



## Welcome to the Inaugural Edition of the *August Wilson Journal*

By Michael J. Downing

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*[Thanks to] August himself for being August . . . for plying his trade as a poet and playwright so artfully as to heartfully touch so many thousands of people across the United States and around the world.*

– Michael J. Downing

### Abstract

A welcome to the inaugural edition of the *August Wilson Journal*, written by the editor.

### Keywords

*August Wilson, August Wilson Journal, Sandra Shannon, Larry Glasco, David Anderson, Patrick Maley, Chris Bell, Artisia Green, Melonnie Walker, Steven Tracy, Alan Nadel, Chris Rawson, American Literature Association, University of Pittsburgh*

### Gratitude

As we prepare to launch the first edition of the *August Wilson Journal*, I can only express heartfelt gratitude to so many people who have helped along the way: Sandra Shannon, Larry Glasco, David Anderson, Patrick Maley, Chris Bell, Artisia Green, Melonnie Walker, Steven Tracy, Alan Nadel, and Chris Rawson, along with all of our excellent peer reviewers and editorial advisors. I would also like to thank Constanza Romero for giving so generously of her time and of course August himself for being August . . . for plying his trade as a poet and playwright so artfully as to heartfully touch so many thousands of people across the United States and around the world. Thank you, all.



*Michael J.  
Downing*

### Origins

With the benefit of hindsight, I now see that this journal project got its unwitting start in 2002 when I established [augustwilson.net](http://augustwilson.net), which was a simple website dedicated to the study of all things August Wilson. It was, as far as I know, the first and for many years the only online source dedicated to Mr. Wilson. The goal was simply to spread the word by seeking permission and then publishing various articles on the internet. It served its purpose: I answered a lot of emails back in those days from people who were interested in

learning more and the plays, sensibilities, and politics that informed Mr. Wilson and his works.

I kept the website alive for a little more than a decade but eventually wanted the online presence to be more dynamic so I started the August Wilson Blog in January 2012. That allowed me to post material more regularly by writing short pieces with links to original articles without having to worry about: 1) seeking permission to reproduce entire articles, and 2) all of the constant design and navigation adjustments associated with maintaining a traditional website. The blog still exists as a searchable database of more than 450 journalistic-style articles. It has also connected me to dozens of Wilson supporters through the years, and even some contributors (CoCo Harris; Catherine Minnick), so I persevered, knowing that this was an important next step in the process of publishing Wilson material online. In addition, working on the blog made me realize how many of August's plays were being performed across the United States, annually. In fact, for the 2016-2017 theater year, no other playwright was performed more than [August Wilson](#).

Then, in May of 2015, at the American Literature Association Conference in Boston, I officially began pursuing the idea of launching a journal dedicated to the life and work of August Wilson. Two years earlier, I had created the August Wilson Author Society through ALA (now coordinated by J. Ken Stuckey), so I was already cultivating scholarly papers for presentation. The question now was *where can we publish those essays?* I began by speaking with some representatives of Penn State University Press, who were in the publishers room in Boston and currently publishing such periodicals as *The Arthur Miller Journal*, *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, *The Steinbeck Review*, *The Chaucer Review*, and the *Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies*, to name a few. PSU publishes so many journals, in fact, that as far as new projects go, they were only interested in publishing journals edited by Penn State faculty. They did, however, point me in the direction of the University of Pittsburgh, to which, I said *of course!*

Pitt was immediately interested and we began negotiating the initial proposal, which had to be approved by various governing bodies at UPitt in order for us to proceed. I'll spare you details, but let us just say it was rigorous and tremendously time-consuming. It took about a year and a half to iron out the details of the proposal and get it approved. Then David Anderson, my managing editor, and I then had to travel to Pitt to design the website and be trained in its operation. Designing the website involved decisions at every turn: Colors, fonts, banners, art, etc. Thanks to the wonderful staff at Pitt and thanks to my wonderful and talented wife, Jackie, who designed the logo that appears at the top of each article.

Now that we are nearing the completion of the first issue, I have a full appreciation of how complicated the website is and how it is actually a form of Artificial Intelligence, coordinating collective production efforts and creating a digital "paper trail" as things progress. Like all AI, however, the downside of the journal website is it is absolutely merciless at times. We had more than a few instances where contributors could not successfully submit their work, which was, we figured out later, due to the fact that they missed a particular checkbox designating themselves as authors. Another issue is that the system—in order to keep things "blind"—automatically converts file names into numbers, which confuses the heck out of two old English professors, who prefer the 26-letter alphabet, rather than constantly-changing computer language.

But we get it. Pitt wants to make sure that all of the protocols are followed. Open Access Publishing has gotten a bad name in some circles (i.e., predatory pay to play) and Pitt wants to make sure all protocols are followed. It has reached the point, however, where David and I are ready to bring another person onto the editorial team to manage workflow and production so that I can focus on driving material to the site and David can focus on working with his team of reviewers. We need help and if you would like to assist, send me an email.

That said, everyone at Pitt has been extraordinarily kind and supportive. I think they are all excited about the idea of hosting a journal dedicated to native son August Wilson and are entirely devoted to making that happen.

### Spring 2019 Edition

This inaugural edition of the journal features 22 separate submissions. Immediately following this introduction is a foreword by Professor Sandra Shannon from Howard University. She comments on the field of Wilson studies and how it has grown over the years. She is the well-published president of the August Wilson Society which has been very active over the past several years promoting the legacy and literature of August Wilson.

Managing Editor David Anderson's brief welcome essay follows. A native Pittsburgher, David and I have been friends for more than 30 years and have been studying the life and works of August Wilson since we met in 1989.

Larry Glasco's article about August leaving Pittsburgh is next. Professor Glasco is a history professor at the University of Pittsburgh and this essay is a chapter from his upcoming book on Wilson. He offers 139(!) sources and offers a detailed and nuanced perspective on the conversations and circumstances that led to August to leave Pittsburgh for St. Paul.

Long-time Wilson scholar Alan Nadel follows with his essay on reading Wilson and his characters. Professor Nadel has published two collections of essays on August Wilson and has also recently released a monograph on August Wilson.

Mark Whitaker's essay is a keynote address that stems from the 2018 August Wilson Consortium which took place at the August Wilson Cultural Center in April of that year. In his remarks, Whitaker talks about how August Wilson fits into his book *Smoketown: The Other Black Renaissance*. Whitaker has worked as chief editor at *Newsweek*, Washington Bureau Chief for NBC News, and managing editor of CNN Worldwide.

Constanza Romero has graciously lent her voice to this first issue and Sandra Shannon was kind enough to conduct the interview. We are aiming at incorporating multimedia into the journal website as often as possible and are glad to say that not only do we have the textual version of the Romero interview, we also have an audio recording.

Chris Bell's interview with long-time August Wilson friend Sala Udin follows. Sala remembers going to elementary school with August and then performing in *Jitney*.

Another goal of the Wilson Journal is to talk with dramaturgs in order to bring them into the conversation and shed some light on their world. We want the journal to be open not only to scholars and academics but also to performers, directors and the theater community at large. So Dramaturgy Section editor Melonnie Walker has conducted two dramaturg interviews from recent productions of *Two Trains Running* and *Radio Golf*.

Patrick Maley is Stage Review Editor for the journal and he has been a strong contributor, bringing four reviews, including Kelsall's review of *King Hedley II*, Ridley's review of *Gem of the Ocean*, Herron's review of *Fences*, and Bell's review of *Radio Golf*. With our stage reviews, we look to go beyond plot summaries and generalized summaries and seek more specific insights such as how the play may have been staged, how the material was treated, or other nuances related to characters or themes that emerged within any particular staging.

Long-time Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Theatre Critic Chris Rawson opens the news section with an article on the August Wilson American Century Cycle Awards, with accompanying sidebar. These awards are given to theaters across the United States that have completed the entire 10-play American Century Cycle. Rawson has also contributed a second article on the activities of August Wilson House.

The next article is written by recent Duquesne master's graduate (and previous Kutztown University graduate) Laura Quain who writes about the Duquesne Fellowship and recent recipient, Natasha Trethewey.

Following Laura's article is a bibliography compiled by Thom Addington who is an instructor of English at Richard Bland College of William and Mary. The bibliography dates back to 2016 and will be a regular feature of the journal going forward as we continue to update it. We are particularly excited this year because we are able to include a primary work of August Wilson in *How I Learned What I Learned*.

Finally, we have an official Note, which is also intended as a regular feature. This year's note calls attention to specifics related to the fluctuating terminology connected to The Pittsburgh Cycle, The Century Cycle, and August Wilson's American Century Cycle. See Note for details.

### Moving Forward

In terms of our evolving vision of the journal, we would like to see and cultivate additional, traditional scholarship, but we realize that it takes time. Now that we have published our first edition, we believe the level of attraction will begin to grow. We have received a handful of essays that were not quite fully mature, so we have elected to put those into the revise and resubmit column and work with the authors to firm up the arguments and evidence. Another place that we are looking to pull from is the aforementioned August Wilson Author Society through the American Literature Association. Authors should note that I am in a position to provide feedback in order to assist in sharpening essays for publication. Then, once the author and I am more or less satisfied, we toss it over the fence to the managing editor and the reviewers for blind peer review.

### Thanks to the University of Pittsburgh

I started this essay with gratitude and I want to conclude with that same sentiment. I would like to thank all of our friends at the University of Pittsburgh for agreeing to take on this project, for training us on the use of the website, and for ultimately publishing the material: Vanessa Gabler, Electronic Publications Manager; Kari Johnston, Communications Support Specialist; Lauren Collister, Director of the Office of Scholarly Communications & Publishing; Timothy Deliyannides, Director of Information Technology. It has been a long haul with numerous challenges along the way, but it is my hope that we are making history with this first edition and that this project will serve as the ongoing, official record for August Wilson studies well into the future.

### Author Bio

Dr. Michael Downing is Professor of English at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches courses in August Wilson, technical writing, journalism, literature, and composition.



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