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**A Proposal to Create a Themed Exhibit on the Consequences of Prolonged Discrimination
Against a Community**

Introduction

African American History is filled with movements and struggles that were pivotal for African Americans to gain equal footing with people from other, more dominant, races. The artifact, *Fences*, is a play by August Wilson written in the late 1980s and is a part “of a cycle of plays that explore some of the historical choices that have confronted African Americans during the twentieth century” (Blues, History, and the Dramaturgy of August Wilson 561, 1993). The artifact was accessed from Hatch-Billops Play Scripts Archive in the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University; it is a stack of papers in a light mustard colored folder. One noticeable trait is that the papers have not been bound even though there are punched holes present on each page. The artifact has been neatly preserved; the print has not faded and all pages are of excellent quality, except for a slight yellow tint on a few pages. The play is divided into two Acts; Act one contains four scenes while Act two contains five scenes.

Fences revolves around a low income African American family living in Pittsburgh, PA in the 1950s. Troy, the primary protagonist of the play, believed that racism was still firmly established in society and could not be uprooted so easily while Cory, his son, believed that African Americans were being given a much amount of opportunities than before and that racism was slowly, but firmly, coming to an end. The audience first experiences the two character’s

differing opinions in the scene where Troy does not allow his son to pursue a college football scholarship as he believed that African Americans had no scope for success in the field of professional sports due to the presence of racial discrimination. However, Cory firmly believed that Blacks were now being given the same opportunities as white sports players.

The author of the play, August Wilson, is known for his “ability to put into words the ideas and experiences of everyday African Americans, who have long been caricatured, relegated to the periphery, or displaced altogether in drama created by playwrights from mainstream white society. His characters, while for the most part living out their lives in a single locale, grapple with themes and issues that all people must deal with” (Gantt, n.p., 2009).

So, after reading and analyzing the play it can be said that Troy and Cory, along with their differing opinions in the play reflect the mentality of most African Americans during the 1950s. So, it can be concluded that prolonged racial discrimination against the African Americans slowly divided the African American community into two halves; one half believed that African Americans were slowly being given the same opportunities as the one being given to the white people while the other half believed that African Americans are still heavily discriminated.

The family’s internal fights and struggles revolve around this primary notion. Further, this family’s struggles resonated through almost all African American families during that crucial decade. As a person who cares about family, this play appealed to me both logically and emotionally. The constant fights between each family member reminded me of how fortunate I am to have a loving family.

Therefore, based on the points made above, this themed exhibit proposes a visual representation of one of the major consequences of prolonged discrimination against a community. The exhibit will attempt to spread what I have learnt to a wider audience. I want this Curated Exhibit to create awareness about how prolonged discrimination against a community can lead to major consequences. The exhibit will make use of artifacts from the Billops-Hatch Archive and the Langmuir Photograph Collection at Emory University's Rose Library.

The artifacts used will consist of photographs, books, letters, audio cues and play scripts relevant from that time period. All artifacts for the play will be gathered from the Rose Library and/or the Black Drama Database. Additional information about the author and his play will be taken from credible online databases and will be cited wherever necessary using the 8th edition MLA Style citation format.

Statement of Purpose

Prolonged discrimination against the African American community during the 1950s slowly divided the African American community into two halves with the former believing that discrimination against the blacks was dwindling and that blacks were now being presented the same opportunities as the whites and the latter believing that the former was wrong and that discrimination on the basis of race was still firmly rooted in society (as established in the introduction above).

This divide is one of the major underlying themes in the play *Fences* and is first evident when protagonist Cory Maxson gets a chance to go to college on a football scholarship but his father, Troy Maxson, stops him from doing so. Troy's reasons for stopping him were that there is no scope for success for African Americans in the field of sports due to racial discrimination.

Here it is seen that Troy is a part of the group that firmly believes that racism is still firmly rooted in society.

On December 1st 1955, Rosa Parks “chose to take a seat on the bus on her ride home from work. Because she sat down and refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, she was arrested for disobeying an Alabama law requiring black people to relinquish seats to white people when the bus was full” (Rosa Parks was Arrested for Civil Disobedience December 1, 1955, n.p.). Also, in 1955, two white half-brothers were found not guilty of the murder of a 14-year-old black teenager (Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder, 1955). The teenager, known as Emmett, had allegedly wolf whistled at the wife of one of the brothers, leading to his murder (Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder, 1955). The all-white jury that made the decision acquitted the brothers in just over an hour (Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder, 1955), even though the brothers had admitted to kidnapping Emmett but claimed that they had released him with no harm (Popham, n.p., 1955). These two incidents about discrimination based on race are some of the few that occurred during this time period and support Troy Maxson’s belief about society’s status on discrimination against African Americans.

However, the author of the play cleverly sets *Fences* during the year the Milwaukee Braves beat the New York Yankees 5-0 to win the 1957 World Series (Finch, n.p., 1957). Henry “Hank” Aaron, one of the few African American baseball players playing in the Major League, batted a .393 with three home runs and led the Braves to the World Series, beating the New York Yankees (Johnson, n.p.). He was also awarded the 1957 National League Most Valuable Player Award (Letzler 309). This proved that African Americans could not only compete with white athletes, but also be leaders in the field of professional sports. A few years later in the play itself,

Cory Maxson also successfully joins the navy and becomes a decorated soldier, further enforcing the fact that racial discrimination and segregation was slowly coming to an end.

So, either side is true to a certain extent, as seen from the events listed above. It can be said that this debate on the situation of discrimination on the basis of race can be argued from either side to great lengths. Hence the reason for the disunion and fights within the community itself.

Therefore, this themed exhibit will showcase, and create awareness about, the effects of prolonged discrimination against a community. It is for this reason that the play *Fences* was chosen as one of the major artifacts for this exhibit as it clearly showcases how a typical family living during that time period was affected by the discrimination. I want my audience to perceive American History from the 1950s to the late 1960s through the eyes of the people living in the community that is being discriminated.

Objective

The objective of this Curated Exhibit is to use August Wilson's views on racial discrimination in the 1950s to highlight and create awareness on how discrimination causes disunion and separation within the community being discriminated. This disunion is caused when a fair number of people start to believe that the discrimination against their community will not end in the near future. This leads to fights and conflicts within the community and this ultimately causes further dissension. In the play *Fences*, this disunion takes place in the Maxson family with Troy Maxson being the one to believe that this discrimination will not end while his son, Cory Maxson believed otherwise.

Discrimination against African Americans is still prevalent today, with the police shooting unarmed black citizens etc. Discrimination is also one of the prevailing challenges in

the world today. A few examples of discrimination in today's day and age include, racial discrimination against African Americans and Islamophobia. As discussed above, discrimination will sooner or later cause disunity with the community being targeted.

Through the use of artifacts from the Rose Library, I want my audience to place themselves in the shoes of the African Americans during the 1950s and look through their perspective. I want my audience to grasp what the thought process of the people being discriminated was. So, through the curated exhibit, I want my audience to understand one of the outcomes of prolonged discrimination against a community.

Plan of Action

This Curated Exhibit will use August Wilson's views on racial discrimination in the 1950s to highlight and create awareness on how discrimination causes disunion and separation within the community being discriminated. To achieve the objective of this Curated Exhibit, I will make use of artifacts from the Billops-Hatch Archives at Emory University's Rose Library and the Langmuir Photograph Collection to highlight how racial discrimination against African Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s divided the African American Community in the United States into two halves. I will build upon the views put forth by August Wilson in his play, *Fences*, and attempt to spread what I have learnt through my study of his play and African American History to a wider audience.

The primary artifact used is '*Fences*' by August Wilson. *Fences* is a play that takes place during the 1950s. The play itself is about an African American family that is going through disunion due to the continued discrimination against them. This resource is essential to my exhibit as the play provides a firsthand experience on how racial discrimination affected each family member's mentality. The theme for this Curated Exhibit has evolved from themes that

were prevalent in this play. Further, August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* (Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives, Series 1: Plays scripts, box 33, FF 11) will be used as another literary work in order for the audience to understand how the Civil Rights Movement that took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s changed society's status on racial discrimination. Both artifacts will be on display in the Curated Exhibit. The reason for using *Two Trains Running* is to perform a comparative analysis of how the state of racial discrimination against African Americans changed from the 1950s to the late 1960s, after the commencement of the Civil Rights Movement. This comparative analysis will be used as a way for the audience of the exhibit to gauge who was right, Troy or Cory Maxson. This comparative analysis will also be used as a way to prompt the audience to perform further research on their own to learn about African American history during the 1950s and 1960s.

Next, I will use photos from the Langmuir Photograph Collection to showcase the state of the African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. These photos will act as visual aids and help the audience of the exhibit visualize the 1950s and 1960s. These photos also include famous personalities that played an important role in securing equal rights for African Americans. The photos that will be used are:

1. [MSS1218_B007_I073, Photograph, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection,] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.
2. [MSS1218_B007_I087, Photograph, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection,] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

3. [MSS1218_B007_I091, Photograph, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection,] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.
4. [MSS1218_B007_I082, Photograph, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection,] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Along with the variety of primary sources listed above, this exhibit will also make use of secondary resources such as newspaper articles and journals. The newspaper articles used will be taken from the online database ProQuest. The articles used will be taken from the 1950s and will cover important incidents that took place in that time period. Incidents that will be covered through the use of newspaper articles include the Incident of Emmett Till, the Brown v. Board of Education, the incident where Rosa Parks was asked to give her seat in the bus up to a white passenger, and the Milwaukee Braves beating the New York Yankees to win the World Series (1957). Other secondary resources such as books, journals and essays will be found using databases such as Emory University's Combined Search option in discoverE and Johns Hopkins University's Project MUSE. These other secondary resources will be used to authenticate the historical information that has been used in the Proposal for this themed exhibit and in the exhibit itself.

Resources that will not be consulted for this exhibit are Oral history. Oral History is not being consulted as a resource as records of interviews and other oral sources found in the Rose Library are not relevant to the theme of the exhibit. Further, Oral History sources are not needed for this exhibit as all information about the theme and the exhibit is available in the Rose Library or in various online databases that can be accessed through Emory University.

Another resource that will not be used for this Curated Exhibit is Ethnography. The reason for why this resource cannot be consulted is the fact that it is not physically possible to observe the African Community in the 1950s from 2016.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Letzler, D. "Walking Around the Fences: Troy Maxson and the Ideology of "Going Down Swinging"." *African American Review*, vol. 47 no. 2, 2014, pp. 301-312. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/566981. Accessed October 3 2016.

The source is an article extracted from the African American Review, Volume 47, Numbers 2-3, pp. 301-312. The source analyses August Wilson's play, *Fences*, specifically Troy Maxson's idea of 'Going Down Swinging'. The source relates protagonist Troy Maxson and his ideology to American Baseball history. The source analyses, to great detail, why Troy Maxson's anger when he talked about the time he used to play professional baseball. This is significant for the themed exhibit as it describes the racial discrimination that was present in professional sports such as baseball in that time period. In brief, the reason for Troy's anger is the fact that he was not given a place in a professional baseball team because of his race. He was denied the position even though his qualifications were higher than those of the player who was eventually selected for the position in the team.

2. Finch, Frank. "Braves Beat Yanks, 5-0; Win, Series." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Los Angeles, Calif., 1957., *ProQuest*, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/167194377?accountid=10747>. Accessed 5 October 2016.

This source is an article from the Los Angeles Times. As the title suggests, this article summarizes the victory of the Braves in the Baseball Series in 1957. The source is about professional baseball in the late 1950s. Earlier in the play *Fences*, it was established that racial discrimination was potent in professional sports but, when Henry “Hank” Aaron led the Braves to victory over the Yankees in the series, it could be said that African Americans were not only equally competitive as white professional players, but also leaders in the field of sports. This source is one of the sources that will be displayed in the themed exhibit as an example that racial discrimination was slowly uprooting itself from society. Statistics about Henry “Hank” Aaron’s performance during the innings will be provided from a webpage from the *Society for American Baseball Research* and is listed below.

3.

- a. Popham, John N. "Brothers Admitted Till Abduction, Sheriff Says." *The Atlanta Constitution (1946-1984)*, Atlanta, Ga., 1955., *ProQuest*,
<https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/1554685073?accountid=10747>. Accessed 5 October 2016.
- b. "Bryant, Milan Acquitted of Emmett Till Murder." *Daily Boston Globe (1928-1960)*, Boston, Mass., 1955., *ProQuest*,
<https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/845275957?accountid=10747>. Accessed 8 October 2016.

The first source is an article from the *Atlanta Constitution* while the second source is an article from the *Daily Boston Globe*. Both articles summarize the incident of Emmett Till, an event that took place in the mid 1950s. The first article shares the news that the brothers that were responsible for the kidnapping of the teenager admit to the crime and are guilty. The second article gives the news that the perpetrator was exonerated of all charges. Therefore, this article is essential to the themed exhibit as it provides an instance of the extent to which racism had ingrained itself in society during that time period.

These sources will act as an example of the fact that racism was still established in that time period. This will act as a contrast to the previous source which indicated that racism was slowly disappearing from society. Therefore, these sources will provide different views on the status of racial discrimination in society. Though there have been cases where African Americans have been treated as equals, there have also been cases where they have been discriminated against.

4. "Text of Supreme Court Decision Outlawing Negro Segregation in the Public Schools." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, New York, N.Y., 1954., *ProQuest*, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/112916078?accountid=10747>. Accessed 3 October 2016.

This source is an article from the *New York Times* and it provides the text of the Supreme Court decision in banning racial segregation in public schools. The article provides another example of an act that proves that racial discrimination is slowly being shunned from society. The Supreme Court decision to ban racial segregation in schools was the result of the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* Case in 1955. This source will be displayed in the exhibit as

another example that shows that society is moving forward in terms of removing racial discrimination from society. These examples will be used to support Cory Maxson's view that racial discrimination is slowly ending and that Blacks are now being treated on the same level as White. While examples such as the article on the kidnapping of Emmett Till will be used to support Troy Maxson's view that racial discrimination is still deeply rooted in society.

5. "Blues, History, and the Dramaturgy of August Wilson." *African American Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1993., pp. 561. *ProQuest*, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/docview/209794203?accountid=10747>. Accessed 7 October 2016.

This source was accessed through ProQuest database and is a part of the African American Review. This criticism article provides a brief history on August Wilson and his dramaturgy. The text provides a background on August Wilson's Cycle of Ten plays and the Blues. The primary artifact used for this Curated Exhibit that is, *Fences* by August Wilson, is a part of August Wilson's Cycle of Ten Plays. It is for this reason that this resource was chosen as it provides information on this Cycle of Ten Plays.

6. Gantt, Patricia M. "Putting black culture on stage: August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle." *College Literature* 36.2 (2009): 1+. *Literature Resource Center*. <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=emory&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA198234176&asid=e3d232451230cf9f6d973dbddbfe1860>. Accessed 10 October 2016.

This source was accessed through Emory University's discoverE database, using the combined search option. This source provides information on August Wilson and his Cycle of Ten Plays. As with the previous source, this source will also be used to provide more information on August Wilson's traits, his style of writing and a list of awards he has won for his various plays.

7. Nadel, Alan. "August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle." Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. *Project MUSE*, <http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.library.emory.edu/book/208>. Accessed October 8 2016.

This source is a book titled August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle. The author of this book is Alan Nadel. This book was accessed through Johns Hopkins University's Project MUSE database. The book itself is about August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle. Each chapter in the book talks about the structural design and the historical relevance of the last four plays in the cycle. Although this book concentrates mostly on the last four plays of the cycle, it also has an introduction that talks about all the other plays in the cycle as well. This introduction provides factual information about August Wilson's career, his life, some of his thoughts and motivations. This book was chosen for its introduction on the author and for the information it provides about his early career and personal life.

8. Johnson, Bill. "Hank Aaron." *Society for American Baseball Research*, <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/5a36cc6f>. Accessed 6 October 2016.

This source is from the website for the Society for American Baseball Research. This webpage gives detailed information about professional baseball player Henry “Hank” Aaron and some of his major milestones and career achievements. This particular source is important as Fences is set during the year Henry “Hank” Aaron led the Milwaukee Braves to the World Series. This website provides batting statistics and the number of home runs hit by Hank Aaron during the inning. According to the source, Hank hit three home runs while batting at a .393 and led Milwaukee to win its only championship in professional baseball. From Hank’s performance during this World Series it can be concluded that, during a time period where racial discrimination against African Americans was prominent, blacks such as Hank Aaron could be leaders in the field of professional sports and lead white players.

9. “Rosa Parks was Arrested for Civil Disobedience December 1, 1955”, *America’s Story from America’s Library*, http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/modern/jb_modern_parks_1.html. Date Accessed 9th October 2016.

This source is a Government website that summarizes the events that took place on December 1st 1955 regarding Rosa Parks. This source is a vital part of the curated exhibit as it provides information on an instance of racial discrimination in the United States during the 1950s. Rosa Parks was forced to give up her seat to a white passenger as the bus was full. Therefore, this source provides an example of an event of racial discrimination and supports Troy Maxson’s point of view that society still discriminated on the basis of race.