts (DSA) and is a graduate of

Carnegie Mellon University (BFA in Drama/MFA in Acting/MCM). She is signed with Stewart Talent and Authentic Management. Saran is just wrapped filming Congo (Shakespeare), and has performed at Goodman (Relentless), Trinity Rep (Intimate Apparel), Merrimack (Sub-Play), *Milwaukee Rep* (Seven Guitars), and Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park (Intimate Apparel). She is beyond excited to be making her Court Theatre debut! Asante Sana ancestors, Mama, and Baba Asé.



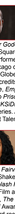
RONALD L. CONNER (*Perry*) is pleased to be returning to Court Theatre. Chicago credits include: *The Island*, *Two Trains Running* (Court); *Seven Guitars*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *The First Breeze of Summer* (Goodman credits: Goodman Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Congo Square Theatre (Ensemble), Steppenwolf, Timeless, and Urban Theatre Company. Regional credits: St. Louis Rep, Berkeley Rep, Kansas City Rep, Arena Stage Theatre, and Geva Theatre. Film credits include: *Talking The Book Off Her*, *Chicago P.D.*, *The Ch*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Chicago Med*, *Sirens*, *Empire*, among others. Ron is represented by Stewart Talent.

BRANDON DAHLQUIST (*Lieutenant*) is making his Court Theatre debut. Chicago credits: Writers, Paramount, Marriott, Drury Lane, Porchlight,

and eight seasons as George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* (American Blues). Broadway and select regional credits: *Ragtime* (Broadway in the Square), *As You Like It* (Guthrie), *1776*, *A Little Night Music* (American Conservatory Theater), *Shakespeare in Love*, *Rhinoceros* (Asolo Rep); *The Glass Menagerie* (Cincinnati Playhouse); *The Last League of Their Own*, *Dark Matter*, *Somebody Somewhere*, *Different People*, *Chicago*, *The Chicago Fire*, *The Ch*. Thanks to Gray Talent – love to Jonathan, Alexis, and Jill. @thats_on_brandon, @brandondahlquistphotography

LIONEL GENTLE (*Court Cotton, a/k/a Victor Mason*) is excited to make his Court Theatre debut. He was last seen in *Fences Continuum*. Lionel has been a

professional actor in Chicago for over 20 years. He has worked with Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf, Congo Square Theatre, Shattered Globe Theatre, Wrendorff Theatre Ensemble, Lifeline Theatre, Northlight, Court, Chicago Theatre Center, Stage Actors Ensemble, and Chicago Theatre Company, among many others. His film credits include *Black Butterfly*, *Message Received*, *Three Little Pines*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago P.D.*, and *Love Shorts*. Lionel studied at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre in New York City. Mr. Lionel is the founder of the YouTube podcasts *Our Unseen Roots* and *Our Unseen Stories*.



NATHAN DANIEL GOLDBERG (*Bailiff*, *u/s Nathan Pozen/Marks*) is excited return to his Court debut. He recently seen in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show and*

Dragons Love Tacos (NYTA); *Every Brilliant Thing* (University of Michigan); *With Love, From inside* (Detroit Public Theatre); and *The Wolves* (which he currently studying at The Second City and just graduated from the Second City Training Ensemble). Gratitude to his ever-supportive family, girlfriend, friends, mentors, Second City, and the Court cast and crew for their unwavering support in his artistic endeavors. nathandanielgoldberg.com. @nathandanielgoldberg

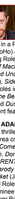
JOSHUA L. GREEN (*Victor Mason*) is a Chicago-based stage/TV actor and actor is excited to be part of another production of

Court Theatre. Recent credits include: *Twelfth Night* (Court); *The Unfinished Revolution* (Court), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Cyrano), *Champion* (Lyric), *Brilliant Traces*, *Birthday Candles* (Northlight), *A Distinct Society* (Writers), *Greenglo* (Paramount), *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Lorraine Hansberry), *The Chi*, *Chicago Med*, *Chicago Fire*, and *Empire*. Training: University of California-Los Angeles (BA) and Columbia University Dramatic Arts (Oxford). Represented by Big Mouth Talent. SAG-AFTRA.

SHARRIESE HAMILTON (*Ella Mason*) returns to Court Theatre after starring in Charlie Cameron's production of *Twelfth Night*. Chicago credits: *The Color Purple*, *The Wonderful World of Dorothy Parker* (Writers' Town Goodman); *It came from Outer Space*, *Smoking* (Chicago Shakespeare); *Sweat* (Congo Square); *Band Christmas* (Shadedancer); *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Book of Ages*, *Annie* (Marriott); *Sister Act* (Drury Lane); *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Porchlight); *Thaddeus and Slocum* (Lookingglass); *Rock of Ages* (Mercury); *Passing Strange*, *The Wild Party* (Baldwin Theatre); *Avenue Q* (Broadway national/Australian tour). TV: *Chicago Fire*, *Empire*.

ANTHONY IRONS (*Court Strander, u/s Daniel Rogers*) is thrilled to return to Court and his credits include *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution* and

Waiting for Godot. Anthony is an ensemble member of Congo Square and Definition Theatre, where he has performed in or directed over 20 productions. Other Chicago credits are Drury Lane Broadway, Shattered Globe, and the Second City. Film and television credits include *Chicago Med*, *Southside with You*, *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, *Ghostlight*, and *I'm Glad To Have Met You*. He is a proud member of the *BLACKISDE*. Congo Square Theatre's YouTube comedy series, Anthony is proud to be represented by Stewart Talent.



JADA JACKSON (*Caroline Mason*) is excited to return to her Court Theatre debut in *Big White Fog*. Her Chicago credits include *Queen and Fairview* (Definition Theatre), *Goodbye Chicago* (Definition Theatre). Regional credits include *Splash Hatch on the E Going Down* (Next Act Theatre). Film and TV credits include *Chicago P.D.*, *Saturdays*, *The Ch*, and *Onja*. Jada is a 2023 Non-Equity Jeff Award nominee and 2022 Black Excellence in Theatre Award recipient. Jada is represented by Gray Talent Group. @Jada_Jackson.

KRISTEN KREIMER (*Nathan Pozen/Marks*) is beyond excited to make his Court Theatre debut. Chicago: *Mercy Killing* (Open Space Arts); *The Tempest* (Lake

Forest Shakespeare Festival); *Illuminati in Drama Libre* (Chicago Dramatists); *Frankenstein* (Lookingglass Theatre); New York: *Wolf in the River* and the world premiere of Inanimate (The Flea Theater); *Usual Girls*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *You Can't Do Humiliation Tragedy*, *Asking for Trouble* (Ensemble Studio Theatre). Thanks to Stage of Eclipse and Creatives for When not on stage, he enjoys refereeing roller derby in Chicago and across the country! www.artemkreimer.com.

ALANNA LOVELY (*Juanita Rogers*) is excited to make her Court Theatre debut. Select Chicago credits: *Sweat* (Congo Square); *Carole King Musical*, *The Little*

Mermaid, *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Paramount); *Everybody* (The Lloyd Price Musical) (Studebaker); *The World Goes Round*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Drury Lane); *Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Lookingglass); *Nina Simone: The Women Remember* (Black Ensemble); *Waiting for Porchlight*); *Ragtime* (Porchlight); *Bare: A Pop Opera* (Refuge); and *A Christmas Story: The Musical* (Paramount). TV credits: *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, *Power Book IV: Force*, *Chicago Fire*. Thanks to her family and Gray Talent for their support! @alannalovely.

JOHN MCBETH III (*Phillip Mason*) is thrilled to make his professional theatre debut at Court Theatre. He's currently attending Roosevelt University and would love to thank Tamekka and Sade for their immense support. @johnmcbeth_iii

PATRICK NEWSOM JR. (*Lester Mason*) is a Chicago-born, Jeff Award-winning actor. He is extremely honored to be making his official Court Theatre debut.

Chicago credits include: *East Texas Hot Links* (Steppenwolf); *Court Theatre*; *Twelfth Night* (Writers Refracted Theatre), *AlaisvBlack Bone* (Definition Theatre), *BUST* (Congo Square), *Seven Guitars* (Raven Theatre), *The Singularity Play* (Jackalope Theatre), The Second City e.t.c. 48th Revue (The Second City), and more. Film and television credits include: *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago Med*, *Shining Girls*, *The Ch*, *Sushi Girls*, and more. His agent is Jonathan Hall at Gray Talent.

GRETA OGLESBY (*Martha Brooks*) returns to Court Theatre; having previously played Ms. Rainey in *He Rainey's Black Bottom*. Select credits include: *Handprints*, *Summer in the Shadows*, *Nellie Hamptons*). Founder Awards for *Dear Emilia*, *King Lear* (Ten Thousand Things), *The Wiz*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Arms Corner* (Promise), *The Christmas Carol*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Red Carolina*, or *Whatever* (Black Ensemble), *The Market Street*, *Beggar's Strike*, *Five Fingers of Funk* (Children's Theatre). Awards: *Joseph Jefferson Award*, Black Theatre Alliance Award, Ivey Award, McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship (2009, 2022).

MICHAEL A. OSSO (*Patrolman, u/s Lieutenant*) is pleased to be making his Court Theatre debut. He was last seen in Non-Equity Jeff Award for

Performer in a Principal Role for his performance in Cyrano (Bohio) and was nominated for Performer in a supporting Role for *The Wiz* (Marriott) and *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (Invictus). Michael has appeared in *Love and Understanding* (Court), *Seven Guitars* (TimeLine), *Sideman* (Metropolis), and more. He has recurring roles in *Dark Matter* (Apple TV) and *Chicago Fire*, *The Bear*, *Shining Girls*, *Shameless*, *In An Instant*, and *Sirens*. He is also featured in independent features and commercials.

BRIDGET ADAMS-KING (*u/s Ella Mason/Juanita Rogers*) is thrilled to return to Court Theatre after Chicago-area credits include *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* and *Ragtime* (Marriott); *The Music Man*, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* (Marriott); *RENT* (Porchlight); *Queer Eye: The Musical* (Paramount); *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Drury Lane); *Hairspray* (Jeff Award nominee – Performer in a Principal Role); *Memphis* (Jeff Award nominee – Performer in a Supporting Role, Carbon Theater Box); and *Cabaret* (Broadway Across America). Television credits include *Chicago P.D.* Represented by Gray Talent Group. www.bridgetdamsking.com. @bdamsking.

MIKHAEL AMIN (*u/s Percy Mason/Court Strander/ Court Cotton*) is excited and new to Chicago. He is a Kentucky native living in Chicago and self-nominated actor. Credits include: *Twelfth Night*, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *The Grandmother*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Sun Invictus Theatre*). TV/film credits include *Empire*, and studied at The Acting Studio (New York). He is honored and grateful.

CERENYA BOUGOUNEAU (*u/s Wanda Mason/ Caroline*) is excited to make her Court debut! *Big White Fog*, and will later appear in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Chicago credits include *Chronic Sky* (Steppenwolf Theatre), *Twelfth Night* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater). Regional credits include *Peter Pan and Wendy* (Milwaukee Rep), *Shakespeare's Twelfth Night*, *Sense & Sensibility* (Indiana Repertory Theatre). TV credits include *Chicago P.D.*, *Chicago Med*. 2024 Non-Equity Jeff nominee for Performer in Supporting Role (Pipeline, Porchlight Music Theatre).

ANTHONY J. HARRIS (*u/s Lester Mason/Phillip Mason*) is making his Court Theatre debut. Chicago credits include: *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (Drury Lane); *What The Ends Well*, and *Lottery Day* (DePaul University). Film credits include *Chicago Med*, and *Chicago Fire*. 2024 Non-Equity Jeff nominee for Performer in Supporting Role (Pipeline, Porchlight Music Theatre).

ANTHONY J. HARRIS (*u/s Lester Mason/Phillip Mason*) is making his Court Theatre debut. Chicago credits include: *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (Drury Lane); *What The Ends Well*, and *Lottery Day* (DePaul University). Film credits include *Chicago Med*, and *Chicago Fire*. Graduate of the University of Chicago, where she majored in Theatre and Performance Studies. Instagram: @emtinderman.

KESHIA KIRKBRUGH (*u/s Martha Brooks*) is a native Chicagoan, actress, voice artist, and improviser with training from Acting Studio Chicago and The Second City. A former microbiologist and healthcare strategy consultant, she left the wealth of the experience and authenticity to her work. Recent credits include *Shakti Mata* (Chicago Dramatists) (u/s Miss Lamenta), table reads for Local Lab Co. and Acting Studio Chicago, and a commercial shooting at the Gloria Bond Clune Playwright's Festival. She is represented by Gray Talent Group. @keshiakirkbrugh

EMMA LINDERMAN (*u/s Caroline Mason*) is excited to make her Court debut. Chicago credits include: *Agent(s) Cut Deep* (Mary Arrchie Theatre) and workshops of *Out Here* (Gray Center, Court Theatre, University of Chicago). She is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago, where she majored in Theatre and Performance Studies. Instagram: @emtinderman.

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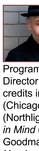
ARTIST PROFILES

THEODORE WARD (*Playwright*, 1902–1983) was born in Thibodaux, Louisiana. In 1935, he moved to Chicago, Illinois, and began working for the Works Progress Administration in the Federal Theatre Project. He produced his most famous play, *Big White Fog*, in Chicago in 1938, and then formed the Negro Playwrights Company in 1940 to produce the play in New York City. Ward's plays were political and dealt with subjects such as Garveyism, anti-Semitism, colonialism in the Black community, the effects of racism, and the appeal of Communism. Works include *Sick and Tiahd*, *Big White Fog*, *Even the Dead Arise*, *Deliver the Goods, Our Lan'*, *John Brown*, *The Daubers, Candle in the Wind*, *The Creole, Whole Hog or Nothing*, *Challenge*, *Skin Deep*, *Shout Hallelujah*, *Falcon of Adowa*, *Throwback*, *Charity*, and *John de Conqueror*.



RON OJ PARSON (*Director, Resident Artist*) hails from Buffalo, New York and is a graduate of the University of Michigan's Professional Theatre Program. He is a co-founder and former Artistic Director of Onyx Theatre Ensemble. Recent directing credits include *East Texas Hot Links* (Court); *HYMN* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Twisted Melodies* (Northlight Theatre); *Toni Stone* (Goodman); *Trouble in Mind* (TimeLine); *Relentless* (TimeLine, Goodman); and *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings* (Indiana Rep). Ron received a Joseph Jefferson Award, a Wave grant in 2021, the 2022 Zelda Fichandler Award, a University of Chicago Diversity Award, many Jeff Awards and Black Theatre Alliance Awards, the LA NAACP Award for *Jitney*. He is a Joyce Foundation grantee and was named Chicagoan of the Year for Theater by the *Chicago Tribune*. Ron is a proud member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and SDC. He would like to dedicate this production to Jonathon Wilson. www.ronojparson.net.

JACK MAGAW (*Scenic Designer*) returns to Court Theatre, having previously designed *East Texas Hot Links*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Radio Golf*, among many others. Recent select credits: *Anastasia* (Bucks County Playhouse, Cape Playhouse), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Drury Lane), *London Road* (Shattered Globe), *Relentless* (TimeLine, Goodman), *Nina Simone: Four Women* (South Coast Rep), *I and You* (Peninsula Players), *Waitress* (Cape Playhouse), *How to Break* (Village Theatre), and *Porgy and Bess* (Musical Theatre Heritage). Jack is an Adjunct Professor of Design at The Theatre School at DePaul University and he resides in Chicago. jackmagaw.com.

YVONNE L. MIRANDA (*Costume Designer*) is excited to return at Court Theatre. She is a U.S. Marine Corps combat war veteran and a 2022 Helen Hayes Award nominee for Best Costume Design for her work on *Ain't No Mo'*. Chicago: *Sweat*, *Hand to God*, *Next to Normal*, and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Paramount); *The Hot Wing King* (Writers); *Primary Trust* (Goodman); *Leroy and Lucy* (Steppenwolf); *HYMN* (Chicago Shakespeare); *She Who Dared* (Chicago Opera Theater). Off Broadway: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Red Bull Theatre + Fiasco Theatre). www.yvonnemirandadesigns.com.

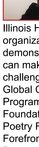
LEE KEENAN (*Lighting Designer*) is Director of the Theatre Program and a Senior Lecturer at Loyola University Chicago. He is delighted to return to Court Theatre, where he has previously lit *Harvey*, *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*. Lee has also designed lights for Lookingglass Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Milwaukee Repertory, Centerstage Baltimore, The House Theatre of Chicago, Kansas City Rep, Albany Park Theatre Project, 500 Clown, Next Theatre, Silk Road Rising, Steppenwolf Theatre SYA and Garage Rep, Griffin Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater: Short Shakes, Bailiwick Chicago, Buzz22, Theatre Seven, Eclipse Theatre, and many others.

CHRISTOPHER KRIZ (*Sound Designer and Composer*) is an award-winning composer and sound designer. Previous Court designs include *The Lion in Winter* and *Gem of the Ocean*. Chicago: Goodman, Steppenwolf, Chicago Shakespeare, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Northlight, TimeLine, Paramount, and others. Regional: Seattle Rep, Kansas City Rep, Indiana Rep, Curtis Institute of Music, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Nebraska Rep, American Stage, Peninsula Players, and others. A recipient of six Joseph Jefferson Awards, Kriz is a proud member of United Scenic Artists 829 and is represented by the Michael Moore Agency. To hear more of his work, visit www.christopherkriz.com.

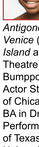
KHALID LONG, PHD, (*Production Dramaturg*) is happy to be returning to Court Theatre. Credits include *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Court); *Relentless* (TimeLine, Goodman); *Boulevard of Bold Dreams* (TimeLine); *Sweat* (Paramount); *Mom, How Did You Meet the Beatles?* (Forward Theatre, Madison, WI); *Kill Move Paradise* (Rep Stage, Howard County, MD); *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Chesapeake Shakespeare Company, Baltimore); *Letters to Kamala* and *Dandelion Peace* (Voices Festival Production, DC). He is the Associate Dean of Research and Creative Endeavors in the College of Fine Arts at Howard University.

JACLYNN JOSLIN (*Production Stage Manager*) is returning to Court Theatre after working on *A Raisin in the Sun*; *East Texas Hot Links*; *The Lion in Winter*; *Arsenic and Old Lace*; *Two Trains Running*; *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*; *Oedipus Rex*; *The Adventures of Augie March*; *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*; *Photograph 51*; and many others. Her other credits include *The Book of Grace*, *Leroy and Lucy*, *Little Bear Ridge Road*, *Purpose*, *No Man's Land*, *Last Night and the Night Before*, *Bald Sisters*, *King James*, *Bug*, *True West*, and many others (Steppenwolf); and *Oklahoma!* (Regional Tour).

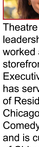
LAUREN PETERS (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is excited to return to Court, having previously worked on *An Iliad*, *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution*, and *The Lion in Winter*. Select Chicago credits include: *A Prayer for the French Republic* (Northlight Theatre); *Cinderella*, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* (Marriott Theatre); *Ironbound* (Raven Theatre); *Native Gardens* (Williams Street Repertory); *Last Night and the Night Before* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Welcome to Matteson!* (Congo Square Theatre Company). Much love and thanks to her family, friends, and Zach.



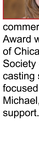
ANGEL YSAGUIRRE (*Executive Director*) has been Court's Executive Director since 2018. Prior to this role, he served as Executive Director of Illinois Humanities. During his tenure there, the organization established a number of new programs demonstrating the contribution that the humanities can make in addressing today's most pressing challenges. Previously, he was the Director of Global Community Investing at Boeing and a Program Officer at the McCormick Tribune Foundation. He has served on the boards of the Poetry Foundation, Theatre Communications Group, Forefront Illinois, Restore Justice, and Chicago Dancemakers Forum.



GABRIELLE RANDLE-BENT (*Senior Artistic Producer*) is a mother, director, dramaturg, and scholar. Her directorial highlights include *A Raisin in the Sun*; *Antigone*; *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (co-directed with Charles Newell); and *The Island* at Court Theatre; *1919* (Steppenwolf Theatre); and *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Remy Bumppo Theatre). She is a co-founder of the Civic Actor Studio, a leadership program of the University of Chicago's Office of Civic Engagement. She has a BA in Drama from Stanford University, an MA in Performance as Public Practice from the University of Texas at Austin, and a PhD from Northwestern University.



HEIDI THOMPSON SAUNDERS (*Senior Managing Producer*) has dedicated her entire professional career to Chicago theatre, including 15 years at Court Theatre where she is proud to be part of the leadership team. Prior to coming to Court, Heidi worked as a stage manager and technician for many storefront theaters and spent four years as the Executive Director of PlayMakers Laboratory. Heidi has served on committees or boards for the League of Resident Theaters, Cabrini Green Legal Aid, the Chicago Family Theater Association, the Chicago Comedy Association, the Illinois Theatre Association, and is currently the Chair of the Board of the League of Chicago Theatres.



BECCA MCCRACKEN (*Director of Casting and Artist Cultivation*) has spent 19 years casting in Chicago, covering the Midwest market working on TV/film, commercial, and theatre projects. Becca is an Artios Award winner for her casting work at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and is a proud member of the Casting Society of America. She is committed to creating a casting space that empowers the artist and is focused on inclusivity and humanity. Thank you to Michael, James, Hayes, and Luna for their love and support.

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ABOUT COURT THEATRE

Winner of the 2022 Regional Theatre Tony Award, Court Theatre reimagines classic theatre to illuminate our current times. In residence at the University of Chicago and on Chicago's historic South Side, we engage our audiences with intimate and provocative experiences that inspire deeper exploration of the enduring questions that confront humanity and connect us as people.

Court Theatre defines classic theatre as texts from any culture, tradition, or era that resonate throughout time and speak to our present moment.

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RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS