

POINT OF VIEW

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

The August Wilson drama

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

August Wilson is the most successful African-American playwright of all times. He is well on his way toward his goal of writing a play about African-American life in each decade of the twentieth century. His works debut at major Broadway theaters and over the last decade he has been honored repeatedly with Pulitzer, Drama Desk and Tony awards.



DR. LENORA FULANI

Wilson's first Broadway hit, and probably still his best known work, is *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, which premiered in 1985. The following year he won America's most prestigious literary honor, the Pulitzer Prize, for *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. He was awarded the Pulitzer again in 1990 for *Fences*, which starred James Earl Jones on Broadway. His most recent play is *Seven Guitars*.

Ironically, while Wilson has been honored by the white-dominated theater establishment and is respected by the primarily white Broadway theater audience, he is much less known by ordinary black folks. Most of us don't get to see his plays. It's not surprising that Wilson would depend on mainly white producers to put on his plays and mainly white audiences to buy the tickets. They don't call Broadway the "Great White Way" for nothing. In spite of — or perhaps, because of — this situation, Wilson recently has begun to advocate for a separatist approach to black professional theaters, claiming that white people cannot write roles of blacks, attacking "color blind casting," that is the casting of blacks and other people of color in roles, for example those written by Shakespeare, that were not originally written for them. Wilson called for a fully separate and exclusive black professional theater.

He first made these separatist views public in a keynote address delivered to the biennial national conference of the Theatre Communications Group, whose members are representatives of non-profit professional

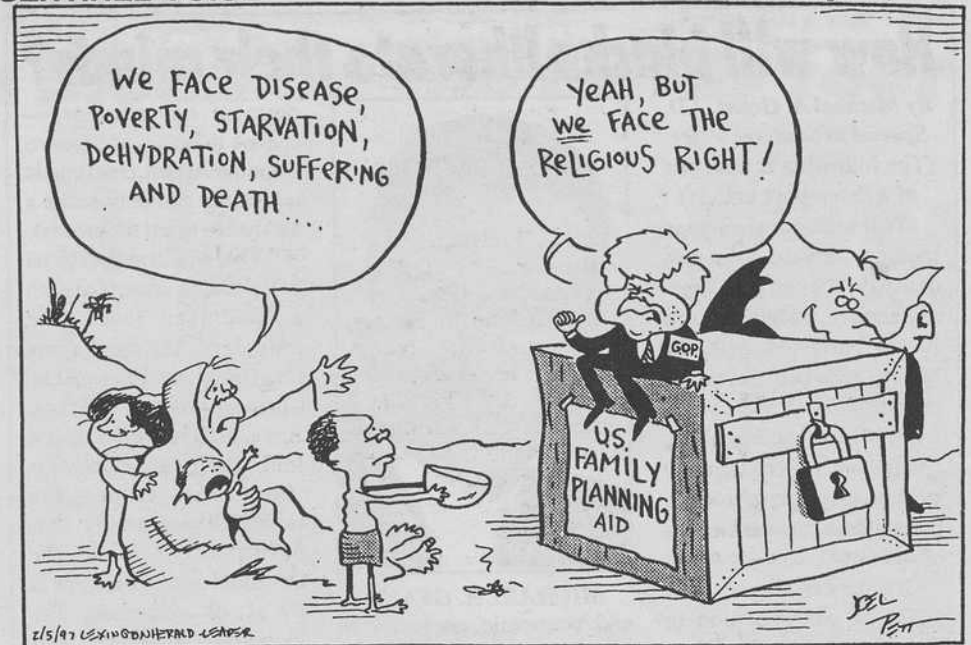
theaters around the country, where he asked that white-controlled government agencies, corporations and foundations which now fund white and multicultural non-profit theaters around the country bankroll separate black theaters.

Not surprisingly, Wilson's views have found little support among working black actors, dramatists and directors. They need to work in existing theaters to make a living and want the opportunity to perform more roles, not less.

The theater establishment — very white and very liberal — was also stunned. Wilson found his most ardent opponent in Robert Brustein, former head of the Yale Drama School, artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and drama critic for *The New Republic*. Their debate has been the debate between two political/cultural positions which have both failed the African-American community — liberalism and cultural nationalism.

Wilson and Brustein held a public debate last month before an overflow crowd of theater artists at a Broadway theater. Brustein insisted that "things have changed" over 300 years and particularly the last 30 for black people. Wilson took on this classically liberal and condescending view. Brustein challenged Wilson to put his plays where his mouth is by premiering his next drama at an African-American theater. Wilson replied: "I myself am personally a playwright. I am not interested in starting a theater." His response was greeted with boos.

What I find most disturbing about this cultural debate is the extent to which the black community has been left out. How the black community can develop a sophisticated and popular theater reflective of its history, and culture and relevant to the current cultural, economic, political and social circumstances in our country is a serious question. We would (See Wilson, Page 14)



TO BE EQUAL

What matters most

By Hugh B. Price
President

National Urban League

When President Clinton declared in his State of the Union address that his "Number one priority for the next four years" was to improve education in America, he underscored how important achieving that goal is, if America is to sustain itself in the economically-challenging world of the 21st Century.

"We face no imminent threat," he said, referring to the lack of a challenge to our military might. "But we do have an enemy: the enemy of our time is inaction."

Mr. Clinton's analysis of the importance of this moment could not be more correct — especially when it comes to education.

The fact is that the elementary and secondary schooling we provide for millions of American youth, particularly those in inner-city and rural areas, is woefully inadequate for what even today's workplace demands of them: Fewer than 10 percent of high school students can read, write, compute, and manage scientific material at a high level. International tests continue to show U.S. high school students ranking near the bottom in mathematics and science.

That is why the report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, which was released last fall (and of which I was a member), deserves attention. Armed with alarming data, it underscores the need for the educational "crusade" the President is urging upon us.

For example, about one-quarter of newly hired teachers lack the qualifications for their jobs. More than 12 percent of new hires enter the classroom without any formal training, and another 14 percent arrive without fully meeting state standards. Although no state will allow someone to write

wills, practice medicine, fix plumbing or style hair without completing training and passing an examination, more than 40 allow school districts to hire teachers who have not met these basic requirements. As the report notes, "More states pay more attention to the qualifications of veterinarians treating America's cats and dogs than to those of the people educating the nation's children and youth."

Those harsh words are not intended to denigrate teachers, but to alert the public to the need to truly support them. We are well aware that, contrary to assumptions, American teachers work very hard, teach more hours a day and year than those in other countries, take home more work to complete each night, on the weekends and holiday.

The problem is that the profession of teaching has suffered from decades of neglect, which has produced poor teacher-education programs and lack of uniform standards with which to measure the ability of new and veteran teachers. It has also suffered from haphazard recruiting of teachers and low salaries. With two million new teachers projected to be hired for America's schools during the next decade, this situation will only get worse — unless we act now.

What Matters Most



HUGH B. PRICE

suggests how we can completely revamp the profession of teaching so that all schools have teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach our children.

To achieve that, we must: set high standards, for both students and teachers; substantially improve teacher preparation and professional development programs; overhaul teacher recruitment, encourage and reward skilled teachers; and create schools that are organized for student and teacher success.

The goal is challenging and requires unprecedented effort. But it does not require new theory, just common sense, a firm sense of purpose, and, yes, money: Our key recommendations — scholarships for recruiting able teachers for rural and inner-city schools; reforming teacher education; and implementing new licensing requirements; (See Matters, Page 14)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

The citizens of Clark County have been misled to believing that our sheriff was here to protect us as he had promised the day that he decided to run for office. The truth is that he has been protecting his own, the bad apples in the police department. As long as an officer is in uniform and on duty, that officer or officers are licensed to kill.

This city is also run by the 'good ole boys' scenario. Officer Brady is the son of a retired detective, so he has been receiving preferential treatment when it comes to misconduct. Like settling out of court misconduct on a citizen after threatening the man with a gun to his head and then sealing the court records. You kind of wonder what else Sheriff Keller is hiding from the public and just how many out of court settlements and sealed court records there are.

Mortensen's attorney says that Mortensen will end up

being acquitted for the murder of Daniel Mendoza. After reading the latest on Christopher Brady's destroying evidence, I'd say it is a pre-conceived plan to save Mortensen. This so-called 'we don't want Mortensen on the force' is a cover up for what Sheriff Keller's real intent to save Mortensen from going to prison. From day one the plan has been in progress. It takes Brady 36 hours to report the murder of Daniel Mendoza by Ron Mortensen; Brady's clothes are not available for the defense to investigate; Brady paints his pickup inside and out and changes the seats. Brady's father who is a retired police detective was at the inquest hearing with his son. Brady had gone to his father first before reporting the incident to the department. So what this is pointing to is that all the above has been done so as to get Mortensen off scot free. Who is going to believe a gang-banging witness who picked Mortensen out of a line-

up? From what has been learned, the only reason Brady gave himself up was because he heard that the witnesses had taken his license to his pickup. Also, another excuse will be that they had been drinking heavily and they had used poor judgment.

Police officers who feel that they have to drink after their shifts to relieve stress and anxiety from their job is a bad excuse. Everyone in this world has stress and we don't have to drink to relieve our stress. Especially police officer who carry guns while drinking.

Sheriff Keller, how many times have you carried your gun when off-duty and drinking, and I'm not asking about just one or two drinks, but 5 tequilas and 10 beers? Shame, shame on police officers who carry their weapons while drinking.

It's all really quite simple. Another cover-up for murder.

Name withheld at writer's request

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Contributing Writers:
Jackie Brantley
Lee Brown
Carl Chamberlain
Ron Gibson
Loretta Arrington Hall
Barbara Robinson
Diana Saffold
Fred T. Snyder
Photographers:
Stacy Banks
John Broussard
Jonathan Olsen

Ramon Savoy, Publisher-Editor
Lynnette Sawyer, General Manager
Nancy Watson, Managing Editor
Willis Brown, Production Manager
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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