

STUDY GUIDE



GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

FURLOUGH'S PARADISE

WEST COAST PREMIERE
FURLOUGH'S PARADISE

04.16–05.18.2025

GIL CATES THEATER

THANK YOU

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ACCESSIBILITY AT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

The theater has wheelchair and scooter-accessible locations where patrons can remain in their wheelchairs or transfer to theater seats.

OC OPEN CAPTION PERFORMANCE

Saturday, May 3, 2025, 3:00pm — An LED sign will display the text of the live production in sync with the performance.

AD AUDIO DESCRIBED PERFORMANCE

Sunday, May 4, 2025, 2:00pm — A performance audio describer will give live, verbal descriptions of actions, costumes, scenery, and other visual elements of the production.

ASL AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE

Sunday, May 11, 2025 at 2:00 pm — An ASL interpreter will be present in the house left.



PHOTO BY KIRK CAMERON
FROM UNSPLASH.COM



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GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS THE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF

FURLOUGH'S PARADISE

WRITTEN BY
A.K. PAYNE

DIRECTED BY
TINASHE KAJESE-BOLDEN

CHOREOGRAPHER
DELL HOWLETT

SCENIC DESIGNER
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COSTUME DESIGNER
CELESTE JENNINGS

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PABLO SANTIAGO

SOUND DESIGN
CRICKET S. MYERS

PROJECTION DESIGNER
YEE EUN NAM & ELIZABETH BARRETT

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
VELANI DIBBA

ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER
& FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER
NAOMI C. WALLEY

DRAMATURGS
**ARIEL OSTERWEIS
& ASHLEY M. THOMAS**

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
SAM ALLEN

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
ALEXUS JADE CONEY

CASTING DIRECTOR
PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA

CAST



**KACIE
ROGERS**
MINA



**DEWANDA
WISE**
SADE



M
U/S SADE



**NAOMI C.
WALLEY**
U/S MINA

ABOUT THE PLAY

OVERVIEW: Cousins Sade and Mina used to be inseparable. Now leading very different lives, they return to their childhood town for the funeral of their mother and aunt. While Sade is on a three-day furlough from prison and Mina experiences a brief reprieve from her career and life on the West Coast, the two try to make sense of grief, home, love, and kinship. As the clock ticks down, the cousins grapple with their conflicting memories of the past and their shared hopes for the future. Poetic and theatrical, *Furlough's Paradise* explores family dreams of a utopia yet to be realized.

TIME / SETTING: A U.S. Great Migration city, late 2017.

RUNNING TIME: 75 minutes, no intermission.

AGE RECOMMENDATION: 12+

WARNINGS: Strobe Lighting Effects • Loud Music • Theatrical Haze • Herbal Cigarette Smoke

CONTENT ADVISORY: This production contains mature content and profanity.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



a.k. payne *Playwright (they/she)*

a.k. payne is a playwright, artist-theorist, and theatermaker with roots in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Their plays love on and engage the interdependencies of Black pasts, presents, and futures and seek to find/remember language that might move us towards our collective liberation(s). They hold a B.A. in English and African American Studies from Yale University and an M.F.A. in Playwriting under Tarell Alvin McCraney from fka Yale School of Drama. A 2023-2024 Van Lier New Voices Fellow, their work has been a finalist for the L. Arnold Weissberger New Play Award. Her work has been a 3x finalist and the 2025 winner of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the oldest and largest international prize for women+ playwrights. Their work has been developed with the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, The New Harmony Project, Great Plains Theater Commons New Play Conference, and Manhattan Theatre Club's Groundworks Lab. She is currently a resident artist/fellow with National Black Theatre's I Am SOUL Playwright Residency and Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh (The Pittsburgh Foundation). They are a proud graduate of Pittsburgh Public Schools; grandchild of the U.S. Great Migration; descendant of a music teacher and a carpenter, who both march every year with their unions in Pittsburgh's Labor Day parade; an nb & genderqueer abolitionist affected in community by the "New Jim Crow;" and of a great lineage of Black women storytellers and living-room archivists; all of which deeply informs, uplifts, and amplifies their work as a playwright, community organizer, and spacemaker.



TINASHE KAJESE-BOLDEN *Director (she/her)*

Tinashe Kajese-Bolden is a multi-award-winning artistic leader, director, and actor whose work lives at the intersection of artistic innovation, complicated human stories, and community empowerment. She is the Jennings Hertz Artistic Director of the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, a Zelda Fichandler Award finalist, a Princess Grace Award recipient for Directing, and a MAP Fund grantee for devised work centering children on the autism spectrum. Her directing credits include world premieres of the modern opera *Forsyth County is Flooding (with the Joy of Lake Lanier)* (Adamma Ebo and Marcus Norris); *The Preacher's Wife musical* (Tituss Burgess); *Furlough's Paradise* (a.k. payne); *Ghost* (Idris Goodwin); and *Nick's Flamingo Grill* at the Alliance. She has directed regionally at Milwaukee Rep, Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre, Virginia Stage Company, and more, with Broadway and Off-Broadway credits spanning the Imperial Theatre, Primary Stages, and The Classical Theatre of Harlem. On screen, she has appeared in *The Suicide Squad*, Marvel's *Hawkeye*, Ava DuVernay's *Cherish the Day*, *Dynasty*, and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, among others. Driven by a passion for connection, her work explores how art can liberate us to imagine a more inclusive future. For my loves—Keith, Kingston, and Kingsley.

2025 SUSAN SMITH BLACKBURN PRIZE WINNER

a.k. payne, *Furlough's Paradise*

Press Release from blackburnprize.org - New York/London (March 10, 2025)

The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize announced the 2025 award has been given to U.S. playwright a.k. payne for their play *Furlough's Paradise*. Awarded annually since 1978, the prestigious international Prize is the largest and oldest award recognizing women+ who have written works of outstanding quality for the English-speaking theatre.

On March 10, the Prize hosted theatre artists and leaders at NYC's Playwrights Horizons to honor and celebrate payne and a cohort of 8 Finalists. Payne received a cash prize of \$25,000, and a signed print by renowned artist Willem de Kooning, created especially for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

On receiving the 2025 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, a.k. payne remarked, "I am so grateful to receive this award and join a list of some of my favorite writers whose plays have shaken how I understand the world and who have made it possible—through their words transcending space and time and/or their caring and abundant mentorship—for me to write: Katori Hall, Julia Cho, Lynn Nottage, Sarah Ruhl, Benedict Lombe and Paula Vogel to name a very select few."

Prize executive director Leslie Swackhamer remarked, "At this moment in our history as a country, and as a Prize which honors women, trans and non-binary writers, we must acknowledge the very real threats that are being aimed at our hard-won freedoms. We must remind ourselves of the power of our voices, and the special magic we create when we lift them at the theatre. Every voice on our stage tonight deserves to be honored, celebrated and heard."

Payne has described her play as a "lyrical journey about grief, home, and survival." *Furlough's Paradise* tells the story of two cousins and their intertwined yet wildly divergent lives. Sade and Mina, raised like sisters, return to their childhood town for the funeral of their mother and aunt. While Sade is on a three-day furlough from prison and Mina experiences a brief reprieve from her career and life on the West Coast, the two try to make sense of grief, home, love, and kinship. But traumas and resentments from the past, both real and surreal, threaten to pull them apart, all as time ticks towards the correctional officer's arrival. A tight 80-page play for two actors, the play masterfully explores what it means to be a Black woman in today's America and shines a bright light on the lack of social safety nets in the wealthiest country in the world. The play won the 20th annual Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Competition, as well as the National Theatre Conference's Stavis Playwriting Award.

Furlough's Paradise was nominated for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize by Atlanta's Alliance Theatre which premiered the play in 2024, directed by the Alliance's Artistic Director, Tinashe Kajese-Bolden. This April, the play will receive its West Coast premiere, also directed by Kajese-Bolden, at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles.

In his season announcement, Geffen Artistic Director Tarell Alvin McCraney said, "This play is poetic and funny, but it's also charting what it means to try to find a utopia in a world that has a criminal justice system that is far from perfect. Payne was one of my students, and probably one of the most powerful writers I've encountered in my time as a professor." McCraney is the chair of playwriting at Yale School of Drama, where payne received her MFA.

For more about the prize, previous winners and additional information visit blackburnprize.org



DIRECTOR TINASHE KAJESE-BOLDEN AND PLAYWRIGHT a.k. payne.
PHOTO BY BIRDIE THOMPSON.



IN REHEARSAL FOR FURLOUGH'S PARADISE:
THIS PAGE: DEWANDA WISE, CHOREOGRAPHER
DELL HOWLET, DIRECTOR TINASHE KAJESE-BOLDEN,
PLAYWRIGHT A.K. PAYNE AND KACIE ROGERS
PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

FURLOUGH'S
PARADISE
SURREAL
DREAMS OF



THE FUTURE

how a.k. payne weaves threads of afro-futurism and afro-surrealism into their play

BY AJA HOUSTON, GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE TEACHING ARTIST

When one thinks of Afrofuturism, creative works such as *Black Panther* and its technologically advanced world of Wakanda or Tomi Adeyemi's YA fantasy novel *Children of Blood and Bone* are popular examples.

However, at its stripped-down core, Afrofuturism conveys authentic, hopeful, and culturally wide-ranging images of the Black experience that **envision a liberated future**. By this definition, narrative works of enslaved people in the 1800s, such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; Written by Herself*, which radically imagined their freedom and that of their descendants, can be counted as the first stories of this genre.

Furlough's Paradise, which the playwright, a.k. payne, describes as "an abolitionist play, or a play about cousins," skillfully taps into that aspect of Afrofuturism. Another form of the Black Arts Liberation Movement, Afro-surrealism, is also used.

They differentiate in that *Afrofuturism* focuses more on **imagined futures**, whereas *Afro-surrealism* focuses more on a **re-imagined present**.

However, both art forms **critique the invention of structure**: racial, societal, and norms that are imposed on them. They explore **legacy** and **history** to expand the understanding of how black individuals exist.

a.k. utilizes these Black art forms to push against the Western dramatic structure by choosing not to lock *Furlough's Paradise* into a realistic living room drama but instead to lean into its dream-like surrealism.

The play's dream is grounded in the current world, where mass incarceration, a legacy of slavery, is an American epidemic that negatively affects cousins Sade and Mina but doesn't stop them from imagining something better.

I'M INTERESTED IN OUTER-SPACE,
BUT THIS PLAY IS MORE OF A
FOCUS ON THE QUIET WAYS IN
WHICH IT CAN HAPPEN:
THE MUNDANE ACTS OF
FREEDOM DREAMING THAT CAN
UTTER/SPEAK WHAT FUTURISM
CAN BE AND MEAN.

-a.k. payne



PHOTOS: (Clockwise from top): CHADWICK BOSEMEN, *BLACK PANTHER*, PHOTO COURTESY OF DISNEY; *ATLANTA*, PHOTO COURTESY OF DISNEY, FX. HARRIET JACOBS, 1894, PHOTO BY ADAM CUERDEN - JOURNAL OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA ; COVER OF *CHILDREN*

Sade creates a universe in which her people, who are impacted by the justice system, can build a harmonious community shielded from the social stigma of being formerly imprisoned.

Her creation draws from the history and legacy of **Marronage**, the process by which enslaved people became 'Maroons' by escaping to form independent, remote communities in the South. There, they developed their own cultures, social structures, and systems of defense as a form of resistance to slavery.

These concepts of community are units of significant change that shape safer, liberated futures. Done one small, active, impactful step at a time.

Furlough's Paradise challenges the audience to use their imaginations to create a community of the future that may not be as grand as Wakanda. Nevertheless, it is infinitely better than the current tumultuous world.

AFROFUTURISM

“THE SURREAL CAPACITIES FOR BLACK PEOPLE TO DREAM ABOUT FREEDOM.”

-a.k. payne

”

Afrofuturism is expressed through a Black cultural lens; it utilizes themes of technology, sci-fi, and fantasy to reimagine, reinterpret, and reclaim the past and present to create an empowered future for African Americans.

AFRO-SURREALISM

Afro-surrealism is inspired by Black culture; it takes the current world and creates an unusual scene-scape, but still somewhat connected to it. It allows the artist to be as free as they like when expressing feelings of worry, liberty, and injustice.

FURLOUGH'S PARADISE SURREAL DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

“ (RE: AFROFUTURISM)
SUBTLE VERSIONS OF IT,
WAYS IN WHICH IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS
TAKING
A PHOTOGRAPH
AND IMAGINING A DESCENDANT
10 YEARS IN THE FUTURE
HOLDING IT.

-a.k. payne

”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is the future you imagine for yourself and your loved ones?
One year from now? Ten years from now?

What are the small steps that you can take today
to realize that future?

Do you dream about making the world a better place?
What does that dream look like?



SCAN the QR code to read the article
“What philanthropy can learn from Afrofuturism
to end violence” by Alexis Flanagan for Alliance-
Magazine.org.



SCAN the QR code to the read about
The Freedom Georgia Initiative which was
created to establish a safe haven for Black
families and their allies19 Black families
came together and purchased 96.71 acres of
land in Toombsboro, GA



SCAN the QR code to read about
the history of Maroon societies as start-
up societies created by escaped slaves in
the Americas. Maroons: How Runaway
Slaves Created Startup Societies from
Medium.com

CREATING UTOPIA

“Worldbuilding is the act of imagining—and bringing into being—a different world where all people live in dignity, and all beings can thrive. Worldbuilding is a practice and—as Mariame Kaba said about hope—a discipline.” — Alexis Flanagan, “What philanthropy can learn from Afrofuturism to end violence”

Around the world, what we now know as futurism began as storytelling in various cultures. It became a worldbuilding practice among people whose lives were shaped by violence, imagining themselves into a future beyond it. Author Ytasha L. Womack described Afrofuturism as *“an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation”* through a Black cultural lens. Indigenous futurism and Latinx futurism are likewise genres that are both rewriting histories and building futures beyond colonialism, where people whose lineages have borne the burden of its violence are thriving, and where the land is stewarded by its native inhabitants and cared for by all.

A **UTOPIA** is an imagined society or community that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its citizens. The term was first coined by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 book *Utopia*, where he described an idealized island society with harmony, justice, and equality. Utopias often reflect hopes for a better world, free from poverty, suffering, or oppression, though interpretations vary based on cultural and philosophical perspectives. However, many scholars argue that true utopias are unattainable or can even lead to dystopian consequences when perfection is forced upon people (Claeys, Gregory. *“Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea.”* Thames & Hudson, 2011).

“

AND WHEN WE GET OUT
WE GONNA BUY A BUNCH OF SHIT
IN A SINGLE NEIGHBORHOOD
AND MAKE A LITTLE HEAVEN.

—Sade, *Furlough’s Paradise*

”

UTOPIA DREAM JOURNAL

ACTIVITY TIME: Up to 30 minutes/day

Write one journal entry per day where you describe your ideal world and community. Each day, focus on a different aspect of your utopia, such as:

Day 1: What does the environment look like? Think about: nature, community living, urban and rural landscapes, climate, technology.

Day 2: How do people live? Think about: housing, food, water, transportation, daily life

Day 3: What is the system of government?

Day 4: How do people interact? Think about: education, support systems, relationships, entertainment

Day 5: What values define this world?

Creative Twist: Illustrate, sketch, or create physical or digital collages alongside your journal entries

THE UTOPIAN MAP CHALLENGE

ACTIVITY TIME: Up to 30 minutes.

Individually or in groups, design a map of your utopian community, country, or planet. The map can include:

- Key locations such as schools, government buildings, recreation areas, transportation hubs, shelter, gardens, farms, cemeteries, health centers and more
- Unique features: floating cities, underground gardens
- Symbols or public art areas that represent the values of the community (e.g., a peace monument, an innovation hub, parks, memorials)
- Creative Twist: You must also write a travel-guide blurb about your utopia for any visitors or for anyone who is interested in moving to the community

A UTOPIA VISION BOARD

ACTIVITY TIME: Up to 30 minutes.

Create a visual representation of your utopian vision using magazine cutouts, drawings, digital designs. Things to consider:

- A motto or slogan for your utopia
- A symbol or flag representing your society
- A short manifesto explaining why this world is the best version of the future. A *Manifesto* is a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer.
- Creative Twist: Present your vision board as a persuasive speech, trying to encourage your family or classmates to “move” to your utopia

COUSINS...1ST, 2ND, 3RD, ONCE REMOVED?

In her article “Cousin Relationships Explained: First, Second, Removed, & More”, Kate Miller-Wilson states “In the most basic sense, a cousin is defined as any relative by marriage or blood, especially one who is more distant than a sibling but shares an ancestor with you. Clearly, this includes a pretty big group of people, so it helps to break cousin relationships down by type.”

The terminology for cousins can sometimes be confusing, especially when multiple generations are involved. Terms like “first cousin,” “second cousin,” and “third cousin” describe how closely two people are related through a shared ancestor. Additionally, words like “once removed” or “twice removed” indicate a difference in generations between the cousins.

Cousin relationships are significant in many cultures, influencing family traditions, legal matters, and even historical royal lineages. Understanding these connections can help you map out your family tree and appreciate the broader network of relatives you may not have realized were cousins!

These cousin naming-conventions are primarily used in English-speaking societies and may be different in other languages and cultures.

FIRST COUSIN - You and this person share a common grandparent.

SECOND COUSIN- You and this person share a common great-grandparent.

THIRD COUSIN - You and this person share a common great-great-grandparent (*the grandparent of a grandparent*).

FOURTH COUSIN- You and this person share a common great-great-great-grandparent (*the grandparent of a great-grandparent*).

COUSIN ONCE-REMOVED - This person is the cousin of your parent or the child of your cousin (*basically, a first cousin with one extra generation thrown in*).

COUSIN TWICE-REMOVED- This person is the cousin of your grandparent or the grandchild of your cousin.

COUSIN BY MARRIAGE - You and this person are cousins because of a marriage, so they could be the spouse of your cousin or your spouse’s cousin.

SOURCE: Cousin Chart—Family Relationships Explained • • FamilySearch Blog. (2019, July 23). • FamilySearch Blog. <https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/cousin-chart>
Miller-Wilson, K. (2014). Cousin Relationships Explained: First, Second, Removed, & More. LoveToKnow. <https://doi.org/10218296.webp%20340w>



Scan the QR Code above to use the cousin chart from

www.familysearch.org to help you figure out what to call your more distant cousins through a visual guide.



KACIE ROGERS AND DEWANDA WISE.
PHOTO BY BIRDIE THOMPSON.



Sister, Sister (1994–1999) Starring Tia and Tamera Mowry, this sitcom followed twin sisters separated at birth who reunite as teens. The show was a staple of '90s Black girlhood, highlighting sisterhood, fashion, and coming-of-age experiences with humor and heart.

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (1990–1996) Starring Will Smith, this iconic sitcom balanced comedy with serious themes like race, class, and identity. Hilary Banks (Karyn Parsons) and Ashley Banks (Tatyana Ali) became early representations of Black girlhood in upper-class settings, showing different dimensions of Black femininity.

SOURCE: Sager, J. (2020, November 2). What Generation Am I? Find Out If You're a Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X, Baby Boomer or Part of the Greatest Generation. *Parade: Entertainment, Recipes, Health, Life, Holidays*. <https://parade.com/1113130/jessicasager/generation-names-and-years/>

T.G.I. MILLENNIALS

a.k. *payne's Furlough's Paradise* is rich with pop-cultural references for even the most nostalgic of Millennials. Born generally between 1981 and 1996, Millennials are the first “digital natives”, meaning people in this generation grew up in an era where technology, particularly the internet and social media, was ubiquitous and integral to their daily lives from a young age.

Sade and Mina reference pop-culture icons from the '90s and early 2000s such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *That's So Raven*. How many of these cultural references for Sade and Mina are you also familiar with either as a Millennial or as a member of a different generation, like Gen. X, Gen. Z, or Gen. Alpha?

That's So Raven (2003–2007) A Disney Channel hit starring Raven-Symoné as Raven Baxter, a stylish teen with psychic abilities. It was the first Disney show to reach 100 episodes, showcasing Black girl creativity, humor, and leadership while tackling social issues like racism and body image.

3LW (1999–2007) A blend of R&B and pop, known for hits like “No More (Baby I'ma Do Right)”, featuring Adrienne Bailon, Kiely Williams, and Naturi Naughton, made them a part of early 2000s Black teen culture.

Clueless (1996 TV series, 1995 movie) The 1995 film and its TV adaptation featured Dionne Davenport (Stacey Dash), a stylish and confident Black teen in Beverly Hills. Though often overlooked, Dionne's character was an early representation of Black girls in mainstream teen media, influencing Y2K fashion and attitude.

The Cheetah Girls (2003–2008) A multicultural girl group and Disney Channel movie series (2003, 2006, 2008) starring Raven-Symoné, Adrienne Bailon, and Kiely Williams. They promoted girl power, friendship, and ambition with a blend of pop and R&B, inspiring many young Black girls with their confidence and diverse representation.

The Proud Family (2001–2005, reboot 2022–present) A groundbreaking animated series centered on Penny Proud, a Black teen navigating family, friendships, and self-discovery. It was one of the first mainstream cartoons to focus on a Black family, featuring cultural references, humor, and themes relevant to Black girlhood.

PHOTOS: (Clockwise from top) Disney Channel. (2001–2005). *The Proud Family* [TV series]. Disney; 3LW. (2000). 3LW [Album]. ABC, The WB; Disney Channel. (2003–2007). *That's So Raven* [TV series]. Disney; Epic Records; DePasse Entertainment, Paramount Network Television. (1994–1999). Disney Channel. (2003). *The Cheetah Girls* [TV movie]. Disney. *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* [TV series]. NBC. Not pictured: Warner Bros. (1995). *Clueless* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.; *Sister, Sister* [TV series] NBC Productions, Quincy Jones Entertainment. (1990–1996)

ALL THAT JAZZ

Jazz, often hailed as America's classical music, (Barbara Green, 2024) is a genre deeply rooted in the African American experience. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, jazz reflects a fusion of African rhythms, European harmonic structures, and improvisational elements, embodying the resilience and creativity of African Americans.

ORIGINS AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The birthplace of jazz is widely acknowledged to be New Orleans, a city renowned for its rich cultural diversity. In this vibrant milieu, African American musical traditions blended with European and Caribbean influences to create a unique sound. Enslaved Africans brought with them a rich musical heritage characterized by intricate rhythms, call-and-response patterns, and improvisation. These elements laid the foundation for jazz, as they were integrated into spirituals, work songs, and later, blues and ragtime music. Ragtime, a precursor to jazz, emerged in the 1880s, characterized by its syncopated rhythms and lively melodies. Composers like Scott Joplin popularized this style, which later evolved into jazz as musicians began to incorporate improvisation and more complex harmonies.

THE EVOLUTION OF JAZZ

In the early 20th century, jazz began to flourish, with New Orleans musicians such as Charles "Buddy" Bolden and Jelly Roll Morton pioneering the genre. The Great Migration saw African Americans moving to urban centers like Chicago and New York, bringing jazz with them and leading to the development of new styles. The 1920s, often referred to as the Jazz Age, witnessed the rise of big bands and swing music, with figures like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong gaining prominence.

SOURCES: African American Registry. (n.d.). Black history, and jazz music in America, a story. African American Registry. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://aaregistry.org/story/jazz-music-and-an-african-american-art-form/>; Barbara Green. (2024, June 26). Why is Jazz Music called America's Classical Music? Our Music World; OurMusicWorld.com. <https://www.ourmusicworld.com/archives/11519>; BLK News Staff. (2025, February 28). The timeless connection between African Americans and jazz. BLK News. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://blknews.com/the-timeless-connection-between-african-americans-and-jazz/>; National Humanities Center. (n.d.). The emergence of jazz. National Humanities Center. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/jazz.htm>; Wikipedia contributors. (2025, March 3). Jazz. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz>

JAZZ AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION

Jazz has always been more than just music; it has served as a powerful form of expression for African Americans. The improvisational nature of jazz reflects the adaptability and resilience of a community navigating social and economic challenges. During the Civil Rights Movement, jazz musicians used their art to convey messages of hope and resistance, further cementing the genre's role in the fight for equality.

GLOBAL IMPACT AND LEGACY

The influence of jazz extends beyond American borders, having a profound impact on music worldwide. Its improvisational nature and complex rhythms have inspired various genres and continue to resonate with audiences globally. Jazz festivals around the world celebrate this rich heritage, showcasing the genre's enduring appeal and its ability to bring people together across cultures.

Jazz stands as a testament to the enduring spirit and creativity of African Americans. From its roots in New Orleans to its global influence today, jazz continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic nature of cultural expression. Its history is a rich tapestry of innovation, resilience, and the unyielding pursuit of artistic freedom.



THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN COLTRANE'S SAXOPHONE INNOVATIONS ON MODERN JAZZ

BY OLEKSANDRA R

When we talk about the titans of jazz, one name that looms large is John Coltrane. His contributions to the world of music, particularly through his groundbreaking saxophone innovations, have left an indelible mark on modern jazz. Coltrane's inventive approach to playing the saxophone reshaped the genre, influencing generations of musicians and redefining the possibilities of jazz.

EARLY DAYS AND THE BEBOP ERA

John Coltrane's musical journey began in the 1940s when he honed his craft in the bebop era. Playing alongside luminaries like Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, he quickly gained recognition for his technical prowess and improvisational skills on the saxophone. Coltrane's ability to navigate complex chord changes and play intricate, lightning-fast runs became his hallmark during this period.

MODAL JAZZ AND "GIANT STEPS"

Coltrane's most significant contribution to jazz came in the late 1950s when he introduced modal jazz to the world. His groundbreaking album "Giant Steps," released in 1960, showcased his innovative approach to saxophone playing. Instead of relying solely on chord progressions, Coltrane used modes and scales as the foundation for his improvisations. This approach opened up new avenues for musicians, allowing for greater harmonic exploration and emotional depth.

AVANT-GARDE AND FREE JAZZ

As the 1960s progressed, Coltrane continued to push the boundaries of jazz with his avant-garde and free jazz experiments. His saxophone innovations during this period involved exploring the outer reaches of sound, utilizing

extended techniques such as multiphonics and overblowing. Albums like "Ascension" and "Interstellar Space" challenged conventional notions of melody and structure, inspiring a new generation of avant-garde jazz musicians.

SPIRITUALITY AND EXPRESSIVENESS

Coltrane's saxophone innovations were deeply intertwined with his spiritual journey. His landmark album "A Love Supreme" is a testament to his quest for transcendence through music. In this work, Coltrane's saxophone takes on an intensely spiritual and meditative quality, reflecting his personal growth and transformation. His ability to convey profound emotions through his instrument remains unparalleled.

LEGACY AND INFLUENCE ON MODERN JAZZ

The influence of John Coltrane's saxophone innovations on modern jazz cannot be overstated. His groundbreaking modal approach and fearless exploration of new sonic territories have paved the way for countless saxophonists and jazz musicians. Artists like Pharaoh Sanders, Archie Shepp, and Kamasi Washington have all drawn inspiration from Coltrane's legacy, continuing to push the boundaries of the genre.

In conclusion, John Coltrane's saxophone innovations have left an indelible imprint on modern jazz. His willingness to explore uncharted musical territories and his ability to convey deep emotions through his saxophone playing continue to resonate with both musicians and listeners alike. Coltrane's legacy is a testament to the enduring power of innovation and creativity in music.

SOURCE: R. Oleksandra. "The Influence Of John Coltrane's Saxophone Innovations On Modern Jazz", kgumusic.com. 2025, <https://kgumusic.com/blogs/news/the-influence-of-john-coltranes-saxophone-innovations-on-modern-jazz>



PHOTO FROM KGUMUSIC.COM

THE POWER OF NAMING

Names are more than just labels; they are symbols of identity, history, and culture. For African Americans, naming traditions carry profound significance, reflecting resilience, creativity, and a deep connection to ancestral roots. The historical journey of Black names reveals a powerful narrative of survival, resistance, and cultural pride.

BY ADWOA, FROM THE 1619 PROJECT
November 13, 2019

I wanted names. I wanted people whose narratives I could hold on to. But what struck me most while reading the essays in “The 1619 Project” were the monikers used to galvanize readers. I recognized some names as Black History Month regulars, and started to write down the ones I didn’t recognize. As I started aggregating individual names against titles and identity groupings, I realized the historical records of enslaved Africans in the British colonies consistently leaves so much unanswered.

As purveyors of records, we are tasked with putting history together than can get lost to time. But for many African-Americans the difficulty in concretely naming ancestors goes far beyond frustrating. All of the essays and creative works in “The 1619 Project” have been tasked with “putting history back together” and with placing the contributions of African-Americans into the center of the country’s fight for democracy and citizenship.

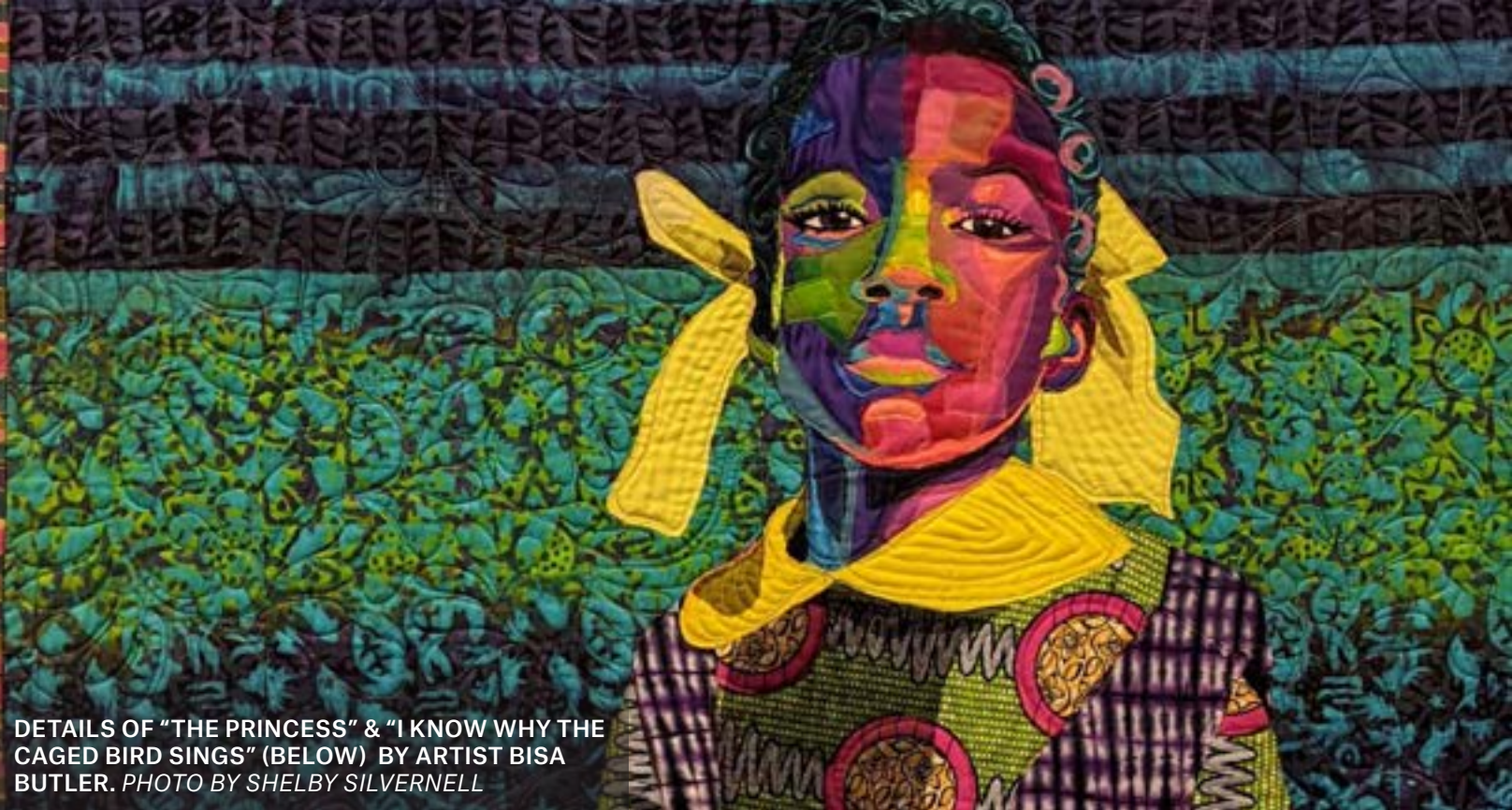
For the over 400,000* Africans brought directly to America against their will in the terrifying jurnies of the transatlantic slave trade and the harrowing existence of chattel slavery, choice and power were systematically and violently stripped from the moment of capture onwards. While they may have held onto their names in their minds and hearts throughout that journey, by the time they reached North American and Caribbean shores, so too were their names stripped— in a cycle that would affect their families for generations to come.

Societies create naming guidelines to help foster affinity as well as individualism. These guides might seem given/ innate, but over time naming conventions can shift, especially as new cultures are introduced. But from slavery to colonialism and imperialism the records show that these “introductions” are often bloody and traumatic.

In West African tribes, then as today, names and naming ceremonies remain a crucial part of structuring social norms. These names can identify your family grouping, your tribe, your religion, your day of birth, your order of birth, whether you are a twin, your family’s aspirations for you, or even your father’s father’s occupation. Amongst the Akan lingual groups, who span modern day Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Togo, you will find similar day names by gender. A Monday born girl might be Adwoa, Adjoa, Adjo, etc. depending on which tribe you were born to and where. In Nigeria, the Igbo often have proverbial lyricism in both long and short names that can serve as guideposts for the bearer: “Ikemefona (let my strength not be lost), Edekobi (do not hang your heart), Ejike (we do not use power in doing things of the world).” Among the Mande people who span across almost all of West Africa, those of the divined “Ritual Clown” group often have comical or socially marked names from birth, such as: “Sekinkolon (old basket), Nyamakolon (worthless power), Tietemalo or Malobali (without shame).”**

The “traditions” of naming in African-American cultural history speaks again to a lack of choice and power: stripped of their own cultural, religious, and social names, enslaved Africans were forced into new names that either tied them (a) to a religion which they knew little to nothing of, (b) to something indicating the free service they would provide, (c) to the general region in Africa they came from, or after emancipation (d) to the last name of the individual for whom they had toiled under free labor.

Although steeped in this “tradition” not of their own making, African-American contemporary names have also been a way to take back control, choice, and creativity. Linking to African names across the continent (Ebony, Zendaya) and Muslim names whether converting to Islam or not (Aaliyah, Michael Jamal Warner, Kareem Abdul Jabbar) thus creating new meaning through naming. We don’t have to look much further than the names and stage names of African-American celebrities to admire the wealth of choices in contemporary



DETAILS OF "THE PRINCESS" & "I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS" (BELOW) BY ARTIST BISA BUTLER. PHOTO BY SHELBY SILVERNELL

naming styles. From symbols and apostrophes (The Artist Formerly Known as Prince symbol, Mo’Nique) to acronyms and unique spellings (CCH Pounder, Quvenzhane Wallis, Jurnee Smollet-Bell). African-American naming traditions are as robust and unconventional as anyone individual’s imagination (Apple, Soleil Moon, Blue Ivy) and can rival the lyricism of the ancient Greeks (Arsenius, Athanas, Kleopatra, Dareios, Eulalia etc.)

The act of naming continues a tradition of memorializing those who have been martyred, shining light on the need for social justice reform. At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, printed t-shirts with the names of black people fatally subjected to police and vigilante violence became a sign of defiance and solidarity. Names-on-shirts have also been used to celebrate individuals who have positively contributed to American history but whom often remain marginalized in textbooks.

Divesting enslaved Africans of their names was not a coincidence or unfortunate lack of foresight on the part of colonists. It was intentional. As intentional as when filmmaker Barry Jenkins struck through the last names of Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner in his essay for “The 1619 Project”— in which he tells the story of Gabriel’s thwarted rebellion.

Sometimes, when presented with the void of individual African-Americans names some mistakenly argue that the lack of record is proof of a lack of contribution to the founding and success of America. The scholarship on this front is not lacking, but access to it sometimes seems specialized.

The 1619 Project should be woven into a wider curriculum and not just as an elective or extracurricular. The histories

presented can help weave and acknowledge more names of black people and shift the standard narratives of American History so that black American history is no longer relegated to a 28-day celebration in February. Now more than ever I think we all need to learn more names. In this way, we create new paths to understanding one another.

A name is always a starting point in (re)search even though we can exist in this world without one. On every level, names and the act of naming indicate choice. Who is doing the naming? When does the naming occur along one’s lifeline? Why has this name been chosen? What does the name mean? How will this name be used? With choice, comes power.

SOURCE: Adwoa. (2019, November 13). “1619 Project: The Power of Naming.” www.Bklynlibrary.org. Retrieved January, 2025.



SCAN THE QR CODE to the left to learn more about portrait artist, Bisa Bulter: *Quilting for Culture* from The Art Institute of Chicago. Bisa Butler’s portrait quilts vividly capture personal and historical narratives of Black life.



SADE:

i wanted rainbow
senegalese twists
for my 14th birthday
and the hair was cheaper
in 1b
so on sunday
one of the only sundays
my mama ever had off
my mama dyed
kanekalon hair in the sink
till her hands were blue
and purple
till her fingertips, orange
she soaked off
her long gold nails
and hummed all the while
she
she ran pink lotion
through my hair
and blue grease
at the roots
and did these long rainbow
twists down to my hips
and i felt like i was
i felt like i was
like my body
was extending
from the beginning
to the end of the sky

- a.k. payne , *Furlough's Paradise*

“TWISTS DOWN TO MY HIPS”

Writer Danyale Reed explains that, “Little is more precious and intimate than a black little girl getting her hair done by her mother, grandmother, or auntie. As adults, black women continue bonding by helping to style one another’s hair or sharing secrets of the perfect braiding techniques.” (12 Reasons Why Hair Is Important in Black History, 2024)

In a.k. Payne’s *Furlough’s Paradise*, Sade poetically explains to her Cousin Mina about a time when she was younger, and asked her mom for rainbow Senegalese twists.

Black hair in America stands as a strong statement of heritage, self-expression, agency, resistance, and creativity. Below are two Black women who share the importance of celebrating, empowering, and defending the significance of Black hair and Black hair styles. We invite you to explore their art, their creativity, and their mission of honoring the rich diversity of Black hair.

Visit this linktree of Kwiin Ava, Visual Artist, Content Creator and Hair Stylist:
<https://linktr.ee/kwiin.ava>

Follow this Link to watch Juliette Myers perform her monologue “Vicktory”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y6AWBdjR9w> from the Geffen Workshop:
 Beyond the Barracks, performed in 2024.

KWIIN AVA Artist (they/she)

Ava is a Visual Artist/Content Creator/Licensed Hair Stylist with a goal of inspiring the black diaspora to love, appreciate, and embrace their beautiful, natural hair. She does this through creative expression of her natural coils, shape-shifting her crown into designs never seen before on human hair. From hearts, stars, flowers, cats, and butterflies, to cosplay of some of the world’s most famous anime and cartoon characters, such as Garnet, Steven Universe characters, and Marge Simpson. At 19 years old, she became the creator of this trend. Amongst the billions of users on the internet, she created a lane of her own that no one had tapped into. There is no limitation to the form which Ava will shape her hair to show the world just how magical the diaspora really is.

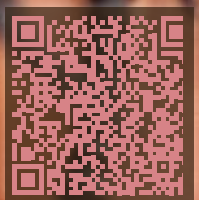


JULIETTE MYERS Actor (she/her)

Juliette Myers is an Actress & VO artist known for her work on TV as a medical professional on *Grey’s Anatomy* and *General Hospital* as well as voicing holiday campaigns for TJ Maxx and San Diego Zoo. She grew up a military brat with 3 other siblings, joined the Army 1998 to 2006 achieving the rank of Sergeant and around the same time, she attended college and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She’s a mom to a teen son, Julian, who’s also an actor and voice artist. Her goal is to be an actor within the Sci-Fi genre as a creature/creative character for Major Motion film.



SCAN the QR code to the left to learn how to ‘The Braid Up’: How to Do Rubber Band Senegalese Twists from Cosmopolitan.com



SCAN the QR code to the left to learn how to ‘stitch braids with Senegalese twists’ from Cosmopolitan.com

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS ON THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Parole Preparation & Appeal Resources at FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History. From Eddie Ellis, founder of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, urging progressive organizations and prison reform advocates to abandon the derogatory and dehumanizing language that had been normalized.

Dear Friends:

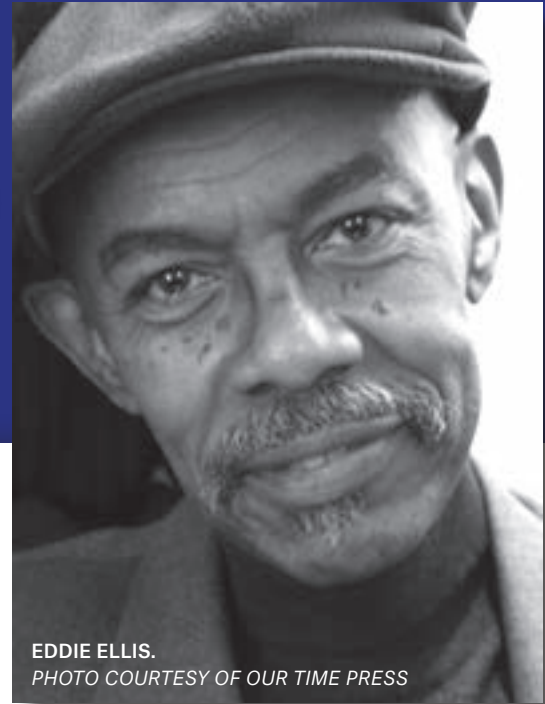
The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions is a human justice policy, advocacy and training center founded, directed and staffed by academics and activists who were formerly incarcerated. It is the first and only one of its kind in the United States.

One of our first initiatives is to respond to the negative public perception about our population as expressed in the language and concepts used to describe us. When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders and other derogatory terms, we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons. All terms devoid of humanness which identify us as "things" rather than as people. These terms are accepted as the "official" language of the media, law enforcement, prison industrial complex and public policy agencies. However, they are no longer acceptable for us and we are asking people to stop using them.

In an effort to assist our transition from prison to our communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves, we are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as PEOPLE. People currently or formerly incarcerated, PEOPLE on parole, PEOPLE recently released from prison, PEOPLE in prison, PEOPLE with criminal convictions, but PEOPLE.

We habitually underestimate the power of language. The bible says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." In fact, all of the faith traditions recognize the power of words and, in particular, names that we are given or give ourselves. Ancient traditions considered the "naming ceremony" one of the most important rites of passage. Your name indicated not only who you were and where you belonged, but also who you could be. The worst part of repeatedly hearing your negative definition of me, is that I begin to believe it myself "for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." It follows then, that calling me inmate, convict, prisoner, felon, or offender indicates a lack of understanding of who I am, but more importantly what I can be. I can be and am much more than an "ex-con", or an "ex-offender", or an "ex-felon".

The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions believes that if we can get progressive publications, organizations and individuals like you to stop using the old offensive language and simply refer to us as "people," we will have achieved a significant step forward in our life giving struggle to be recognized as the human beings we are. We have made our mistakes, yes, but we have also paid or are paying our debts to society.



EDDIE ELLIS.
PHOTO COURTESY OF OUR TIME PRESS

“

WE HABITUALLY UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF LANGUAGE...THE POWER OF WORDS AND, IN PARTICULAR, NAMES THAT WE ARE GIVEN OR GIVE OURSELVES.

...YOUR NAME INDICATED NOT ONLY WHO YOU WERE AND WHERE YOU BELONGED, BUT ALSO WHO YOU COULD BE.

”

We believe we have the right to be called by a name we choose, rather than one someone else decides to use. We think that by insisting on being called “people” we reaffirm our right to be recognized as human beings, not animals, inmates, prisoners or offenders.

We also firmly believe that if we cannot persuade you to refer to us, and think of us as people, then all our other efforts at reform and change are seriously compromised.

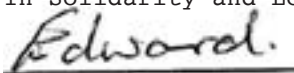
Accordingly, please talk with your friends and colleagues about this initiative. If you agree with our approach, encourage others to join us. Use positive language in your writing, speeches, publications, websites and literature.

When you hear people using the negative language, gently and respectfully correct them and explain why such language is hurting us. Kindly circulate this letter on your various list serves.

If you disagree with this initiative, please write and tell us why at the above address or email me at eellis@centerforleadership.org *. Perhaps, we have overlooked something.


Please join us in making this campaign successful. With your help we can change public opinion, one person at a time. Thank you so much.

In Solidarity and Love,




Eddie Ellis
President




 **SCAN** the QR code to the left to read *The Run-On Sentence: Eddie Ellis On Life After Prison* By Katti Gray July 2013 from SunMagazine.org



 **SCAN** the QR code to the left to read an interview with Prison Reform Visionary Eddie Ellis from *Our Time Press*. in 1997 At the time Mr. Ellis was President of the Community Justice Center, Inc., an anti-crime research, education, and advocacy organization.



 **SCAN** the QR code to the left to watch PBS SoCal *Crash Course: "Philosophies of Punishment & The Prison Abolition Movement"* - unpacking prison abolition and how the United States. came to incarcerate 2 million people. Aired 01/23/2025 on PBS.org

SOURCE: Ellis, Eddie, “An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language” (2020). All Categories. 5. <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/pp/5>

** This letter was written in 1997. Eddie Ellis passed away in 2014, but the power of his words and vision continue to provide change. Visit <https://nuleadership.org> or email info@nuleadership.org*

UNDERSTANDING THE PRISON ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

The prison abolitionist movement challenges the idea that prisons are necessary for a just society. Instead of reforming the current system, abolitionists believe in completely dismantling it and creating a better way to address harm and justice.

Abolitionists argue that locking people in cages is cruel and unnecessary. Just as slavery was once seen as normal but later abolished, they believe society can evolve beyond prisons. They see the current system as rooted in brutality rather than justice.

Instead of punishing people, abolitionists believe in reconciliation—restoring both the person who committed harm and the person who was harmed. This means providing care, support, and services rather than simply locking people away. Abolitionists argue that most crime stems from poverty, lack of education, and inequality. They believe that if society invested more in resources like housing, mental health care, and education, crime would decrease without the need for mass incarceration.

The words used to describe prisoners shape how they are seen. Abolitionists reject dehumanizing labels like “inmates” and challenge terms that make prisons seem beneficial, such as calling punishment “rehabilitation.” Changing the language is part of changing how people think about justice.

Abolitionists believe that people who have experienced prison firsthand should have a say in how justice works. They support programs that give prisoners more control over their futures and advocate for their voices to be heard in policy decisions. Scholars like Dorothy Roberts argue that today’s prison system evolved from slavery and continues to disproportionately harm Black people and marginalized groups. “I wanted to write about prison abolition because I think it’s the most exciting legal development—the idea that we could work toward a society that doesn’t cage human beings and that acknowledges the way in which our current prison system, policing, and capital punishment all originate in slavery and continue to perpetuate an unjust society,” (Penn Today Staff, 2029) Abolitionists see prisons as a tool used to maintain racial and economic inequality.

Abolitionists don’t just want to get rid of prisons; they want to create a society where prisons aren’t needed. This means investing in mental health care, conflict resolution, and

economic opportunities to prevent harm before it happens.

Some people believe in making prisons more humane, but abolitionists argue that the system itself is flawed beyond repair. They see reform as a temporary fix rather than a real solution.

Instead of focusing only on “fixing” those who commit crimes, abolitionists believe we need to fix the conditions that lead to crime in the first place. They call for communities that support people rather than punish them.

The prison abolitionist movement is about reimagining justice. Instead of relying on punishment, abolitionists envision a world where social problems are addressed through care, prevention, and community support. While it’s a radical idea, they believe that, like slavery, prisons can become a thing of the past if society commits to change.

SOURCES: Dorothy Roberts on prison abolition constitutionalism | Penn Today. (2019, December 17). Penn Today. <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/dorothy-roberts-prison-abolition-constitutionalism>

Instead of Prisons Nine Perspectives for Prison Abolitionists. (n.d.). Www. prisonpolicy.org. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead_of_prisons/nine_perspectives.shtml

Wikipedia Contributors. (2024, August 12). Prison abolition movement in the United States. Wikipedia; Wikimedia Foundation. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_abolition_movement_in_the_United_States

Angela Y. Davis is an activist, writer, and lecturer whose work has long focused on prisons, police, abolition, and the related intersections of race, gender, and class.



POLITICAL ACTIVIST AND AUTHOR, ANGELA DAVIS
PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TOWARDS ABOLITION, JUSTICE & COMMUNITY

Take a moment and continue your education about these different organizations below working towards Abolition, justice, and the community.

ALL OF US OR NONE is a grassroots civil and human rights organization fighting for the rights of formerly-and currently-incarcerated people and our families @ About AOUON - Legal Services for Prisoners with Children <https://prisonerswithchildren.org/about-aouon/>

THE ANTI-RECIDIVISM COALITION (A.R.C) works to end mass incarceration in California @ Home - Anti Recidivism Coalition <https://antirecidivism.org/>

CALIFORNIA COALITION FOR WOMEN PRISONERS is a grassroots abolitionist organization — with members inside and outside prison — that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people, and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC) @ CCWP – together, fearless and unified <https://womenprisoners.org/>

CALIFORNIA'S UNITED FOR RESPONSIBLE BUDGET (CURB) is a Black-led statewide coalition of more than 80 grassroots organizations. Our three point mission is to reduce the number of incarcerated people in California; reduce the number of prison and jails in our state; and shift wasteful spending away from incarceration and toward healthy community investments @ CURB | Homepage <https://curbprisonspending.org/>

CHOICES FOR FREEDOM design and deliver creative programming to interrupt the cycle of mass incarceration @ Choices for Freedom | criminal justice reform | Oakland, CA, USA <https://www.choicesforfreedom.org/>

COMMUNITIES UNITED FOR RESTORATIVE YOUTH JUSTICE CURYJ (pronounced 'courage') unlocks the leadership of young people to dream beyond bars. We look to young people to lead the way in transforming our communities by investing in their healing, aspirations, and activism @ CURYJ – Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice <https://curyj.org/>

ESSIE JUSTICE GROUP is the nation's leading organization of women with incarcerated loved ones taking on the rampant injustices created by mass incarceration @ Home - <https://essiejusticegroup.org/>

HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated people, allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community @ Home | Homeboy Industries <https://homeboyindustries.org/>

INITIATE JUSTICE's mission is to end incarceration by activating the power of the people it directly impacts @ www.InitiateJustice.org

LEGAL SERVICES FOR PRISONERS WITH CHILDREN organizes communities impacted by the criminal justice system and advocates to release incarcerated people, to restore human and civil right, and to reunify families and communities at Home - Legal Services for Prisoners with Children <https://prisonerswithchildren.org/>

LIFE SUPPORT ALLIANCE - Fighting for the lives and freedom of California Lifers @ California Lifer Parole | Life Support Alliance | California <https://www.lifesupportalliance.org/>

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EXCHANGE (RJE) has created programs, advocated for systemic reform, aggregated benchmarks and best practices in prison reform, and worked to expand knowledge about restorative justice @ Home - Restorative Justice <https://restorativejustice.org/>

THEMES & TOPICS

ROOT & REBOUND supports people navigating reentry and reducing the harms perpetuated by mass incarceration @ Home - Root & Rebound <https://www.rootandrebond.org/>

THE PLACE FOR GRACE - Fighting for families impacted by incarceration @ The Place 4 Grace - Keeping families together, even beyond the walls. <https://theplace4grace.org/#hero>

YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER has provided support, mentorship, training, employment, and advocacy to young women and trans youth of all genders in California who have grown up in poverty, experienced the juvenile legal and foster care systems, have had to survive living and working on the streets, and who have experienced significant violence in their lives @ Young Women's Freedom Center | #Freedom2030 <https://youngwomenfree.org/#>

THEATER AS A LENS FOR JUSTICE

“

For many Californians the concept of justice feels deeply out of reach. According to Prison Policy Initiative, nearly 200,000 individuals are incarcerated at any given time in our state with about 35,000 incarcerated people released each year. Those numbers are sobering. They are made worse when we remember that the families connected to those individuals are not counted in those statistics. But their lives too are affected by incarceration.

”

—TARELL ALVIN MCCRANEY

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Established by playwright and Artistic Director Tarell Alvin McCraney, whose own work has been profoundly influenced by his family's experiences with the justice system, **Theater as a Lens for Justice** provides access to theater at Geffen Playhouse for populations impacted by incarceration, beginning with the 2024/2025 Season. This initiative provides individuals and their families the opportunity to experience performances throughout the season, supplemented with talkbacks and workshops by theater staff and artistic leaders.

To begin this work, Geffen Playhouse partnered with **UCLA's Center for Justice**, lead by Bryonn Bain & Claudia Peña, and **ManifestWorks**, lead by Michele Mulrone. Throughout the season this initiative has provided programming within local prisons, including taking our production of *Waiting for Godot* into the Victorville Correctional Complex for a performance and conversation. We invited system impacted audiences to attend our production of *The Brothers Size* and we provided space and support for the UCLA Prison Education Program's Hip Hop Theater course. The Hip Hop Theater "Collaborative" created a hip hop theater production written by formerly incarcerated artists and adapted in a creative writing workshop at the California Institute for Women (CIW) - the oldest women's prison in the state.

This initiative also aims to create employment pathways into the theater industry for formerly incarcerated individuals— in all aspects of theater making including technical, artistic, and administrative — through internships, mentorships, and professional development.



TARELL ALVIN MCCRANEY
GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
PHOTO PHILIP CHEUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE BY VISITING
[GEFFENPLAYHOUSE.ORG/JUSTICE](https://geffenplayhouse.org/justice)

*Theater as a Lens for Justice is supported, in part,
by Jayne Baron Sherman.*



TARA RICASA AND SARA PORKALOB AND STUDENTS
AT THE STUDENT MATINEE OF *DRAGON LADY* AT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE
PHOTO BY ISAAK BERLINER

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and your participants' interests, guide them to respond to the suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, and respect 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.

- What images and moments from the performance stood out or resonated with you? What was meaningful, stimulating, surprising, evocative, memorable, interesting, exciting, striking, touching, challenging, compelling, delightful, different, and unique?
- Overall, how did you feel while watching this show? Engaged? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Uncomfortable? What made you feel this way?
- Have you had at least one glass of water, and said something kind about yourself today? This week?
- How familiar were you with the prison industrial complex, private prisons, or Abolition movements, before seeing the show?
- What are some similarities and differences between Cousins Sade & Mina? How would you describe each character's inner life in the show? What is their conflict and how does that affect their emotional states throughout the show? How do they change?
- Did you identify or empathize with any of the characters? If so, which character(s) and when? If not, why not? Which characters remind you of someone in your life?
- What do you feel stands in the way of society moving towards a more Utopian lifestyle?
- Is there anything you can do to advance the ideas of a Utopia?
- What did you find most moving about the play? Use direct examples from the show.
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- Describe the design elements from the show: set, props, costumes, music. Be specific as possible: what did you see, hear, feel and experience? How do these design elements inform the storytelling and how do they make you feel as an audience member?
- What is the most important story that is not currently being told, but you feel needs to be told? Why?

- Think about your childhood and youth. What shows did you watch, or bands did you listen to? Do you still watch those shows or listen to those bands? Why or why not? How do watching those things now make you feel?
- Who were your early influences, both professional, and in your own life?
- If you could tell a loved one anything, who would you tell and what would you tell them? Who or what inspires you to be a better person? Give them a call or write them a letter and share how impact they were, and how grateful you are.
- What are some of your earliest experiences you remember of hearing family stories being shared? Was it at a holiday event or birthday party?
- Who in your family do you feel most comfortable talking to about serious topics? What about less serious or silly topics? Are they the same person? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BUILD your pillow fort using these helpful tips at 4 Ways to Make a Pillow Fort - wiki <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Pillow-Fort>

CHECK OUT out Photographer Thandiwe Muriu's work at Thandiwe Muriu – Kenyan Artist <https://thandiwemuriu.com/>

IMAGINE what an equitable art world would look like at <https://tinyurl.com/mry87x7f>

JOIN award-winning musician and composer Nicole Mitchell and the Black Earth Ensemble at Afrofuturism in Sound <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymsWhJujtV4>

KNOW Kaos Networks at HOME | KAOS NETWORKS <https://www.kaosnetworkz.com/>

READ this list of of 195 books on Afrofuturism at Afrofuturism <https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/79707.Afrofuturism>

STEP INSIDE this college class that helps incarcerated Texans prepare for life after prison: <https://tinyurl.com/mrtprssw>

TAKE A MOMENT to continue your education about the different organizations working towards Abolition, justice, and the community on p. 30 of this study guide.

GET LIT: NOISES OFF

Geffen Playhouse Education & Community Engagement has partnered with the Los Angeles-based nonprofit Get Lit. Get Lit ignites student engagement, literacy, and young voices around the globe using the power of spoken word, technology, and community. Get Lit - Words Ignite is striving to change LA's literacy rate & arts scene into a grassroots wonderland, one teen poet at a time. Through classic and slam poetry, the power of Spoken Word, technology, and community they ignite a love of words and introduce teens to great works of literature. They respond with their own original poems and perform them all over the world.

Ultimately, Get Lit's goal is to improve students' writing and speaking skills, which will benefit them in university and beyond. Through their program they also develop self-confidence and unbreakable friendships and collaborations.

Each study guide this season will spotlight written response pieces to Geffen Playhouse productions, crafted by students enrolled in Get Lit Players literacy programs. Get Lit receives complimentary tickets to all Geffen Playhouse Gil Cates Theater shows as part of our Lights Up & Access Community Engagement Programs.

The poem *From the Eyes of a Play Critic Extraordinaire* written by Erica Almond and *Work Sucks!* written by Marvin Rivera on the following pages are in response to the Geffen Playhouse and Steppenwolf Theatre Company's production of Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*, presented Jan. 29th - Mar. 9th, 2025.

The next Get Lit written response will be to a.k. payne's *Furlough's Paradise* and will be shared in the Study Guide for Geffen's upcoming show: *The Reservoir*, by Jake Brasch, presented June 18th to July 20th, 2025.



ORA JONES, JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH, AUDREY FRANCIS
 PHOTO BY MICHAEL BROSILOW
 COURTESY OF STEPPENWOLF THEATER COMPANY



ERICA ALMOND, poet (she/her)

Erica Almond is a Communication Studies Graduate from CSUN, 2020. She is a lifelong Creative with a deep passion for the Arts and a Teaching Artist with Get Lit. Erica is an Alumni of the Youth Get Lit-Classical Slam 2013-2014: winner of 2014 era! She draws inspiration for her poetry work through connections to emotions, stories, people, and self. Erica enjoys witnessing and being immersed in all things arts and performing arts.



MARVIN RIVERA, poet (he/him)

Marvin Rivera, is a Get Lit Creative Lab Performance Pathway alumni and student at California State University - Los Angeles. Marvin is currently studying Mechanical Engineering, but at heart, is a creative that loves poetry, theatre, and writing.

GET LIT

SCAN the QR code above to check out Get Lit's performances, interviews and behind-the-scenes tomfoolery at their Youtube page.

Learn more or get involved here:
<https://www.Getlit.Org>

From the Eyes of a Play Critic Extraordinaire

by Erica Almond

EXTRA EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

The tell-all tale of the “Nothing’s On” experience
The galavanting riveting concoction of characters, where nothing is on track
You know what I mean?

Fall down into this rabbit hole with me,
Take a moment to look through the windows of backstage and grab a seat
You may know how this story should go, but in all realms of reality nothing goes without imperfection.
Who are we on the other side?
When the stage turns around and we embody the characters of another world
Creating their lives through our own interpretation.
You know what I mean?

I spent my time traveling to watch this 3 month extravaganza of a show,

And I must say.

BRILLIANT
BRILLIANT
BRILLIANT

These characters deep dive into emotion
Transitioning audaciously with their performances from beginning to end
“Nothing’s On” truly embodied the metamorphosis of spiraling

D
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N

...Comedic genius to the stuffy plays of the past, those that are well scripted, well rehearsed, accommodating to the eye, Lights On, typically primed and primmed for display

NO. “Noises Off” was raw and unexpected!
No rest, staging in disarray,
Doubles of characters and extras breaking into the madness with their monologues
Brooke Ashton holding onto individual lines in the feminine power of Vicki,
Garry Lejuene tumbling down the stairs into Roger’s dismay
Belinda conjuring the wit to dance and move the show along as Flavia
Their true voices could not be stopped!

Sardines, were lost and found- complimentary to the salty expression of Mrs.Clackett and her harrowing trail down to madness.
New balances on her feet by the end of show...
Impeccable character development of Dottey Otley walking a mile in her shoes
You know what I mean?

You never knew what was coming next!
You know?
The drama,
The faux paw
The heroism
The gut wrenching twists of events
The laughter
The genius

Sensational performances across the board, and pure THRILL to be of audience!

Work

** From the perspective of Dotty/Mrs. Clackett*

by Marvin Rivera

The phone rings in the middle of work
You struggle to pace yourself
You struggle like a sardine out of water
You keep on flailing

Ring! Ring!
Work time!

Life is hectic
Because no one deep down wants to work
They want to fool around
They want to lie down and lounge

Now read that backwards again

You can remove every piece of a ship and replace it, but at the end of the day
It's still a ship
We get older and replace our time
For play
And turn it into WORK!

We don't know everything
We do know an important thing
We have to work to live
Because life never has enough miracles

Stop!
What's with these words of introspectiveness?
Work makes money.
It's that easy. Stop with all this hoopla.

You agree with me then?

Just cut to the chase.
WORK SUCKS! MY BOSS SUCKS HE STOLE MY SARDINES!!
I QUIT!!

You think too highly of such drivel
You're not analyzing
If you don't analyze then how can others understand

SSHH..

Just relax. We've worked too much. Do you want a nice batch of freshly cooked sardines?

No, get out of here.

Well more for me I guess but when you're done reading and thinking about this do something nice for yourself okay.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASSISTANT TO THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, **DIONN RICHARDSON**

What is your position at Geffen Playhouse and how long have you been at the Geffen?

My position at Geffen Playhouse is Assistant to the Artistic Director, a.k.a. Tarell Alvin McCraney. I started working here in September 2023.

What educational, artistic, and professional experiences led to you working at the Geffen?

Here's my story... I have always had a love for the arts. I grew up in Atlanta, and was mostly a Ballet and Modern dancer. After spending a summer in NYC as an Alvin Ailey student, my dream of becoming a professional dancer ended, and I had to find another path. I went back to Georgia, and graduated with a Theatre Degree from Georgia Southern University. Six months later, I moved to NYC with \$1500 and one suitcase. My first job in this industry was working as the assistant to Black Thought from The Legendary Roots Crew. After that I started working as a Production Assistant for Commercials and Reality TV. In 2013, I moved sight-unseen to LA, and continued to work in Unscripted Television, moving from a Production Assistant to Associate Producer and Talent Coordinator. In 2020, I started working as a Showrunner's Assistant for Tarell's show *David Makes Man*, and for the show *All Rise*. Then boom... Writers and Actors strikes happen. I'm out of work, and then Tarell reached out about being his assistant here. Now you know my whole life's story.

What are your primary responsibilities as the Assistant to the Artistic Director?

My primary responsibilities are making sure that our Artistic Director has what he needs to be the best at his job. This includes making sure that his calendar is in order, setting meetings, checking emails, fielding phone calls, etc. I'm also the kind of Assistant that cares about the personal. So I try not to schedule too many meetings in one day and will schedule in breaks for him.



What key skills and disposition does an Assistant need to possess?

Assistants have to be very organized, and able to think ahead. You must be able to predict what is needed, AND have the ability to adjust accordingly. But the main thing that has worked for me, is that I am someone people like to work with. There are a lot of personalities in this industry, and you are a representative of yourself and your boss and the place you work.

Was there a pivotal moment when you realized you wanted a life in the arts?

I love all things art. I don't remember one instance, but I do remember growing up, watching tv and film, and thinking "I want to know those people." Something about surrounding myself with folks who appreciate art, feels innate.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

What do you find most challenging about your work?

The most challenging thing is also the thing I think I thrive at, and that's navigating other people's personalities. Often, I am the go-between for Tarell and those that want time with him. And sometimes, I'm a representative for my community folks who come to visit Geffen Playhouse. I need to be able to set boundaries, and expectations with people. And that can be hard depending on their response. But I love it. I have learned to not take anything personally, make sure folks feel heard and seen, and to just do my best where I can.

What do you find most rewarding?

First, I get to work in the land of make-believe. It's my favorite thing. I also have the best boss and team. I am encouraged to sit in as many meetings as possible, and give my opinions and thoughts on plays, and such. But mostly, I am able to learn as much as I can, and I am encouraged to build relationships with some of the coolest and smartest people.

What was one of your favorite shows to work on?

I have to say that I love shows when our Black artists and audiences come into the building. It's one thing to see representation on stage and screen, it's another thing when you get to work and play in the spaces that help nurture that representation. I feel seen, fulfilled, grounded, supported, and loved.



TARELL AND DIONN
PHOTO BY SIX28 PRODUCTIONS



L-R: THE BROTHERS SIZE PLAYWRIGHT AND GEFGEN PLAYHOUSE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TARELL ALVIN MCCRANEY, ASSISTANT TO THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DIONN RICHARDSON, ALANI ILONGWE, CHOREOGRAPHER JUEL D. LANE AND MALCOLM MAYS IN REHEARSAL FOR THE BROTHERS SIZE AT GEFGEN PLAYHOUSE. PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH.



SCAN this QR code to watch videos from American Theatre Wing's Masterclass series on different jobs in American Theater. Stage Managers, Wig Makers, Scenic Designers, Front of House staff, Marketing Directors and many other people work behind the scenes to bring a show to life! If you are interested in a career in the arts and work behind the scenes, learn more here. #theater #jobs #alifeinthearts #getintotheatre #americantheatrewing #career #behindthescenes



REMEMBERING MARGUERITE HARRIS

Geffen Playhouse is deeply saddened to share the passing of our dear friend and longtime, front desk receptionist, Marguerite Harris. A beloved presence at the theater for 29 years, Marguerite welcomed every guest with warmth, kindness, an ever-present smile, and was an integral part of the Geffen family.

Born in Kansas City, KS, Marguerite moved with her family to the Watts community in Los Angeles in 1954 following the Brown v. Board of Education decision. She attended Manual Arts High School and later UCLA before embarking on a career spanning multiple industries.

She worked as a lab assistant at Hawthorne Community Hospital and held executive assistant positions at TRW Inc., Thrifty Corporation, and Big 5 Sporting Goods.

In 1996, Marguerite transitioned from the corporate world to the arts, joining Geffen Playhouse as the daytime front desk receptionist. From day one, she became the heart of our lobby, offering kindness and professionalism to every artist, staff member, and audience member who walked through our doors. Her love for the arts and the Geffen community made her an essential part of our theater's history.

We will miss Marguerite deeply, but her legacy of grace, kindness, and dedication will live on in the hearts of all who had the privilege of knowing her.



Still I Rise

by Maya Angelou, 1978

You may write me down in history
with your bitter, twisted lies,
you may trod me in the very dirt
but still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
with the certainty of tides,
just like hopes springing high,
still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
you may cut me with your eyes,
you may kill me with your hatefulness,
but still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
that I dance like I've got diamonds
at the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise!
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise!
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise!
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise!
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise,
I rise,
I rise.



PHOTOS: (from top): Maya Angelou performing in San Francisco early in her career, Photo from PBS.org; Dr. Maya Angelou in San Francisco at the time of publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in, 1970; Photo from MayaAngelou.com, Dr. Maya Angelou at her home in Harlem, 2006, Photo by Chester Higgins, NYTimes.

DR. MAYA ANGELOU *Poet (she/her)*

A multitalented writer and performer, Dr. Maya Angelou is best known for her work as an author and poet. Her 1969 memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, made literary history as the first nonfiction bestseller by a Black woman. Some of her famous poems include "Phenomenal Woman," "Still I Rise," and "On the Pulse of Morning," which she recited at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993 and which earned her a Grammy Award. Angelou also enjoyed a career as a Tony- and Emmy-nominated actor and singer in plays, musicals, and onscreen. She became the first Black woman to have a screenplay produced with the 1972 movie *Georgia, Georgia*. In her work as a civil rights activist, she collaborated with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, among others. The Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient died in May 2014 at age 86.

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