

AUGUST WILSON'S 10-PLAY CENTURY CYCLE

➔ **1865** **1896**

13th Amendment to the Constitution ratified, prohibiting slavery

Plessy v. Ferguson upholds racial segregation and establishes "separate but equal"

1900s



GEM OF THE OCEAN
Aunt Ester carries nearly 300 years of memories for the people of the Hill District, and helps one man find himself within a turbulent history.

Through the power of memory, a man takes a mystical journey toward freedom and redemption

1910s



JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Herald Loomis arrives in the Hill District after working on Joe Turner's chain gang, and his journey becomes a search for the meaning of his past and the possibilities for his future.

Tenants of a boardinghouse contend with the personal and social aftermath of slavery and the Great Migration

Considered **America's Shakespeare**, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **August Wilson** (1945-2005), created an unprecedented 10-play Century Cycle—one play set in each decade of the 20th century—chronicling the joys, struggles, history, and culture of African Americans.

August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945, in the Hill District community of Pittsburgh, the son of an African American cleaning woman, Daisy Wilson, and a German immigrant and baker, Frederick Kittel, who was mostly absent from Wilson's life. Wilson's mother raised him and his five siblings in a two-room, cold-water flat. Wilson left school in the 10th grade after experiencing racial bullying and false accusations of plagiarism. For the next several years, he educated himself at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh during school hours, unbeknownst to his mother.

Wilson began his artistic life as a poet, spending time in restaurants and barbershops and on the streets of The Hill, scribbling down the voices of residents as they reflected on their lives. Wilson would later draw on these voices and histories to create unforgettable characters in his plays, all but one of which are set in the Hill District.

The plays in Wilson's 10-play Century Cycle (also known as The Pittsburgh Cycle) present African American life in all its fullness, but they are also explorations of the universal themes of community, identity, diversity, activism, self-reliance, and resilience. August Wilson told extraordinary stories about ordinary people, and in doing so, he changed the face of the American theater.

1995

Million Man March

1990s



RADIO GOLF

Harmond Wilks has ambitious plans to redevelop the Hill District, but clashes with his partner over whether to deny the past in the name of development, or to preserve the Hill's history.

The rewards of the American Dream are weighed against the cost to the larger community

1986

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is declared a national holiday in the U.S.

1980s



KING HEDLEY II

An ex-convict tries to rebuild his life, family, and sense of self in a community plagued with violence and prejudice.

A man's quest for identity and dignity is thwarted by limited opportunity, secrets from the past, and personal demons

1970s



JITNEY

In an unofficial taxi station threatened with demolition, an assorted group of drivers tell stories, argue, and dream as they come and go, hustling to make a living.

Bonds between generations are tested by personal and community conflicts

1966

Rise of the Black Power Movement

1965

Voting Rights Act outlawed discrimination in the voting process

1964

Freedom Summer
Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin

1963

March on Washington

1960s



TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Regular customers sit in a restaurant and discuss their views on work, faith, and race relations, wondering how much has really changed for them by the end of the 1960s.

African Americans grapple with the social and psychological impact of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements

1955-1956

Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott

1954

Brown v. Board of Education overturns "separate but equal" in America's schools

1952

For the first time in 70 years, the Tuskegee Institute reports no lynchings in the United States

1950s



FENCES

Troy Maxson must reconcile his high aspirations with his personal disappointments and experience of discrimination.

A father's frustration with his own past threatens his son's future

1948

Executive Order 9981 desegregates the armed forces

1947

Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in Major League Baseball

1930s



THE PIANO LESSON

A sister and brother wrestle over whether to sell or keep a piano that was acquired during slavery through the sale of two of their ancestors.

Siblings disagree about how to honor the legacy of their family's painful past

1940s



SEVEN GUITARS

As six friends try to make sense of a young blues musician's untimely murder, they celebrate their lives together while riffing on their hopes, dreams, and frustrations.

Internal and external struggles shape African American men as they fight for their humanity and self-worth

“August Wilson wrote the frustration and the glory of being black...in America.”

—Ruben Santiago-Hudson

Tony Award-winning actor, *Seven Guitars*

1910-1930

Great Migration of 6 million African Americans from the rural South to large industrial cities in the North begins

1920s

The Harlem Renaissance



MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Rich in cultural gifts, but poor in opportunities, four musicians share jokes, bitter barbs, mounting tension, and the blues as they wait for their lead singer in a Chicago recording studio.

Stifled and disillusioned by exploitation by white record labels, black musicians turn their rage inward

“August Wilson helps us remember who we are...all of us, as an American people.”

—Suzan-Lori Parks

Playwright, 2002 Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Topdog/Underdog*



AUGUST WILSON: THE GROUND ON WHICH I STAND
A documentary presented by WQED Multimedia and the PBS series, *American Masters*

Premiering February 2015*...

August Wilson: The Ground On Which I Stand details August Wilson's unexpected rise from humble beginnings and adversity to create a 10-play cycle about African American life – a groundbreaking achievement in theater history. From the 1980s into the first decade of the 21st century, Wilson was the most produced playwright both on Broadway and in regional theaters. His unprecedented 10-play Century Cycle (also known as the Pittsburgh Cycle) helped launch the careers of countless actors and earned Wilson two Pulitzer Prizes.

A native of Pittsburgh's Hill District where all but one of the plays in the Cycle are set, Wilson put the joys, struggles, history, and culture of African Americans on the national stage. *August Wilson: The Ground On Which I Stand* features Wilson's family, friends, and collaborators recalling his formative years and, later, the evolution of his body of work.

Notable actors such as James Earl Jones, Laurence Fishburne, Phylicia Rashad, and Charles S. Dutton discuss Wilson's impact on their careers, his artistic process, and his unwavering belief in black life as rich and full of stories worth telling. Powerful performances of scenes from Wilson's plays round out this definitive story of the life, work, and impact of the most prolific playwright of the last half of the 20th century.

*For airtimes, please check your local PBS listings.

