

AUGUST WILSON'S

FENCES





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MARCH 3-5, 2023

TPAC'S JAMES K. POLK THEATER

NASHVILLEREP.ORG | 615-782-4040

Written by:
AUGUST WILSON

Directed by:
JON ROYAL

Produced by:



NASHVILLE
REPERTORY
THEATRE

Content Warning: coarse language, violence,
racial slurs, and themes of racism

STUDY GUIDE

By Mike Sallee Jr

Director's Notes:



"When I say culture, I am speaking about the behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought as expressed in a particular community of people."

"Growing up in my mother's house at 1727 Bedford Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I learned the language, the eating habits, the religious beliefs, the gestures, the notions of common sense, attitudes towards sex, concepts of beauty and justice, and the responses to pleasure and pain that my mother had learned from her mother and which you could trace back to the first African who set foot on the continent."

August Wilson

The Ground On Which I Stand

Keynote Address for Theatre Communications Group's Biennial Conference 1996

When I was three years old, my mother and I started sharing a house with my aunt, Mary Royal. Our residence, here in Nashville, was on Batavia Street, right around the corner from Tennessee State University. Mary ran a daycare center out of our home, for youth as young as a few months all the way up to four years old. She would care for three to four children at a time, and had been doing so for years. Mary had been doing it for so long, that even when I was in single digits, she was already caring for multiple generations of families.

These were all black people that somehow, or someway knew one another. Maybe they worked at the same place. Maybe they had gone to school with one another. Some were neighbors, and even family relatives of each other. Word of mouth, and personal relationships brought them to our house. The fact that they took their children to the same place, knowing that they would be well cared for and safe, was an extension of a larger community of working Black people. That body of folks, in my opinion reached peak expression on Fridays.

On the last day of the working week...if the weather was right.. and in Spring and Fall here it always was... people would pull up to the curb, park their cars, walk into the yard and linger. It was Friday night, so there's no school or work the next morning. Folks would sit on the wrought iron bench, or stand on the porch while we children played, and commune. They would talk loud, and freely joke. My Aunt and her clients would tell stories about things that happened to them during the week. They would tell stories about their childhoods, what they wanted to eat or cook. And laughter? There was sooo much laughter. They would always pay Mary, cash money, and hold that porch down until it got dark, and the street lights came on. I'm so lucky to have the memories of those Friday night rituals in Joy.

At no point in time, while I was 5, 6, 7, or 8 did I spend any moments considering the inner lives of those adults beyond what I experienced with them on those afternoon-into-evenings when they would come get their kids, pay my Aunt, and signify in our yard. I never thought about how they may be struggling to pay the mortgage, or hang on at their jobs. I never, cause what child is thinking about this, wondered if they were truly happy in their lives or their situations. I just knew that they were happy in those moments when I saw them. It's a beautiful thing that two things can be true at the same time.

August Wilson has gifted us with both. I want you to look at this play as an invitation for you to sit, and "linger" with the Maxson family until the lights come on. Sit with them as they struggle to celebrate, commune, and walk the path of a family, trying to stay together. It's no accident that this story begins with a Friday, after-work ritual. Laugh. Feel all of the feelings as we present to you the Maxon's ritual of Joy.



Jon Royal, Director

*Clark Harris as Troy Maxson (left)
Kenny Dozier as Bono (right)*

TEAM: August Wilson's: Fences

#	Player	Substitute
1	Troy Maxson	Clark Harris
2	Rose Maxson	Alicia Haymer
3	Jim Bono	Kenny Dozier
4	Cory Maxson	Cameron Mitchell
5	Lyons Maxson	DéYonté Jenkins
6	Gabriel Maxson	Bakari King
7	Raynell Maxson	Jordan Marie Elizabeth Nixon
8	U/S Troy	Jermaine Pearson
9	U/S Rose	Nina Hibbler Webster
10	U/S Cory	Jakholbi Murry

SUBSTITUTES

#	Player	#	Player

VS. _____ AT TPAC - Polk Theatre

DATE March 3rd - 5th TIME 2:30pm & 7:30pm

COACH(ES) Jon Royal, Assistant: Candace Lafayette

ACT ONE

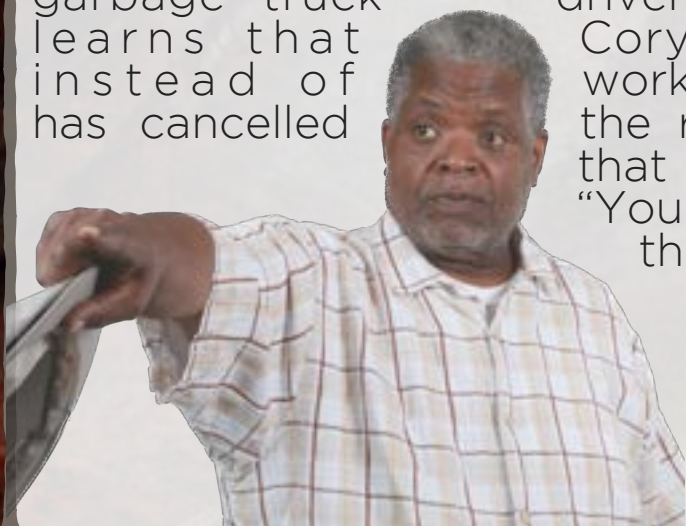
Synopsis

The play opens on a Friday in 1957. Troy Maxson and his friend, Jim Bono, have just finished a long day of work as garbage men and head to Troy's porch for a drink. As they chat, Troy mentions he has spoken to his boss about the rule prohibiting black men from driving garbage trucks. Troy's wife, Rose, joins them in the yard and announces that their son, Cory, has just been recruited for a college football team. Troy worries that black men will never be given a fair shot in the professional league, recalling how he was better than many professional baseball players but was never allowed to play.

Lyons, Troy's son from a previous marriage, drops by the house. He knows it's Troy's payday and asks for a loan. Troy lectures Lyons to stop playing music and get a steadier job but gives him the money anyway.

The following morning, Troy's brother, Gabriel, stops by for a visit. Gabriel used to live with Troy because a head injury from the war left him mentally incapacitated, but had recently moved in with a neighbor. Later that afternoon, Cory and Troy get to work building a fence around the yard. When Cory reveals that he is working only weekends because of football practice, Troy gets angry and threatens him: he must get his job back or he won't be allowed to play football.

Two weeks later, Troy announces that he has been made a garbage truck driver. But the mood darkens when he learns that Cory has gone to football practice instead of work. Because Cory disobeyed him, Troy has cancelled the recruiter's visit and told the coach that Cory is quitting. Livid, Cory shouts, "You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all!"



Clark Harris as Troy Maxson

ACT TWO

Synopsis

The following morning, Troy tells Rose that he's been seeing another woman and she is pregnant with his child. Troy claims he doesn't love Alberta, but when he's with her he can escape his responsibilities. Frustrated, Rose responds that she also wishes for an escape but instead has always honored her marriage.

A tense six months of silence passes. When Rose finally speaks to Troy again, it is to tell him that Gabriel has been taken to an asylum. Though Troy claims he wouldn't allow that to happen, Rose tells him she knows that he signed the papers. As they argue, news arrives that Troy has a new daughter, and her mother has died in childbirth.

Troy brings the baby, Raynell, home and asks that Rose help him raise the child. Rose relents but tells Troy, "This child got a mother. But you a womanless man."

Two months later, life settles into a new routine. The fence around their home is finally finished. Cory has graduated and is looking for a job. Lyons returns the money he owes his father. Rose finds new community within her church. Even Bono has found new friends, since Troy is now on a different garbage route as a driver.

Isolated, Troy lashes out at Cory. Their fight turns physical, and Troy throws Cory out. Cory tells Troy he'll be back for his things, but Troy tells him they'll be on the other side of the fence.

Seven years later, Lyons, Bono, Cory and Rose have all gathered for Troy's funeral. Cory has joined the Marines, Lyons is in jail and Raynell is a lively seven-year-old. Cory is conflicted about attending the funeral, but is finally convinced by Raynell, who innocently recalls the songs their father used to sing. At the last moment, Gabriel arrives despite worries that the hospital would not allow him to leave. Before they depart for the church, Gabriel shouts to the sky, asking that Troy be admitted into heaven.

Find Out More: [Ford's Theatre](#)

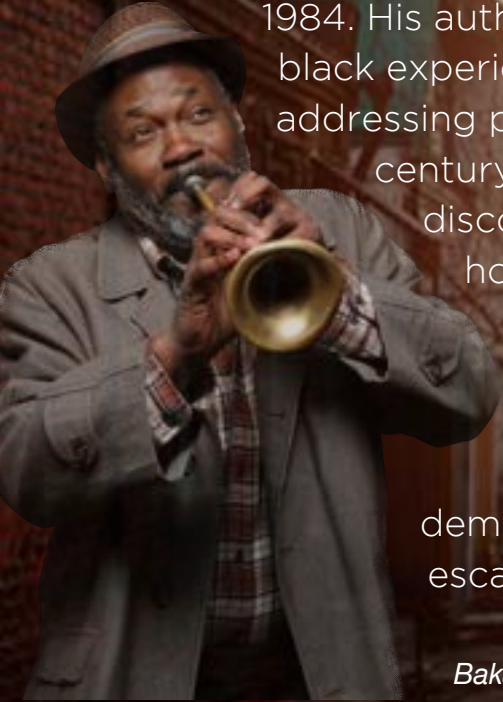
Jordan Marie Elizabeth Nixon as Raynell Maxson (left)
Alicia Haymer as Rose Maxson (right)



AUGUST WILSON

April 27, 1945 - October 2, 2005

Called “one of the most important voices in the American theater today” by Mervyn Rothstein in the New York Times, August Wilson has written a string of acclaimed plays since his *MA RAINEY’S BLACK BOTTOM* first excited the theater world in 1984. His authentic characters have brought a new understanding of the black experience to audiences in a series of five plays, each one addressing people of color in a different decade of the twentieth century. A key theme in Wilson’s dramas is the sense of disconnection suffered by blacks uprooted from their original homeland. He told the Chicago Tribune that “by not developing their own tradition, a more African response to the world, [African Americans] lost their sense of identity.” Wilson has felt that black people must know their roots to understand themselves, and his plays demonstrate the black struggle to gain this understanding—or escape from it.



Bakari King as Gabriel Maxson

Find Out More: [August Wilson](#)

August Wilson's: *Fences*

"Four Tony's & Pulitzer Prize for Drama"

The Piano Lesson

"Pulitzer Prize for Drama"

Joe Turner's

Come and Gone

"New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play"

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

First in Cycle to be Produced on Broadway



The Pittsburgh Cycle

Gem of the Ocean (1900s)

Joe Turner's
Come and Gone (1910s)

"New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play"

Ma Rainey's
Black Bottom (1920s)

First in Cycle to be Produced on Broadway

The Piano Lesson (1930s)

"Pulitzer Prize for Drama"

Seven Guitars (1940s)

August Wilson's: Fences (1950s)

"Four Tony's & Pulitzer Prize for Drama"

Two Trains Running (1960s)

Jitney (1970s)

King Hedley II (1980s)

Radio Golf (1990s)

Playwright August Wilson wrote about the complexity of the African American experience, of undocumented lives, and of the people he grew up with in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ten of his plays comprise a deliberate body of work unto itself: "The Pittsburgh Cycle," also known as the "American Century Cycle."

Each of the plays is set in a different decade of the 20th century, representative of their time from which the past insists on being acknowledged and taken into account.

The Pittsburgh Cycle, interestingly enough, was not written in chronological order. In the 2015 documentary, *August Wilson: The Ground on Which I Stand*, the playwright describes how the plays revealed themselves to him:

"Generally I start with a line of dialogue and I often don't know who's talking or why their talking and then I'll give the character a name. And by probing him and questioning him I begin to find out things I need about the character and from out of that comes the story."

Find Out More on: [August Wilson's 'Pittsburgh Cycle' Plays](#)

Cameron L. Mitchell as Cory Maxson (left)
DéYonté Jenkins as Lyons Maxson (right)



Troy Maxson vs Jackie Robinson

ACT 1: SCENE 1

Troy: "I was batting .432 with thirty-seven home runs! ...What you talking about Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody. I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I come along too early. If you could play ...then they ought to have let you play."

In 1945, the president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Branch Rickey, sat down for a three-hour meeting with Jackie Robinson. Why then? Why Jackie? Robinson asked Rickey if he was looking for someone who was afraid to fight back. To which he responded, 'he was looking for someone with the guts not to fight back.'

When Robinson played in the Negro American League for the Kansas City Monarchs before becoming the first African-American baseball player to play Major League Baseball, Troy was correct; 'Robinson wasn't nobody.' He was hitting .389 with five home runs and thirteen stolen bases. A bit shy of the accolades Troy had collected years prior. Troy stated that he'd seen 100 players better than Jackie, so why Jackie? When speaking about Robinson, Troy responds with the exact animosity that tells us the answer as to why it was Jackie and not Troy.

Jackie Robinson was not the end of racism and segregated thoughts in the MLB, but he was meant to be the start. This placed a huge responsibility on the shoulders of Robinson, Larry Doby, Hank Thompson, Willard Brown and all the African-American players to come after to be ambassadors for their entire race. Talent was not what drew Rickey to Jackie Robinson; he was a good player, he was a soldier, he was college educated and he had discipline having lettered in four sports while attending UCLA.

It didn't matter that Troy was a better player on paper than Jackie. It wasn't just the fact that he was a soldier or that he was educated. Jackie Robinson had patience for the world where Troy Maxson had anger. Maxson had the stats to play in the majors, but it wasn't about the stats. African-American's needed ambassador's like Robinson to bridge the gap of segregation by enduring all the language and verbal abuse on and off the field without pushing back to lead the league toward complete integration.

Find Out More: [The Road to Baseball Integration](#)



Hear it ring, Hear it ring

'Ole Blue' was a folk song originally written about a hunting dog, that August Wilson transformed into a soliloquy for Troy Maxson and his relationship with his father and his family. Maxson does what he can to do for his family, what he feels to be the best way to set them up for a better life than he had growing up.

After being driven from his house at the age of fourteen, Maxson was able to find solace in the twisted relationship with his father through this song. It depicts a relationship of a man's need to be respected and seen as master to this loyal companion; to maintain a hyper-masculine quality; one that his father had with him, and that Troy had with Rose, Cory and most likely everyone he ever knew.

Why Ole Blue?

For Troy: Troy never sings this song in its entirety in the play, nor does he sing the lyrics about the death of Ole Blue until right before he himself dies. Seeking loyalty, admiration and appreciation for all that he does for other's, Troy sings the song in moments to almost prove to himself worthy. Bringing up the lyrics about Ole Blues death at the point of his own could be interpreted as Troy finally accepting that Death is coming for him; no more fighting, no more singing, no more fences to to build, only hoping that what he did was enough.

For Cory / Raynell: At the end of the play, Cory and Raynell find a moment of connection before their father's funeral when singing about Ole Blue. Raynell sees this song as a happy memory of a thing their father used to do. Cory takes the moment a step further and begins to reflect on it as more than just a memory. 'Hear it ring, hear it ring.' He revisits the lyrics in his mind as he and Raynell sang; making the connections to all the things that Troy did for him, his mother and ultimately for Raynell to set them up for a better life. Cory began to think about how his father worked as hard as he could, and as best he could; still failing at times, but always intending to do good for his family.

Find Out More: [Old Blues - A Study of 'Fences'](#),

LYRICS

Hear it ring...

I had an old dog who name was Blue
You know that Blue was mighty true
You know Blue was a good old dog
Blue treed a 'possum in a hollow log
You know from that he's a good ole dog...

Old Blue died and I dug his grave
I dug his grave with a silver spade
I let him down with a golden chain
And every link I called his name...
I'm goin' to tell you this jes' to let you know
Old Blue's gone where the good dogs go

Jim Jackson

*Cameron L. Mitchell as Cory Maxson (left)
Jordan Marie Elizabeth Nixon as Raynell Maxson (right)*

Needs vs Wants: Average Income

ACT 1: SCENE 3

Cory: 'Hey, Pop ... why don't you buy a TV?'

Troy: 'Naw, it's just two hundred dollars. See that roof you got over your head at night? Let me tell you something about that roof. It's been over ten years since that roof was last tarred. See now ... the snow come this winter and sit up there on that roof like it is ... ain't gonna hardly notice it. Then the next thing you know, it's gonna be leaking all over the house. Then the wood rot from all that water and you gonna need a whole new roof. Now, how much you think it cost to get that roof tarred?Two hundred and sixty-four dollars ... cash money. While you thinking about a TV, I got to be thinking about the roof...'

What would you do; repair your television or fix the roof?

In 1957 Pittsburgh, where our play takes place, it cost \$264 dollars to tar a roof. The cost of a television is \$200. Troy and Cory live in Pittsburgh, PA where the average household size was about 950 SqFT. The average income in Pittsburgh was \$4,950, if you were a white male and \$3,137 if you were BLACK; this equates to about \$60 a week or \$261 a month for Troy Maxson. Cory wants Troy to buy a television for \$200. Troy needs to get the roof tarred for \$264. With this information, we don't have to list out the other expenses to know; Troy cannot afford a new television or to fix his roof.

The average income needed to afford goods and services is still nowhere where it needs to be to afford the things we want or the things we need. Inflation is the continued increase in price of goods and services over a period of time; a top of the line television in 1957 cost \$200 and today costs more than \$1000. The television is something we want. The \$264 repairs to the roof back then could be as much as \$2000 today. This is something we need. It's recommended by [Bankfirst](#) to keep your expenses, housing and everything else to 33% each. How is this possible? If we take a calculator to Troy's possible income, it's not. The median individual income in the US averaged out to be about \$46,001 in 2021. The poverty line according to the census in the US was \$35,801 in 2022. It is the year 2023 and Fences takes place more than sixty years ago. The average income has increased alongside the price of goods and services from then to now, but the ability to afford these goods and services has not gotten any easier.

In today's world, it cost about \$2.50-\$4.50 a square foot to tar a roof. The cost of a television can be as low as \$250 and well exceed \$1000 for one that's top of the line. Troy and Cory live in Pittsburgh, PA where the average household size was about 950 SqFT. If Troy were to get the roof tarred today, it would cost him somewhere between \$2,375 - \$4,275. The average median income in

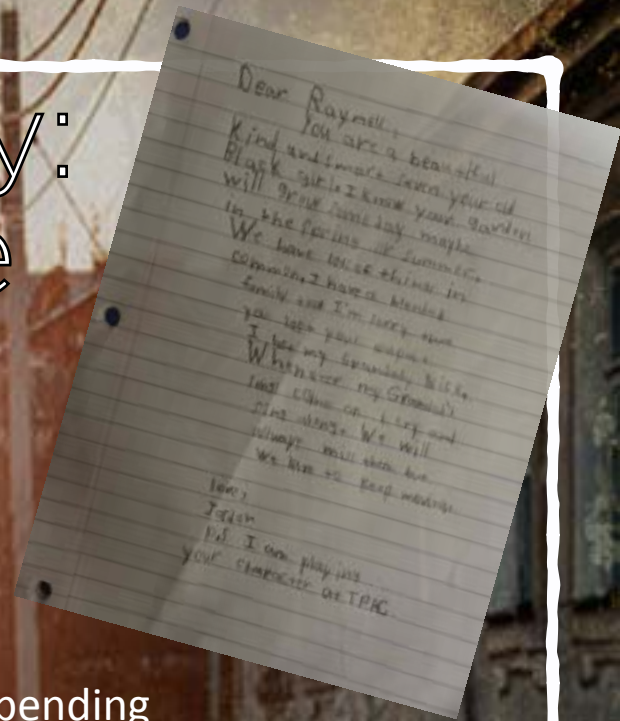
Pittsburgh today is about \$42,803; this equating to around \$1,783/bi-weekly or \$3,567 a month. Cory wants to buy a television for \$1000. Troy needs to get the roof fixed for \$2,375. With this information, we don't have to list out the other expenses to know; Troy cannot afford a new television or to fix his roof.



*Cameron L. Mitchell as Cory Maxson (left)
Clark Harris as Troy Maxson (right)*

Writing Activity: A Letter to the Character

The work done to understand, relate and live the lives of the character's is no easy task. The actor's playing Troy and Raynell have taken the time to write a letter to their character's after spending the time to learn more about the why they were and I challenge you to do the same. Find a character's story you relate to and send them a response to the story that August Wilson has created for them. There's no write or wrong to the content of this letter. Jordan has sent words of encouragement and understanding to Raynell; relating the common experiences of being a young black youth and losing a cherished relative. Clark has sent Troy a letter wishing that things had been different for Troy given his situation; all the while still expressing an understanding that he did the best he could.



Clark Harris as Troy Maxson (left)
Kenny Dozier as Bono (right)

A Letter from: Jordan to Raynell

Dear Raynell,

You are a beautiful, kind and smart seven year old Black girl. I know your garden will grow someday, maybe in the Spring or Summer. We have lots of things in common. I have a blended family too. I'm sorry that you lost your papa. I lost my granddaddy Nick. Whenever my grandad's songs come on I cry and sing along. We will always miss them but we have to keep moving.

Love,
Jordan

P.S. I am playing your character at TPAC!



A Letter from: Clark to Troy

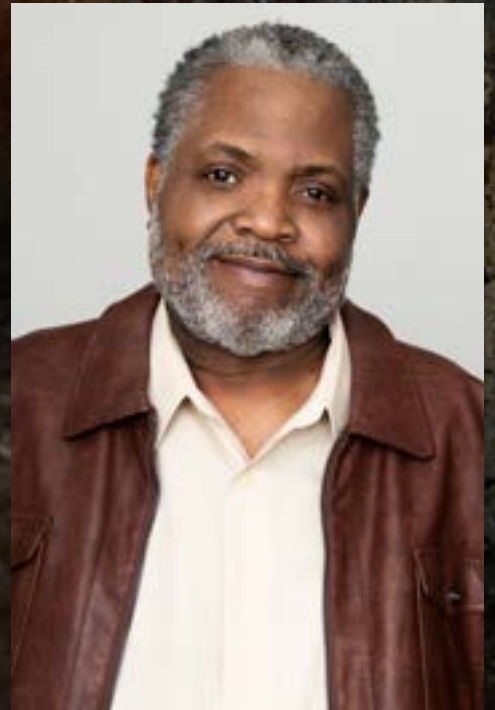
Dear Troy,

I too had somewhat of a hard life growing up, but not as bad as you. I really wish you had more opportunities in life that would have changed your direction. There are many who share your mentality of brutality and prejudice and some were able to overcome those obstacles. A lesson and or mistake should give us hope to make better choices. Your choice was to survive by any means. You made a great choice, when you did those 15 years in prison, when you met Rose and started a family. I do understand the demons of the past that kept haunting you, but you had good people in your corner for support and still chose a life that you saw as "this is the way it is". I cannot fault you for that, but only wished you would have, at least, gave your support network a chance. A loving family and best friend can ease the pain. Your love of baseball could have lived through your son in sports. You had the drive, knowledge and knowhow to take him where you couldn't go. He had the chance and you let it fall. Times were changing and you were too stuck in your ways to see it.

Till next time.

Take care for a better tomorrow,

Clark



A Letter from: You



*Cameron L. Mitchell as Cory Maxson (left)
DéYonté Jenkins as Lyons Maxson (right)*