

**REGINALD C. BROWN
IN**

**PERFORMING
RICHARD
WRIGHT**

**AN
ORIGINAL
ADAPTATION
OF**

**THE MAN
WHO
SAW THE FLOOD**

**THE ETHICS OF
LIVING
JIM CROW**

**DOWN BY
THE
RIVERSIDE**

DIRECTED BY TERESA MORROW



THE JOURNEY TO HERE

For me, theatre has always been about the telling of stories. I often relate the role of the actor to that of the griot, sometimes referred to as the cultural guardian. The theater has always been a communal space where our minds and spirits get lifted, and where our shared experiences are examined and celebrated in an effort to bring us closer to one another while becoming attuned to the spirit of life.

As an undergraduate student at Rutgers State University of New Jersey in 1979, I was first introduced to the idea of creating literary adaptations in a production of Richard Wright's play, *The Long Dream* directed by Avery Brooks. This was my introduction to Richard Wright, and, after reading the novel, I was hooked.

In 1981, I co-founded and was co-artistic director of Ensemble Theatre Company of Newark, NJ. One of our missions was to pursue the idea of adapting literature for the stage, and we knew that the work of Richard Wright would be high on the list. So, in the early 80's we contacted Ellen Wright, Richard Wright's widow, and we were granted permission to adapt to the stage *Uncle Tom's Children*.

In 2005, I was granted permission by Julia Wright, Richard Wright's daughter, to adapt *Fire and Cloud* at Virginia Commonwealth University. While directing this performance project, I was astounded that so many students had not read the works of this literary genius. I determined that part of my mission as an educator and theatre artist would be to expose as many people as I could to the words of Richard Wright. I began adapting *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow* and *Down by the Riverside* for a solo stage performance.

In 2007, I had the immense pleasure of meeting Julia Wright and shared the progress of my work. We had a chance to sit down and talk, and recognize the impact of her father's writing on current issues. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the stories explored in *Performing Richard Wright* reflect the echoes of devastation from an earlier historic flood. All, just as relevant now as they were when they were originally written, and all are a testament to the truly staggering talent of one of our most inspirational writers.

Richard Wright

African American writer and activist Richard Wright, born September 4, 1908 - and a native son of the Delta - became famous with his boundary-breaking bestseller *Native Son*. He came of age on Beale Street, as he discusses in his critically acclaimed memoir, *Black Boy*, detailing his struggles to escape poverty, fear, and racism in the segregated south. Wright went on to explore these themes in his writing after he moved north to Chicago and then lived in exile in Paris, which became home base as he reported on Third World struggles in the era of decolonization, before his premature death on November 28, 1960.

PERFORMING RICHARD WRIGHT

The Man Who Saw the Flood
The Ethics of Living Jim Crow
Down by the Riverside

The performance is approximately 1 hour, without intermission.

REGINALD C. BROWN

Reggie is an Assistant Professor and a member of the Performance Faculty in the University of Memphis Department of Theatre and Dance. He was Co-founder and Co-Artistic Director of Ensemble Theatre Company of Newark, NJ from 1981-1996. After previewing *Performing Richard Wright* in Paris, France as a part of the Richard Wright Centennial Conference held at the American University of Paris this past June, Reggie is pleased to have the opportunity to present this work here, in another home of this renowned writer. As an actor, Reggie was last seen as Old Major/Napoleon in the University of Memphis production of *Animal Farm*, for which he won the Ostrander Award for Best Actor in a College/University production. For Theatre Memphis, Reggie performed the role of The Duke in *Measure for Measure*. Reggie's long career has been comprised of many stage, television and film projects, both as an actor and as a director. Currently, Professor Brown is directing Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* for Germantown Community Theatre, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Broadway premiere of this American classic. This spring he will perform the role of Papa Shakespeare in the University of Memphis Department of Theatre and Dance production of Carlyle Brown's *The African Company Presents Richard III*.

TERESA MORROW, Director

A Rhodes College alumna, Teresa is a freelance director, educator, performance artist. She is honored to serve as director for Mr. Brown, and to assist in bringing the poetry of Richard Wright's work to the stage. Teresa has an extensive background in directing narrative theatre for youth. For the past four years, she has been the Director/Developer for Heifer International's Theatre for Social Change initiative. Through this program, she has inspired students to create original poetry, song, and creative movement - founded on affecting solutions to end hunger and poverty while building sustainable communities. Pursuing her desire to explore the transformative power of the arts, Teresa studied with Augusto Boal at the Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory in New York City. She has served as an adjunct professor at Rhodes College, helping to launch their Theatre for Social Change curriculum. For ten years she was a Theatre Arts Director for the Texas public high school systems where she helped develop state guidelines and curriculum for teaching theatre arts. An honoree of the Who's Who of American Teachers, Teresa was selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities to participate in the Summer Institute at Shakespeare & Company of Lenox, MA, where she directed *Much Ado About Nothing* for their Fall Festival of Shakespeare.

Currently, Teresa is playing in her one-woman interactive story-building experience for elementary aged children:

Tessa Tumbleweed, Tales from the Trail

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reggie would like to thank all of those who were so instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.

First and foremost God and the ancestors, where would I be without You? Then, of course, Richard Wright, whose legacy is timeless, and whose words provide the fuel.

Julia Wright (a hero in her own right), who entrusted me with this undertaking. My beloved family and friends.

Marcus Langford, Director of New Student Programs

Kevin Collier, Performing Arts Coordinator

Brothers With Purpose

Laura Canon, McCoy Theatre Technical Director

Jane Metters, Lighting Operator