

August Wilson's Century - The Ten-Play Cycle

GEM OF THE OCEAN

(set in 1904; completed in 2004)

Bewildered by the collapse of the old slave regime, the first generation of black Americans recently freed from slavery are unprepared for the backlash against their newly acquired freedom by whites and head north. Aunt Ester, the drama's 287-year-old fiery matriarch, welcomes into her home Solly Two Kings, who was born into slavery and scouted for the Union Army, and Citizen Barlow, a young man from Alabama searching for a new life.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

(set in 1911; completed in 1988)

Haunted by seven years on a chain gang, Herald Loomis appears in Pittsburgh to reunite his family. Surrounded by the vibrant tenants of a black boarding house, he fights for his soul and his song in the dawning days of a century without slavery.



- 1988 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

(set in 1927; completed in 1984)

The only play in the cycle that takes place outside of Pittsburgh, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* delves into the sultry and dangerous 1920s blues scene in Chicago. Ma Rainey was a renowned vocalist, famous for her deep and forthright interpretation of the blues. When Levee, a man deeply scarred by the harassment and dismissal of his worth by white society, strays from the group to reach for a solo career, the magic of the band is broken.

- 1985 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play

THE PIANO LESSON

(set in 1936; completed in 1990)

Produced at SCR in 1999, *The Piano Lesson* is set in the house of a family of African-Americans who have migrated from Mississippi. The conflict centers on a piano that was once traded by the family's white master for two of the family's ancestors. Siblings Boy Willie and Berniece argue about the literal and symbolic worth of the piano and whether or not to sell it.

- 1990 Drama Desk Award Outstanding New Play
- 1990 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play
- 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- 1996 Peabody Award

SEVEN GUITARS

(set in 1948; completed in 1996)

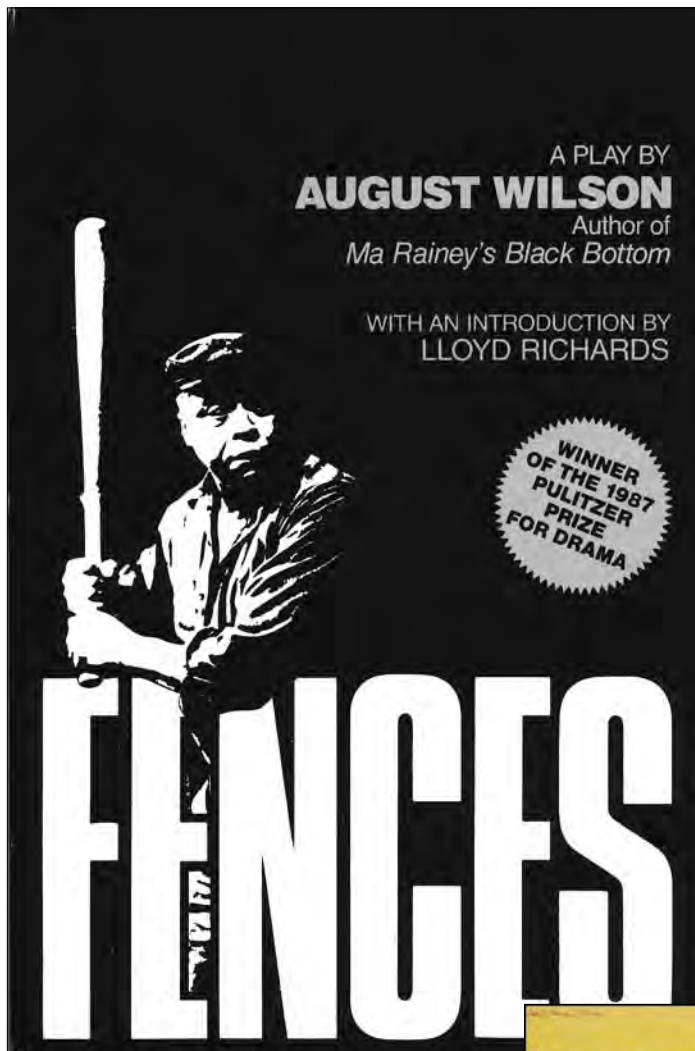
This story of blues guitarist Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton unravels in flashback after his untimely death. In the time since recording his first album, Floyd has squandered all his money, left his girlfriend for another woman, was left by the other woman, pawned his guitar, and spent time in jail after being arrested while walking home from his mother's funeral. Floyd's second chance at success beckons and inspires hope until his life is cut tragically short.

- 1996 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play

FENCES

(set in 1957; completed in 1987)

Baseball makes sense to Troy Maxson; a man gets three strikes and he's out. In this most American of



pastimes, Troy has found an opportunity to play by the rules and win. When his rapid rise through the Negro leagues hits the ceiling of racial prejudice, however, Troy is forced to let go of his dream of major league success.

- 1987 Drama Desk Award for Best New Play
- 1987 New York Drama Critics' Circle Best Play
- 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- 1987 Tony Award for Best Play

TWO TRAINS RUNNING

(set in 1969; completed in 1992)

Memphis is hardly making a large profit with his modest diner, but the place has long sustained a small community of folks in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Developers have come for the building that houses Memphis' diner. He vows to make the city give him a fair price for his diner and is willing to go through fire

to get it. No one knows quite what Memphis has been through, but all soon realize that this is his most important stand.

JITNEY

(set in 1977; first written in 1979; rewritten and expanded in 2000)

Eager to gentrify the neighborhood, the city threatens to level a makeshift taxi dispatch office that has served as a community gathering place for years. As he tries to stave off the city, the owner of the cab company faces his own inner struggle. After a twenty-year stint in prison for murder, his son is returning home. *Jitney* tells the story of a generation recognizing its mortality while the next must face its responsibility.

- 2001 Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Off-Broadway Play
- 2002 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play (London)

KING HEDLEY II

(set in 1985; completed in 2001)

Described as one of Wilson's darkest plays, *King Hedley II* centers on King, the son of Hedley and Ruby from *Seven Guitars*. We meet King as a grown man in 1980's Pittsburgh, fighting to survive a life that seems never to look bright. King is an ex-con; he's trying to save \$10,000 by selling stolen refrigerators so that he can buy a video store.



RADIO GOLF

(set in 1997; completed in 2005)

Wilson's cycle comes full circle as Aunt Ester's one-time home at 1839 Wylie Avenue in *Gem of the Ocean* is slated for demolition to make way for a slick new real estate venture aimed to boost both the depressed Hill District and Harmond Wilks' chance of becoming the city's first black mayor. *Radio Golf* is a play in which history, memory and legacy challenge notions of progress and country club ideals.

- 2007 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play