

Proposal Introduction
ENG 101 015 Fall 2016
Instructor: Anthony Cooke

A Proposal to Create a Themed Exhibit on the State of African Americans in the 1950's

Arnav Jalan

September, 2016

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. The artifact was accessed from Hatch-Billops Play Scripts archive (Box #33) at Emory University's Rose Library.¹ The artifact 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 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

¹ [Fences, Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives,] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

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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.”²

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. Though segregation was slowly being banished in various cities throughout the United States, African Americans were still racially discriminated in most parts of the United States. It can be said 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.

² Gantt, Patricia M. "Putting black culture on stage: August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle." *College Literature* 36.2 (2009): 1+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 10 Oct. 2016.
<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=e3d232451230cf9f6d973dbdbfe1860>.

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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. The exhibit will make use of artifacts from the Billops-Hatch Archive and the Langmuir Photograph Collection at Emory University's Rose Library.

I want the audience of this themed exhibit to see, through eyes of the community that is being discriminated, how a community that has been discriminated against for long periods of time, slowly begin to have fights and arguments among themselves. I also want them to understand the mentality of the members of that community.

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 each artifact will be taken from credible online resources and will be properly cited. Therefore, this introduction proposal has highlighted my methods for gathering information.