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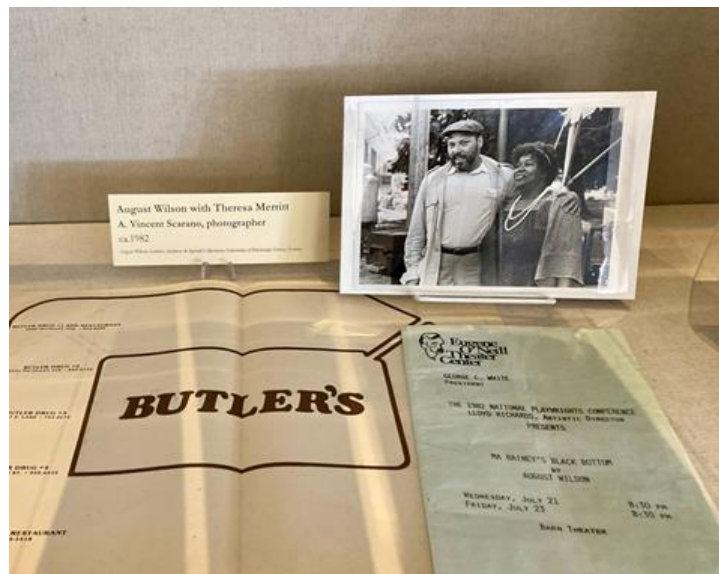
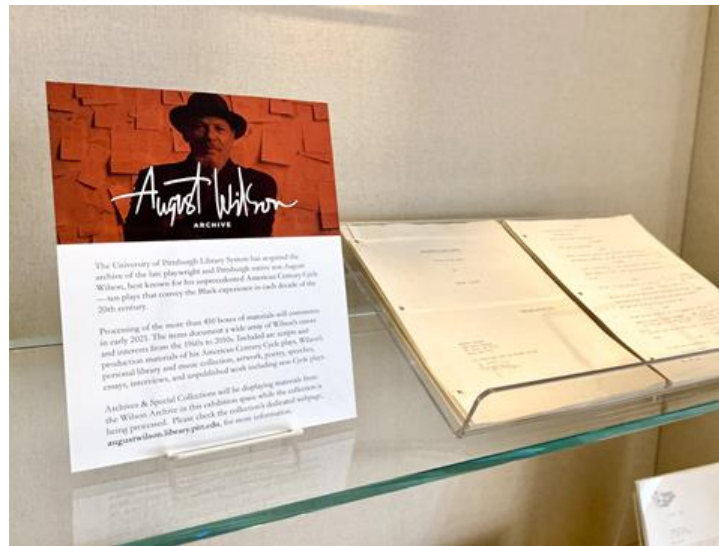
This is a new quarterly newsletter from the University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS), in which we share news, event information, collection updates, and more from the August Wilson Archive and Black arts and culture collections.

Welcoming the August Wilson Archive

In case you have not heard, we are excited to share that the ULS has acquired the archive of the late playwright and Pittsburgh native son August Wilson, best known for his unprecedented American Century Cycle —ten plays that convey the Black experience in each decade of the 20th century. All ten of these plays have had Broadway productions, and two earned Wilson the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The more than 450 boxes of materials in the archive document Wilson's writings and career from the 1960s to the 2010s.

Learn more about the August Wilson
Archive at
<https://augustwilson.library.pitt.edu/>

*Selections from the August Wilson Archive are on display
at Hillman Library!*





The August Wilson Archive Receives Grant Support

Last year, the ULS received generous funding from the Hillman Foundation and the Heinz Endowments to support the processing of and initial outreach and engagement with the August Wilson Archive. Grant funds from the Hillman Foundation enabled the hiring of a dedicated project archivist and helped provide the supplies and resources necessary for managing such a complex collection. The Archive is expected to be open to the public in the spring of 2023. Going forward, the support from the Heinz Endowments will allow us to engage the Pittsburgh community, especially students and residents from the Hill District, with the August Wilson Archive in creative and meaningful ways.



Meet Dr. Leah Mickens, August Wilson Project Archivist

Dr. Leah Mickens (pictured) is the newest member of the University Library System's Archives & Special Collections team. She joined the ULS in March 2021, initially working remotely from her hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, before relocating to Pittsburgh.

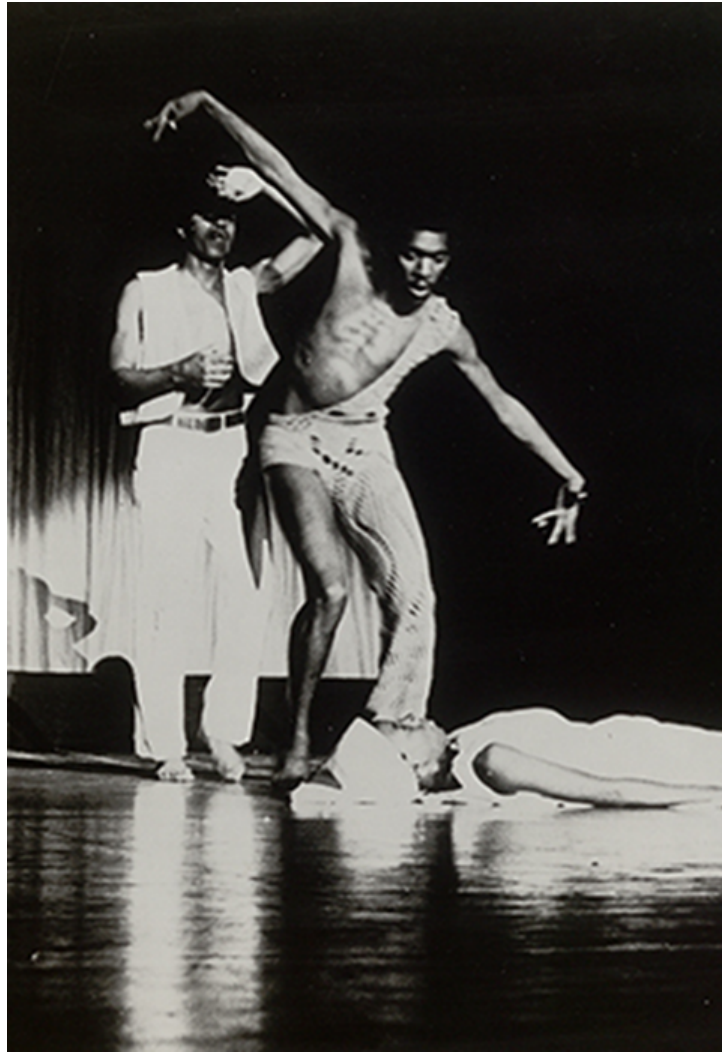
Leah has a Ph.D. in religious studies from Boston University, a master's in library and information science with a concentration in archival studies from the University of South Carolina, a master's in digital media from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and an undergraduate degree in international studies from Oglethorpe University. As the August Wilson Project Archivist, Leah has been organizing and describing the correspondence, business papers, and memorabilia associated with August Wilson's Century Cycle Plays.



The Papers of Playwright Rob Penny

We are pleased to announce [the acquisition of the papers of Rob Penny](#), noted Pitt professor, activist, playwright, and poet. The Collection documents Penny's career as an instructor in the Africana/Black Studies department and includes production files and scripts for Kuntu Repertory Theatre performances, handwritten and typed poetry by Penny, documentation on the activities of the Kuntu Writer's Workshop, and meeting minutes for the local chapter of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America.

In 1965, Penny and Nicholas Flournoy, Chawley Williams, and August Wilson cofounded the Centre Avenue Poets Theatre Workshop. Four years later, Penny was hired as part of the first faculty cohort for Pitt's Department of Black Community Education, Research, and Development, now the Department of Africana Studies, which he would eventually chair. Along with Dr. Vernell Lillie, Penny founded the Kuntu Repertory Theatre in 1974. He served as the Playwright-in-Residence of Kuntu Repertory Theatre for nearly 30 years, writing many of their staged plays, including their first production, *Little Willie Armstrong Jones*. The papers of Rob Penny join the Kuntu Repertory Theatre Records and Dr. Vernell Lillie Papers in our growing collection of materials that represent African-American history and culture in Pittsburgh.



Preserving and Providing Access to the Bob Johnson Papers and Kuntu Repertory Theatre Collection

In 2019, ULS Archives & Special Collections (A&SC) was awarded a \$36,000 Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Recordings at Risk grant. Our project aims

to preserve and provide access to the film, video, and audio recordings relating to Pittsburgh's Black Arts Movement organizations held in our collections.

Specifically, we are digitizing materials from [the Bob Johnson Papers](#) and [the Kuntu Repertory Theatre Collection](#), which contain audio-visual media formats that are currently unavailable to researchers. These recordings document the performances and other activities of the Kuntu Repertory Theatre, the Pittsburgh Black Theatre Dance Ensemble, Theatre Urge, and several courses and activities of Pitt's Black Studies department, now known as the Africana Studies department. The CLIR funding supports digitizing obsolete and at-risk legacy media into modern formats following digital preservation best practices.

Although the pandemic slowed down the project's progress, we plan to have the recordings accessible for on-site use next year!

(Left): *Ritual of Damballa(h)* performance with choreography and solo by Bob Johnson, May 23, 1970, Bob Johnson Papers, 1949-2003, CTC.2014.03, Curtis Theatre Collection.

(Right): Karla Washington Payne and Victoria Bey as Minne Dove Charles & Miss Leah in Kuntu Repertory Theatre's production of *Flyin' West* by Pearl Cleage, directed by Eileen Morris at the Stephen Foster Memorial Auditorium in 1995. Kuntu Repertory Theatre Collection, CTC.2015.01.

Recordings at Risk: Kuntu Repertory Theatre's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Last summer, Sean Hale, one of our undergraduate student assistants for the CLIR Recordings at Risk grant, helped process VHS and U-Matic tapes from the Kuntu Repertory Theatre Collection. As he reviewed the tapes to create descriptive data for future researchers, Sean came across the 1984 Kuntu Repertory Theatre performance of *A Raisin in the Sun*. The production honored the play's 25th anniversary and was staged in Pitt's Stephen Foster Memorial Hall.

The brief clip above shows Marcia Jones in the role of Ruth Younger and special guest Esther Rolle, known for her role as Florida Evans in the television show *Maude*, in the role of Lena Younger.

From Sean, who is also an undergraduate student in the Departments of Theatre Arts and Linguistics :

"The recording...capture[s] close-up images of the performers, highlighting the delicate work and dedication they invested into portraying such dynamic characters. Marcia Jones, in the role of Ruth Younger, demonstrated a noticeably exhausted and worn figure in her portrayal through her tone and posture. Rolle's depiction of Lena was also truly exceptional, with the tape perfectly capturing her tight and rigid body that was held with teary eyes and a shaky voice during the scene following Walter Lee's heartbreaking mistake."

[Read more about this expertly planned and crafted production on the Archives & Special Collections Blog](https://pittarchives.tumblr.com/post/659426906110935040/another-level-of-consciousness-black-excellence)

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