

# InsideOUT

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## AUGUST WILSON'S **RADIO GOLF**

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By August Wilson  
Directed by Israel Hicks

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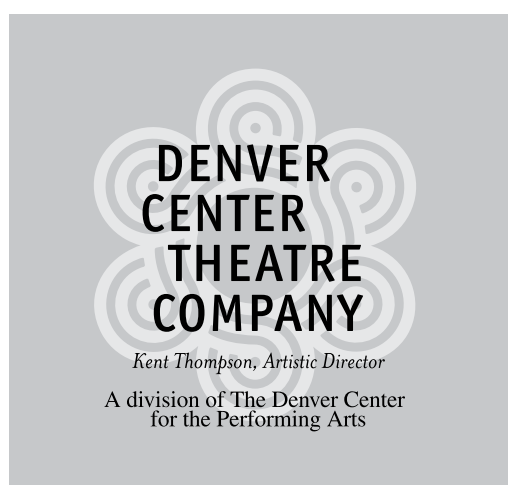
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# InsideOUT

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## SYNOPSIS

*My idea was that the black middle class seems to be divorcing themselves from that community, making their fortunes on their own without recognizing or acknowledging their connections to a larger community.*

— August Wilson <sup>1</sup>

Harmond Wilks is a representative of the black middle class who has moved out of the Hill District of Pittsburgh to a more affluent part of the city, Shadyside. He lives there with his wife, Mame, a very ambitious lady who is running Harmond's mayoral campaign as well as competing for the public relations position in the Pennsylvania governor's office. As a real estate developer and head of Wilks' Realty, local leader and potential mayoral candidate, Harmon has joined forces to redevelop the Hill with Roosevelt Hicks, a college roommate, avid golfer, soon-to-be Mellon Bank vice president and part owner of WBTZ radio station where he hosts a golf talk show.

Harmond and Roosevelt are involved in a new, black enterprise – the Bedford Hills Redevelopment, Inc. Funded by a combination of their own and federal money, the two plan to revive the Hill District with new apartments, a health center and the hallmarks of corporate America: Starbucks, Whole Foods and

Barnes and Noble. In improving the Hill, they hope to make a tidy profit on their \$200,000 investment.

Into the busy hive of Harmond's campaign office come two Hill denizens who are representatives of the past. One is Sterling Johnson, a house painter, and the other is Elder Joseph Barlow, the owner of 1839 Wylie Avenue, the home of the deceased Aunt Ester, the embodiment of the African American soul and a past that must never be forgotten. Through a glitch in their plans, Bedford Hills Redevelopment does not own that property and Mr. Barlow refuses to sell so it can be bulldozed.

*Radio Golf* is August Wilson's last play, and its characters are the children and grandchildren of the characters in some of his earlier plays. The themes in the play include race, politics, survival, success and spirituality.

1. "The Light in August: An Interview with August Wilson by Suzan-Lori Parks." *American Theatre*, November, 2005.

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# THE PLAYWRIGHT: AUGUST WILSON

*It's August's language – the rhythm of hurt, the rhythm of pain, the rhythm of ecstasy, the rhythm of family – which sets him apart and is why we call him the heavyweight champion.*  
– Marion McClinton, director.<sup>1</sup>

August Wilson was born in 1945 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, the setting of most of his plays, including *Radio Golf*. He is the product of a mixed marriage but, he said, “the culture I learned in my mother’s household was black.”<sup>2</sup> As the only African American in his high school, young August’s efforts to learn were thwarted by racism, from ugly notes he found on his desk each morning to the beatings he tried to avoid each afternoon. Finally, when a teacher questioned the authenticity of a paper he wrote on Napoleon, he walked out of school at the age of 15.

Every morning for the rest of the school year he spent in the local library reading everything – sociology, anthropology, theology, fiction; he felt he’d found a brand new world. When his mother Daisy discovered he was a drop-out, she banished him to the basement. At about the same time, he discovered the music of the blues when he bought a Bessie Smith record; it was like an epiphany for him. The music and lyrics became cemented in Wilson’s mind and every play he has written has been influenced by the notion of “finding a song.”<sup>3</sup>

After a one-year stint in the United States army from 1962-63, Wilson returned to the Hill District and began to meet other black writers. With fellow writer Rob Penney he formed the Black Horizon Theatre, hoping to raise consciousness through theatre. In 1976, Wilson saw a production of *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* written by Athol Fugard, a South African playwright and activist, in collaboration with two African actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, both of whom appeared in the original production. Fugard used his plays to portray the horrors of South Africa’s racist apartheid system and crafted the political and social issues in clear, compelling language while also presenting powerful, unforgettable characters. Wilson saw theatre as a way to inform, as well as to entertain;

to move an audience to action as well as move them emotionally.

In 1978, he moved from Pittsburgh to St. Paul, Minnesota where his satire *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills* was produced. He also wrote children’s plays on science-related subjects for the Science Museum of Minnesota. Twice he submitted *Jitney* to the O’Neill Playwrights Conference in Connecticut and twice it was rejected. Wilson realized he could write a better play and turned his attention to one on legendary blues singer Ma Rainey. In 1982, the Yale Repertory Theatre accepted *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* for a workshop, and thus began Wilson’s relationship with director Lloyd Richards, then head of Yale Drama School and the Yale Repertory Theatre as well as the O’Neill. In 1991 Wilson moved to Seattle after a divorce. It was as far away from New York as he could go in the United States and still write. He didn’t know anyone in Seattle and in an interview in 1993, said: “I still don’t know anyone in Seattle. That’s fine with me.”<sup>4</sup>

With the success of *Ma Rainey* on Broadway, Wilson gave himself a mission: to continue to chronicle, decade by decade, the African American story in the 20th century.

- *Gem of the Ocean*, written in 2004, is about the first ten years of the 20th Century.

- *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* is set in 1917 and revolves around the story of Harold Loomis who returns to a boarding house in Pittsburgh in search of his wife. He is haunted by the memory of a bounty hunter, Joe Turner, who had illegally enslaved him.

- *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (1920s) deals with a female blues singer who works in the pressure of an abusive music business that victimizes its black artists.

- *The Piano Lesson* (1930s) concerns a battle over possession of a piano that carries the meaning of one family’s legacy and opportunity and the choices the characters must make.

- *Seven Guitars*, set in the 1940s, shows the plight of African Americans after World War II. After fighting and dying for the country, black men return

to confront the same inequities they faced before they left.

- *Fences* (1950-1965) revolves around the main character, Troy Maxson, a garbage collector, who takes great pride in keeping his family together and providing for them even as he sets barriers between himself and them. Troy's rebellion and frustration set the tone for the play as he struggles for fairness in a society that seems to offer none.

- *Two Trains Running* (1960s) concerns the prospects for securing the American dream in a northern urban ghetto. Memphis Lee and the patrons of his restaurant stand on the precipice of urban renewal and must consider their prospects for survival and their loss of identity when the existence of their community is threatened.

- *Jitney* (1970s) revolves around the struggles of Pittsburgh's gypsy cab drivers to retain their livelihood in the face of redevelopment and the difficulty of father-son relationships.

- *King Hedley II* (1980s) in which King, recently out of jail, struggles to make a living selling refrigerators with his friend, Mister. To get money to open their own video business, they decide to burglarize a jewelry store. King's mother, Ruby, reintroduced from *Seven Guitars*, is now living with him and his wife Tonya. They worry about King's illegal activities; Tonya dreads bringing a child into the world when King may end up in jail or dead.

Both *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson* won Pulitzer Prizes and Wilson's success helped bring down barriers for other black artists such as actors Charles S. Dutton, Samuel L. Jackson, Courtney Vance, Angela Bassett and playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks, Keith Glover, Sam Kelley and Carlisle Brown.

Mr. Wilson received many fellowships and awards in addition to his Pulitzer Prizes. He was awarded Rockefeller and Guggenheim fellowships in Playwriting, the Heinz Award in 2003 and a National Humanities Medal by the President of the United States in 1999. In addition to numerous honorary degrees from colleges and universities, he received the only high school diploma ever issued by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

In 1995, Wilson broke with his mentor, Lloyd Richards, who had been like a father to him. He

chose Marion McClinton to direct *Jitney* for the Pittsburgh Public Theatre. McClinton had done many inventive second productions of Wilson's earlier plays and their collaboration was one of mutual trust and respect. McClinton also directed *King Hedley II*.

In 2005 Wilson completed his cycle of plays with *Radio Golf* (1990s), which concerns an inner-city redevelopment plan. Its message is more socially overt; as Wilson said it is about "the failure of the black middle class to return their expertise, participation and resources back to the community."<sup>4</sup>

In April 2005, Wilson learned he was suffering from inoperable liver cancer. He died on October 2, 2005, in Seattle, Washington, survived by two daughters, Sakina Ansari and Azula Carmen and his second wife, costume designer Constanza Romero. On October 16, 2005, Broadway renamed The Virginia Theatre at 245 West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street The August Wilson Theatre.

*We got to be united and come together before we  
can proceed on, into this 21st century.*<sup>5</sup>  
– August Wilson

1. Lahr, p. 50.
2. Lahr, p. 50.
3. Lahr, p. 59.
4. Shannon, interview.
5. Zoglin, p. 66,
6. Zoglin, p. 67.

Herrington, Jean. *I Ain't Sorry for Nothin' I Done: August Wilson's Process of Playwriting*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998.

Heinsman, Aaron and Lichtenstein, Steve, eds. *Study Guide for Radio Golf*. Center Stage Theatre. Baltimore, MD: 2006.

<http://www.kinghedley.com/studyguide/printerversion.html>

Lahr, John. "Been There and Gone." *The New Yorker*. August 16, 2001.

Shannon, Sandra G. "Blues, History and Dramaturgy: an Interview with August Wilson." *African American Review*. Winter, 1993.

Zoglin, Richard. "100 Years in One Life." *Time Magazine*. May 2, 2005.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

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**T**he title of the play metaphorically alludes to the aspirations of the black middle class towards the accumulation of wealth and social status, including celebrity, within the larger American context.

Golf is, after all, an upper-class individual sport played on manicured greens as opposed to team baseball played on back lots in urban neighborhoods. Wilson chose golf – a professional sport once inaccessible to blacks – to examine the erosion of African American cultural values in pursuit of success as defined by a dominant white society.... Wilson has issued a warning. We're all trying to imitate the British to become lords and aristocrats, have a bunch of servants and a gardener.

– Margaret Booker. “*Radio Golf: the Courage of his Convictions.*”

From *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* edited by Christopher Bigsby. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. p. 185.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE “HILL”

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**P**ittsburgh's Hill district began on “farm number three,” a piece of land owned by William Penn's grandson and later sold to General Adamson Tannerhill, a Revolutionary War veteran, for \$20 an acre.

In the late 1840s, Thomas Mellon bought a tract of farmland on the slope nearest the city. He subdivided the tract into smaller plots and sold them for a tidy profit. Thus began the Hill's development as a settled community.

The Hill is actually composed of several smaller hills, which were inhabited by three communities. Haiti was on the lower hill, settled by runaway slaves; the middle portion was called Lacyville, while the upper hill was called Minersville. The latter two areas were populated predominately by Germans and Scotch-Irish until the 1880s when central and eastern Europeans began to settle there.

African Americans began arriving from the South between 1880 and 1910. During the years leading to World War I, blacks were urged to come by industry recruiters who promised relief from the segregation laws of the South. New arrivals swelled the area and the Hill became an ethnic and racial melting pot of Russians, Slovaks, Armenians, Syrians, Lebanese, Greeks, Poles, Chinese and Jews.

The races wove a rich and vibrant tapestry for Pittsburgh city life. Hill District residents supplied the labor for mines, mills, business and government. They toiled, raised their children and contended with each other while establishing

a community that left an indelible mark upon Pittsburgh's religions, politics and economy.

The ethnic diversity of the Hill produced a bustling business community. Wylie and Bedford Avenues and Logan Street were lined with neighborhood stores. Their vibrancy lasted through the hard times of the Depression. It was through these difficult times that the Hill remained a place for music. The Hill was known on the National Jazz Circuit with places like the Crawford Grill, Hurricane Lounge, Savoy Ballroom and Musicians Club. Celebrities such as Rudy Vallee and Paul Whitman came to the Hill to hear black musicians play after performing at downtown theatres and clubs. Later black musicians like Ramsey Lewis, Oscar Peterson, Cannonball Adderley, Billy Eckstine and Lena Horne entertained nightclub patrons. In the 1940s and 50s the Hill was brimming with interracial bars and clubs. In the 1930s the Hill also became known for its Negro League baseball team, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, and for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the country's leading African American newspapers.

Although the Hill District continued to be a vibrant, politically active community, a deteriorating neighborhood infrastructure began to take hold. In 1943, George E. Evans, a member of city council, wrote that “approximately 90% of the buildings in the area are sub-standard, and have long outlived their usefulness, and so there would be no social loss if these were all destroyed.”

<sup>1</sup>. Local residents, however, suspected that the

officials were using this as an excuse to create a “neutral zone” between the city’s black and white areas.

In September 1955 the federal government approved the lower Hill redevelopment plan, making available \$17.4 million in loans and grants. Ninety-five acres were slated for clearing, with the demolition of the first of 1,300 structures to be razed set for June 1956. Redevelopment displaced more than 8,000 residents; 1,239 black families, 312 white. Of these 35% went into public housing, 31% into private rentals and 8% bought homes. About 90 families refused to move and ended up in substandard housing. Relocatees received little compensation, with maximal benefits coming from the federal government.

The Hill’s fortunes struck bottom during the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968. The riots began on April 5, 1968 and lasted until April 12. That week of rage saw 505 fires, \$620,000 in property damage, one death and 926 arrests. This violence heightened the decline of the already struggling Hill District. As the neighborhood continued to deteriorate, it became a haven for drug dealers and the population waned even more. The demise of the steel industry in the

late 1970s and 1980s did not help the Hill regain its footing. By the 1990s, the decade in which *Radio Golf* is set, only 5,419 residents remained on the Middle and Upper Hill.

The Hill District’s rich legacy has been leveled by botched redevelopments and riots, but it was black Pittsburghers who met and transcended these problems and who are striving to rebuild. Crawford Square has returned residential homes to the area with plans for retail developments and the restoring of the New Granada Theatre as a jazz center. Carl Redwood of the One Hill Coalition says, “The Hill District community feels it knows best how to move forward with its neighborhood development.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Korol, p. 2.

2. Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation.

Heinsman, Aaron and Lichtenstein, Steve, eds. *Study Guide for Radio Golf*. Center Stage Theatre. Baltimore MD: 2006.

[http://www.phif.org/2008/Pittsburgh History and Landmark Foundation](http://www.phif.org/2008/Pittsburgh%20History%20and%20Landmark%20Foundation).

Korol, Paul S. “A Brief History of the Hill.” *Pittsburgh Senior News*. <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~njm1/hillhist.htm>



# THE GROWTH OF THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS

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*The black middle class is the most invisible, unknown group in the country. There are millions and millions of people in it, and yet we know nothing about them.*

– Gayle Pemberton,  
Professor of African-American Studies at  
Wesleyan University <sup>1</sup>

According to Benjamin P. Bowser in his book, *The Black Middle Class*, the growth of this group began after World War I and was motivated by two factors: the need for labor created by the war and the accelerated migration of African Americans out of the Southern states. World War II reduced the flow of European immigrants to the United States while millions of young white men were drafted into the military. The demand for labor in the rapid production of military equipment forced employers to overlook prewar social norms. Despite continued discrimination policies, blacks were hired for skilled and well-paying jobs that would normally have gone to white men. Getting out of the South and into the industrial economy of the Northeast, Midwest and West more than doubled the number of blacks doing blue-collar work. When the war ended, white men returned to their well-paying jobs, but the industrial sector retained the African-American workers. As a result, large urban black working-class communities grew in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis and Los Angeles, among other cities.

After 1960 the continued growth of the black middle class was reinforced by “the enforcement of new civil rights laws, racial desegregation, and federal affirmative action.” <sup>2</sup> African-American men who had fought the Germans made it clear that they would no longer live under “Jim Crow laws” of racial oppression and inferior status. Protests, boycotts, and the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King led to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which brought less restriction and more opportunity for African Americans.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. the Board of Education* outlawed racial segregation in schools and signaled the end of the “separate but equal” doctrine of the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision. *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was the pillar of Jim Crow laws and practices and “was finally judged to be what it had been all along – unequal and racially oppressive.” <sup>3</sup>

The Civil Rights legislation of 1964 contained affirmative action policies in the hiring of African Americans. According to Karyn R. Lacy in *Blue Chip Black*, “It was through affirmative action that a new generation of working class African Americans gained admission to the same schools as whites, and were able to rent and buy homes in formerly white communities.” <sup>4</sup> This program brought blacks and minorities into unions, civil service jobs, colleges and universities and private sector jobs. According to Bowser, it partially corrected inequities from the historic racial repression in the United States.

Television was an important medium in bringing about civil rights reform. When it focused on the protests, marches and the violent reactions taken by some authorities against the movement, the visual images of white on black violence and hatred offended national pride. TV also brought international attention to our “special vulnerability.” How could the United States claim to be the leader of the free world and a model of democracy if it maintained racial segregation?

Lacy writes that “income is the most straightforward and frequently employed definition of middle class position.” <sup>5</sup> Middle class incomes vary widely, ranging from \$17,000 to \$79,000 annually. The median middle class white family income is between \$35,000 and 43,000; the black median middle class income is slightly more than \$20,000. Whatever the figure, both parents in the family usually work to attain middle class status.

The single most important factor for the modern middle class African American is higher education. A college degree is associated with higher and

more stable earnings, particularly advanced degrees in law, medicine, business, education, etc. In a survey done by the US Census Bureau in 2000, “13% of black lower-middle class are college graduates; 18% of the black core middle class hold degrees, and 28% of the black elite middle class hold higher degrees.”<sup>6</sup>

Where do black middle class families live?

Many have left the ‘hood’ but live in predominately black communities adjacent to the urban poor. The percentage of blacks living in the suburbs has increased from a small minority in the 1970s to a sizable number in 1990s. Middle class distinctly black enclaves are growing in popularity, especially in cities such as Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Houston and St. Louis. Most black middle class members leave poorer neighborhoods because of drug trafficking, high crime rates and inferior schools.

In order to achieve higher education and occupational position to merit higher status and privilege, black middle class values include “delay of gratification, control of consumerism and a willingness to work hard.”<sup>7</sup> Middle class blacks save money, avoid debt, and try to maintain good credit.

All contemporary, famous and wealthy African Americans have earned their money in their lifetimes. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Madam C. J. Walker was the wealthiest black woman of her time with her success in hair care products. But her inheritance never made it past her grandchildren’s generation. Today the black “upper class” rings with names such as Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, P. “Diddy” Combs, Tiger Woods, etc.

1. Grigoriadis
2. Bowser, p. 73.
3. Bowser, p. 74.
4. Bowser, p. 9.
5. Lacy, p. 33.
6. Lacy, p. 38.
7. Bowser, p. 91.

Bowser, Benjamin P. *The Black Middle Class: Social Mobility and Vulnerability*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007.

Grigoriadis, Vanessa. “Black and Blacker.” *New York*. August 18, 2008.

Lacy, Karyn R. *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.

Landry, Bart. *The New Black Middle Class*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

## BLIGHT AND REDEVELOPMENT

*They’re not going to pass up \$5 million even if it is for minority redevelopment.*

*They’re going to declare it blighted.*

– Harmond Wilks in *Radio Golf*

The Federal Housing Act of 1949, Title I, created the Urban Renewal Authority that awarded money to blighted housing areas. The responsibility for determining blight was left to the states or cities. New York state has adopted this definition: “An area is considered blighted if it is characterized by deteriorating and/or abandoned buildings; inadequate or missing public or community services, and vacant land with debris, litter and junk accumulation and impacted by adverse environmental nuisances such as noise, heavy traffic and odors.”<sup>1</sup>

When an area is declared blighted, it is eligible for Federal and State funds and can be “acquired by public agencies through eminent domain and, as part of an adopted redevelopment plan, resold to private developers.”<sup>2</sup> Harmond and Roosevelt pin their hopes on the Hill District being declared blighted so they can thrive in their prospective development.

Dr. Kimberly Ellis, a Pittsburgh scholar, longtime resident and August Wilson’s niece, shared her thoughts on the Hill’s redevelopment:

“When the city developed Crawford Square (1993-95) they encroached upon the neighborhood, so many activists complained. Then the city stopped their investment in the Hill district and began a campaign – of benign neglect.... The Hill’s city councilman had to fight to make sure some of the apartments [in



Crawford Square] were subsidized so that African Americans who were displaced could live there.... Redevelopment cannot mean the relocation and exclusion of thousands of African Americans.”<sup>3</sup>

In the play Harmond tells Sterling his development scheme will bring the Hill back, but Sterling responds by saying the Hill is dead, so he’ll have to put something else in its place. Nevertheless, Harmond is convinced he can make the whole district live again.

In 1966 the Federal government enacted the Model Cities program, which was an ambitious urban aid reform package. “The program’s goals emphasized comprehensive planning, involving not just rebuilding, but also rehabilitation, social service delivery and citizen participation.”<sup>4</sup>

Many cities followed the program, but it proved to be a failure. A Yale study of model cities in St. Louis produced an exhibit and website which concluded: “Planners thought that new buildings would make new people.”<sup>5</sup> Renewing the city physically does not solve the problems of poverty, unemployment and racial antagonism. The planners did not understand you couldn’t erase the past.

That is Wilson’s position in *Radio Golf* – and he is supported by two eminent architectural critics and authors. Jane Jacobs, critic and author of *The Death and Life of American Cities*, said in an interview in 2001: “There is no new world that you can make without the old one.”<sup>6</sup> In 2008 Christopher Hume, architectural critic of *The Toronto Star*, wrote: “Heritage represents a rare resource, a civic asset, not simply an obstacle on the way to a developer’s bottom line.”<sup>7</sup>

Roosevelt only thinks about that bottom line. He doesn’t care about the community; he wants to amass his wealth and move on. Harmond, however, plays by the rules. When he realizes he does not own 1839 Wylie, he wants to rectify the mistake by trying to buy the house, but he can’t. He visits the house and realizes by bulldozing it, he will be destroying history. In essence he becomes one of Aunt Ester’s children.

*The wisdom and tradition she [Aunt Ester] embodies are valuable tools for the reconstruction of their personality and for dealing with a society in which the contradictions, over the decades, have grown more fierce, and for exposing all the places it is lacking in virtue.*  
– August Wilson.<sup>8</sup>

1. Fernandino and Associates, (2003 draft).

2. Ibid.

3. Ellis, “Pittsburgh Perspective.”

4. Encyclopedia of Chicago.

5. Urban review St. Louis.

6. Jacobs, p. 18.

7. Hume, p. 2.

8. Wilson, p. 30.

Ellis, Kimberly Dr. “Pittsburgh Perspective.” *Radio Golf Study Guide*. Centerstage Theatre. Baltimore: 2006.

Fernandino and Associates, Inc. *Flanders, Northampton, Riverside, Revitalization Study*. New York: May, 2003.

Hume, Christopher. “Urban Tragedy Unfolding as Highrise to Erase History.” *The Toronto Star*. Toronto: May 22, 2008.

Kunstler, Jim. “Interview with Jane Jacobs.” *Metropolis Magazine*. May, 2001.

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<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org>.

<http://www.urbanreviewstl.com>.

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# AFRICAN AMERICAN GOLF

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*I hit my first golf ball. I asked myself where have I been? – I felt free. Truly free.*

– Roosevelt Hicks in *Radio Golf*

The history of African Americans in the sport of golf is a winding tale of racism, discrimination and segregation. Golf has always had an air of mystique; the general population's perception of the game was that it was for the rich, famous and retired. The institutional segregation of courses, associations and country clubs made it impossible for African Americans to display their talents. Until recent history blacks were stuck in the roles of caddies and country club staff. However, since 1899, African Americans started changing the sport.

In 1899 African American George Grant invented the golf tee, the first to be registered by the US Patent Office. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century John Shippen was reported to be the first African American golfer in the United States and the first to earn money as a contestant in a U.S. Open.

In 1935, Rhonda Fowler, a pioneering black woman golfer, became the Women's Eastern Champion. Bill Powell designed and opened Clearview Golf Course in 1946, a desegregated course. In 1948 Theodore "Rags" Rhodes, Bill

Spiller and Madison Gunther filed a civil lawsuit against the PGA for civil rights violations. The PGA then changed to an "invitation only" format to avoid its legal and moral obligations to let African Americans play in the PGA tournaments. Only by challenging these rules did these men make significant inroads in segregated facilities. As a result, Charlie Sifford became the first African American PGA tour member in 1962.

In 1954 Harold Dunovant turned pro and was one of the first black golfers to attend the PGA Business School in Long Beach, California. He became the head pro at Minorcas Golf Course in Winston Salem and founded the National Black Golfers Hall of Fame.

In 1967 Renée Powell joined the Ladies PGA Tour and was an active competitor for 13 years. She also was active in promoting minority golf and running the Clearview Golf Course established by her father.

In 1975 Lee Elder became the first black to play at the Masters Tournament in Augusta; in 1979 he played on the U.S. Ryder Cup Team. History was made in 1997 when Tiger Woods became the first African American Masters Champion.

<http://www.afrogolf.com/page18.html>

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# AFRICAN AMERICAN RADIO

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*I know radio is the best advertising out there. You have no idea how much money's to be made in radio right now.*

– Roosevelt Hicks in *Radio Golf*,

The growth of African-American radio has largely mirrored changes in American culture and in the market forces that control the communications industry. The growth of economic power among African Americans has helped change black radio from a white dominated advertising medium into a multi-million dollar industry gradually owned and operated by more blacks.

In the early days of radio, a mixture of positive

and negative stereotypes characterized African Americans. Such shows as "Beulah" and "Amos and Andy" featured black characters (played by the white actors Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll) that were carefree, inarticulate and generally inept. Other broadcasts such as those by Duke Ellington and his band or singer/actor Paul Robeson exposed predominantly white radio audiences to the work of talented and refined black artists. Such images of African Americans frequently appeared in early radio broadcasts, yet there were no blacks in positions of management and ownership. Moreover, radio shows did not hire black announcers, actors or masters of ceremonies.

In 1949 station WDIA in Memphis became the first station to employ an all-black on-air

announcing staff; later that year WERD in Atlanta began broadcasting as the first black-owned radio station. However, institutional racism and a shortage of capital discouraged black entrepreneurs from investing in radio broadcasting. African Americans would not make substantial inroads into radio ownership and management until the 1970s.

After World War II, rhythm and blues programs hosted by black disc jockeys attracted more white listeners. The exposure of white teen-agers to black urban music began to change American society. Black radio fueled the popularity of rock'n'roll and was instrumental in lowering the cultural barriers between blacks and whites in the 1950s. Working from the African oral tradition, black disc jockeys shaped both black and white musical tastes.

This broader media perspective created a social grapevine that contributed largely to the empowerment of the growing civil rights movement. Southern black stations in particular became clearinghouses for information and forums for discussion among black communities cut off from each other by segregation and geography.

The 1970s marked a period of dramatic change in African-American radio. The emergence of FM radio with its "more music, less talk" philosophy intensified the trend away from news and discussion shows that targeted African-American audiences. During this time the most significant

change in black radio was the increase in the number of black-owned radio stations. This was encouraged by the FCC's minority tax program which deferred capital gains to owners of broadcast and cable properties if they sold to minorities. The number of black-owned stations in the 70s grew from 16 to 88, somewhat closing the gap between black-owned stations and stations broadcasting black-oriented programming.

By 1990, 206 of approximately 600 black-oriented stations were owned by African Americans. The format was dominated by music, news and some talk programming. A breath of fresh entrepreneurial air emerged in the 1990s in the form of Cathy Hughes, CEO of Radio One, Inc. This African American woman owns the seventh largest radio broadcasting company (based on 2003 net broadcast revenue) and the largest company that primarily targets African Americans and urban listeners. Radio One owns and/or operates 69 radio stations located in 22 urban markets in the United States and reaches approximately 13 million listeners each week.

[http://www.aaregistry.com/african\\_american\\_history/2769/First\\_exclusive\\_Black\\_radio\\_show/](http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/2769/First_exclusive_Black_radio_show/)

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## HARMOND WILKS AND BARACK OBAMA

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*I'm going to be mayor of everybody. It's not about being white or black; it's about being American.*

—Harmond Wilks, in *Radio Golf*

*There's not a liberal America and a conservative America. There's the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white America and a Latino America and an Asian America — there's the United States of America. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the Stars and Stripes.*

—Barack Obama,  
Democratic National Convention, 2004.

Harmond Wilks and Barack Obama have much in common. Harmond graduated from Cornell, an Ivy League college, and speaks nearly perfect grammar about such issues as marketing and business deals. However, he can adjust his speech patterns to his constituency. He is a local leader with connections in the city administration. Well known by the citizens on the Hill as the inheritor of Wilks Realty, he has benefited from the expanded opportunities offered by civil rights and affirmative action. "He views the law as a means to set standards for everyone (black and white), curb violence, protect individual rights and ensure social order."<sup>1</sup> His principles carry over into his golf game.

Barack Obama, too, profited from affirmative

action as a graduate of Columbia University and later Harvard Law School. He speaks eloquently but can revert to a “black patois when the time calls for it.”<sup>2</sup> As the product of a bi-racial marriage, he was raised by his white mother and her parents. After attending Columbia in New York, he became a community organizer in Chicago, helping South Side residents cope with a wave of plant closings. He then attended Harvard Law, where in 1990, became the first African American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. He returned to Chicago to practice civil rights law and eventually became involved in politics. He prefers basketball to golf.

Obama does not share the legacy of slavery and oppression in this country with other African Americans, just as Harmond believes he does not. Obama has felt racial antagonism, but still feels he is part of the American mainstream because his hard work and love of country have established him there. “His perspective is that strengthening family values and upholding morality may be the one thing within the black community’s control that can actually reduce their marginalization,” writes Armstrong Williams.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Harmond Wilks is faithful to his wife and uses the law and morality as his standard in business and in life.

1. Booker, p. 188.

2. Grigoriadis, p. 24.

3. Grigoriadis, p. 65.

4. Williams.

5. Williams.

6. Johnson, p. 42.

Bigsby, Christopher, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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# BLAIR CALDWELL AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH LIBRARY OF THE DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

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**Mission: To serve as an educational and cultural resource for the people of Denver, Colorado and the world, focusing on the history, literature, art, music, religion and politics of African Americans in Colorado and throughout the Rocky Mountain West.**

Denver Mayor Wellington E. Webb and First Lady Wilma J. Webb had a shared vision. They envisioned a research library and museum to preserve and showcase the many contributions of African Americans to Colorado and the West. Much of that history was in private hands—those of political leaders, community organizations, churches and individuals. Other history was unwritten, still in the heads and hearts of those who had lived it.

In 1999, during his third term as Mayor of Denver, Mayor Wellington E. Webb and First Lady Wilma J. Webb saw the urgent need to collect this legacy in one place before it was lost forever. They proposed construction of an African American Research Library (AARL) as part of the Denver Public Library system.

“There’s so much history, and we need to capture that for young people,” he said. “So much of it is in boxes, in basements, or in our heads.”

And so the journey of gathering that history began.

In 2000, the Denver Public Library engaged consultants and a community advisory committee to help plan the African American Research Library. Public meetings were held with neighborhoods that would use the facility, and Library staff began to collect personal and professional papers, publications, photographs, works of art and other memorabilia of distinguished African Americans from all walks of life.

Finally, groundbreaking for the new library took place in early 2002.

Location:

2401 Welton St.

Denver, CO 80205

(720) 865-2401

[www.aarl.denverlibrary.org](http://www.aarl.denverlibrary.org)

Northwest corner of 24<sup>th</sup> and Welton St. in the heart of the historic Five Points Neighborhood. The RTD rail line stops just outside the front door. There are 65 free parking spaces next to the building.

Hours:

Mon.-Wed., 10am-7pm

Fri.-Sat., 10am-5pm

Closed Thursday and Sunday

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# RADIO GOLF QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

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## Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the significance of Old Joe painting the house at 1839 Wylie Street?
- 2) Why does Harmond want to name the Model Cities Health Center after Sarah Degree?
- 3) Explain Roosevelt's obsession with golf? Why did August Wilson title this play *Radio Golf*?
- 4) Why does Mame want to edit Harmond's campaign speech in the Post-Gazette? Why does Harmond want to keep the speech in its entirety?
- 5) How does one define success? Explain why you believe Harmond to be successful or Roosevelt to be successful.
- 6) What does this play say about economic class?
- 7) What does Harmond think about Roosevelt's decision to become an owner of the radio station? How do their opinions differ?
- 8) What is the significance of the "cowboys and Indians" references that Sterling makes?
- 9) Why does Harmond want to preserve the house at 1839 Wylie Street? Why does Roosevelt want to tear it down?
- 10) Why do you believe Harmond is willing to sacrifice his candidacy to correct the problem with the property? How do Mame, Roosevelt and the other characters react to his position? Do you respect Harmond more as political candidate or less?
- 11) If August Wilson were alive today and continued his play cycle about the Hill District, what would he write about for the first decade of 2000?

## Activities

### City Hall Debate

Goal: To put together opposing sides of a debate.

Harmond and Roosevelt have two distinct feelings about what is to be done to the house at 1839 Wylie Street. Harmond wants the redevelopment project to build around the house and Roosevelt wants the house condemned and removed.

Split the group into two parts that will represent the two sides. Compile a list of reasons to support each side to plan for the debate. Use information from the play to support the arguments, but also look for examples in your city or town where this problem may have also arisen.

From the two groups, select five people to represent the City Council. The rest of the group will represent the two sides. Hold a public meeting to debate what is going to happen to the property in an open forum.

### Colorado Model Content Standards

**Reading and Writing 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.**

**Civics 4.3: Students know how citizens can exercise their rights.**

### Representative Objects

Goal: The objective of this exercise is to give students a perspective of their pasts by using representative historical objects.

August Wilson's plays are full of symbolism. In *Radio Golf*, there are many objects that become symbols. Start with compiling a list of objects that are found in the play and what they may represent. What do the objects tell us about the owner and how do the other characters react to these objects? Have the class brainstorm some objects that they possess or remember from their past. How do these objects help to represent them?



Ask the students to talk with their parents and grandparents about some of the objects from their past. Pick one of these objects and write a paragraph or compose a poem that is about the symbolic nature of these objects.

### **Colorado Model Content Standards**

**Reading and Writing 2: Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.**

### **Social Activism and Media**

Split the class into two groups. You and your classmates have been hired to be the public relations firm for either Harmond Wilks and his wish to save the house on 1839 Wylie Street or Roosevelt Hicks and his desire to demolish the house. Decide which side you will support and compile a list of reasons for your support. Who will be your audience and how will they react?

With your group decide the best way to get the word out about your cause. Will it be on buttons, bumper stickers, posters, advertisements or is there some other way to communicate your stance?

Which form of media would best suit your cause and be the most effective?

Draw or make a mock up of your medium. Does it convey your stance? Will other people know what you are trying to relay?

Create a public address radio spot. Create an advertisement for television.

Extension: Instead of making these choices for the issues in *Radio Golf*, are there other issues or causes that you could advocate for at your school or in your community?

### **Colorado Model Content Standards**

**Civics 4.4: Students know how citizens can participate in civic life.**

**Visual Arts 1: Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of communication.**