Study Guide

SEATTLE REPERTORY THEATRE

The Seattle Repertory Theatre presents
Yale Repertory Theatre's production of

TWO TRAINS RUNNING

by August Wilson

January 2 – 26, 1991

Directed by Lloyd Richards
Scenic Design by Tony Fanning
Costume Design by Chrisi Karvonides
Lighting Design by Geoff Korf
Sound Consulting by Michael Holten

CHARACTERS:

MEMPHIS
–a restaurant owner

WOLF
–the owner of a funeral parlor

RISA
–a waitress

HOLLOWAY
–a regular customer at the restaurant

HAMBONE
–a frequent visitor to the restaurant

STERLING
–a young man fresh out to prison

WEST
–a prominent businessman

ABOUT THE SEATTLE REPERTORY THEATRE

Recipient of the 1990 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, the Seattle Repertory Theatre operates with a professional company of actors, designers and stage technicians from its home base in the Bagley Wright Theatre at Seattle Center. Each student matinee is attended by 850 high school students from school districts throughout the Northwest.

SYNOPSIS:

It is 1969, one year after Martin Luther King's death and four years since the assassination of the African-American leader, Malcolm X. The scene is Lee's, a soul food restaurant in the Hill district of Pittsburgh. At the funeral home across the street, the Reverend Samuels, hailed as a prophet by some in the community, lies in state. With violence brewing in the streets, Memphis, the owner of the restaurant, and his friend, Holloway, try to sort out the past and put the present in perspective.

Holloway, a retired house painter, views life with a kind of settled, stolid spiritualism. He places his faith in Aunt Ester, a seer and spiritual adviser who is nearly 350 years old. It is Aunt Ester who, he asserts, cured him of his crippling hatred for his "Uncle Tom" grandfather. For all his other-worldly beliefs, Holloway, is a practical man who has managed to work all his life at a dead-end job without losing his dignity or sense of self.

Memphis once owned a small farm in Natchez but was soon cheated, threatened and chased off his land by a white man named Stovall. Once he found out the rules of Stovall's game, says Memphis, he "called it a draw." In 1936, he came to Pittsburgh and, after hitting the numbers, set up his business. Now, in the course of urban renewal, the city wants to buy Memphis out and demolish the restaurant. Feeling in control of the situation at last, Memphis vows he won't sell for anything less than $10,000. He soon learns, however, that there is a clause in his deed which stipulates that he must sell for whatever price the city offers. Incensed, he refuses to compromise. This time, he is out to win.

West, the prosperous owner of the funeral home, has the capital and the business experience to help Memphis make a better deal with the city. At first, he seems generous, offering Memphis $10,000 for the restaurant. But Memphis, suspicious, questions West's motives. West admits he can probably resell the property for $20,000, but refuses to split his potential profits. Even though West is willing to pay the full asking price, Memphis, insulted, rejects the deal.

Meanwhile, Sterling, a young man fresh out of prison, hits Lee's restaurant with a blast of energy and urgency. He will try anything and everything he thinks might change his luck. He plays the numbers with whatever money he can lay his hands on, flirts with Risa (the restaurant's only waitress) whenever he gets a chance, makes plans to attend a demonstration commemorating Malcolm X's birthday, and pesters West for a job with good pay. To his elders, Sterling's shotgun approach seems doomed. West says he's asking for too much all at once, and Memphis predicts he'll be back in jail within three weeks.

Sterling befriends Hambone, a forty-year-old man who regularly comes to the restaurant for a handout. More than anyone else at Lee's, Hambone is burdened by the past. Nearly ten years ago, Lutz, the white owner of the grocery store across the street, promised him a ham in exchange for some menial labor. Hambone did the job, but Lutz has never delivered. Since then, Hambone has been repeating over and over, "He gonna give me my ham." Sterling tries to get through to Hambone, but all he manages is to get Hambone to say "Black is beautiful" once. Then Hambone lapses into his familiar litany.

Memphis is getting nowhere with City Hall. By now, Sterling is carrying a gun and considering more forceful means of changing his luck. When Risa learns that Hambone has been found dead, she tries to persuade West to bury him with more than just a plain board "welfare" casket. But their negotiations, like everyone else's, soon stall. Sterling's number comes in, but he finds out that the white mob who back the numbers operation have "cut" his winnings to half of what they should have been. Enraged, Sterling vows to confront the men that have cheated him. Certain that Sterling is about to get himself killed, Risa and Wolf, the numbers runner, make a futile attempt to reason with him, but Sterling refuses to compromise.

Though he survives his encounter with the mob, Sterling does not get the money he feels is due him. He goes to see Aunt Ester, and inspired by her advice, gains a new confidence in himself. Though he still has no job and no immediate prospects, his luck is finally changing. As if aware of some new power in Sterling, Risa at last warms up to his advances.

The next day, West has laid out Hambone's

body over at the funeral parlor. Sterling notes that few people have bothered to pay their respects to the dead man. Wolf speculates that someday Lutz will "go to hell with a ham under each arm." Sterling exits quietly. Memphis comes reeling in, drunk and elated. The city, it turns out, has been ready all along to pay him $25,000 for the restaurant. After a visit to Aunt Ester, he has decided to go back to Natchez to regain his land and his past. From across the street we hear the sound of breaking glass and a burglar alarm. Sterling comes back, his face and hands bleeding, and lays a large ham on the counter. He tells West the ham is for Hambone's casket.

Playwright August Wilson

AUGUST WILSON: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SEARCH FOR SELF

To August Wilson, "the real struggle," for himself and for all African-Americans, "has been an affirmation of the value of oneself." Born in Pittsburgh in 1946, Wilson describes his youth as a search for cultural identity. "When I was twelve," he recalls, "I made a discovery in the library: the Negro section — thirty or forty books, and I read them all. After I read [poet and novelist] Langston Hughes, I became interested in writing."

Though he was a voracious reader, Wilson did not do well in school, and, in the course of repeating the ninth grade at age fifteen, dropped out. "I was bored. I was confused. I was disappointed in myself. I didn't do any work after school until my history teacher assigned us to write a paper on a historical personage." Wilson chose to write about Napoleon. "I had always been fascinated by Napoleon because he was a self-made emperor." When Wilson turned in the assignment, the quality of the work was so high that his teacher accused him of plagiarism and demanded an explanation. But Wilson refused: "I had my bibliography and my footnotes and I felt that's all the explanation I should give." The teacher, who had written both an A+ and an F at the top of the paper, circled the F and handed it back. Wilson tore it up, walked out and never went back to school. (Since then, he has been awarded nine honorary university doctorates.)

At nineteen, Wilson left home to develop his skills as a writer. "I moved into a basement apartment with a group of writers and painters. It was a great time. In this community of artists, I began to discover who I was. I began to discover myself as a black man in relation to the world. My friend Rob Penny — we used to call him Black Rob — turned me on to tapes by Malcolm X. I really embraced this. It was around that time I bought a record player for three dollars, and it only played one speed, seventy-eight. I used to go to this place that had stacks and stacks of seventy-eights. I'd buy them ten at a time — give the man fifty cents and I'm gone. One day there was this typewritten yellow label and it said, 'Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine — Bessie Smith.' I'd never heard of Bessie Smith. I listened to it twenty-two straight times, and I became aware that this stuff was my own. Patti Page, Frank Sinatra — they weren't me. This was me."

At first, Wilson had no thought of writing for the theatre. "I was writing poetry and stories. But some of my friends in Pittsburgh and I really wanted to reach the people. So we started Black Horizons. I was a director then, not a writer. That was in 1968. The theater did real well. We'd charge a dollar to see a show. It was good for Black pride." In 1978, at a friend's urging, Wilson wrote his first play, Black Bart and the Sacred Hills, which was given a workshop production at the Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota. Soon after, Wilson moved to Minneapolis and took a job with the anthropology division of the local science museum. There, he refined his craft by dramatizing legends for presentation to students.

In 1980, Wilson first became aware of the O'Neill Center's National Playwrights Conference, an organization dedicated to developing new scripts. The O'Neill's Artistic Director was Lloyd Richards, who now also heads the Yale School of Drama and the Yale Repertory Theatre. "I had no idea who Lloyd Richards was," says Wilson, "but a friend of mine who had studied with him in New York told me he was the black dude who directed [Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play] *A Raisin in the Sun*. It was odd to me, a black cat running this thing. So I figure that's cool, and I sent my stuff." After rejecting five of Wilson's manuscripts, Richards decided to accept *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Directed by Richards, the play went on to become a hit on Broadway, and the two men began a collaboration that has lasted ever since. Since then, Wilson has twice won the Pulitzer Prize for his plays, *Fences* (1985), and *The Piano Lesson* (1988).

Wilson has dedicated himself to bringing the heritage of Black Americans to the stage. As a playwright, it is his ongoing project to express some aspect of the African-American experience during each decade of the twentieth century: the '20s in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom;* the '50s in *Fences*; the teens in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone;* and the '30s in *The Piano Lesson. Moon Going Down*, his current project, is set in the 1940s. For Wilson, the discovery of power — as a person, as a writer, and as a member of the African-American community — is inextricably linked with the recovery of the past. "Can you acquire a sense of self-worth by denying your past?" he asks. "I don't think you can."

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HEROES IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND IN *TWO TRAINS RUNNING*

> There are other heroes, daunting men and women whose names and faces are mirrored in the motion of history. They are the people of this play. People who have loud voices and big hearts. They search. They falter. They continue. In the end they are not overwhelmed. For here there are warriors and saints. Here there is the hope refreshing itself, quickening into life. Here there is a drumbeat fueled by the blood of Africa. And through it all there are the lessons, the wounds of history. There are always and only two trains running. There is life and there is death. Each of us rides them both. To live life with dignity, to celebrate and accept responsibility for your presence in the world is all that can be asked of anyone.
>
> —August Wilson

To the people who gather at Memphis Lee's restaurant, it seems the last of the African-American heroes have been consigned to the earth. The Reverend Samuels, once a community leader of some standing, now lies in state at the funeral parlor across the street. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are gone. Death hangs heavy in the air, and with it has come a crushing fatalism: it seems the Black community will never find a way to unite against racial hatred and economic oppression. Peaceful demonstrations seem pointless to Memphis. "All them niggers wanna do is have a rally," he says. "Soon as they finish with one rally they start planning

Photo: William B. Carter

CURRICULUM SUPPLEMENT FOR *TWO TRAINS RUNNING*

PRE-PLAY ACTIVITIES

SUGGESTED READING AND TOPICS FOR RESEARCH

1. Have students read the study guide and discuss the situations and characters. Which of the characters do you identify with most? Why? Discuss how you imagine the play will be produced. What will Memphis' diner look like?

2. Have students discuss what comes to mind when they think of 1969. Ask them to remember these images as they watch the play, so they can discuss with the class how these images were altered, reinforced or expanded by what they saw in *Two Trains Running.*

3. Have students research the year 1968; Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, U.S. Supreme Court activities. After seeing the play, have students discuss how this historical perspective affected their understanding of the characters and situations. In addition, have students listen to music, watch videos and read books from 1968 in order to gain a stronger understanding of the time of the play. (For examples, see Bibliography.)

4. Have students find out where their parents and grandparents were living in 1968. Share these discoveries with the class.

POST-PLAY ACTIVITIES

FOR DISCUSSION OR ESSAY

1. Why is the play titled *Two Trains Running?* What did August Wilson mean by this title?

2. Who do you think is the main character in this play?

3. Many of the characters in this play have stories which symbolize something larger. Can you pick a character whose story could be representative of something larger? Hambone's story involves a struggle over whether his work is worth a ham or a chicken. What is fair compensation for Hambone? What does Hambone's character represent? What is the larger issue here? Memphis and West cannot find a way to come together over the sale of Memphis' diner. Why not? What does this represent in a larger sense? Can you find other examples?

4. Is Aunt Esther a real person? Does it matter? What does her character represent?

5. What does Aunt Esther heal?

6. What besides money does Aunt Esther expect the characters to let go of as they throw their money down the river? Would you be able to do what she asks? Is what she provides worth it?

7. What is Risa hoping for when she cuts her legs? Does she get it?

8. What brings Risa confidence?

9. Is Sterling a good influence on Risa? Is Risa a good influence on Sterling? What attracts them to each other?

10. It appears that Risa is falling in love with Sterling. Will she? Will their relationship last? If so what will their lives be like in 1970? 1980? 1990? Do they have children? Does he stay out of jail? Are they happy?

11. What drives Sterling? What does he believe in? Choose examples from the play that support your conclusion.

12. If you met Sterling on the street, would you like him? Explain your answer.

13. Memphis says Sterling "ain't got good sense." What does Memphis mean by "good sense"? Do you agree with Memphis? Why or why not?

14. What words would you use to describe Memphis? Is he bitter, practical, generous, chauvinistic? All of these?

15. Memphis ended up getting a better deal than even he expected for the sale of his diner. Before he knew this he had decided not to sell to West. Memphis explains why he didn't — Do you agree with the reasons he gave? Would you have sold the diner to West?

16. Why did Memphis' wife leave him? What do you observe about him that may have contributed to her leaving? Did he love her?

17. Throughout the play, Memphis downgrades Aunt Esther's value, yet by the end of the play he goes to Aunt Esther. Why?

18. Aunt Esther tells Memphis "if you drop the ball you gotta go back and pick it up." What "ball" is Memphis going to pick up in Jackson?

19. Compare and contrast the characters of Holloway and Memphis.

ACTIVITIES

1. Is *Two Trains Running* a comedy or a drama? Divide the class into two groups. Have one group create a list of all the comic elements and moments in the play. Have the second group list all the dramatic moments and situations. Have each group defend the play as a comedy or a drama using their lists. Are there moments that appear on both lists? If so, why is this true?

2. The '50s and '60s are known as the Civil Rights Era. How have things changed? How have they changed for African Americans? Are they significant changes? Have students discuss this with their parents and grandparents and other older relatives and bring this discussion back to class for further sharing and debate.

3. Divide students into teams of 8 to 13 students. Have each team pick a famous person from 1968. Have students decide who will be the famous person and who will portray which characters from the play. Set up an improvisation where the famous person comes into Memphis's restaurant and has a discussion with the characters about a topic central to that famous person. (If required, there could be more than one famous person per each improvisation.) Examples:

A. Martin Luther King enters and, over dinner, discusses non-violence as a tactic in the civil rights struggle.

B. Bobby Kennedy and Malcolm X start discussing the Vietnam War. (Other persons might be Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Abby Hoffman, Jesse Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver, President Johnson, President Nixon.)

4. There is always another side to the story. Have students re-write the scene where Memphis tells Risa the story of his wife leaving him. Have the scene take place between Risa and Memphis' wife. How does Memphis' wife tells the story to Risa? How does changing the *point of view* affect the story?

FOR DEBATE

INSTRUCTIONS:

Divide students into teams for debate. Have each team pick a statement and refute or support its conclusion.

A. Hambone should have taken the chicken.
B. History heals.
C. Memphis should go back with his wife.
D. Holloway is Aunt Esther's voice.
E. Sterling was wrong to have stolen the Ham.
F. Aunt Esther is really 349 years old.

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

FOR DISCUSSION OR ESSAY

1. Memphis says "If you can't fight the fire, don't mess with it." List examples of "fires" we are currently living with that feel too big to "mess with." Where does that feeling leave us? List examples of "fires" we are currently struggling with that we are capable of fighting. Where does that feeling leave us?

2. Memphis sells his diner, Hambone dies, Risa and Sterling are going to Reno. What does this mean for the community? What does community mean to you? Do you have a sense of community in your neighborhood and life?

3. August Wilson has written plays which trace the African-American experience decade by decade. *Two Trains Running* represents his most recent work. If Mr. Wilson writes a play that takes place in 1980 or 1990, where would you suggest he set the production? What kind of characters should he include? What issues should be explored?

4. In a world that is so fast-paced, where MTV and video games are the number one form of entertainment for young people, how did this play affect you? Did you find the images powerful? Confusing? How does live theatre compare with to prerecorded t.v. and film?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

READING:

Freedom Bound; a History of America's Civil Rights Movement by Robert Weisbrot.

Chronicles of Negro Protest, edited by Bradford Chambers.

Blacks in America, edited by Irving J. Sloan.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

VIDEO/FILM:

"Eyes on the Prize," a series of documentaries on the Civil Rights Movement available from PBS.

The Great White Hope

Hair

This Curriculum Supplement was prepared by Jacqueline Moscou and Laura Penn and edited by Andrew Emery.

for the next." Holloway's outlook isn't any different. "Malcolm got too big," he says. "People call him a saint... Same with Martin Luther King... When you get to be a saint there ain't nothing else you can do but die."

But Holloway's words carry a double meaning. The death of saints implies a resurrection. If at first the people of *Two Trains Running* feel all their saints have perished, mourning soon gives way to new belief as they come to realize that heroism is not dead. As the grandchildren of slaves, as survivors of violence and bigotry, as African Americans, they themselves are heroes. By recognizing and celebrating their cultural identity and their common heritage, they can choose to ride the train of life. Their realization mirrors the discovery of many Black Americans who, at the end of the 1960s, lamented the failures of the Civil Rights Movement, mourned the death of Martin Luther King and his Dream, and then rose up to celebrate their own fiery awakening.

The mainstream Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s was founded on an uneasy alliance between African-American leaders and white liberals. This coalition formed the backbone of the movement — and was also its Achilles' heel. Leaders such as Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) believed in and made the most of what the liberal agenda had to offer. It was a movement based on faith: not only religious faith, but faith in federally-mandated integration as the means to justice, freedom and opportunity. While some civil rights workers used direct action — sit-ins and boycotts — to eliminate such blatant symbols of segregation as the whites-only sections of lunch counters and buses, others lobbied for the federal legislation they thought would guarantee and protect the liberty and citizenship rights of African Americans.

They made impressive gains. In 1963, campaigns in Birmingham and other cities across the South involved more than 100,000 people, led to nearly 15,000 arrests, and brought civil rights issues to a new national prominence. In August of that year, in the largest civil rights demonstration that had ever been held thus far in history, a quarter of a million marchers, both Black and white, gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to demand action from the federal government. Dr. King prophesied a time in the near future when the nation would "rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident — that all men are created equal.'"

But real change proved slow in coming. Despite the long-awaited passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, despite the bloodshed in Selma and Birmingham, social and economic opportunities for African Americans, especially those living in the ghettos of the North, did not improve. By 1966, Dr. King's coalition was becoming increasingly strained. Only three years after the triumphal march on Washington, King was booed by young Blacks at a Chicago rally. He later wrote, "For twelve years I, and others like me, had held out radiant promises of progress. I had preached to them about my dream. I had lectured to them about the not-too-distant day when they would have freedom. I had urged them to have faith in America and in white society. Their hopes had soared. They were now booing because they felt that we were unable to deliver on our promises."

Victories won at great cost had proved, in the main, more symbolic than substantial. As one disgruntled Urban League worker put it, "The Black cat in Harlem wasn't worried about no damn bus — he'd been riding the bus for fifty years. What he didn't have was the fare."

Rage against discrimination, economic conditions and police brutality frequently led to violence. In 1964, the year Martin Luther King won the Nobel Peace Prize, there were race riots in Jacksonville, Rochester, Harlem, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In 1965 (only five days after the passage of the Voting Rights Act), it took six days for National Guardsmen and police to stop a riot in the Watts district of Los Angeles. Four thousand were arrested in violence that left hundreds homeless, nearly a thousand injured and thirty-four dead. In the aftermath, when Andrew Young, Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King visited the area, a group of young people told them joyously, "We won." "How can you say you won," the civil rights leaders asked, "when thirty-four Negroes are dead, your community is destroyed, and whites are using the riot as an excuse for inaction?" "We won," the youths insisted, "because we made them pay attention to us."

In 1967, King called for Congress and the President to commit themselves to "the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty." But unlike the earlier drive for desegregation and voting rights laws, this demand for economic equality failed to sway most liberal reformers, who held that the social order was already basically sound and that merit, rather than race or class, chiefly determined one's chances in life. Many liberals thought the civil rights leader had gone too far.

Yet, to many African Americans in the movement, he hadn't gone far enough. Christian tolerance and nonviolent action were all well and good, but even by 1965, many of the hardiest of civil rights workers had grown tired of professing love for brutal sheriffs and racist mobs. In the 1964 "Freedom Summer" voter registration drive in Mississippi alone, three Civil-Rights workers had been killed, three wounded by gunfire, eighty beaten and more than a thousand arrested. Sixty-six buildings, including thirty-five churches, were burned or bombed. For many Blacks, the violence of white backlash begged the question, as James Baldwin had put it, "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?"

Many of the movement's younger leaders were trying to shift the focus away from passive resistance to more aggressive strategies. "I'm not going to beg the white man for anything I deserve," said Stokeley Carmichael. "I'm going to take it." In effect, Carmichael, chairman of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), dismissed the Civil Rights Movement's early emphasis on coalition politics as a well-intentioned mistake: "The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years — and we ain't got nothin'. What we gonna start saying now is 'Black Power!'"

Black leaders in the more conservative civil rights groups like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) observed the rise of Black Power with increasing alarm. At best, they saw it as a slogan without a program and, at worst, a threat to the gains already made by a movement based on restraining and re-channeling rather than acknowledging African-American anger. White reaction to Black Power was, predictably, a mixture of bewilderment and fear. As Carmichael wrote, "To most whites, Black Power seems to mean that the Mau Mau are coming to the suburbs at night. The Mau Mau are coming, and whites must stop them. Articles appear about plots to 'get whitey,' creating an atmosphere in which 'law and order must be maintained.'"

But though anger was certainly an aspect of Black Power, those who heard only an angry slogan did not comprehend the full significance of the idea. To Carmichael and groups like the SNCC and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), Black Power meant empowerment; it meant political action and community pride. It meant a new focus on getting more Black Americans into positions of leadership. And most importantly, in a society that had stripped Africans of their culture and denied them respect for three and a half centuries, Black Power meant asserting and affirming African-American self-respect.

The characters in *Two Trains Running* discover their own kind of Black Power. Though doubt often threatens to overcome them, Memphis and Sterling both go to see Aunt Ester — a woman who claims to have been born in 1619, the year Africans were first brought to America. August Wilson calls Aunt Ester an "emblem of African-American consciousness... People go to see her when they need to get right with themselves and the world."

Aunt Ester prescribes remedies reminiscent of the animistic religions of Africa in which not only people, but natural phenomena and inanimate objects as well, are believed to possess an innate soul. If, for example, a man wants a woman to come back to him, Aunt Ester might tell him to regain his influence over the woman by walking around

with her picture in his shoe. Aunt Ester never asks for direct payment, but instead tells her visitors to take a leap of faith: they are to throw twenty dollars in the river — it will come to her eventually, she says. Her advice, based in the customs and spiritual ideas of another continent and another time, allows Memphis and Sterling to recover their sense of purpose and self worth by getting in touch with their heritage.

West, by contrast, has become so alienated from his roots that Aunt Ester cannot reach him. The world of business has so possessed him that he has lost his ability to take risks. He simply cannot bring himself to throw money in the river, and taking a chance in order to help Memphis is out of the question. The wildness of Sterling's dreams now seems like mere foolishness to him. "You walking around with a ten gallon bucket," he tells the young man. "Somebody put a little cupful in and you get mad cause it's empty. Get you a little cup." West was not always so stiflingly cautious. Before he became an undertaker, he used to gamble, to live by his wits, to have faith in his dreams. But now, he has lost his ambition, his imagination; he is disconnected from his heritage and dead to the community that supports him. In compromising with society, he has compromised himself.

By the end of the play, Sterling and Memphis have rejected all forms of crippling compromise. They are ready to resort to any means necessary to gain what is rightfully theirs, to provide for their friends and family. They are no longer slaves praying for freedom, but warriors preparing for battle. Their struggles may land them in prison, but then, as August Wilson asserts, many of the most heroic African Americans, those with the "warrior spirit," will necessarily find themselves on the other side of the law: "I think ever since the first Africans set foot on the continent, there has been a resistance, and I think that this spirit is best exemplified in those [who] . . . because of that spirit . . . find themselves on the opposite side of the society that has constantly tried to crush that spirit." Memphis and Sterling may never be as financially successful as West — in fact, the odds are against them. But West's brand of success is not the one they are looking to buy.

This study guide was written by David Hlavsa, head of the theatre department at Saint Martin's College in Lacey, Washington, and edited by Andrew Emery.

Quotations of August Wilson are excerpted from the following interviews: Bill Moyers (PBS), Joe Adcock *(Seattle P-I)*, Dennis Watlinton *(Vanity Fair)*.

CHRONOLOGY

1619 First Africans brought to America.

1641 Massachusetts first colony to recognize slavery as legal institution.

1663 First major slave rebellion in Virginia.

1775 First abolitionist society founded by whites.

1776 One of the original grievances against the British king, a section denouncing the slave trade, is struck from the Declaration of Independence.

1777 Vermont is the first state to abolish slavery.

1785 Constitutional Convention approves three clauses protecting slavery.

1793 Eli Whitney invents cotton gin making possible the cultivation of cotton on a large scale and thus providing impetus for mass importation of slaves.

1827 *Freedom's Journal*, first black newspaper, published in New York.

1831 Nat Turner leads U.S.'s largest slave rebellion.

1861 Civil War begins.

1863 Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation.

1865 End of the Civil War. Lincoln assassinated. Congress passes Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery. Klu Klux Klan organized.

1870 Fifteenth Amendment gives Blacks the right to vote.

1882 Tennessee passes first "Jim Crow" law — beginning of the modern segregationist movement.

1896 U.S. Supreme court upholds segregationist doctrine of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson.*

1909 NAACP founded.

1920 National convention of Marcus Garvey's Universal Improvement Association, African-American nationalist organization.

1942 CORE, an organization dedicated to direct nonviolent action, founded in Chicago.

1954 In *Brown v. Board of Education*, U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation is inherently discriminatory, therefore unconstitutional.

1955 Boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

1957 Martin Luther King elected president of SCLC.

1958 Sit-ins, protesting whites-only lunch counters, begin in Oklahoma City.

1960 Civil rights protests in cities throughout the South; more than 600 arrested. SNCC founded, Marion Barry elected chairman.

1961 "Freedom Riders" begin interracial trips throughout the South in attempts to integrate buses. The riders are harassed, attacked and arrested before the Federal government intervenes.

1963 Massive civil rights march on Washington, D.C. President John F. Kennedy assassinated.

1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964. SNCC leads "Freedom Summer" voter registration drive in Mississippi. Martin Luther King is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965 Malcolm X assassinated. King leads a civil rights march 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Riot in Watts district of Los Angeles. 1965 Voting Rights Act.

1966 Stokeley Carmichael elected Chairman of SNCC. James Meredith begins solitary 200-mile march from Memphis to Jackson, but is shot in the back; another march is organized to follow his route. CORE votes to adopt resolution endorsing concept of Black Power; the NAACP disassociates itself from the doctrine, Demonstrators, including Martin Luther King, are stoned by a white mob as they march through Chicago.

1967 King takes a strong stand against the war in Vietnam calling it a serious obstacle to the Civil Rights Movement. H. Rap Brown, SNCC's new Chairman, urges Blacks in Cambridge, Maryland, to burn the town unless their demands are met. President Johnson appoints a commission to study causes and propose solutions to race riots.

1968 Martin Luther King assassinated in Memphis. Violence erupts in 130 cities across the nation: 38 are killed, 20,000 arrested. Richard Nixon is elected President.