

STUDY GUIDE

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE  
**PARADISE  
BLUE**



WEST COAST PREMIERE

# PARADISE BLUE

11.09–11.22.2021

GIL CATES THEATER

**SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Amy Levinson, Rachel Weigardt-Egel, Brian Dunning, Brian Allman, Stori Ayers, and Dominique Morisseau.

**STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY**

Dawn Robinson-Patrick

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COVER PHOTO BY JUSTIN BETTMAN

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ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

# PARADISE BLUE

WRITTEN BY  
**DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU**

DIRECTED BY  
**STORI AYERS**

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**EDWARD E. HAYNES, JR.**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**WENDELL C. CARMICHAEL**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**ALAN C. EDWARDS**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**JEFF GARDNER**

COMPOSER  
**DAVID "PREACH"  
BALFOUR**

FIGHT DIRECTOR  
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INTIMACY CHOREOGRAPHER  
**NEDRA CONSTANCE  
GALLEGOS**

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER  
**SHAWNA VORAGEN**

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER  
**LIV SCOTT**

CASTING DIRECTOR  
**PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA**

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[WWW.CONCORDTHEATRICALS.COM](http://WWW.CONCORDTHEATRICALS.COM)

THE WORLD PREMIERE OF PARADISE BLUE WAS PRODUCED BY THE WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL IN JULY, 2015  
MANDY GREENFIELD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR; STEPHEN M. KAUS, PRODUCER

## CAST



**TYLA  
ABERCROMBIE  
SILVER**



**WENDELL B.  
FRANKLIN  
BLUE**



**ALANI  
iLONGWE  
P-SAM**



**JOHN EARL  
JELKS  
CORN**



**SHAYNA  
SMALL  
PUMPKIN**



## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

# SYNOPSIS

In the Detroit community of Black Bottom, trumpet player and jazz club owner *Blue* struggles to keep his father's business afloat. As gentrification threatens to destroy the livelihood and the close community that *Blue* and many club owners in the area have built, he has a difficult decision to make—sell and create a new life for himself and his lady *Pumpkin*, or stay and allow his inner madness to defeat him. *Blue*'s band member, *P-Sam*, and a mysterious and sexy stranger, *Silver*, fight for ownership, creating more confusion. *Pumpkin* struggles to find confidence in her voice while piano man *Corn*, *Blue*'s friend and confidante, attempts to keep the peace. Chaos ensues as the future of the Paradise Club and the group's complicated relationships to each other unfolds.

**TIME/SETTING** 1949. Paradise Club in Detroit, Michigan.

**RUNNING TIME** 2 hours and 15 minutes, including one 15 minute intermission.

**PRODUCTION NOTES** Contains strobe lighting effects, theatrical haze, gunshots, profanity, and the smoking of herbal cigarettes.

## ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



### **DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU** Playwright

Dominique Morisseau is the author of *The Detroit Project (A 3-Play Cycle)*: *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), *Paradise Blue* (Signature Theatre), and *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem and NBT). Additional plays include: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Sunset Baby* (LAByrinth Theatre), *Blood at the Root* (National Black Theatre), and *Follow Me To Nellie's* (Premiere Stages). She is also the Tony Award nominated book writer on the Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations* (Imperial Theatre). TV/ Film projects: She most recently served as co-producer on the Showtime series *Shameless*. She's currently developing projects with Netflix, HBO, and A24, and wrote the film adaptation of the documentary *STEP* for Fox Searchlight. Awards include: Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award (2), and the Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, named one of *Variety's* Women of Impact for 2017-18 and a recipient of the 2018 MacArthur Genius Grant.



### **STORI AYERS** Director

Stori Ayers is a New York-based actor/director and co-founder of [RARE] Lotus Productions. Originally from Washington, D.C., she has a passion for stories that challenge social norms, create conversations in the community, and ignite within her generation a spirit of activism. Stori is an original cast member and producer of Dominique Morisseau's *Blood at the Root*, winner of the Graham F. Smith Peace Foundation Prize for its promotion of human rights. She recently played Regina, childhood best friend of Tiffany Haddish, on the TBS hit series *The Last O.G.* starring Tracy Morgan. Stori has worked at Lincoln Center Theater, Signature Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, the National Black Theatre, Baltimore Centre Stage, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Syracuse Stage, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati, Signature Theatre DC, Premiere Stages, Pennsylvania Center Stage and Round House Theatre, to name a few. Stori is a proud member of Actors' Equity and SDC, holds a B.A. from Mary Baldwin University, an M.F.A. in Acting from Penn State University, and is a writing assistant to Dominique Morisseau.

# BLACK BOTTOM & PARADISE VALLEY



PHOTO: DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Black Bottom and Paradise Valley were two predominantly Black neighborhoods in Detroit that, for the first half of the 20th century, were the heart of Detroit's Black community. An internationally renowned jazz hub and center for Black-owned businesses, Black Bottom and Paradise Valley were known as "Detroit's Black Wall Street."

Black Bottom, named for its rich, dark soil, and Paradise Valley drew many Black migrants from the South who were moving north for greater opportunity in the early 1900s. Restrictive housing covenants limited them from living in most other areas of Detroit—one effect of these restrictions was the creation of an area in which Black people of all social classes lived side by side.

"These were people, people who had jobs, had thoughts, and had aspirations to do something great. Many of them had left Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana — the Jim Crow South — to make a way for themselves in the city of Detroit, and they're going to. They're going to make a way for themselves and they're going to transform Detroit." – Jamon Jordan, Detroit historian

The two neighborhoods were separate, though adjacent to one another. While Black Bottom was more residential, Paradise Valley was the business and entertainment district. By the 1920s, there were 350 Black-owned businesses in Detroit, most of them concentrated in Paradise Valley and Black Bottom.



Black Bottom historical marker, erected July 2021

## JIM CROW (noun)

Racial segregation and discrimination enforced by laws, customs, and practices in especially the southern states of the U.S. from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 until the mid-20th century. The percentage of blacks living in the South fell from 89 percent in 1910 to 53 percent in 1970 as millions migrated to the Northeast and Midwest to escape Jim Crow and acquire a better standard of life. (merriam-webster.com)

## THEMES & TOPICS

### URBAN RENEWAL (noun)

The rehabilitation of city areas by renovating or replacing dilapidated buildings with new housing, public buildings, parks, roadways, industrial areas, etc., often in accordance with comprehensive plans. (dictionary.com)

### GENTRIFICATION (noun)

The process of changing the character of a neighborhood through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses. Gentrification often increases the economic value of a neighborhood, but resulting in demographic displacement. Gentrification often shifts a neighborhood's racial/ethnic composition and average household income by developing new, more expensive housing and businesses in a gentrified architectural style. Gentrification can lead to population migration and displacement. (wikipedia.org)

### SOURCES

Coleman, Ken. "Black Bottom and Paradise Valley: Center of Black Life in Detroit." Michigan Chronicle. [tinyurl.com/michchronicle](http://tinyurl.com/michchronicle)

Crawford, Amy. "Capturing Black Bottom, a Detroit Neighborhood Lost to Urban Renewal." Bloomberg City Lab. [tinyurl.com/lostdetroit](http://tinyurl.com/lostdetroit)

"With music in its DNA, Detroit's small, all-Black community served as a backdrop for thriving clubs and bars." —Rochelle Riley, Director of Arts, Culture, and Entrepreneurship for the city of Detroit

Paradise Valley and Black Bottom were known for their rich night-life, including many jazz clubs. In addition to local talent, the clubs in the area saw the likes of touring jazz legends such as Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, and Ella Fitzgerald.

### "A THRILLING CONVERGENCE OF PEOPLE"

Detroit was home to numerous immigrant groups, especially Jewish people. The area that became known as Black Bottom became an African-American neighborhood as Black migration exploded throughout the first half of the 20th Century and white Detroiters made it difficult for Black residents to move into many areas of the city.

As late as the 1920s, Black Bottom was home to both Black Detroiters and other newcomers. Coleman Young, Detroit's first African-American mayor, moved there from Alabama with his family in 1923, when Young was 5. He often recalled that his neighbors were Italian and Syrian immigrants, with German and Jewish stores nearby.

But as Black people poured into booming Detroit to find jobs and escape the South, Black Bottom became one of the few districts in the city where African Americans could live.

These once-thriving and famous neighborhoods were targeted for "urban renewal" and "gentrification" in the 1940s and razed by the end of the 1960s, leaving many residents displaced and a community destroyed.

### URBAN RENEWAL

The destruction of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley was part of a wider effort by the U.S. Government to clear areas in cities that were considered to be "slums." The National Housing Act of 1949 provided federal loans to cities, including Detroit, to clear areas deemed to be "blighted." These areas would then be sold to private developers for "redevelopment" projects that were aligned with the city's plans. That same year of 1949, a real estate investor

named Albert Cobo ran for mayor of Detroit on a platform against public housing and in favor of clearing Black Bottom. When he announced his plan, the Black-owned Michigan Chronicle called it a "Jim Crow project."

Detroit was one of the first cities to take advantage of this federally-offered money for "slum" clearance and redevelopment projects, spending billions on these efforts by the mid-1980s. Soon after Cobo's win in 1949, the city started to tear down Black Bottom. Most residents of the area were renters and had little power to resist. Many were given 30 days' notice to vacate and negligible relocation assistance. Today, this section of Detroit is the site of the Chrysler Freeway and Lafayette Park (a collection of superblock apartments).

## DISCUSSION POINT

- How do the concerns and changes in the community of Black Bottom relate to the issues we still face in the world today?
- Have you or anyone in your community experienced change or displacement due to socio-economic shifts?
- When considering your own community, who might you be excluding, overlooking or forgetting?



# DETROIT JAZZ IN THE 1940s



"Paradise Valley" by Don Reasor, 1997

The growth of Detroit and the migration of jazz musicians northward to Detroit in the early 20th century was fundamental in the molding of America's jazz sound.

Paradise Valley brought one of the most important changes in the 1930's for the Black jazz community: the gradual shift from big ballrooms to small cabaret bands.

Musicians preferred jam sessions over the more stilted big band sound. Former rivals in the big bands began recruiting each other to create blended cabaret bands that found regular homes in established local clubs and ballrooms. Two dozen or so clubs dotted the area, many owned by African Americans. Places such as 606 Horseshoe Lounge and Club Three Sixes featured national acts including Duke Ellington, Dinah Washington, and Sarah Vaughan, plus other jazz greats such as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie. At the Graystone Ballroom many groups perfected the Detroit Jazz style.

Paradise Valley was also home to Detroit's first "black-and-tan" cabarets and nightclubs. Black-and-tans were venues where Black artists performed for Black and white audiences. Plantation Club, was the most prominent of the black-and-tans during the 1930s. Another Black-owned black-and-tan cabaret was the Chocolate Bar, as was the Brown Bomber Chicken Shack.

Much like jazz was anchored on improvisation and informality, so was its history. Few books chronicle the growth and impact of Detroit jazz although oral tales have been passed down from generation to generation. While new styles evolved, old guards often held onto the former society band and big styles, creating a rich tapestry of jazz subcultures in Detroit, offering diversity to audiences who visited from across America.

## SOURCES

[tinyurl.com/wikidetroitjazz](http://tinyurl.com/wikidetroitjazz)

[tinyurl.com/detroitjazzboom](http://tinyurl.com/detroitjazzboom)

## DISCUSSION POINT

- What musical artists or associations come to mind when you think of Jazz?
- In what ways has the history of jazz music influenced the music you listen to today?



# POET GEORGIA DOUGLAS JOHNSON



## SOURCES

Lindsey, Treva B. "Saturday Night at the S Street Salon." University of Illinois Press.  
[tinyurl.com/illinoispress](http://tinyurl.com/illinoispress)

Lewis, Jone Johnson. "Biography of Georgia Douglas Johnson, Harlem Renaissance Writer."  
[tinyurl.com/gdjthoughtco](http://tinyurl.com/gdjthoughtco)

In *Paradise Blue*, Pumpkin finds strength and inspiration in the poetry of Georgia Douglas Johnson.

Georgia Douglas Johnson (Ca. 1880-1966) was born in Atlanta, Georgia, to parents of African American, Native American, and English descent. She graduated from Atlanta University Normal College and studied music at the Oberlin Conservatory and the Cleveland College of Music.

Johnson was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a period in the 1920s and 1930s in which Black art, literature, music, and culture flourished in Harlem, New York City. She was a poet, playwright, editor, music teacher, school principal, and pioneer in the Black theater movement, and wrote many poems, plays, and songs. She challenged both racial and gender barriers to succeed in these areas. Though Johnson never found great success as a playwright or poet during her lifetime, she was influential to generations of noted Black writers and playwrights who came after. She came to be known as the "Lady Poet of the New Negro Renaissance."

*"Your world is as big as you make it.  
 I know, for I used to abide  
 in the narrowest nest in a corner  
 my wings pressing close to my side."  
 — Georgia Douglas Johnson*

## THE SALON

After moving to Washington D.C, Johnson's home at 1461 S Street NW became known as a halfway house due to her willingness to provide shelter for those in need. The

home also eventually became an important gathering place for Black writers and artists, who discussed their ideas and debuted their new works there. Black artists, poets, and playwrights, including Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Mary Burrill, and Anne Spencer, met for weekly cultural gatherings, which became known as "The S Street Salon."

"Johnson's home, and in particular the weekly gatherings, represented a much "understudied" community of Black writers, playwrights, and poets, especially Black women, in what was initially called "The New Negro Movement" and eventually, the Harlem Renaissance. With a particular emphasis on the writing of African American women, the S Street Salon evolved into a viable space for African American women writers to workshop their poems, plays, short stories, and novels. Many literary works produced by African American women participants of the S Street Salon tackled politically significant and contentious issues such as racial and sexual violence and women's reproductive rights. The S Street Salon was arguably one of the most significant intellectual, political, and cultural communities of the era..." —Treva B. Lindsey, a Black feminist cultural critic.

## DISCUSSION POINT

- In what ways has poetry inspired you?
- What are some examples of how you can bring people together for creative gatherings and discussions to help promote change like the S Street Salon?

# THE FUTURE: 19 FAMILIES & 97 ACRES

The play *Paradise Blue* addresses the struggle that many communities face as land development and infrastructures of economic growth displace families and dismantle local histories. Blue, Pumpkin and the band find conflict internally and externally as the emotional and physical strain of the loss of ownership and community takes hold.

Today in Toombsboro, GA, 80 years after the Urban Renewal of Black Bottom & Paradise Valley, one community of families have created sustainable opportunities for regrowth and ownership.

## THE FREEDOM GEORGIA INITIATIVE

A group of 19 families are developing 96.71 acres of land to help create an intentional community of health, wellness, agricultural and economic development, and arts cultivation. The community hopes to provide generational sustainability and support for displaced or disadvantaged Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) families and their allies.

"The (Initiative) was established out of an extreme sense of urgency to create a thriving safe haven for Black families in the midst of racial trauma, a global pandemic, and economic instabilities across the United States of America brought on by COVID-19. Out of our desire to create generational wealth for our families, we wanted to provide a place for restoration, recreation, and reformation for your families during this time." — The Freedom Georgia Initiative



The mission of the project is economic empowerment, healing from trauma and building communities across the African Diaspora. The families of the initiative are creating the opportunity to dismantle gentrification and the erasure of Black histories with intentional community building and economic sustainability.

For more information and to support the Freedom Georgia Initiative visit [www.thefreedomgeorgiainitiative.com](http://www.thefreedomgeorgiainitiative.com).

## DISCUSSION POINT

- What ways could you support the future of your community in the midst of environmental, economic or societal changes?
- What is the importance of building community?
- How would you seek to create in an intentional and sustainable community?

## BUILDING A PARADISE



PHOTO: JEFF LORCH

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR STORI AYERS

Director Stori Ayers has been collaborating with playwright Dominique Morisseau for years, directing and performing in numerous plays of Dominique's—including multiple plays in "The Detroit Project," the trilogy that includes *Paradise Blue*. During the early days of rehearsal, Director of New Play Development Rachel Wiegardt-Egel asked Stori to share some words about what directing this play in this specific moment means to her.

**RACHEL WIEGARDT-EGEL:** What has artistic work looked like for you over the last year and a half, and what does it mean to be coming back to in-person theater with this particular play?

**STORI AYERS:** This past year I had the opportunity to work in the American theatre on the other side of the table. Meaning I wasn't freelancing as an actor or director because the theatre was shut down. But rather working *inside* of White American Theatre in a way that I had never done before. The pandemic provided me with opportunities to serve my industry in a new and exciting way that I hadn't really considered. I was offered and accepted two positions. I was the Artistic Directing Fellow at Cleveland Playhouse and the new Associate Artistic Director at Chautauqua Theatre Company. And I accepted these

positions during a time when our world, our country, and our industry was under great distress and in need of re-imagining and re-envisioning a new culture for us all to live and work in equally and equitably. A culture void of white supremacy. And I had answered the call.

While in these positions, that I no longer hold, there was not a day that went by where I did not suffer the extreme consequences of being the only Black woman in these spaces. Where I felt the full weight of white supremacy culture. Where my understanding of just how deep the roots of racism are embedded within our culture left me heart-broken, disenchanted, and bordering on hopeless. Not a day went by where I didn't ask myself, "What's the point?" and "Why am I spending so much energy fighting to be accepted fully into this space?" and I had to honestly ask myself if I believed it was even possible to truly dismantle white supremacy. I heard phrases and words like "burn it down" and "defund" and "anti-racist" and I tried to fathom and imagine what life could look like on the other side of those calls to action.

And then one day I saw on the news a story that stole my breath. While I was elbows deep in White American Theatre, I read a story about 19 Black families who had purchased 97 acres of land in Georgia. They called it the Freedom Georgia Initiative. It was led by two Black women—no surprise there—and they purchased this land out



## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR STORI AYERS, CONT.

of an extreme sense of urgency to create a thriving safe haven for Black families in the midst of racial trauma, a global pandemic, and economic instabilities across the U.S. They aim to build a new city for Black families and they want to call it Freedom, GA.

I have never seen a place like this in my lifetime. I couldn't even really conceive of it. I had heard of Tulsa and read about the flooding and drowning of Black towns in America over the years. But it all happened before I was born. And over the years, Black folks seemed to learn that communities like this would not be allowed. So the attempt to build our own cities and safe havens ceased. Until now.

I understood so deeply what these Black families in Georgia longed for and what they wanted. I wanted it too. And I want it now. I desire a place where I can self-actualize as an artist and human being. Where I can reach my highest potential and become the most that I can be, live out my purpose without being thwarted by systems designed to kill and destroy me and my family. I desire a place to work that doesn't treat me like a burden to be tolerated and tokenized. I desire a Paradise. And I don't want to have to die to get it in heaven. I want it now.

*Paradise Blue* is about a place just like the one I desire. It tells the story of a Black community, known for its freedom and the liberation of Black people, at the cusp of being destroyed by a system of white supremacy rooted in racism. And the communities fight with the city and itself to hold onto the place they call home. As I continue to pray for those families in Georgia. Pray for their success and longevity. Pray that their efforts to build a city where the basic physiological needs (breath, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep) of Black people are provided. And the safety and security needs (health, employment, property) are actually met. I also honor the ground that the vision of this community stands on. I honor Blackbottom and Paradise Valley in Detroit, Michigan.

Telling this story now, in the fall of 2021, after the year I just had with White American Theatre, is about shining a light on the American History that has consistently robbed Black Americans of their constitutional rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Rights that they have only truly obtained in the communities that they have built for themselves. My hope is that, as Black Americans witness this story, they are encouraged to continue fighting for their own spaces. Encouraged to build spaces together and resist the system that teaches us to value white spaces over our own. This story is about a Black woman, much like the two who founded the Freedom Georgia Initiative, who understands the value of Paradise to the survival of the Black community in Detroit. We embark on a journey with her as she finds the strength to make the ultimate

sacrifice in order to save the most valuable asset for the Black American: ownership.

**RW:** For those not working in the theater, it can be hard to know exactly how a director brings a play from page to stage. What does the role of a director mean to you?

**SA:** The playwright writes the play. The director writes the production. The audience writes the story. Directing is about vision first, leadership second, and bridging the gap between playwright and audience third.

I'm responsible for honoring the playwright's intentions with a clear vision of *how* we will tell the story. The vision is the creative element that I bring to the table. It's my job to understand the play as the playwright intended and develop a controlling idea that guides the storytelling. I decide the tone, the style, and how we will execute the genre the play is written in. I lay the train tracks that each designer and actor will build their design element or performance on top of. It's my job to assemble a team that can also honor the playwright's intentions while executing the vision I have set for the production. Then I lead the team down the train tracks I have set. My father taught me that a good leader leads from the back, pushing everyone forward. I am responsible for creating an environment where everyone serving the story feels equipped with the information and resources needed to execute their area of expertise. I do that by listening, being proactive, learning how to speak their language to communicate effectively and articulating the vision in a way that they can receive it. By opening, my hope is that the audiences that will experience the play will walk away with a clear understanding of the story, the controlling idea, and a call to action. All my work as a director asks something of the audience by the end of the play. I just pray they answer.

**RW:** You and playwright Dominique Morisseau have a longstanding artistic relationship. What is it about her work that draws you in?

**SA:** Before we had an artistic relationship, we had a personal one. One where she invested in my development as a student first. Then prioritized my growth as a woman over my artistic career. I am drawn to her as a leader, mentor, and friend first. And I would not be the woman I am today without the investment that she has made into me. As I continue to grow under Dominique's mentorship and friendship, my mother is made even more proud of the woman I am becoming. I could not ask for anything more.

Dominique's consciousness, activism, passion for Detroit, love of Black people, and deep admiration and respect for her family is the foundation on which her stories are built. I'm drawn to her work because I'm able to live out my own purpose through her plays.



# AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette.”

**THE AUDIENCE’S ROLE** The audience plays an essential role during the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring their performance to life.

**BEHAVIORS TO AVOID** Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members. These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA** We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status in the lobby after the performance, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

**AUDIENCE AWARENESS ACTIVITY** Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television.

## DISCUSSION POINT

- If you were onstage performing in a play, how would you want to experience the audience?

# POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Depending on the time available and your group members' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching *Paradise Blue*? Engaged? Conflicted? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Put off? What made you feel this way?
- What did you find most surprising about this production?
- How would you characterize each character's journey?
- What aspects of this production were difficult? How did the playwright use music or poetry to express the characters emotional and physical pain?
- How did the set, props, costumes, and songs contribute to the impact of this show?
- What did you appreciate most about the performance?
- What is the playwright's message in *Paradise Blue*?
- Would you recommend this production of *Paradise Blue* to other theatergoers? Why, or why not?

# RESOURCES

**WATCH** the documentary about Black Bottom called *Slum Clearance: The Destruction of Black Bottom*. [tinyurl.com/slumclear](https://tinyurl.com/slumclear)

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**LISTEN** to “How the razing of Detroit’s Black Bottom neighborhood shaped Michigan’s history” from Michigan Radio. [tinyurl.com/bbradiohist](https://tinyurl.com/bbradiohist)

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**LEARN** more about Black Bottom neighborhood at the Black Bottom Historical Society. [tinyurl.com/detroithistency](https://tinyurl.com/detroithistency)

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**LEARN** more about the history of Detroit Jazz from *Detroit’s Jazz Heritage: A review of Detroit’s place in music history*. [tinyurl.com/musicheritag](https://tinyurl.com/musicheritag)

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**LISTEN** to the PBS audio show *Migration and Jazz* on how migration of African Americans from Louisiana and elsewhere influenced Detroit’s jazz sound. [tinyurl.com/jazzmigration](https://tinyurl.com/jazzmigration)

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**WATCH** a short video highlighting the life Georgia Douglas Johnson in *The Heart of a Woman by Georgia Douglas Johnson*. [tinyurl.com/gdjheart](https://tinyurl.com/gdjheart)

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**WATCH** *Creative Activism: Our Moment, Our Movement*, an interview with playwright Dominique Morisseau. [tinyurl.com/creativeactivist](https://tinyurl.com/creativeactivist)

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**LEARN** more about the Georgia Freedom Initiative. [www.thefreedomgeorgiainitiative.com](https://www.thefreedomgeorgiainitiative.com)

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And many more!

