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An Interview with Whitney J. LeBlanc

Whitney J. LeBlanc is a director, writer, producer, and teacher. He has taught a variety of theatre courses at Antioch College, Howard University, Lincoln University, Towson University, and the University of Texas. For ten years he was a teacher, and today, along with his professional work in television, he returns to the classroom occasionally as a visiting professor. Bringing inspiration and encouragement to students is one of the most satisfying experiences that he has known in his professional life. He takes special pride in the accomplishments of former students Howard Rollins (Ragtime), Dwight Schultz (The A-Team), and Stephen Hendrickson, Artistic Director of Wall Street.

LeBlanc has practical experience in all phases of theatre. He has acted, directed, designed, done props and the technical work on many stage productions. Although directing is his main focus, he also likes to design. In New York he designed three productions of the Negro Ensemble Company's Ceremonies in Dark Old Men. Included in the many productions in which he has worn two hats are The Glass Menagerie, A Raisin in the Sun, Zooman and the Sign, and Funnyhouse of a Negro for the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre in San Francisco. He received the "Best Director Award," given by Drama-Logue, for his production of Raisin in the Sun. Along with everything else he finds time to write. He is the author of two plays, The Killing of an Eagle and Dreams Deferred and the PBS teleplay It's a Small World. He also creates ideas for television and film. Treatments, stories, series, and films are the primary genres in which he writes.

In 1970, he joined the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting as a Director of Television. He was the only director of 105 episodes of the nationally aired series Our Street. As a producer, he also wrote for the series, and in 1972 Our Street received the Ohio State Award. Later, for a weekly public affairs program called Npac, he directed the acclaimed and controversial tv special Holidays... Hallow Days. Rehearsed in prison, the special was about prisoners, by prisoners. Not only did this PBS special get national airing, but it also received the American Film Festival Award and coverage by Time magazine.

Moving from PBS to network television, he joined the staff of Tandem Productions in Hollywood as the associate producer of Good Times. Later he worked as a freelance stage manager for CBS on The Dinah Shore Show, The Jim Nabors Show, and The Redd Foxx Variety Hour. In 1979 he joined the staff of the series Up and Coming at KQED-TV in San Francisco. As the Associate Producer/Production Manager and one of the directors, LeBlanc was involved in the production of 52 half-hour episodes. Presently, he works as a freelance director on daytime, syndicated, and prime-time television.

Philip C. Kolin is the Charles W. Moorman Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at the University of Southern Mississippi and Editor of Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present. He has written or edited 15 books, including Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism (Greenwood, 1993). Professor Kolin wishes to express his indebtedness to Whitney LeBlanc for his invaluable assistance in preparing the introduction to this interview.
shows. His work can be seen on Generations, The Robert Guillaume Show, Benson, The Young and the Restless, 227, Me and Mrs. C, and Marblehead Manor. He is a member of the Directors Guild of America and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

The following interview with Whitney LeBlanc was done in early October 1991, shortly after he directed a Black-cast production of The Glass Menagerie at the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre from May 15 through June 2, 1991.

Kolin: Would you please describe the types of directing you've done over the last several years? How does your work directing plays by Black playwrights compare to your directing The Glass Menagerie? I know that you have done one of Adrienne Kennedy's plays.

LeBlanc: During the last several years I have directed both for television and theatre. But because the focus of this interview is theatre, I will talk only about my directing experiences in that sphere. The productions have included To Find a Man, by Jeff Stetson; Baby Cakes, by Ted Shine; and at the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, A Raisin in the Sun, and Funnyhouse of a Negro, by Adrienne Kennedy, who was Visiting Professor at the University of California-Berkeley at the time.

Ms. Kennedy is a very quiet person, not given to expressing her opinions unless asked, but I do remember a discussion that we had about hair. It seems as if her own hair gave her such a constant problem that she passed the problem on to the character Sarah in Funnyhouse. Knowing this, I had a key to the symbol for the character. The production was the closest that I have ever come to designing and directing a full surrealistic production. I enjoyed it immensely.

In comparing my work on these plays to directing Glass Menagerie, I must say there was little if any difference. Except in a couple of instances where the writer was available, I did the same research and preproduction planning. Only, in the case of Glass Menagerie, I did have to update some references that would have been ridiculous if they were kept as written by the author—i.e., servant in place of colored boy, darky, or Nigger; vice-president of a college in place of Vice-President of Delta Planter's Bank; New York in place of Wall Street; Daughters of Isis in place of Daughters of the American Revolution; a university president in place of White House; and Knuckle Head in place of Kraut Head. I am sure Tennessee Williams himself would have found it ridiculous to have Amanda with a Black face as a member of the DAR. The other directing problems—motivation, interpretation, style, concept, blocking—are all basically the same no matter who the playwright is. One has to take the play and the situation and the characters, and bring them to life.

There was a question from one of the cast about a Southern accent. Basically, I believe that Southern whites and Southern Blacks of similar socioeconomic backgrounds sound alike. So I urged the actors to sound as if they lived in the South. The a's, o's, and -ing endings were the sounds most concentrated on.

Kolin: One reviewer pointed to the similarity between A Raisin in the Sun and Glass Menagerie. Do you think such a comparison is justified?

LeBlanc: Yes, Gerald Nachman of the San Francisco Chronicle referred to Lorraine's play. And what he said was not so much a comparison to Raisin as it was an identification of the abilities of the two playwrights. He says, "The fact is, this famous drama fraught with the tensions of a lower-
middle-class family aspiring to something better while living on dreams and illusions and old hurts in a St. Louis tenement, might almost have been written by Lorraine Hansberry herself.” This observation could easily be made.

If, by asking the question, you have in mind comments perhaps made by reviewers of other productions of this play, it does not surprise me. It is always amusing how white reviewers will use some well-known entity and make comparisons. It usu-
ally points out, at least as far as I am concerned, their narrowness and to some extent racist attitude. To feel that everything we do has to be equated to everything else is like saying “all Black people look alike,” like comparing a performance of Eddie Murphy to one by Denzel Washington.

A couple of years ago I shaved my head. Immediately, many of my white associates began making a visual identification between me and Louis Gossett. Believe me, we are in no way, shape, or form alike. The only commonality is our skin color. And this is all the reviewers who make these generalizations are doing—relating to color.

The two plays are alike in that they are “plays” and great works of art. The Glass Menagerie is an impressionistic piece seen through the eyes and memory of Tom. The through-line is Amanda’s efforts to get Laura married before her mother dies. Raisin is a realistic piece taking place in an environment created by racism. The through-line is Mama Younger’s decision to use her insurance money to improve her family’s standard of living. The dialogue in Glass Menagerie is full of poetic imagery: “fell in love with long distance,” “the world is lit by lighting.” On the other hand, the dialogue in Raisin is realistic: “How come you talk so much about money?” “I ain’t never stopped trusting you. Like I ain’t never stopped loving you.” The two plays have different forms, dialogue, and through-lines. Again, the only possible “alikeness” that one could claim would have to be based on color—Black casts.

Kolin: In your “Director’s Notes” for the Hansberry Menagerie you brilliantly point out that theatre should not presume the experience of a single group or race is the only experience a play should reflect. Yet you also note that “every ethnic group has a different focus and different perception.” In what specific ways does an all-Black cast with their racial heritage and accomplishments deepen an audience’s understanding and appreciation of Glass Menagerie? Or, to put this another way, Stanley Williams, Artistic Director of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, referred to the Hansberry’s doing Glass Menagerie as “taking ownership of the play.” What does this involve—this “taking ownership”?

LeBlanc: Let me begin with the last part of your question. I have no idea what Stanley Williams is saying or trying to say. I would not presume to give an interpretation to this phrase taking ownership; it is a phrase that Stanley thought up and uses frequently. This production of Glass Menagerie is the first play that the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre has ever done by a writer other than an African American. So it would be my guess that he uses it metaphorically.

When I discussed finding the spine of commonality in a play, I was referring to the fact that, as Black professionals in theatre, we have always had experiences with the plays written by many different writers. So, the African-American theatre professional is usually able to find the human condition relationship in plays that were not initially written from an ethnic perspective.

I must admit that plays written by African-American writers usually concern themselves with some aspect of racism, and as such they are more attractive to production consideration...
by Blacks than by whites. Usually, whites are not too interested in exploring this aspect of our historical condition, so African-American plays are not routinely included as a part of their training curriculum. But Blacks have always studied the great plays written by both white and Black writers. And by so doing we have become accustomed to finding the commonality of the human spirit in all plays. So it is not unusual for us to see a relationship in a play like _Glass Menagerie_ that identifies with a situation that we know Black people have experienced.

I knew that there were Black people in the 1940s who had cotillions, and servants and fathers with money from large farms or “plantations.” Herein lies one of the problems that some may have with seeing Blacks in _The Glass Menagerie_—the connotation of _plantation_. A plantation consisted of many acres that were planted with a single crop that was usually cultivated by slaves. So the term _plantation_ carries the connotation of slavery. However, we know that there were Blacks who owned many acres of land that were planted with a single crop. And some of these Black plantation owners had slaves and some did not. My grandfather in Louisiana had many acres planted with cotton cultivated by sharecroppers. And he was Black. I knew there were Black women who married outside their social group only to find that their husbands did not live up to expectations and abandoned the family. And I knew there were women who wanted their children to aspire to their earlier values and material comforts. So there was nothing in _Glass Menagerie_ that was foreign to what I knew and remembered from my “Black experience.”

Consequently, I knew that with very minor substitutions this play would work. The problem comes when there are people in the audience who do not know about, or who want to deny, Black history and the history of this country. They are the ones whom we hear saying, “There is an overbearing attention to the African-American involvement.”

The second part of your question focuses on a reference in my notes to cultural diversity in casting and is not in any way connected to Stanley Williams’s idea of “taking ownership.” For several years, liberal theatres advanced the concept of “open casting.” However, this admirable extension of color-blind liberalism denies the truth of our social situation. And it doesn’t make much artistic sense. A director has to consider the intent of the writer, the relationship of the characters, and the truth of the situation in which they function; i.e., to cast blindly in a family situation creates many questions in the minds of the audience, and may lead to misinterpreting the intent of the writer.

However, stretching the point of open casting to cultural diversity and mixing the characters creatively where color is not a primary issue can and does present new perspectives. Casting _Glass Menagerie_ with Blacks, for example, can evoke the absent father, traditionally a problem in the Black family. The lack of self-esteem because of a physical infirmity can easily take on the implied metaphor of skin color being the cause rather than the limp. The imposition of a prior generation’s values on present-generation children is a situation that causes a special rebellion among young Blacks. All these situations will bring new perspectives and different levels of truth based on what an audience sees in the faces of the actors. So this comment in my notes was related to the concept of cultural diversity in casting rather than “taking ownership.”

Kolin: There is no doubt, as William Glacklin, reviewer for the _Sacramento Bee_, points out, that a Black actress like Phyllis Applegate helps us to see
new meaning in the role of Amanda. How, in your opinion, did Applegate "open up" the role while at the same time making it a "universal" one? How was her interpretation fresh, inventive, and new—an anti-Laurette Taylor Amanda?

LeBlanc: Phyllis was indeed everything that Glackin said she was. I gave her the image of a butterfly, and she based her character and characterizations on that. She was beautiful, flitting and fluttering from one subject to another and driving her children, especially Tom, to distraction. I never for one second tried to get a Black interpretation. First, I don’t know what that is, or even how to begin to think about a Black or a white interpretation. I was simply bringing Williams’s work to life. If Phyllis had been white, my approach would have been the same.

I worked the entire show—design, lights, actors—from the same metaphor:

The truth of life is
as fragile as glass,
as illusive as shadow and
as lasting as light.

Amanda’s butterfly was within that metaphor. There were certain words and expressions that would not ring true coming out of the mouths of Black actors. I have talked about these substitutions earlier. But that was the extent of my concern about interpretation with the Black cast.

I cannot speak to the idea of Phyllis’s interpretation being unlike Laurette Taylor’s. I did not see, nor have I studied, Miss Taylor’s Amanda. I do know that Taylor’s interpretation in 1945 pleased Williams very much. She was also very close to the image of Edwina, Williams’s mother, even though Edwina refused to recognize this, at least according to Williams’s brother Dakin. All interpretations of roles in theatre are different, even though they seek to reveal the same truth. This is what makes theatre so exciting.

Kolin: Some critics said that your production was a "Black version" of Glass Menagerie. But it was more than that. Version is a poor word. How would you characterize your production?

LeBlanc: Yes, I know. The critics need labels. One said that I sanitized Glass Menagerie. It was not enough to have a cast of African-American actors performing one of the great plays of our time; it needed a label. Well, this is a by-product of living in a racist society. I have never gotten used to this "labeling," although I know it is inevitable.

It was not a Black version. In 1936 Orson Welles did a Negro version of Macbeth at the Lafayette Theatre in New York. The entire Shakespearean script was reinterpreted and placed on a mythical island in the Caribbean. (I know because this production was the subject of my thesis, "A Project in Scenic Design for Shakespeare’s Macbeth.") In the 1960s, Owen Dodson did a Black version of Medea, titled Medea in Africa, at Howard University. Both of these productions could accurately be called "Black versions" in that they were specifically and deliberately rewritten and retranslated from the original. None of this transformation can, or does, apply to my production of The Glass Menagerie. It was simply another production of Glass Menagerie, performed by a Black cast—nothing more, nothing less.

I began talking to the producers and thinking about this production nine months before it was scheduled to open. The deal was I would bring Mary Alice, a very talented actress who played the female lead in August Wilson’s Fences on Broadway, with me as Amanda. I have for a long time wanted to direct her in something. I knew that she could be difficult. But
she is brilliant, and I have a reputation for being difficult also, so I was willing to find out whether we would kill each other and, if so, at what point. When I talked to Mary Alice about the role, which she wanted badly to do, she asked what I planned to do about the DAR. She said, “You can’t have a Black Amanda talking about going to a DAR meeting and make her believable.” I agreed with her and told her that I planned to find a substitution, along with substitutions for some other references that I also felt were ridiculous.

Initially, I think, Stanley Williams expected that I would do the production as written. At the time I presented these planned substitutions to Stanley, I was intending to use Eastern Star in place of DAR. For many reasons that I won’t go into, this didn’t do it for me. But it was the best of the few organizations in existence at that time from which I could choose. Stanley didn’t like it either and suggested that, if I thought about it, he was sure that I could come up with something better.

I went to Dr. Thomas D. Pawley, my mentor, friend, and former teacher at Lincoln University, who knew Tennessee Williams personally, when they were both students at the University of Iowa. Tom sent me material on the Daughters of Isis. It was perfect: Daughters of Isis in place of Daughters of the American Revolution. Just as the DAR had roots in America, the DOI had roots in a native land, Africa. The DOI was very exclusive, and at the time of its brief existence, only the select middle and upper classes of African Americans could join. The DOI symbolized the integrity of Queen Isis from Egyptian mythology. The organization encouraged the common bond of friendship, awarded scholarships, and was the sister organization to the Nobles of Mystic Shrine, Inc. Tom Pawley had come through for me again. But when I passed all this information on to Stanley Williams, he told me he did not want me to use Daughters of Isis. I had to keep DAR. His reason was that there are presently Black women who are members of the DAR. (I never bought that as the real reason for his wanting to keep DAR. I felt it had more to do with some pseudo-idea which caused Stanley to fancy himself being a dramaturge. Ironically, he had no problem with any of the other substitutions.)

We were at a standoff. I said I would not use DAR because it was historically incorrect. We agreed to a compromise, “club meeting.” This was not satisfying to me or to the actors. We rehearsed DOI. Stanley heard DOI at a rehearsal, went into a rage, and threatened to close down the production. I did not feel this was worth the three times that DOI was mentioned, so I relented. The explanation about Daughters of Isis remained in my program notes because he forgot it, and it became too late to change it.

So, even among Black professionals of theatre, there is disagreement over how our images are best represented. I understand that in the production done at Arena Stage, in Washington, D.C., in 1989, with Ruby Dee, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority was used in place of DAR. (This figures because Ruby is herself a Delta.) I had thought of the sororities but did not feel that Amanda, being the kind of woman she was, and in her present situation, would be an active member of such a social organization. Then there was the National Council of Negro Women. This was certainly higher on my list of choices than a sorority. However, I am still convinced, and now more than ever, that Daughters of Isis is the perfect substitution. Incidentally, Mary Alice and Stanley could not come to terms, and she ended up doing a show in New York.
Other than the substitutions just mentioned, Stanley and I were together on the point of view of the production. It would be done as close as possible to the original. This was the reason for using the scrim. We also agreed that the original music would be used, although we both, after hearing it, found that it was horrible. I could not believe that anyone could have decided on such music for a Broadway production of this beautiful piece, so I selected music from the swing era of the late 1920s and early 1930s: Duke Ellington, Sydney Bechet, Art Tatum, and Fletcher Henderson, all emanating from the Paradise Dance Hall. Historically, this was the music of the time, and ironically it was all created and played by African-American musicians. Laura’s father left her a scratchy Skater’s Waltz that she played over and over. Laura and the Gentleman Caller danced to Ellington’s In My Solitude coming from the dance hall. It was all quite beautiful and poetic. The single, pure, haunting sound of Wiesler’s flute underscored Tom’s narration. (Manuela Wiesler was living in Iceland at the time her album To Manuela was made). So the entire piece moved like flowing silk from one time period to the next, lasting only as long as light would allow.

There was one innovation that I brought to the production that set the time and ambience. When the house was opened, the audience entered to hear a radio program in progress. The programming of 1936 consisted of the music, the commercials, and the news of that period, including Jesse Owens’s triumph in Berlin. Two minutes before curtain, the radio was turned off, and there was silence. It worked; the time and period were established.

Let me just say one more thing regarding a “Black version.” I recently submitted a proposal for a tv series, and the network official reading the proposal turned it down because he “didn’t need another Black show.” I pointed out that at no place in the proposal was Black or African-American mentioned, nor was there any reference made to ethnicity. It was a generic sitcom that anyone could do. But because I am Black, it had to be Black. As far as the network was concerned, I could not conceive a sitcom that was not Black. That is racist thinking. And that is what we have too much of. No matter what we do, it has to be a “Black version.” It makes one wonder about the strength-of-the-blood concept held for many years in the South: “One drop of Black blood makes you Black.” Strong stuff, isn’t it?

Kolin: Yes. Why did you do this play and not, say, Summer and Smoke or A Streetcar Named Desire or a play by Arthur Miller—Death of a Salesman?

LeBlanc: It was not my call. The producers at the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre had planned well in advance to put The Glass Menagerie in the schedule as part of their expanding program of play selection. When they asked if I would like to do it, I agreed. I had done Streetcar at Howard University many years ago [1965] with non-traditional (open) casting, and it worked fine for me. That was at the college level, and if I had to do it in a professional setting like LHT, I probably would have cast it with cultural diversity in mind.

Kolin: In one bad review (and what I would say was an unperceptive review), Judith Green, of the [San Jose] Mercury News, said that “the
Wingfield children could be anyone's children but Amanda's race is germane to her social background. How would you rebut this?

**LeBlanc:** I would rather not have to. She is the person to whom I referred in my notes when I said, "So it would not be surprising to know that there may be some members of this audience who will ask, "Why are they doing *The Glass Menagerie'?" The fact of this question, alone, identifies the person who is biased."

It is difficult to rebut prejudice. There is nothing in Amanda's social background that has not been experienced by persons of other ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, Green assumes that no one anywhere, at any time, ever had any common human experiences which parallel those of a white Southern aristocrat. This same thinking would limit Hamlet to Danes and Stanley to Poles.

Theatre is pretend. We create the illusion of the characters based on the truth of the play. If this can be done by a Laurette Taylor, a Helen Hayes, or a Phyllis Applegate, then so be it. But please save us from narrow-minded, prejudiced reviewers.

**Kolin:** Can you share any insights/observations the actors/actresses had about an all-Black cast doing *The Glass Menagerie'? Any comments shared with you from Phyllis Applegate (Amanda) or Michael Boatman (Tom) would shed light on your production.

**LeBlanc:** For my actors, as for me, it was just another play. We (Blacks) have been accustomed to approaching our jobs with the same professional attitudes as other professional theatre producers.
workers. You analyze the piece and go from there. I will, however, first share some observations that I made. During auditions one actress reading for the role of Amanda made it a comedy. She was heard to remark later that Glass Menagerie was a comedy, but we thought we were doing a drama. At the time, I was amused by her reading, but it did not cross my mind to consider seriously her interpretation. After the show opened in San Francisco, I went home to Los Angeles. Four weeks later, I returned to see the show right before it closed. By this time Phyllis Applegate had discovered the humor in some lines, and she was playing the comedy. I, of course, was horrified, but it was too late to say anything; the show was scheduled to close the next night. But it was a revelation to me that there was so much humor in this piece. Or maybe it was how the audience responded to it. I did not do a study of the different audience reactions. That might be an interesting thing to do.

I was fortunate and blessed to have good actors. As I pointed out, early in rehearsal I give Phyllis the image of a butterfly for Amanda. Later she said, "The butterfly seeks always the rarest and the sweetest blossoms. You have planted the Amanda seed. I promise some enchanted evening she shall unfold and burst forth in all her glory!" And indeed she did.

The role of Laura was the most difficult and the hardest to cast and direct. Laura is both delicate and strong at the same time. It was difficult for me to find a true image for the actress to play. Laura is both a "shy deer" and "a moth" drawn to the shimmering light of her menagerie. And it was difficult for me to settle on one image that would have given the actress the grasp of truth that she needed. I cast Thea Perkins as Laura because, at the time, I thought she had the key. During auditions, she listened to and reflected everything that was going on around her, but in rehearsals the key was lost and never found again. Laura became silly, as if mentally afflicted. I was never fully pleased with the interpretation. I came out of this experience realizing that Laura is a challenging and difficult role for any actress.

Michael Boatman, who played Tom, was on an extended hiatus from the tv series China Beach. His playing Tom was superbly constant on two levels: in the present and in the past. He intuitively understood the who and why of Tom. He played the present time with compassionate insight and the past memory with profound wisdom. He said in a note to me when we opened, "I know that this has been a hard one for you! But I admire the calm and level-headed manner with which you guided the production! I am proud to have had the honor to work with you, and hope to do it again. Thanks for helping me grow!"

When I saw Leith Burke take the stage as Jim during the auditions with a head full of dreadlocks, I thought, "In no way does he look like the Gentleman Caller." But his energy, honesty, and truth made me look past his hair and caused me to ask, "If you are cast, will you cut your dreads?" Without hesitation he said, "Yes!" Leith performed with a fire and an energy that was a joy to watch. And when he left to pick up his fiancée, he dashed all of Laura's expectations with firm gentleness, leaving her with hope that her new-found knowledge of self would make the coming days brighter. He left me with the joy that a director feels when he has made the right choice.

Kolin: Did members of the community/audience give you any special feedback? For example, did any Black politicians, civic leaders, etc. see the production and comment on it?
LeBlanc: There is one audience comment that I would like to share. This response, however, needs some backstory. I had planned to use a photograph of a male relative from one of the cast members as the picture of the father. I wanted to do this because it would no doubt be close to resembling the family that I had on stage. Thea Perkins (Laura) brought me an 8 × 10” photograph of an uncle that was fine. He was light-skinned, with sharp features, and there was a faint resemblance to Thea. The producer had arranged to use props from a recent university production of Glass Menagerie. When the props came there was a large 24 × 36” picture of the father, complete with WWI uniform, that had been used in that production. I ordered that the 8 × 10” photograph be blown up to match the face of the larger picture and be superimposed over it. As we got close to opening, I found out that the producer had canceled my blowup order with the photographer because it cost too much ($50.00). Not wishing to “deal” with the producer on such a small matter compared to the other major issues that were a daily chore, I left the large picture hanging.

We opened and played the entire production with the picture of an obviously white father who had abandoned the family. For me it was prophetic. It was our history. Black people in this country have been miscegenated to look like we look. We have had white fathers. We have been abandoned by them. It was not outside possibility that in the 1920s a white man could have been married to a Black woman. And so the picture provided a subtle comment to go with the all-Black cast. The more I looked at the picture, the more I liked the idea. So the picture stayed. I am sure most of the Black audience knew and understood. And now the point, after all that backstory. One reviewer, Gerald Nachman, wrote, “...most jar- ring, the runaway father in a large family photo hanging in the living room is unaccountably white.” He went on to call this one of the production’s “three oddities” and “minor peculiarities.”

The other comment about this picture came from a member of the audience. During intermission I was introduced by a friend to a couple attending the play. The husband was Black; the wife was unmistakably white. The husband had the audacity, or should I say stupidity, to ask why I had a picture of a white man as the father. I answered, “The man in the picture is not white; he is a light-skinned Black (I lied!) like your wife. You should know as well as I, there are many Black people who look like white.” With that I excused myself and moved on to speak with others. I left him with something to think about. I share this to say that white people are not the only ones whose knowledge of our history falters when it comes to understanding how we became who we are.

I do not hesitate one second to believe that if Williams had seen my production he would have applauded—even and especially the picture on the wall. From the research I did and from what Tom Pawley told me about Williams, he would have understood. He knew the commonalties that exist between us. He knew and understood that Blacks and whites in this country are two parts of one people.