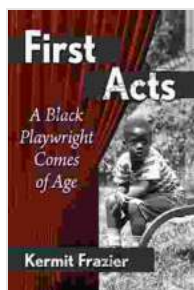


# First Acts: Black Playwright Comes of Age

Black playwrights have been making significant contributions to American theatre for over a century. From the early days of the Harlem Renaissance to the present day, Black playwrights have used their work to explore the complexities of the Black experience, challenge social norms, and give voice to the voiceless.

One of the most important early Black playwrights was August Wilson. Wilson's plays, which often focused on the lives of working-class Black Americans, were praised for their realism and their powerful exploration of themes such as race, class, and identity. Wilson's most famous plays include *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.



## First Acts: A Black Playwright Comes of Age by Gail Morin

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Another important early Black playwright was Lorraine Hansberry. Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* was one of the first plays by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway. The play tells the story of a Black

family's struggle to buy a house in a white neighborhood, and it was a groundbreaking work that helped to change the face of American theatre.

In the years since Wilson and Hansberry, a new generation of Black playwrights has emerged, continuing to push the boundaries of American theatre. These playwrights include James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Danai Gurira, and Jeremy O. Harris.

The work of these playwrights is as diverse as the Black experience itself. They have written plays about everything from the Civil Rights Movement to the AIDS crisis to the Black Lives Matter movement. Their work is often challenging and provocative, but it is also essential to understanding the complexities of race and identity in America.

Black playwrights have played a vital role in shaping American theatre. Their work has helped to change the way we think about race, class, and identity. It has also helped to give voice to the voiceless and to create a more inclusive and representative American theatre.

## **August Wilson**

August Wilson (1945-2005) was an American playwright best known for his cycle of ten plays about the African American experience in the 20th century. Wilson's plays are set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he grew up. They explore themes of race, class, and identity, and they often feature characters who are struggling to find their place in the world.

Wilson's most famous plays include *Fences* (1985), *The Piano Lesson* (1987), and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984). *Fences* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1987, and it was adapted into a film in 2016. *The Piano Lesson* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1990, and it was adapted into an opera in 1995. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was adapted into a film in 2020.

Wilson's plays have been praised for their realism, their powerful exploration of themes, and their memorable characters. He is considered one of the most important American playwrights of the 20th century.

### **Lorraine Hansberry**

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) was an American playwright best known for her play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). *A Raisin in the Sun* was one of the first plays by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway, and it was a groundbreaking work that helped to change the face of American theatre.

*A Raisin in the Sun* tells the story of a Black family's struggle to buy a house in a white neighborhood. The play is a powerful exploration of themes such as race, class, and identity, and it was a major critical and commercial success.

Hansberry was a brilliant playwright who was taken from us too soon. Her work continues to be relevant and important today, and she is considered one of the most important American playwrights of the 20th century.

### **James Baldwin**

James Baldwin (1924-1987) was an American novelist, essayist, playwright, and poet. Baldwin was one of the most important and influential

figures of the Harlem Renaissance, and his work continues to be relevant and important today.

Baldwin's plays often explored themes of race, sexuality, and identity. His most famous plays include *The Amen Corner* (1954), *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), and *The Dutchman* (1964).

Baldwin was a brilliant writer who was not afraid to challenge the status quo. His work is essential to understanding the complexities of race and identity in America.

### **Amiri Baraka**

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) was an American poet, playwright, and activist. Baraka was a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement, and his work is known for its political and social commentary.

Baraka's plays often explored themes of race, class, and identity. His most famous plays include *Dutchman* (1964), *The Slave* (1964), and *The Baptism* (1964).

Baraka was a brilliant writer and activist who was not afraid to speak his mind. His work is essential to understanding the complexities of race and identity in America.

### **Ntozake Shange**

Ntozake Shange (1948-2018) was an American playwright, poet, and novelist. Shange was a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement, and her work is known for its exploration of themes of race, gender, and sexuality.

Shange's plays often featured strong female characters who were struggling to find their place in the world. Her most famous plays include *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), *spell #7* (1979), and *A Daughter's Geography* (1985).

Shange was a brilliant writer who was not afraid to challenge the status quo. Her work is essential to understanding the complexities of race, gender, and sexuality in America.

### **Suzan-Lori Parks**

Suzan-Lori Parks (born 1963) is an American playwright, screenwriter, and director. Parks is a Pulitzer Prize winner, and her work has been produced on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and around the world.

Parks' plays often explore themes of race, class, and identity. Her most famous plays include *Topdog/Underdog* (2001), *In the Blood* (2009), and *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)* (2014).

Parks is a brilliant writer whose work is essential to understanding the complexities of race, class, and identity in America.

### **Lynn Nottage**

Lynn Nottage (born 1964) is an American playwright and screenwriter. Nottage is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, and her work has been produced on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and around the world.

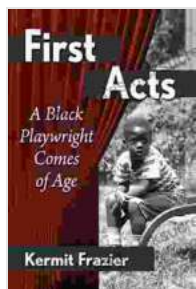
Nottage's plays often explore themes of race, class, and gender. Her most famous plays include *Intimate Apparel* (2003), *Ruined* (2009), and *Sweat* (2015).

Nottage is a brilliant writer whose work is essential to understanding the complexities of race, class, and gender in America.

## Tarell Alvin McCraney

Tarell Alvin McCraney (born 1980) is an American playwright, screenwriter, and director. McCraney is a MacArthur Fellow, and his work has been produced on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and around the world.

McCraney's plays often explore themes of race, class, and sexuality. His most famous plays include *The Brothers Size* (2007), *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* (2008), and *Choir*



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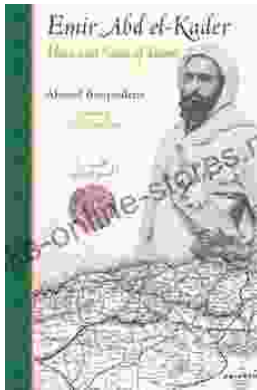
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