

## 2016 STATE OF THE CITY FACT SHEET: AUGUST WILSON

### About August Wilson

August Wilson was born in Pittsburgh in 1945, and moved to Saint Paul in 1978. He wrote a cycle of ten plays, each one depicting the African American experience during a different decade of the 20th century. The series, called *The Pittsburgh Cycle*, received two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. In 1987, Mayor George Latimer named May 27 “August Wilson Day” in the City of Saint Paul. Wilson passed away in October of 2005.

### Excerpts performed during the address:

#### SCENE ONE: Boy Willie from *The Piano Lesson* by August Wilson (Pages 93-94)

**BOY WILLIE:** The world ain't wanted no part of me. I could see that since I was about seven. The world say it's better off without me. See, Berniece accept that. She trying to come up to where she can prove something to the world. Hell, the world a better place cause of me. I don't see it like Berniece. I got a heart that beats here and it beats just as loud as the next fellow's. Don't care if he black or white. Sometime it beats louder. When it beats louder, then everybody can hear it. Some people get scared of that. Like Berniece. Some people get scared to hear a nigger's heart beating. They think you ought to lay low with that heart. Make it beat quiet and go along with everything the way it is. But my mama ain't birthed me for nothing. So what I got to do? I got to mark my passing on the road. Just like you write on a tree, “Boy Willie was here.”

#### SCENE TWO: Old Joe from *Radio Golf* by August Wilson (Pages 21-22)

**OLD JOE:** America is a giant slot machine. But you got to have the right quarter. You walk up and put your coin in and it spits it back out. You look at your coin. You think maybe it's a Canadian quarter. It's the only coin you got. If this coin ain't no good then you out of luck. You look at it and sure enough it's an American quarter. But it don't spend for you. It spend for everybody else but it don't spend for you. The machine spits it right back out. Is the problem with the quarter or with the machine? Do you know?

#### SCENE THREE: Act 1; Scene 3 KING HEDLEY II

**KING:** My fifth grade teacher told me I was gonna make a good janitor. Say she can tell that by how good I erased the blackboards. Had me believing it. I come home and told mama Louise I wanted to be a janitor. She told me I could be anything I wanted. I say, “Okay, I'll be a janitor.” I thought that was what I was supposed to be. I didn't know no better. That was the first job I got. Cleaning up that bar used to be down on Wylie. Got one job the man told me he was gonna shoot me if he caught me stealing anything. I ain't worked for him ten minutes. I quit right there. He calling me a thief before I start. Neesi told me I shouldn't have quit. But I'm a man. I don't bother nobody. And I know right from wrong. I know what's right for me. That's where me and the rest of the people part ways. Tonya ask me say, “When we gonna move?” She want a decent house. One the plaster ain't falling off the walls. I say, “Okay but I got to wait.” What I'm waiting on? I don't know. I'm just waiting. I told myself I'm waiting for things to change. That mean I'm gonna be living here forever. Tonya deserve better than that. I go for a job and they say, “What can you do.” I say, “I can do anything. If you give me the tanks and the airplanes I can go out there and win any war that's out there.” I can dance all night if the music's right. Ain't nothing I can't do. I could build a railroad if I had the steel and a gang of men to drive the spikes. I ain't limited to nothing. I can go down there and do Mellon's job. I know how to count money. I don't loan money to everybody who ask me. I know how to do business. I'm talking about mayor ... governor, I can do it all. I ain't got no limits. I know right from wrong. I know which way the wind blow too. It don't blow my way.