



GULF SHORE PLAYHOUSE

*Kristen Coury, CEO & Producing Artistic Director*

## STUDY GUIDE TO



JAN 7 - 29, 2023

PREVIEWS: JAN 5 & 6

**Directed by**

MARSHALL JONES III

**Starring**

JAMES HOLLOWAY

TONI LACHELLE POLLITT

LILIAN OBEN

PHILIPPE D. PRESTON

**Production Stage Manager**

KELLI KAREN

**Lighting Designer**

JOSÉ SANTIAGO

**Sound Designer**

LINDSAY JONES

**Scenic Designer**

EDWARD E. HAYNES, JR.

**Costume Designer**

IVANIA STACK

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**Study Guide Materials Assembled by**  
MEREDITH SINGLETON & JOHN PERINE, Education Associates  
and AUDREY ZIELENBACH, Literary Manager



## About the Playwright

Dominique Morisseau is the author of *The Detroit Project* (A 3-Play Cycle) which includes the following plays: *Skeleton Crew*, *Paradise Blue*, and *Detroit '67*. Additional plays include: *Pipeline*, *Sunset Baby*, *Blood at the Root* and *Follow Me To Nellie's*. She is also the TONY nominated book writer on the new Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations*. Dominique is alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop and has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival and Eugene O'Neil Playwrights Conference. She most recently served as Co-Producer on the Showtime series *Shameless* (3 seasons). Additional 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), Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18, and a recent MacArthur Genius Grant Fellow.



## About the Director



Marshall Jones III has over 35 years of producing theater and live entertainment experience in a wide variety of key executive positions at some of New York city's most prestigious venues including the world famous Apollo Theater, Madison Square Garden, Radio City Music Hall, and Disney On Broadway's *The Lion King*. Marshall made his professional debut directing *Radio Golf* at Gulfshore Playhouse last season. For 13 years seasons (2007–2019), he was the Producing Artistic Director for the Tony® Award-winning Crossroads Theatre Company. Other directing credits include *A Christmas Carol – The Musical* and the world premiere of *Walter Mosley's Lift*. At Crossroads, he directed Nikkole Salter's *Repairing a Nation*. In the spring of 2018, Marshall served as the Creative Consultant (replacement director) for the Off Broadway production of *Little Rock*, which received NY Times Critic Pick. Since 2002, Marshall has been on faculty at his alma mater as professor of Theater Arts at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University as the Head of the BA Theater program. He is a member of the Stage Directors Society (SDC), the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers (ATPAM), and the Dramatist Guild. For 8 years (2010-2018), Marshall proudly served as the President of the Theatre Communication Group (TCG) and now he currently serves on the Board for the NJ Theatre Alliance. Marshall earned a BA in Theater Arts from Rutgers University and an MA in Arts Management from New York University.



# About the Cast



**LILIAN OBEN** (Regine/Elsie) is a Cameroonian-American actor, writer, and storyteller based in New York City. Select theatre credits include: *Nine Night* (Round House Theatre); *Intimate Apparel* (Orlando Shakespeare Company); *Murder on the Orient Express* (Everyman Theatre); *The Crucible* (Olney Theatre); *The Second Shepherd's Play* (Folger Theatre); *Antigonick* (Taffety Punk Theatre Company); *Melancholy Play: A Contemporary Farce* (2019 Helen Award – Outstanding Production; 2019 Helen Nomination – Outstanding Ensemble), *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Arabian Nights*, and *Journey to the West* (Constellation Theatre Company); *Love and Information* (Forum Theatre). Select Film/TV: *The Noel Diaries* (Netflix). Presenter/ storyteller credits include: The Other America: An MLK Jr. Celebration (Washington National Cathedral, DC); Zeitgeist Literature Festivals: Insiders & Outsiders 2018; Queer as Volk 2017 (Embassy of Switzerland, DC); and Mayim b'Sasson: A Joyful Mikvah Rededication (Adas Israel Congregation, DC). Writer credits: Lilian's poetry, short fiction, and creative non-fiction has appeared in The New York Times ("Modern Love" — print edition 2017, podcast edition 2020), and in online literary journals such as Spittoon Magazine, Thrice Fiction, Symmetry Pebbles, Survivor's Review, and Some Ways to Disappear, among others. As a playwright, Lilian's short plays include *AETHER* and *NOW CASTING* (Keegan Theatre, "Womxn on Fire Festival", 2020 and 2019). [LilianOben.com](http://LilianOben.com)



**TONI LACHELLE POLLITT** (Toshi/Frances) is a New York City based Actress. She is both excited and grateful to be a part of this production of *Mud Row* here at Gulfshore Playhouse. Other credits include the world premier of Zora Howard's *STEW* produced by Page 73 for which she received an Audelco Award Nomination for Best Featured Actress in a play. She is a Lead in the soon to be released web-series *Last Bodega In Brooklyn*. *The Usual* (web-series), *Locker Room Talk* (web-series), *Three Girls Never Learnt The Way Home* by Matthew Paul Olmos (Produced as a part of The Cherry Lane Theatre's 2019 Mentor Project as well as The Dorset Theatre Festival's 2019 Pipeline Series) and David Thigpen's *Hurricane Party* (The CollectiveNY). She is a graduate of the Two Year Full-time Acting Program at the William Esper Studio and holds a BA in Theater Arts from Rutgers University. More information about past and upcoming projects can be found at [www.tonilachellepollitt.com](http://www.tonilachellepollitt.com)



# About the Cast

**JAMES HOLLOWAY** (Davin) Off-Broadway: *Separate and Equal* (Audelco Nomination Best Featured Actor; 59E59), *Macbeth* (Theatre Row), *The Men* (Primary Stages), *They Think Our Favorite Color is Green* (Kraime Theater). Regional: *Tiny Houses* (Cleveland Play House, Cincinnati Playhouse), *Superior Donuts* (GEVA Theatre Center), *Fences* (Bristol Riverside), *FLY* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *History of the Word* (Crossroads), *Weekend Comedy* (New Theatre), *Broken Fences* (BroadwayWorld Award Best Featured Actor; The Road Theatre Company). Film/TV: *The Newsroom* (HBO), *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC), *Law & Order: SVU* (NBC), *Sam & Cat* (Nickelodeon), *The Roe Effect* (HBO), *The Cycle* (HBO), *Jackson Parish* (First Run Film Festival Best Actor; BET), *Music City* (PBS). Music: "Halfway EP" (Spotify, Apple, Amazon Music, YouTube). Training: SUNY-Purchase (BFA), LAMDA (MA Classical Acting). For Langston, Mama and Dada love you. Instagram: jameshollowayofficial



**PHILIPPE D. PRESTON** (Tyriek) is a New York-based actor originally from Oakland, CA. He is excited to be working with Gulfshore Playhouse for the first time. Most recently Philippe was seen as Montague/Steven in the U.S. Premiere of *Serving Elizabeth* at Peterborough Players. He has also performed in the World Premiere of *The October Storm* at Hudson Stage. Some of his theater credits include the New York premiere of *Affluenza* (Bernard) at Theater Row, an International Tour of *Charlotte's Web* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Tom Robinson) at TheatreWorks. Mr. Preston has also appeared in various productions with Rutgers Theater Company including, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Benedick). Some of his film and T.V. appearances include *Grey's Anatomy*, *As the World Turns*, and *A Hundred Blocks*. He received his BFA in Acting from Rutgers University (Mason Gross School of the Arts) in addition to studying at Shakespeare's Globe Theater in London, England. Philippe is an avid runner and tries to go on a travel adventure whenever he can.





# Think About It

**What shapes a community and brings it together? What can divide it?**

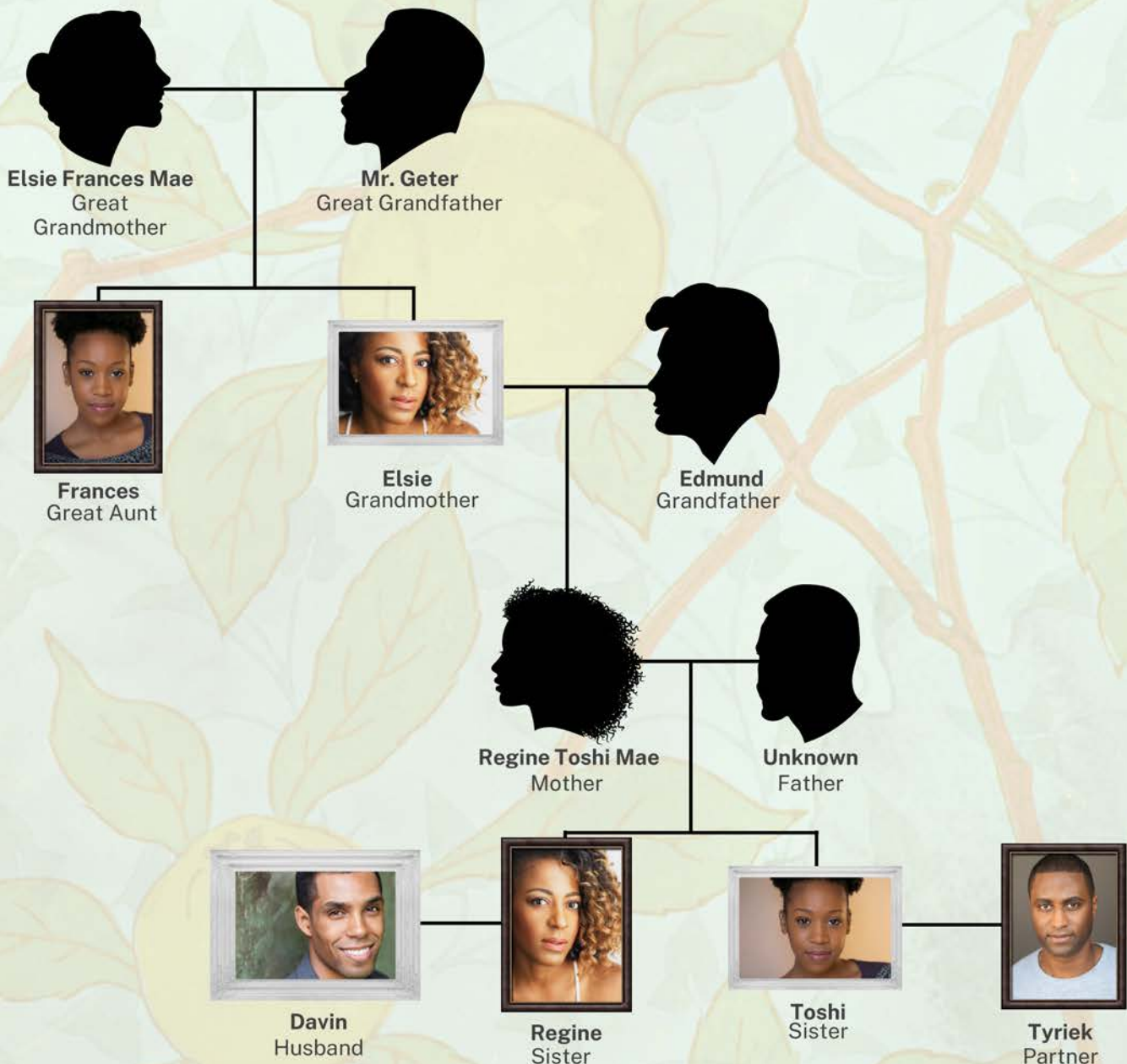
**What traits and personal qualities do you think you inherited or learned from previous generations in your family? Which of your traits or qualities do you hope to pass along to the next generation?**

**What is a parent's duty to their children?**



# Geter Family Tree

*Mud Row* follows two generations of sisters in the same family. The family tree below expands upon this family tree, include the generation between the sisters and one earlier. What do you notice about the family tree? What do you think the significance is between the characters' names and the actors playing them?





# West Chester

"They was all two, three story houses. All had different names. There was Thumblatch Row. No idea what that meant. Academy Row. Those is the houses built on the side of old West Chester Academy. Mechanics Row. You can guess who lived there. Bunch of mechanics all together. That's a whole different kinda segregation. Job segregation, I guess. But some people wouldn't call it segregation. Just living around people they got somethin' in common with. It's a funny thing to try to name somethin' people just do on their natural. Like maybe if mechanics like each other that much they oughta have a row together. ... Anyway, the Colored area is east of the railroad tracks. By Goose Creek. Where all the sewage from the town flows. One of the filthiest creeks to flow near West Chester. And that's where they called it. ... But it makes sense, I think. That Coloreds bein' the mud of the world...livin' in mud-like conditions...would naturally be in Mud Row. I don't know the answers. I'm just learnin' cuz we got to know how we got somewhere, so we know how to get somewhere else. Nobody wanna be stuck in the mud. Not nobody." (Elsie, *Mud Row*, Act 1, Prologue)

## About West Chester, PA

- The town was first settled by Quakers who strongly supported abolitionist activity and welcomed enslaved people seeking freedom.
- West Chester was a major stop on one branch of the Underground Railroad.
- The town vigorously supported the Union Cause during the Civil War.
- 80% of West Chester is on the national historic registry.
- One of the Civil Rights Movements' architects, Bayard Rustin, was a West Chester native. Learn more about Rustin's work with Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil rights timeline below.





# The Civil Rights Movement

This timeline highlights national and Philadelphia-centric events in the Civil Rights movement through 1968

Philadelphia Event

National Event

	Philadelphia's chapter of the NAACP is established. The chapter was focused on protecting the rights of Black migrants moving North to fill jobs in industrial plants after the ban on immigration from Europe and the onset of World War I. The Black population in Philadelphia increased by approximately 50% by 1920. During the 1920s, the Black population increased by another 64%.
1912	
1927	After World War I, Black workers were pushed out of industrial jobs. By 1927, only 6.1% of Black workers in Philadelphia were employed in the industrial sector.
1935	The NAACP successfully lobbied the Pennsylvania Legislature to pass legislation banning racial discrimination in public accommodations within the state.
1939 - 1944	During WWII, the flow of Black migrants rose again as labor demands grew to support the war effort. Racial discrimination was pervasive in employment and housing. Most skilled, technical, and professional occupations were closed to Black people. Housing endured racial barriers and a wartime housing shortage which enabled landlords in Black neighborhoods to profit from doubling up families, subdividing apartments, and charging exorbitant rents for dilapidated housing units.
1948	<b>July 26:</b> President Truman signs Executive Order 9981 ending segregation of the United States Armed Forces.
1954	<b>May 17:</b> Ruling that "separate, but equal" facilities are "inherently unequal," the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down public school segregation in Brown vs. Board of Education
1960	<b>February:</b> Inspired by the Woolworth's sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, the Philadelphia Youth Committee Against Segregation pickets Woolworth's stores in neighborhoods with significant black populations.
1962	<b>October 1:</b> James Meredith becomes the first African American to enroll at the University of Mississippi. His enrollment sparks riots at the school and U.S. Marshals are dispatched to ensure Meredith is admitted.
	<b>December 15:</b> Cecil B. Moore is elected President of the Philadelphia chapter of the NAACP. Moore focuses on direct action on civil rights and a militant desegregation program that includes Girard College, which has been a center of dispute since the College pursued legal action to prevent Black students from enrolling since 1954.

Source: <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-city/timeline>





Source: <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-cit/timeline>



# W.E.B Du Bois and the Talented Tenth



**W.E.B. Du Bois** was a prolific writer and the first African American to earn a doctorate. He was one of the founders of the NAACP and advocated for full civil rights and increased political representation for African-Americans. He protested against lynching and Jim Crow laws in the US, and was a major proponent of Pan-Africanism.

The theory of the **"Talented Tenth"** states that 10% of all African-Americans are highly intelligent and must pave the way for the rest of African-American society. It first originated in an essay by Henry Lyman Morehouse, a white Baptist minister and proponent of education, in 1896.

W.E.B. Du Bois first encountered this notion during his Harvard student days. He wrote that, "the educated elite had a glorious opportunity to guide the race by reshaping its own ideals in order to provide the masses with appropriate goals and lift them to civilization." He later went on to write his own essay on the Talented Tenth in 1903.

Du Bois argued that the history of human progress required those at the top to guide the rest and pull those worth saving up to their level. He wanted white readers to recognize that Black Americans were in the United States because of their forefathers and they were there to stay. The process of upliftment would only be achieved through education and employment. He felt that training the Talented Tenth was an important means to an end: political and civil rights equal to those enjoyed by white Americans.

Du Bois' theory has been met with much criticism over time. When it was written, many believed it was at odds with Booker T. Washington's ideas and since, the theory has been viewed as elitist, selfish, and self-serving as Du Bois so clearly developed a theory he fit into.

In later years, he became disenchanted with his expectations in the Talented Tenth, writing, "They naturally tended to become, as Washington hoped, themselves exploiters of the Negro and white workers, as acquisitive and as hard-fisted as the white employers. But, on the other hand, some of them did not. The miracle which I had regarded as probable did come true, but only after long years: this leadership for the workers came mainly from intelligent and better paid workers, trained as workers and not as exploiting aristocrats. ... I now realize that the ability within a people does not automatically work for its highest salvation. On the contrary, in an era like this, and in the United States, many of the educated and gifted young black folk will be as selfish and immoral as the whites who surround them and to whom Negroes have been taught to look as ideals."

Source: In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday, 1952.



# Generational Trauma

## Traumatic Experience

This can be several different things. In particular, studies have focused on things like war and genocide because they impact a wide range of people, making them easier to study.

In Morriseau's *Mud Row*, the two pairs of sisters struggle to come to terms with the actions of their parents and grandparents. Elsie and Frances must decide whether to stand up for who they are as the children of a deadbeat father and a promiscuous mother or to hide from their past. Regine and Toshi face a similar struggle, with the added problem of living under the expectations their grandmother has placed upon them. This idea of the experiences of parents directly and indirectly affecting their children is based on real studies into a topic known as "**Generational Trauma**".

## Parents

As a response to trauma, people's emotional responses, reactions to stress, and even their genetic information can change. People can develop new found anxiety and depression as a reaction to trauma. All of these things can affect their parenting styles.

## Next Generation

The children of the parents who experience trauma are also impacted by the experience, even though potentially they never experienced it first hand. This passing down of traumatic experiences can continue for generations, especially if new traumas are added.

## Statistics on Generational Trauma

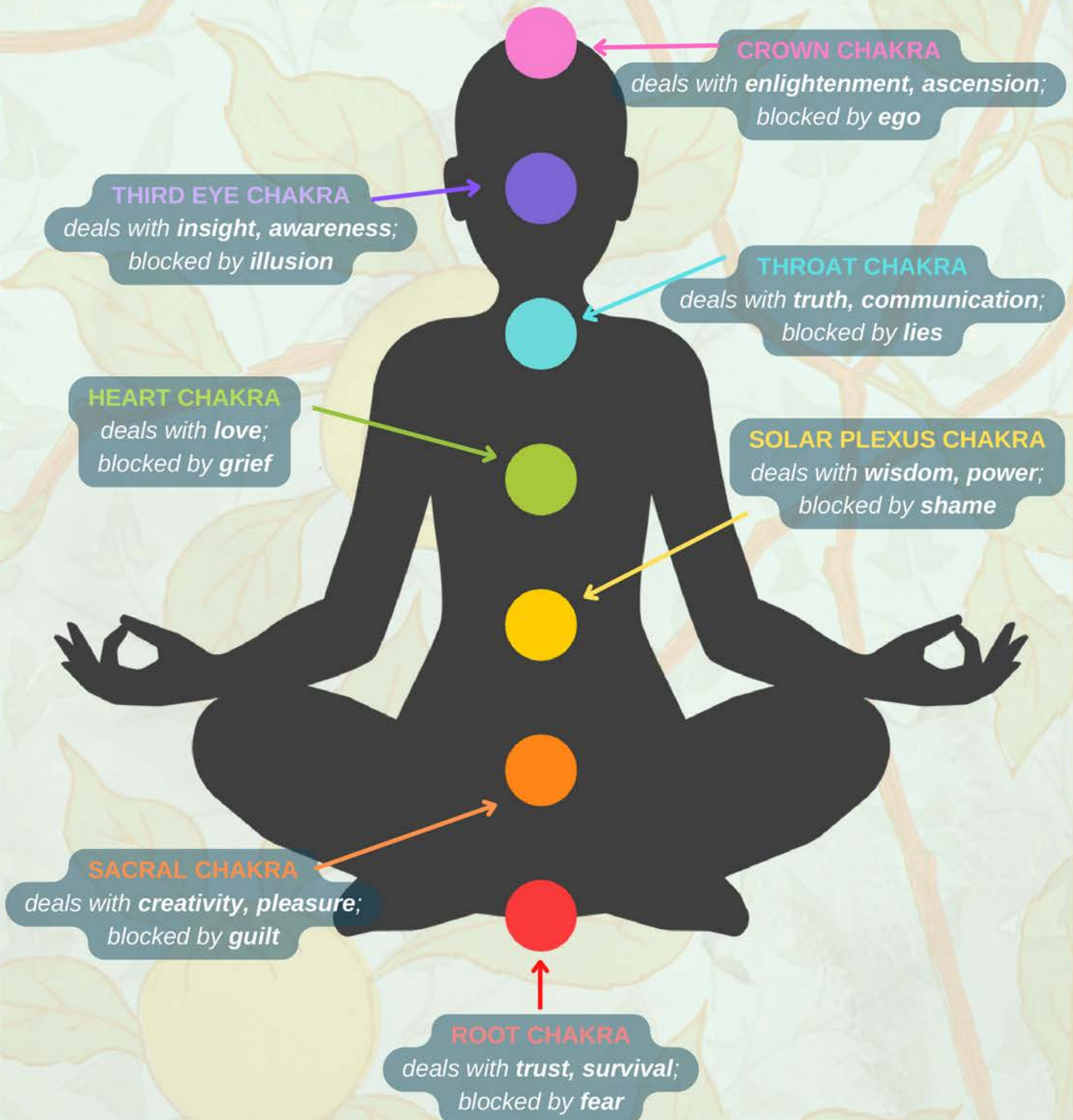
- In a study focused on Holocaust survivors and their children, researchers found that significant number of subjects had genetic changes related a gene that controls stress and the body's processing of stressful situations, in the both parents and children.
- A 2017 study looking at the children of prisoners of war during the Civil War found that children of prisoners who had been held captive were more likely to die prematurely than children whose parents were not prisoners during the war.
- Several studies have looked at the "shared stress" of members of African-American communities in the United States, specifically at the rates of mental health problems and at the similarities shared between parents regarding their fears for their children.

Statistics from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/02/legacy-trauma>.



# Spirituality of Chakras

In *Mud Row*, the character of Toshi has recently turned to a life of spirituality, and frequently perceives color energy when she enters spaces. What role does color play in the tone or energy from scene to scene? How do these colors tie into larger themes in the play?





# Themes and Symbols in *Mud Row*

## Familial Legacy

A family's legacy is what they are remembered for, by their future generations and the community at large. As you watch *Mud Row*, think about what the women of the Geter family are remembered for. What do they want to be remembered for? What do you want your family to be known for?

## Motherhood and Parenting

The mothers in the Geter family struggle at times to provide proper support for their daughters. Even if they wish the best for them, their expectations can be too high or too low for their children. How do the actions of the parents in *Mud Row* affect the children?

## Progress vs Escapism

When faced with a problem, the women in *Mud Row* are faced with two possible choices: they can either attempt to escape their problems or try to make progress to face them. As you watch the show, note which characters take each approach. Which solution works? Are there benefits to each?

## Gentrification

Gentrification is the process by which wealthy people move into poorer areas and change them by adding more expensive businesses and houses. This makes it harder for the original residents to afford to live in the area, forcing them to move out. How is the neighborhood Mud Row affected by gentrification? How are the lives Regine, Toshi, and their partners specifically impacted?

## Names

The women in *Mud Row* have inherited their first names from their mother. Regine and Toshi's mother was named Regine Toshi Mae and Elsie and Frances's mother was named Elsie Frances Mae. But they also inherited their father's last name of Geter, which was then passed down to the other sisters. Why do you think Morrisseau chose to focus on the passing down of names in the play? How does this idea tie into larger themes surrounding family and legacy?

## Mud

The neighborhood of Mud Row was named because it was along the banks of Goose Creek, stuck in the mud. Throughout the play, characters refer not only to being stuck in the mud, but also being treated like mud by others. How does Morrisseau use mud to show not only the Geter sisters' struggles but also the struggles of black people throughout history?

## The Tree

The tree in the backyard of the family's house has been around seemingly as long as the house itself. Regine and Toshi remember it being there as they think back on their childhood together. As children, they had to select branches from the tree to be beaten with as a form of punishment. In the this production, the tree wraps around the perimeter of the set, being woven into the house itself. How does the tree tie into larger themes surrounding trauma, childhood, and family?



# Creating the World of *Mud Row*

"The imaginative use of metaphors is just one of many reasons why Dominique Morisseau is a brilliant writer of plays. *Mud Row* is a play about generational betrayal where the story spans 4 generations (even though only two generations - 1962 and 2019) are dramatized in the production).

Our award-winning scenic designer, Ed Haynes was inspired by Ms. Morisseau's generational perspective of the story, hence the use of the family tree which lines the proscenium both literally and figuratively. Our design of the family tree actually incorporates older relatives of the actors as a part of the family tree.

The sisters fondly remember playing in a tree in the backyard during their childhood, but the younger sister now says:

*'...those roots is damn near coming into the house. They just keep growing and growing until them joints are strong and unbreakable and they will tear down your entire house unless you chop the whole damn tree. That's the only way to stop the spread right?'*

In the scenic design, the actual tree the characters reference can be seen through the window (stage right). There are also branches visible from the tree out front when the door is open.

A well-crafted scenic design uses levels so the storytelling can be enhanced because the communication gets stronger when the actor is speaking from a higher position. with actors communicating when they are as well as when the front door is open.

Another metaphor is mentioned during an argument between Regine and her husband, where Regine says:

*'And one thing I always learned from my grandmother is that you can't erase the dirt that is at the root of a people or a problem. And if you aren't ready to get dirty too, then you don't go diggin' up roots.'*

Note in the second act when the altruistic husband is wearing cleaning gloves so symbolically, he's not ready to get his hands dirty."

**- Marshall Jones III, Director**



*Scenic Rendering by Edward E. Haynes, Jr., Scenic Designer*



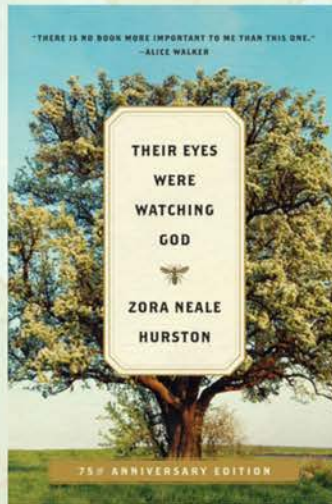
# Further Reading

## Fiction



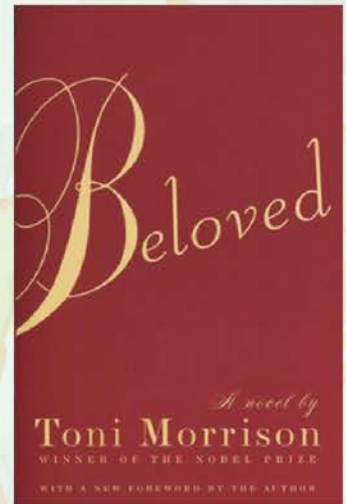
***The Vanishing Half***  
**Brit Bennett**

This award-winning 2020 novel is a multi-generational family saga set between the 1940s to the 1990s and centers on identical twin sisters Desiree and Estelle "Stella" Vignes and their daughters Jude and Kennedy. It focus on family, and the struggles Black women face in America.



***Their Eyes Were Watching God***  
**Zora Neale Hurston**

This is a classic of the Harlem Renaissance. It focuses on a young woman in Florida as she grows from a teen into an adult. This novel was initially unpopular, but has since become one of the most influential novels in American literature.



***Beloved***  
**Toni Morrison**

One of Toni Morrison's most well-known and influential novels, *Beloved* tells the story of a formerly enslaved family in the post-Civil War north. This haunting novel is a Pulitzer prize winner and an American classic.



***for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf***

**Ntozake Shange**

*for colored girls...* is a theatre piece written in 1976. It is a series monologues accompanied by dance numbers and music that tells the story of seven Black women facing racism in America. The 1976 Broadway production was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play.



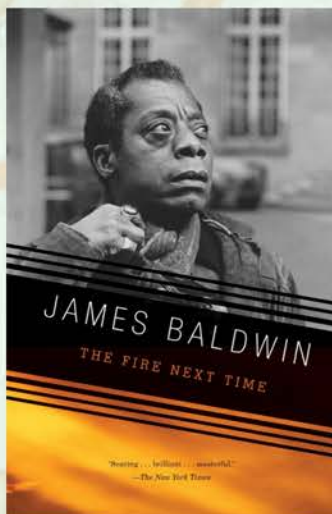
***The Color Purple***  
**Alice Walker**

*The Color Purple* tells the story of a young African-American woman as she grows up in the American South in the early 1900s. This award-winning novel has been adapted several times for both stage and screen.



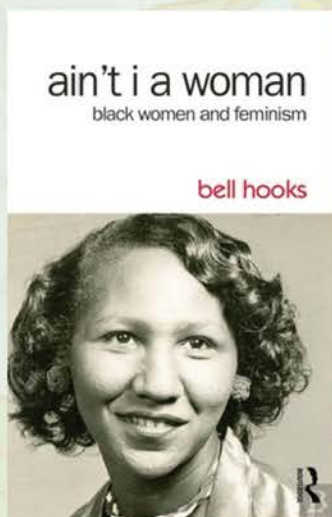
# Further Reading

## Non-fiction



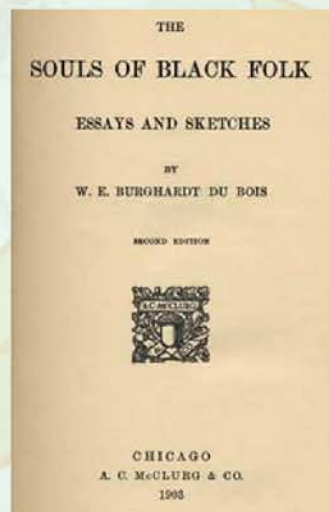
***The Fire Next Time***  
**James Baldwin**

*The Fire Next Time* is a series of two essays written by James Baldwin focusing on race relations in America. Written in the 1960s, *The Fire Next Time* is regarded as one of the most important non-fiction books on American race relations.



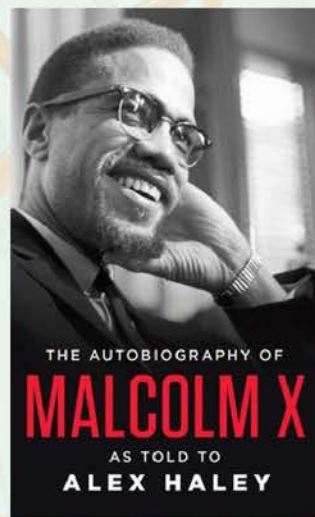
***Ain't I A Woman:***  
***Black Woman and Feminism***  
**bell hooks**

This 1981 novel examines the intersection between racism and sexism by looking at Black women through out American history, starting with slavery and continuing through to contemporary civil rights movements.



***The Souls of Black Folk***  
**W.E.B. Du Bois**

*The Souls of Black Folk* is one of the earliest works in the field of sociology. Written in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois assembled a collection of essays on how people view African-Americans in society and how they view themselves. While somewhat dated by today's standards, this book was instrumental in early African- American literature.



***The Autobiography of***  
***Malcolm X***

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* examines the life, philosophy, and work of civil rights activist Malcolm X. It is regarded as one of the most important pieces of non-fiction American literature.