

RADIO



GOLF

WRITTEN BY AUGUST WILSON

DIRECTED BY TIMOTHY BOND



Geva
Theatre
Center

P.L.A.Y.
(Performance = Literature + Art + You)

Student Matinee Series

2010-2011 Season

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Cover image: *Radio Golf*,
featuring actors Richard
Brooks, Thomas
Jefferson Byrd,
G. Valmont Thomas;
photo by
T. Charles Erickson

DEAR EDUCATORS,

It's hard to believe that we're at the end of our five-year exploration of Wilson's plays. Here at Geva we're constantly celebrating the insights and impact of great theatre, but among so many exciting productions the annual return to Wilson's work has emerged as a truly unique endeavor. I've come to think of our Wilson productions as a recurrent pilgrimage: a reinvestment in timeless themes and questions, different each year, but promising a continuity of fulfilling investigation.

Most perfectly, this is one of those pilgrimages which brings us right back home to where we started. After travelling so much historical landscape and perilous terrain, *Radio Golf's* 1997 setting returns us to the threshold of our very own headlines, our own questions, our challenges today. We knew it was inevitable, that this is where we were heading all along, and yet it's so vivid and surprising and satisfying to have the history arrive here on our doorstep. There's a visceral moment for me in the second act of this production when Harmond Wilks, mayoral candidate, is deeply engaged with a call on his cell phone and he's bombarded with his office phones ringing, too. That's where I live. From the underground railroad to cell phones, the history has come home. The insistent phones are ringing off the hook. It's time to answer, and the answers will have to come from us.

You and your students will recognize so much of this story. Perseverance against unyielding obstacles. Hidden history and hidden agendas. Brave declarations and painful compromises. Wilson doesn't pull any punches to minimize the complexity of the choices, or the scars that hard-fought battles can leave. Sharing the sophistication and the nuance of the world he dramatized prepares us to look at our own stories with the same sensitivity and discernment.

Whether you've been with us for this pilgrimage over the years, or if this happens to be your first travel with Wilson, thank you for sharing the challenges and discoveries of this journey.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Moroney
Associate Director of Education

**Participation in this
production and
supplemental activities
suggested in this guide
support the following
NYS Learning Standards:
A: 2, 3, 4; ELA: 1, 2, 3;
SS: 1, 5**

FREE PLAY READING FOR THE COMMUNITY

King Hedley II is the story of a man who reaches for a life that is just beyond his grasp. In the midst of the Reagan-era 1980s, ex-con King Hedley tries to scratch out a garden in the hardscrabble soil of his Pittsburgh backyard. He also dreams of one day owning a video store, and sells stolen refrigerators in an attempt to make that dream a reality. But how can Hedley's dreams take root in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in 1985 with neither rain nor sun in sight?

Geva will present a reading of *King Hedley II*, which precedes *Radio Golf* in the cycle, on April 11th at 7:30 p.m. Tickets for this event are free but must be reserved in advance through the Box Office: (585) 232-Geva. All teachers and high school students are encouraged to join us.

"Things have changed. This is America. This is the land of opportunity. I can be mayor. I can be anything I want." – Harmond

AUGUST WILSON'S AMERICAN CENTURY

"Aunt Ester's Children: A Century on Stage" first appeared in the *New York Times* (April 23, 2000), and was published in the preface to *King Hedley II*. The essay was written before Wilson had begun the final two plays in his 20th-century cycle, *Gem of the Ocean* and *Radio Golf*, and is excerpted here.



Above: August Wilson visits a production of his work

system of laws and practices that deny us access to the tools necessary for productive and industrious life, are available to any serious student of history or sociology.

Instead, I wanted ... to place this culture on stage in all its richness and fullness and to demonstrate its ability to sustain us in all areas of human life and endeavor and through profound moments of our history in which the larger society has thought less of us than we have thought of ourselves.

The plays are peopled with characters whose ancestors have been in the United States since the early 17th century. They were brought across an ocean, chained in the hulls of 350-ton vessels. In the southern part of the United States, they were made to labor in the vast agricultural plantations. They made do without surnames and lived in dirt-floor cabins. They labored without pay. They were bought and sold and traded for money and gold and diamonds and molasses and horses and cows. They were fed the barest of subsistence diets. When they tried to escape, they were tracked down by dogs and men on horseback. They existed as an appendage to the body of society. They had no moral personality and no moral status in civic or church law.

After 200-odd years, as a political expediency, they were granted freedom from being the property of other men. During the next hundred years they were disenfranchised, their houses were burned, they were hung from trees, forced into separate and inferior houses, schools and public facilities. They were granted status in law and denied it in practice. *(continued on page 3)*

Before I am anything, a man or a playwright, I am an African American. The tributary streams of culture, history and experience have provided me with the materials out of which I make my art.... The cycle of plays I have been writing since 1979 is my attempt to represent that culture in dramatic art.

From the beginning, I decided not to write about historical events or the pathologies of the black community. The details of our struggle to survive and prosper, in what has been a difficult and sometimes bitter relationship with a



Above: Costume designer Susan E. Mickey's rendering for Elder Joseph Barlow

August Wilson's American Century

Gem of the Ocean
1904

Joe Turner's Come and Gone
1911

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
1927

The Piano Lesson
1936

Seven Guitars
1948

Fences
1957

Two Trains Running
1969

Jitney
1977

King Hedley II
1985

Radio Golf
1997

**"They ain't gonna let no black man be the mayor.
Got too many keys." – Elder Joseph Barlow**

How does each character proclaim “the worth of their being?” How does their behavior indicate their beliefs or values?

Which of Wilson’s concerns and themes do you see appear in *Radio Golf*? Which are most prominent?

Elder Joseph “Old Joe” Barlow is a walking piece of Hill District history. How would you describe his presence in the play, including his appearance, his language, the actor’s performance and the information he contributes? How do other characters relate to him? How do they feel about history? Any correlation?

Yet the characters in the plays still place their faith in America’s willingness to live up to the meaning of her creed so as not to make a mockery of her ideals. It is this belief in America’s honor that allows them to pursue the American Dream even as it remains elusive. The conflicts with the larger society are cultural conflicts. Conflicts over ways of being and doing things. The characters are all continually negotiating for a position, the high ground of the battlefield, from where they might best shout an affirmation of the value and worth of their being in the face of a many-million-voice chorus that seeks to deafen and obliterate it.

They shout, they argue, they wrestle with love, honor, duty, betrayal; they have loud voices and big hearts; they demand justice, they love, they laugh, they cry, they murder, and they embrace life with zest and vigor. Despite the fact that the material conditions of their lives are meager. Despite the fact that they have no relationship with banking capital and their communities lack the twin pillars of commerce and industry. Despite the fact that their relationship to the larger society is one of servitude and marked neglect. In all the plays, the characters remain pointed toward the future, their pockets lined with fresh hope and an abiding faith in their own abilities and their own heroics.

Theatre, as a powerful conveyer of human values, has often led us through the impossible landscape of American class, regional and racial conflicts, providing fresh insights and fragile but enduring bridges of fruitful dialogue. It has provided us with a mirror that forces us to face personal truths and enables us to discover within ourselves an indomitable spirit that recognizes, sometimes across wide social barriers, those common concerns that make possible genuine cultural fusion. ♦



Above: Actor Anthony Chisholm with August Wilson during the rehearsal process for the *Radio Golf* premiere



Above: Mame (Crystal Fox) enters the office in *Radio Golf* (Photo by T. Charles Erickson)

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August Wilson died in 2005, but his beliefs and his questions are carried forward in his plays and by the many artists and audiences who explore them today, including *Radio Golf* director Timothy Bond. Bond reflects:

“While the experience of enslavement and its consequences is specific to African Americans, August Wilson understood that the history is in fact the history of all America and all Americans. It is a history we all share and a history we all must strive to understand and accept if we are to go forward—together—through this new century, already a decade old.” ♦

“They don’t mind you playing their game but you can’t outplay them. If you score too many points they change the rules.” – Sterling

WILSON ON RADIO GOLF

“Hey, you have to go forward into the 21st century. I figure we could go forward united.”



Above: Harmond Wilks (Richard Brooks), with poster of Martin Luther King Jr. in the background (Photo by T. Charles Erickson)

Discuss the significance of “Cowboys and Indians” in the dialogue. Who identifies with which group? Does the metaphor color your impression of right and wrong, or your expectation for how the play will end?

In what instances do you see a character forced to choose between personal advancement, someone else’s interests, and/or the needs of a larger community? How do they make that choice?

In a 2005 interview, August Wilson explained: “One of the things with *Radio Golf* is that I realized I had to in some way deal with the black middle class, which for the most part is not in the other nine plays [of the cycle]. My idea was that the black middle class seems to be divorcing themselves from that community, making their fortune on their own without recognizing or acknowledging their connection to the larger community. And I thought: We have gained a lot of sophistication and expertise and resources, and we should be helping that community, which is completely devastated by drugs and crime and the social practices of the past hundred years of the country....

“You get in that community, you can solve some of those problems, provide some of those people with free legal services, lobby the government, the school boards, the communities. Put that expertise that we’ve gained to some use. You can still be middle class; you can still live the life you want to; you can still be contributing to where you came from.... Some people don’t feel that responsibility, but I do, so I thought I would express that in the work. In the 21st century we can go forward together. That was my idea behind the play.” ♦

SYNOPSIS

Harmond Wilks is an Ivy League-educated lawyer with an educated and ambitious wife, **Mame Wilks**, who works in public relations. Having inherited a prosperous real estate firm from his father, he is about to declare his candidacy to be Pittsburgh’s first African American mayor, with Mame running his campaign. Meanwhile, he and his one-time college roommate and friend, **Roosevelt Hicks**, are engineering a development deal on Wylie Avenue with apartments and an urban mall including trendy franchises. The deal depends on federal money, which requires a finding that the area is blighted. Suddenly another world intrudes with the arrival of long-time Hill District resident **Sterling Johnson** and recently-returned Hill native **Elder Joseph “Old Joe” Barlow**. Barlow’s family home, an old mansion at 1839 Wylie, is slated for demolition, but turns out to have a significant past in the community. In the argument over the house, Harmond discovers that his Bedford Hills Redevelopment group never properly bought 1839 Wylie from its owner. When “Old Joe” refuses payment for his property, Harmond and Roosevelt cannot agree whether ownership of the house is a moral obstacle requiring a new approach or a minor inconvenience. Harmond is inspired to include preservation in the development plans, but the financial and political interests have their own momentum; will holding his ground cost him his ambitions? ♦

Please note that this production includes adult language, profanity and racial epithets and is recommended for mature high school audiences.

“Nobody’s going to vote for an angry mayor.” – Mame

THE HISTORY OF PLACE

Watch for how the red door of 1839 Wylie is represented on stage. What information do the director and design team give you through the staging and the use of sound and light? Did the significance of the door change for you throughout the play?

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

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

MAME: Harmond, it looks raggedy.

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

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

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

A debate about history, practicality and progress begins in the very first lines of *Radio Golf* as Harmond and Mame enter the his new offices. Scenic designer Bill Bloodgood explained his role: "The main challenge of designing the set for *Radio Golf* was to bring a sense of history to the space. The Hill District has a long history and Wilson's cycle of plays follows this history decade by decade. It is the director's responsibility that an audience understand the lineage of the characters; it is the set designer's responsibility to ensure that the audience gets a sense of the lineage of the space where the plays happen.



Above: An early sketch of the set by scenic designer Bill Bloodgood

"The set for *Radio Golf* is an old store. In my mind, it could very well be in a building that was built before the time of *Gem of the Ocean*, Wilson's first play of the Pittsburgh Cycle, so I tried to give some evidence of the past lives of the space. The walls are dingy; the floor is covered in a tile pattern from the 1950s; there is a cabinet on the wall from some earlier business and brackets on the wall that once held a shelf, etc. Now, in its latest phase, the room is filled with modern office furniture bought or rented in one phone call to Staples (or the like).

Resources about the history of the Hill District appear on page 10 of this guide. You might also be interested in researching the "No Casino in the Hill" and "Find the Rivers" campaigns regarding some recent redevelopment efforts.

"A distinctive feature of this design is the large door unit that is ghosted in upstage of the store, behind a scrim. This stands in as an evocation of Aunt Ester's door, and therefore a symbol of the deep heritage and spiritual history of the Hill District."

Though Wylie Avenue is a main thoroughfare of the Hill District, 1839 is a fictional address; the number references the year of the Amistad slave ship revolt. Pittsburgh writer Christopher Rawson describes this mystical location in Wilson's work. "A kind of modern station on the underground railway of black empowerment, Aunt Ester's house has served as a center of healing and sanctuary in three other plays in the cycle. Now it is the center of conflict. Should economic development weigh more than history and spirit? Who really benefits from economic development, anyway? But the most urgent question, as with the piano carved with the saga of slavery in Mr. Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, is, who owns the house?" ♦

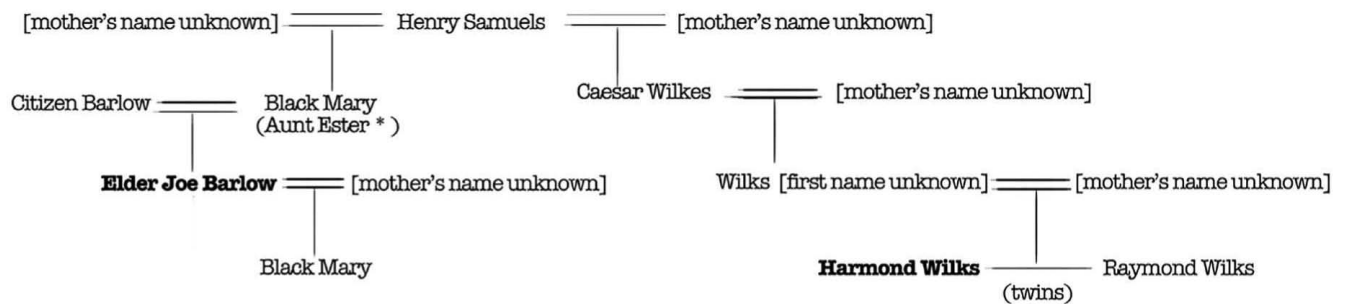
"They say if you live long enough the boat will turn around. Big boats turn around slow but they turn nonetheless." – Elder Joseph Barlow

A FAMILY TREE

Director Timothy Bond notes: “It is not necessary to know all or any other part of the Cycle to fully enjoy and appreciate any one play. Taking them together, though, broadens the scope of theatrical experience, exposes layers of understanding and illuminates deeper connections concerning the unbroken thread of history.” Several of the characters in *Radio Golf* are direct descendants of characters from *Gem of the Ocean*, and while audiences need not know their history to follow this play, tracing the relationships may be rewarding. Of these first and final plays in the cycle, Wilson noted, “The two form a kind of umbrella for the rest to sit up under.”

Aunt Ester is also mentioned in *Gem of the Ocean*, *Two Trains Running*, and *King Hedley II*. A “washer of souls,” she was the original owner of Old Joe’s house at 1839 Wylie Avenue. She dies in 1985, during the events of *King Hedley II*, at the age of 366. August Wilson said: “She represents the entire body of wisdom and tradition of the African American – going all the way back to 1619, our first presence here in America. So that memory and that experience, that tradition and wisdom are kept alive in the person of Aunt Ester.”

Please note that the shared ancestry of the *Radio Golf* characters is revealed as a surprise in the play; this discussion of family relationships may be more useful to classrooms for clarification and discussion following the play than in preparation for the performance. Educators should use their own discretion based on students’ prior experience with Wilson’s work.



Wilks is a surname from *Gem of the Ocean*, which introduced half-siblings Caesar Wilks and Black Mary. Caesar was a constable and powerful in the Hill District, enforcing the law even when it means harsh consequences for his community. Harmond is his grandson.

Black Mary served as Aunt Ester’s housekeeper, and the plays suggest that she was mentored to take on the identity of Ester Tyler and continue her legacy in the community. Thus, the Aunt Ester who dies in *King Hedley II* is Black Mary from *Gem of the Ocean*, and Elder Joseph (“Old Joe”) Barlow is her son.

Barlow is another family name from *Gem*; Citizen Barlow is the young man who comes to have his soul washed by Aunt Ester, and a spark of romantic potential blooms between Citizen and Black Mary during the events of that play.

Caesar Wilks and Black Mary became estranged in *Gem*; in *Radio Golf* we learn that Caesar, and later his son, secretly paid the taxes on 1839 Wylie where Black Mary lived and worked. Harmond and Old Joe are more invested in the revelation of an unexpected family connection and history than in seeking any more significant motivation for Harmond’s grandfather to pay the taxes; audiences who wish to consider Caesar’s action further may wish to read *Gem*.

Sterling appears in *Two Trains Running* as a young man just out of the penitentiary after robbing a bank; he searches for work in Pittsburgh in 1969 as the Black Power movement gains momentum. At loose ends, he is directed to seek counsel from Aunt Ester, a visit which seems to add a keener sense of morality and purpose to his enterprising nature and self-confidence. We meet him as a self-employed contractor in this play; it’s interesting to note that two of the older men he knew during the events of *Two Trains*, Holloway and Hambone, did similar work as painters in the neighborhood. ♦

“I mean that’s nice and I understand the sentiment but it’s just not practical to throw all that history away.” – Mame

THE SHAPE OF SUCCESS



Above: Costume designer Susan E. Mickey's rendering for Harmond Wilks

How do you respond to the idea of a “post-racial” America? What does it mean? Is it important to you? Do you believe it’s possible? Is cultural assimilation a requirement? Rochester elected its first African American mayor, William A. Johnson, Jr., in 1993. Can you find media or reporting from that campaign? How many African American mayors were there in 1997? Today? How many other minority mayors? Look at current political races locally or nationally. How does race appear to be a factor or not?

August Wilson never wrote a Hill District of homogenous opinions or a single perspective of the African American experience; his characters frequently disagree about the best way forward. *Radio Golf* looks at the competing goals and values that define success for each character and also questions the costs of that success.

Early in the play Harmond hangs a poster of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the wall of his new Bedford Hills Redevelopment office. Watching the play, it may be interesting to ask in what ways Dr. King strikes you as an appropriate hero for Harmond, what Harmond seems to have in common with King, and in what ways they differ.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

HARMOND: I’m gonna be the mayor of everybody. It’s not about being white or black, it’s about being American.

In the United States of 2011, it’s nearly impossible to respond to Wilson’s depiction of an African American’s political ambitions without thinking of the decade to come when our country elected its first African American president. The similarities with Barack Obama’s political trajectory can seem eerily prescient, and the differences may be interesting to discuss.

The play introduces Harmond, Roosevelt and Mame, all on the cusp of important new success. Roosevelt has just been appointed vice-president of Mellon Bank, and a new business opportunity for him to co-own a radio station arises during the play. Mame is in line for a new post as the Governor’s press representative. But Wilson also invites us to question what these visible markers of change really mean and what progress they represent, both for the individuals and for the community at large. Do a few minority faces truly represent progress?

HARMOND: We got a black mayor. We got a black CEO. The head of our department is black. We couldn’t possibly be prejudiced. Got two hundred and fourteen people work in the department and two blacks but we couldn’t possibly be race-conscious.

HARMOND: So you’re the black face? You’re just the front?

ROOSEVELT: Naw, Harmond. Naw. I get to get in the door. Remember in school we used to say we wanted to be in the room when they count the money. You’re there already. This is my shot.

Radio Golf questions whether the advancement of some African Americans is of any benefit to a larger group, or whether divisions of class and culture have irrevocably divided the community.

STERLING: You know what you are? It took me a while to figure it out. You a Negro.... Negroes got blindyitis. A dog knows it’s a dog. A cat knows it’s a cat. But a Negro don’t know he’s a Negro. He thinks he’s a white man. It’s Negroes like you who hold us back.

ROOSEVELT: Who’s “us”? Roosevelt Hicks is not part of any “us.” It’s not my fault if your daddy’s in jail....

“You the cowboys. I’m the Indians. See who win this war.” – Sterling

Golf emerges as an important symbol in this play. Critic John Lahr offered: “Golf, with its lavish disregard for time and money -- is a symbol of the two men’s bourgeois achievement (and of their burden, which is to assume the attitudes and the leisure activities of the white man). Roosevelt is planning to build a golf course on the Hill. A memory of hitting a golf ball is for him what the green light at the end of the dock was for Gatsby. ‘I watched the ball soar down the driving range,’ he tells Harmond. ‘I felt something lift off of me. Some weight I was carrying around and didn’t know it. I felt like the world was open to me. Everything and everybody.’” In the first scene of the play Roosevelt hangs a poster of Tiger Woods on the office wall. Wilson’s reference to Woods, especially in contrast with Harmond’s poster of King, may suggest Roosevelt’s ambitions and values through his chosen celebrity hero.

August Wilson described his characters: “They have adopted the values of the dominant society and have in the process given up some of their cultural values, so in essence they have different cultural clothing. Some people make that choice; it’s certainly not only black people—a lot of ethnic Europeans have made that choice completely. They have been so anxious to become Americans that they’ve changed their names, forgotten the old ways and don’t want to be reminded of them. Other people go, ‘No, I want to go live in Little Italy. I’m Italian and I’m an American too.’ You can be both. It’s as simple as that.”

HARMOND: I’m afraid you look away from what’s right too long you won’t turn back. Start all the time looking for what’s in this for me.

Radio Golf’s characters find their path to success is not only complicated by competing agendas, but about true moral questions embedded in the workings of business.

HARMOND: Rightly or wrongly we’re going to tear down the house.

STERLING: Wait a minute...wait a minute...say that again. Did I hear that shit right? “Rightly or wrongly?” It don’t matter to you if it’s wrong?

HARMOND: I didn’t say it didn’t matter to me.

STERLING: It’s got to matter. If it don’t matter then nothing don’t work. If nothing don’t work then life ain’t worth living.

“So we’ve adopted those materialistic values at the expense of some more human values.” Wilson observed. “There are ways to live life on this planet without being a consumer, without being concerned with acquiring hundreds of millions of dollars. I think, God, you have \$100 million; don’t you think that’s enough? But a guy that has \$100 million is trying to get \$200 million.”

STERLING: So I robbed that bank. I had some money. It didn’t make me smarter. It didn’t make me better than anybody else. You can’t do nothing with money but spend it. After that you back where you started from. Then what you gonna do? I found out I was looking for something that you couldn’t spend. That seem like the better of the two. To me. Everybody got their own way of looking at it but if you ask me ... I’d take something you couldn’t spend over money any day.

Roosevelt and Harmond both make choices and compromises in their partnership as they redefine and pursue their separate visions of success. Which compromises would you be willing to make? At the end of the play, which man do you believe is more empowered to help effect positive change? Which compromises will pay off in the long term? ♦

Tiger Woods’ personal life and career have come under new media scrutiny since 2005 when the play was written and since its 1997 setting. Do you think current attitudes toward Woods change the impact of seeing his picture on the wall? Does the story August Wilson was telling change at all as a result?

Do you believe politicians have to make unsavory compromises in order to accomplish their goals? Do business leaders in the commercial sector? Give examples from recent news to support your opinion.



Above: Harmond Wilks (Richard Brooks) and Roosevelt Hicks (G. Valmont Thomas; photo by T. Charles Erickson)

“He’s lost sight of what’s important.” – Roosevelt

SOUL OF THE COMMUNITY

John Marshall High School Students told us about their neighborhoods:

"People are the soul of our community.

People make our community.
People break our community."

"What I believe kept us together, close, and friendly? Helping hands."

"My community strips people's expectations to a minimum and never fails when it comes to proving a critic right."

"There's no soul of my community because my community is antisocial. But there is a soul of my family. My grandma is the soul of my family."

"The soul of my community is the rec center. It made me the person I am."

"And in the middle of the street stands me: Observing, watching, listening...with my hands in my pockets with no destination."

What's the soul of your community?

HARMOND: Mr. Barlow, it's good to see you. I have something for you.

OLD JOE: It ain't no bread pudding, is it? I was just thinking about some bread pudding. You like bread pudding? My mother used to make bread pudding. She didn't do it too often, but when she did she used to make a great big old pan last two or three days. It ain't no bread pudding, is it?

In a 2005 interview, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks asked Wilson about this improbable interjection by Old Joe, who should have more pressing issues to discuss with Harmond. Wilson reflected:

"The bread pudding is simply representative of some of those houses that are still standing—the old way, the parts of the community that we're giving up. Miss Harriet, the fried chicken—these are all the things that were part of this Pittsburgh community that are being changed because of this slickness with the new building and Barnes & Noble and Whole Foods and Starbucks, simply to entice middle-class people to move back to the Hill, which is only a four-minute walk from downtown. That's prime real estate, and now what you've got is this slum sitting here. Now if we can get black and white people to move back into this area, we will have reclaimed this prime real estate for a better use. But the bread pudding is saying, 'Wait a minute, there's a history here and it doesn't fit in with you guys' stuff.' The bread pudding is ... this particular community backed up against change."

"1839 Wylie Avenue, is it always going to be standing?" Parks asked. Wilson answered:

"Probably not.... But, symbolically, 1839 will always be standing, as part of our repository of all our wisdom and knowledge that we as an African people have collected over the hundreds of years that we've been on the planet Earth. We haven't lost all of that stuff, because when we came here we did have a history, we did have customs, we did have a culture. And all that would have been lost, except they made a mistake by extending the slave trade over those hundreds of years. They were always bringing in fresh, new Africans who managed to keep that stuff alive.

"It's the community. You can't survive by yourself. Look at the Eskimos. They live a very harsh life up there, and in order to survive they have to be a community. They have to share everything, even share their wives, because there's no way you can survive by yourself in that harsh environment. In order to survive you need a community of people who can support you. And we've always been those people that rise up in the face of adversity." ♦



Above: Young people gather by the sign marking August Wilson's childhood home in Pittsburgh's Hill District

Why do you think the businesses mentioned in the play are considered indicators of progress? Are there other franchises or brands you associate with desirability and success?

Would you want any of these to come to your neighborhood? Which existing business would you replace, and which would you not? Do you know who owns any of the businesses? Does that matter?

At the end of the play, Harmond has lost partners and allies in Mame and Roosevelt. Do you see any evidence of the community Wilson described? Where is it found?

"It's dead. It take Jesus Christ to bring it back. What you mean is you gonna put something else in its place." – Sterling

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

August Wilson

<http://www.gevatheatre.org/learn/guide-archive.php>

While each play stands as an independent piece, many issues and themes run through August Wilson's cycle of plays, just as those issues run through the twentieth century. To help track the progression of history and ideas, many useful resources and articles can be found in our guides for *Gem of the Ocean*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Fences* and *Two Trains Running*.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1053643,00.html#ixzz0hzsYzSAI>
An article on August Wilson and the American Century Cycle of Plays

<http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/nov05/wilson.cfm>
"The Light in August," an interview with Suzan-Lori Parks

<http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/nov05/ester.cfm>
"Aunt Ester's Children: A Century on Stage" by August Wilson

Conversations with August Wilson edited by Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig
"Been Here and Gone" by John Lahr, *The New Yorker*, 4/16/2001

Pittsburgh

http://www.post-gazette.com/downloads/2007august_wilsons_hill.htm
The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* created an excellent interactive map of the Hill District, placing the landmarks from all of Wilson's plays.

http://www.post-gazette.com/newslinks/1999_hilldistrictindex.asp
Article provides a nice history of the Hill District, including an overview of how contemporary issues have evolved from past events.

<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>
The image collection at "Historic Pittsburgh" is vast and easily navigated.

<http://reason.com/archives/2000/06/01/death-by-wrecking-ball>
Pittsburgh and the politics of eminent domain.

Race and Politics

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/18/us/politics/18text-obama.html>
Barack Obama's 2008 speech on race in America

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