

The Rep
MILWAUKEE

SEPTEMBER 23 to NOVEMBER 2

Play
Guide

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PRESENTS

The **Color Purple**



Book by **Marsha Norman**

Music and Lyrics by **Brenda Russell,
Allee Willis and Stephen Bray**

Directed by **Mark Clements**

Executive Producers

James E. & Mary K. Braza

Jackie Herd-Barber & Michael Barber

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FROM PAGE TO STAGE: *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Since its publication over thirty years ago, *The Color Purple* has become a quintessential part of the American cultural landscape. While there has been much debate about Alice Walker's story and its subsequent adaptations, it remains a modern classic, now arriving on the Quadracci Powerhouse stage.

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POST CARD

Did You Know?

Alice Walker and *The Color Purple* book writer Marsha Norman both won Pulitzer Prizes in 1983: Walker in Fiction for *The Color Purple* and Norman in Drama for *'Night, Mother*.

1982 Alice Walker publishes *The Color Purple* novel.

1983 Alice Walker wins the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, National Book Award.

1985 *The Color Purple* film arrives in movie theaters and stays there for 21 weeks, earning the #4 box office slot for the year.

Stephen Spielberg directs the film, starring Whoopi Goldberg (Celie), Danny Glover (Mister), Oprah Winfrey (Sofia), and Margaret Avery (Shug).

1986 Earning 11 Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture, Best Actress, and Best Supporting Actress, *The Color Purple* walks away from Oscar night with no statuettes.

The Color Purple earns four Golden Globe nominations, and Whoopi Goldberg wins for Best Actress in her film debut portraying Celie.

Late 1990s Producer Scott Sanders starts working on developing *The Color Purple* for the stage.

Alice Walker is originally reticent about turning her novel into a musical, but after seeing some of the work being done on Broadway and discovering the potential for the show, she gives Sanders her blessing.

The process of negotiating the rights to the story takes two years.

Early 2000s Sanders starts to assemble a creative team, including songwriters Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray; book writer Marsha Norman; director Gary Griffin; and producer Todd Johnson.

2004 The first staged reading of the musical is completed and changes are made.

The first trial run of *The Color Purple* is staged at Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia.

Oprah Winfrey and Quincy Jones sign on as producers.

2005 *The Color Purple* premieres on Broadway.

2006 *The Color Purple* earns ten Tony nominations and one award for Best Actress for LaChanze, who portrayed Celie in the original production.

2014 Milwaukee Rep stages a new production of *The Color Purple*.

ACT 1

The Color Purple opens in rural Georgia, 1911. Two young sisters, Celie and Nettie, play a game and sing a song together. The scene transitions to church, where Pa and Nettie enter, with a pregnant, 14-year-old Celie lagging behind. The church service begins, and before the end of the first hymn, Celie and Nettie must leave so Celie can give birth.

Celie and Nettie talk in a shed after Celie has just given birth to a baby boy named Adam. Pa comes into the shed and forces Celie to give him the baby to get rid of, just like he did her first child, Olivia. Celie reveals that Pa is the father of the children. After Nettie leaves, she speaks to God about her lot in life.

It is several years later, and Celie and Nettie discuss marriage in Pa's store. Mister comes to ask Pa for Nettie's hand, and keeps coming by to pester them even after Pa has refused him. Pa offers Celie's hand as an alternative, but Mister keeps turning him down until Pa offers him a cow if he is willing to take Celie. Celie goes with Mister to save Nettie from being taken away from her education and future.

Celie and Mister arrive at his farm, where Mister gives Celie a barrage of orders, ending with her being pulled into the house and their bedroom. On another day, Nettie sneaks away from home to visit Celie, and asks if she can stay at Celie's home to escape Pa's advances. Mister agrees, but when Nettie leaves for school, he follows her and tries to assault her. Nettie fights Mister and runs, causing him to swear that he will make sure she and Celie never see each other or hear from each other again.

It is now 1919, and Celie is convinced that Nettie is dead because she has not heard from her in five years. Celie speaks to Harpo, Mister's son, about the woman he loves, Sofia. When a

pregnant Sofia arrives, Mister is skeptical, and Harpo must choose between his father and his girlfriend.

In 1922, Harpo and Sofia, now married, argue and both Mister and Celie tell Harpo that he must beat Sofia to get her to mind him. Harpo returns home, receives a beating from Sofia in turn, and she leaves him, heading off with her strong and independent sisters. The women try to persuade Celie to leave Mister, but she will not. Harpo decides to turn their home into a juke joint. Harpo turns his attention to a young woman, Squeak, who wanders by looking for work.

Later that year, Mister receives a letter from Shug Avery, his mistress, telling him that she will be returning to town. As he primps for her arrival, the men and women of the town gossip about Shug. When Shug arrives, she is in poor health, and Celie is the only one able to nurse her back to wellness. Through this process, Shug and Celie begin to connect, talking about Mister, Nettie, and Celie's life. Shug reveals that Mister's name is Albert. Even after Albert's father arrives to bad mouth Shug, she stays. Shug is the first person to help Celie recognize her own beauty and worth.

After she is well, Shug makes her triumphant return to the stage at Harpo's juke joint. Sofia arrives with a new man named Buster. Harpo and Sofia reconnect on the dance floor, and Squeak picks a fight with Sofia who is a much stronger foe. Celie and Shug head back home, laughing about the evening's events, and share a moment of romantic connection. Shug retrieves some of Nettie's letters Albert had been hiding and gives them to Celie. The act closes with Celie reading the first of Nettie's letters from Africa.

ACT II

The act opens with the moment after Act I closes. Shug distracts Albert so Celie can read Nettie's letters without consequence. Nettie narrates her story while Celie reads. The audience is transported back in time with Celie to follow Nettie's journey.

After Nettie escapes from Mister, she goes to the Reverend's house and sees two children, knowing they must be Celie's. The Reverend and his family take Nettie in to help with the children, and the family goes to Africa as missionaries. The Reverend reveals the truth about his children's adoption, and Nettie's suspicions are confirmed. As the world of Nettie's journey appears, Celie follows along and gets caught up in the story.

Nettie arrives in Africa and travels to an Olinka village. The Olinka begin to dance and chant, sweeping Nettie and the children into the celebration. Albert pulls Celie out of her letter-reading reverie. Back in Georgia, Shug leaves and Celie is without her companion. The story returns to Nettie's letters. The mood of the Olinka has changed, and the women are suspicious of Nettie and her efforts to educate the girls of the village. Soldiers arrive and a war begins. The soldiers push the tribe out of their land.

Harpo enters, bringing Celie back to 1926. He speaks of the tragedy that has befallen Sofia. As he narrates, Sofia's experiences come to life. Sofia stands up to the mayor's wife after she asks Sofia to be her maid. The mayor's men attack Sofia and take her to jail for fighting back. As the scene shifts back to Africa, Nettie and the children become refugees with the Olinka. Celie nurses Sofia's wounds, but the mayor's wife gets her way, taking Sofia to be her maid.

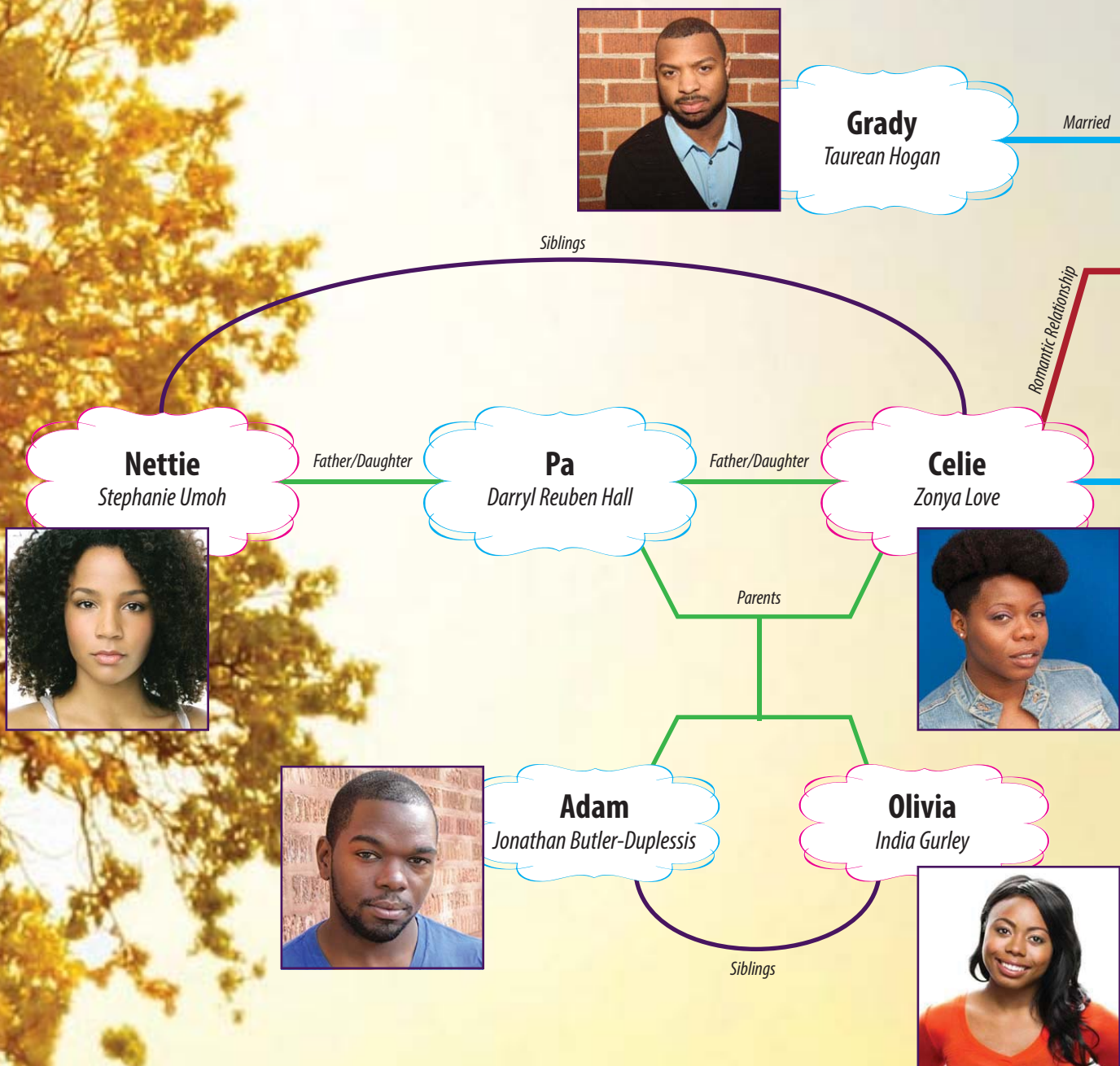
The day before Easter, 1937, arrives. Shug returns, with a new husband and breaks Celie's heart once again. Celie and Shug plan for Celie to leave Albert and move in with Shug and her husband, Grady.

On Easter day, the family gathers for dinner. Sofia has been released after eleven years as the mayor's maid, but is a changed woman. Shug tells Albert that Celie is going with her and Grady, and Celie finally stands up to Albert. The women laugh at truths that are revealed and the men do not know what to do. Celie asserts herself, cursing Albert, and she and Squeak leave with Shug and Grady. Sofia takes charge of the household.

Albert becomes a joke in the community and realizes that nothing will go right for him until he changes his ways. Six more years pass, and Celie is thriving at Shug's house, and the two companions are happy. Pa's wife calls, telling Celie that Pa has died. She also says that Celie and Nettie now own his house and store, and reveals that he was not their real father. Celie moves out of Shug's house and into her own home, converts the store into a shop where she sells her unisex pants, and becomes a businesswoman.

Some time has passed, and Celie and Shug sit on Shug's porch together. Shug speaks to Celie about her upcoming performance tour and a young man in the band she has her eye on. Shug asks Celie to wait for her until she returns, when she will finally be ready to settle down and create a life together. Celie asserts herself, telling Shug she will not put up with such neglect anymore. She acknowledges her own beauty and strength, letting Shug go.

On July 4th, a few years later, everyone gathers for a party. Celie is now fifty years old. Albert appears at the party after Sofia's coaxing. Albert and Celie talk honestly and openly, perhaps for the first time. All of the extended family arrives. From down the road, Celie hears a voice singing the song she and Nettie shared as children. Celie and Nettie are reunited, and Nettie reveals that Shug and Albert arranged her return. The whole community celebrates a new beginning for Celie and her family.



THE COMMUNITY:



Melody Betts*
Darlene



Izayah Briggs
Young Harpo/Young Adam/Ens.



Allyson Kaye Daniel*
Church Soloist



Vanessa A. Jones — Dubose*
Jarene



Jennifer Latimore
Ensemble



Zuri McGowan
Young Nettie



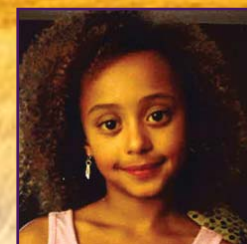
Chantae Miller
Young Celie



Nya
Ensemble



Esther O'Brien
Ensemble



Maya O'Day-Biddle
Ensemble

Shug Avery
Christina Acosta Robinson



Ol' Mister
Darryl Reuben Hall

Romantic Relationship

Son/Father

Mister
Nathaniel Stampley



Father/Son



Harpo
Gilbert L. Bailey II

Married

Sofia
Bethany Thomas



Romantic Relationship

Romantic Relationship



Squeak
Jessie Hooker

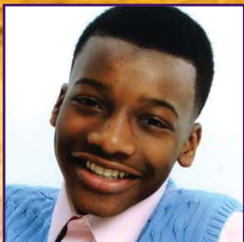
Buster
Carl Clemons-Hopkins



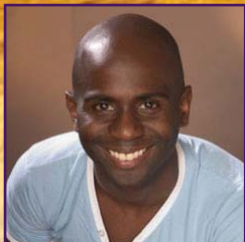
Alexis J. Rogers*
Ensemble



Malkia Stampley*
Ensemble



Braylen Stevens
Ensemble



Leonard E. Sullivan*
Ensemble



Vallea E. Woodbury
Doris

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel, or a novel written in a series of letters or documents. In this form, one or more characters tell the story through correspondence, revealing psychology and details that are not as easily articulated with other forms. Epistolary novels originated with *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson, published in 1740. Literacy was increasing and letter writing became more popular, so the form was accessible to a wider audience. The form remained popular throughout the 1700s, but became less prevalent during the 19th century.

In many contemporary novels, authors achieve some of the same effect through a first person or omniscient narrator. Some writers still use the epistolary form to craft their novels; although some have evolved the form with the times, using e-mails, text messages, and other modern day communication forms in the creation of their stories.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker crafts her story using letters from Celie to God, from Nettie to Celie, and eventually from Celie to Nettie. The letters from Nettie to Celie are an essential part of Celie's story; Celie and Shug finding Nettie's letters serves as a catalyst for Celie's transformation.

In adapting the book for stage, the playwrights needed to find ways to incorporate the inner thoughts and important details that the epistolary form allowed Alice Walker to reveal to her readers. Often, these concepts are shared with the audience through song.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

Excerpt from *The Color Purple* novel, letter from Celie

Dear Celie,

I wrote a letter to you almost every day on the ship coming to Africa. But by the time we docked I was so down. I tore them into little pieces and dropped them into the water. Albert is not going to let you have my letters and so what use is there in writing them. That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to you on the waves. But now I feel different.

I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't I pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie.

Excerpt from *The Color Purple* novel, letter from Nettie

POST CARD

Did You Know?

The term epistolary comes from the Latin word *epistola*, meaning "a letter."

Epistolary Novels Reading List

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

by Stephen Chbosky

Bridget Jones's Diary by Helen Fielding

84 Charing Cross Road by Helene Hanff

Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keyes

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

Dracula by Bram Stoker

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society

by Mary Ann Shafer

Les Liaisons Dangereuses

by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos

Pamela by Samuel Richardson

P.S. I Love You by Cecelia Ahern

Upon its release, the novel of *The Color Purple* was a commercial and critical success, but met controversy due to its content. There was much debate after the release of the book, and especially the release of the 1985 film, about the particular subject matter and themes of the story. The book and film were the subject of numerous articles, talk show segments, and discussions about the impact of Walker's story. According to the American Library Association, the novel has landed a spot as the seventeenth most banned or challenged book in America for over twenty years.

Much of the controversy over *The Color Purple* came from its portrayals of African-American men. Some critics argued that the book and film made African-American men either villains or buffoons, and that this portrayal would reinforce the split between the genders in the African-American community. On the opposite side of the argument, many African-American female critics and audience members lauded the film for highlighting women's stories and showing female characters with the agency to change their lives.

Some of the arguments about the novel and film centered on the portrayal of African-American culture. The use of, as Walker terms it, black folk English, has been a point of contention in discussing the book and its adaptations. The portrayals of the African-American family unit also came under fire as inaccurate and damaging to the image of the African-American family. The lack of addressing social class in the film was also a sore spot for academic critics. Walker and critics supportive of the book and film have pointed out that this story is entrenched in the real experiences of the time, and that by highlighting these issues, the story opens discussion about these topics in our contemporary society.

While *The Color Purple* has faced much controversy since its release, it continues to be a contemporary classic of the American literary, film, and theatrical canon.

ALICE WALKER ON *THE COLOR PURPLE*

About the title:

"Because when I was writing the novel, I lived way in the country in Boonville, California, and I went walking through the redwoods and swimming in the river and noticed that in nature purple is everywhere. And it's interesting because we tend to think that in nature you would see more red, yellow, white, you know, all of those colors. But actually, purple is right there. And in that sense, it's like the people in the novel. You think that they are unusual, that what's happening to them is unusual, but actually it's happening somewhere on your block almost every minute. All the trouble, all of the trials and tribulations of Celie are happening to people all over the planet right now."

On Celie and Shug:

"So, the relationship that they have really develops Celie's sense of herself as a person, a real person, instead of a drudge."

On her reasons for writing the book:

"I think I was longing, really, to know my ancestors better - the immediate ancestors. My parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents, and I just started thinking . . . that I could write a story about them that I would enjoy, because it would mean spending time with them . . . with people I hadn't had a chance to spend time with, growing up."

"Celie basically curses Mister and all the misters in the world and says to them, 'Until you do right by me,' meaning herself as a person but also 'me' as the earth, 'everything you do will crumble, and everything you do will fail.' And it's prophetic in that sense, and she somehow knows this. It comes very strongly through her that this is true, that unless people are doing right by the poor of the world, by the downtrodden, and by women, generally, they are doomed. Our culture, our society, our world is doomed."

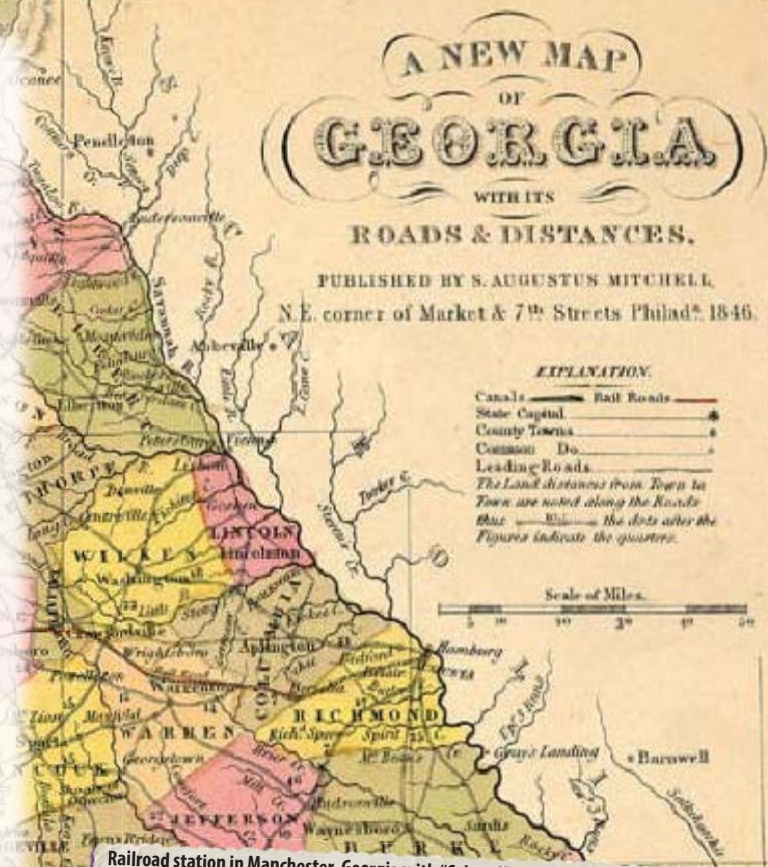
After the Civil War, the South was in turmoil, both from the devastating effects of the war, but also because of drastic change in the status of African-Americans, most of whom had been slaves. As the South moved through the Reconstruction period, it was evident that equality would not come quickly. From sharecropping to Jim Crow laws, African-Americans faced many hardships in the South from immediately after the war through the time period in which *The Color Purple* takes place.

At the end of the war, Georgia freedmen had been promised land, but very soon afterwards, President Andrew Johnson revoked this promise for all except those who had court decrees verifying their ownership. Many former slaves remained working on the plantations and farms where they had been enslaved, but entered into a sharecropping relationship with the landowners, a system that was difficult to escape. White landowners leased a portion of their land to other farmers, who were given supplies on credit, and worked the land for a portion of the profits. Too often, when the time to pay up on the credit they were given for supplies came around, owners told the sharecroppers they were short. Many were tied to the land for generations to pay off their "debts."

The Color Purple opens in the early 1910s, almost fifty years after the end of the Civil War. Progress was slow in coming, and the world of that time was still one full of discrimination and hardship for people of color. One of the most egregious examples of this inequality was the prevalence of Jim Crow, or segregation, laws. Beginning in the 1890s, and affirmed by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, the Jim Crow system codified a series of customs, habits, and laws that gave people of color second-class citizen status. The confrontation between Sofia and the mayor's wife in *The Color Purple* is a prime example of the expectations placed on African-Americans in their interactions with whites.

During this period, violence against people of color was all too common. The Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist organization, increased its presence in the 1920s, using intimidation and fear to scare African-Americans into submission. Violence had become a tool to keep the racial caste system intact. Between 1882 and 1930, 458 documented lynchings occurred in Georgia, a number second only to Mississippi's 538. Celie's real father was a victim of lynching due to his success as a businessman.

Although the oppression of African-Americans in the time and place of *The Color Purple* was systematic, some African-Americans found economic success. Some African-American farmers were eventually able to jump from tenant farmers to landowners, like Ol' Mister did. By 1910, African-American farmers owned one-fourth of the farms worked by African-Americans (the rest were often share-croppers). For much of American history, being a landowner allowed one to have power beyond those without, a power those African-Americans like Ol' Mister strove to achieve. Many of the people of *The Color Purple* are landowners, businesspeople, teachers, and entrepreneurs. Walker's story tells of a class of people that are often ignored in history books, those who struggled against the discrimination they faced to find economic success within their communities.



Railroad station in Manchester, Georgia with "Colored" Waiting Room, 1938



Image: John Vachon, Library of Congress collection

"You'd care about this land too if you was born a slave on it, like I was. You'd know what it meant to own somethin'. You'd want to pass it on to yo kids, see it grow into somethin' better, see it prosper."

-Ol' Mister

Cotton sharecroppers, Greene County, Georgia, 1937

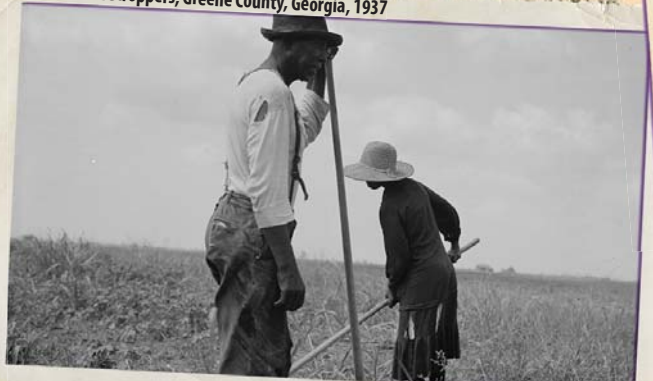


Image: Dorothea Lange, Library of Congress collection

I vibrated like a bell
When I saw the African coast.
And we kneeled down and thanked God

.....
For letting us see the land where our
Mothers and fathers died
African homeland.
Homeland,
Land of my people, people

-Nettie, "Africa"

Nettie travels to West Africa as a missionary and schoolteacher, ending up with the fictional tribe of the Olinka. During her time there, the Olinka lose their land to the building of a road and rubber plantations. While the Olinka are a fictional tribe, this occurrence was all too common for West African tribes. European countries had colonized much of Africa due to the rich agricultural and economic resources available there, as well as the slave trade. These European imperialist powers used Africans for labor, and also took lands from native tribes for their agricultural and commercial ventures.

African-American missionaries had been ministering to people in the United States and other locales for several hundred years by the early 1900s, when *The Color Purple* takes place. By the early to mid-1800s, missionary work became more prevalent within black churches and several missionary societies were formed. Black churches expanded exponentially after the end of slavery, so many of them established frameworks for serving. By the late 1800s, the number of African-Americans serving under some missionary societies outnumbered whites by four to one.

African-American missionaries started to go to Africa more frequently for several different reasons. Some mission organizers subscribed to a misrepresentation of the connection between genetics and race: a belief that African-Americans would be more tolerant of the heat and more resistant to disease than their white counterparts. This idea carried on with the belief that it was safer for African-American missionaries to travel to Africa over white missionaries. Many missionaries went to Africa with a desire to explore the land of their ancestors. Nettie highlights this connection in her letters to Celie. Some believed that the influence of Christianity would "civilize" African people and help them to better govern themselves, possibly creating a haven for African-Americans who were denied so many rights at home.

While these missionaries went to Africa with the best intentions to do good, they eventually met resistance from multiple sources. Many local tribes were skeptical of the missionaries, as *The Color Purple* shows. The Americans brought new customs, new ideas, and new religion that they felt was superior to that of the native people, thus alienating many. The European colonial governments were also suspicious of the missionaries, worrying that they would incite native peoples to rise up against their imperialist leaders.

As the 20th century progressed, the large amount of African-American missionaries going to Africa decreased after its peak in 1910. Not only were they not as welcome in Africa as they once were, but several social and technological changes made the practice less common. As the economy changed, money for this sort of work was not as available to black churches. In the early 1900s, the development of quinine to fight malaria started to ease white missionaries' fears about travelling to Africa. While the heights reached in the 19th and early 20th century's missionary movement may not be duplicated, work by foreigners still continues on African soil. Today, many different American religious and secular organizations still work in Africa, providing health care, education, and economic aid, much like the missionaries featured in *The Color Purple*.

A group of Arkansas missionaries before leaving for Liberia, 1898

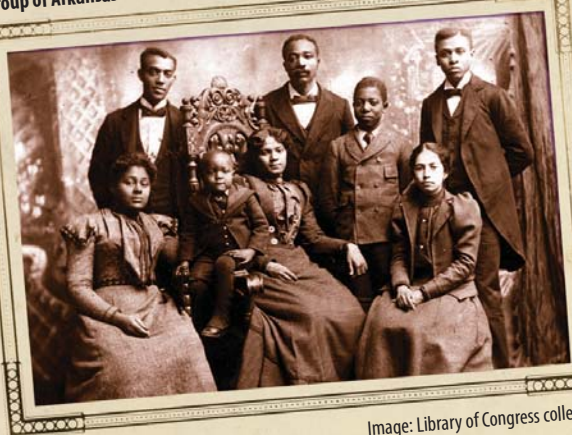


Image: Library of Congress collection

Colton's Common School Geography.

MAP No. 21.

AFRICA

Scale 1
42,875,000
STATUTE MILES

0 100 200 400 600 800 1000

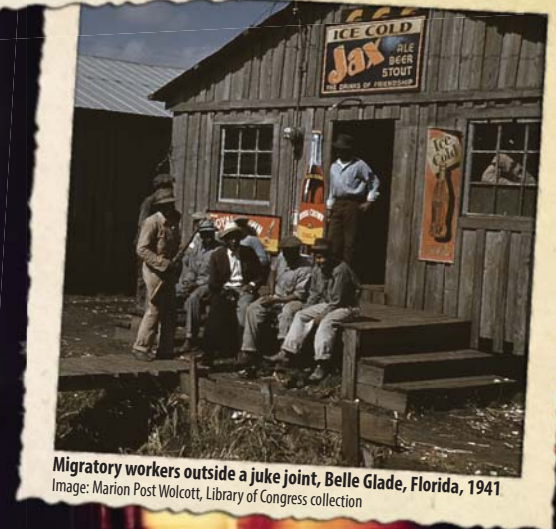
In *The Color Purple*, Harpo turns his home into a juke joint, a type of business that was prevalent in the South during the time period of the play. These establishments often served cheap drinks and food, usually had live music and dancing, and sometimes even served as brothels. Juke joints were strongly connected to work camp culture in the South, and as such, were associated with working class people and farm laborers. Owners created juke joints out of their homes, like Harpo's; or barns; shacks; or any other buildings that would work.

The origin of the term "juke" is unclear, but some attribute it to the Gullah word *juk* which means "disorderly," a correlation that is telling of much of the reputation associated with the clubs. Many accounts described juke joints as places of ill-repute, but often these accounts were colored by the white authors' views on African-Americans as "other." Working class whites also frequented juke joints, but as was common for many institutions in the South, the clubs were separate from the ones patronized by African-Americans. Regardless of race, juke joints were places for folks to go to have a good time and let loose from the troubles of daily life.

While ragtime music and other styles had been popular at juke joints over time, blues music and musicians formed the core of the entertainment in juke joints during the period of the play. Singers like Shug were fixtures in these clubs. Some of the most recognizable names in blues music performed in juke joints. Shug Avery's sister singers, women such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, brought this new sound to these clubs and blues music to the world.



Couple jitterbugging in a juke joint, Clarksdale, Mississippi, 1939
Image: Marion Post Wolcott, Library of Congress collection



Migratory workers outside a juke joint, Belle Glade, Florida, 1941
Image: Marion Post Wolcott, Library of Congress collection

LADIES OF THE BLUES



Shug Avery (Character in *The Color Purple*)



"Empress of the Blues," Bessie Smith, 1936

Image: Carl Van Vechten, Library of Congress collection



"Mother of the Blues," Ma Rainey, 1917

Image: Wikimedia commons

**I feel sorry for you.
To tell you the truth
You remind me of my mama,
Under your husband's thumb.
Naw, you under your husband's foot
What he say go.
Why you so scared
I'll never know.**

-Sofia, "Hell No!"

**I got plenty to blame.
My daddy beat me,
For my own good he say.
My first wife got kilt
When she run away.
My kids is all fools,
My crops is all dead
Only woman I love won't lie in my bed.**

...
**So tell me how a man do good when
all he know is bad?**

-Mister, "Mister Song"

**Whoop!
Girl ain't nothin' with no man
Why you makin' such a big fuss.**

**Whoop!
Need a husband and children
Or you're gonna be nothing.**

-African Wives to Nettie



Stephanie Umoh (Nettie)
and Zonya Love (Celie).
Photo by Michael Brosilow.

A central theme in *The Color Purple* revolves around gendered expectations for the characters in the musical. These expectations reflect the cultural constructs placed upon these people, and also of the many relationships in the piece. Author Alice Walker has long been an activist for a variety of causes, many of which relate to empowering women and girls. Walker has said of the novel: "It's a book mostly about women, and what they're doing, and how they're carrying on no matter what the men are doing . . . I think that for many men at that time [of the novel's publication] it was a shock that you could actually write a novel with women at the centre."

In the play, this focus on women is no different. Celie's journey is the center of the musical, and her road from powerlessness to empowerment carries the audiences through almost forty years of her life. At the beginning of the musical, Celie has very little agency or ability to rescue herself from her circumstances. As she grows in age and in confidence, she is able to assert herself and fight against the gendered expectations put upon her.

Sofia, Nettie, and Shug are able to defy some of the gendered expectations placed on them. Sofia consistently stands up for herself, and in the end, her relationship with Harpo becomes one of loving equals. Nettie travels and teaches, and as a young, single woman, people judge her for her choices. Shug asserts her independence from the very beginning, making decisions about marriage, relationships, and career unlike those made by the other women in the musical. In the musical, other women judge and conversely support these characters in their bold choices.

The men in *The Color Purple* are not without their own struggles against their expected gender roles. While the men often oppress the women, they too are oppressed by societal norms. A cycle of abuse carries through the story, and both Mister and Harpo have learned that violence is an integral part of keeping their wives and children in line. Harpo begins the musical in a loving relationship with Sofia, but is soon hindered by what he has been told he needs to do as a man. Only in the end of the play are this father and son able to find more egalitarian relationships with the women in their lives through their own growth. Alice Walker has said of the men in her novel: "You'll notice that most people, in discussing Mr -- [Celie's husband], even old Mr --, who was the son of a slave-owner, they just cut it off right there, they act like 400 years of being dominated and enslaved by white men left no trace, and that all this bad behaviour started with the black people. It's so ridiculous. But it's the way that people distance themselves from their own history, and their own participation in what is very bloody and depressing behaviour, over centuries."


ABOUT OUR PRODUCTION

The set of *The Color Purple* spans 12 different locations over 32 individual scenes.

A six-piece live band plays the music for the production. Look for them in silhouette throughout the show.

Each of the church ladies (Darlene, Doris, and Jorene) sports a particular color scheme throughout the show.

The stage floor is covered with masonite, a hardboard that allows the Paint Shop artisans to paint the floor to fit the show's needs. Underneath the laid floor, the Powerhouse stage is covered with battleship linoleum, a material that is self-healing after the removal of nails and screws.



The “tree-spllosion” around the proscenium arch of the Quadracci Powerhouse stage uses 700-750 individual boards.

The costume shop built ten pairs of “Celie’s pants” for the musical number “In Miss Celie’s Pants.”

The list of props for *The Color Purple* spans 26 pages.

FEATURED ARTIST: KEVIN GRAB PROPS CRAFTS ARTISAN

Featured Artist Interview by Deanie Vallone,
Education Intern



Kevin Grab, Props Crafts Artisan, is one of Milwaukee Rep’s newest additions, beginning his work here in August. His education in Theater and Studio Art comes from Florida State, followed by graduate work in Property Design and Management at the University of Illinois, a program started by The Rep’s own Jim Guy. His introduction to art came at an early age; “I started with crayons on the wall,” Kevin says, and working in theater has its similarities: “bigger crayons, bigger walls”.

Though he works on a variety of props projects at Milwaukee Rep, his specialty is fake food, having completed his graduate thesis on the subject. He even worked on developing a cook book for theatrical food, giving interested readers and properties designers a quick how-to in the art and craft. *The Color Purple* has some notable food props, including a massive, already consumed Easter dinner. “It’ll be interesting,” Kevin says, “to construct this feast and then deconstruct it.” About half of the food on the set is actually consumable, but for the other half that isn’t, Kevin and his crew turn to a variety of materials and techniques to mimic reality. Kevin’s secret to the perfect fake frosting? “Siliconized acrylic sealer,” he says. “Works just like icing, and you can put food coloring in it [...] it spreads just like [real frosting]; it pipes just like it.”

With all of their work—culinary or not—Kevin believes collaboration and text work is of the utmost importance. In order to design the world of the characters, the crew has to turn to the script: “the best thing to start off is to go right to the story and the characters [...] would they take time to put cloves in the baked ham or would they just throw it in the oven like my family would?” Collaboration with the director, designers, and lighting technicians is a must, as props can look completely different when put on stage under stage lighting. Because of this, a significant portion of work happens right before the show, during tech week. Still, standards are high. “Make it right the first time,” Kevin says of the Props Shop motto. “If it’s as real as you can get it, then that’s the way we want it.”



An Easter “Ham” constructed by Kevin Grab

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. In the central rotunda is a large staircase which leads to The Rep's Quadracci Powerhouse theater and lobby.

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- ★ Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems and script synopses to ensure that theater at The Rep is accessible to all;
- ★ Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Artistic Intern Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

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