Jitney takes place just after the Vietnam War — a period when African Americans were redefining their power in art, culture, and politics.

- As the country reflects on the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement, clashes between the Ku Klux Klan and Black Power Movement continue across the country.
- Black veterans return from Vietnam and struggle to claim the benefits promised to them by the GI Bill. The GI Bill was created to ensure veterans had access to education and low-income housing. However, Black servicemen, like Youngblood, face disproportionate obstacles in claiming these benefits.
- Oprah Winfrey hits TV screens across Baltimore city as a co-anchor on the six o’clock news — her first job on television.
- Roots, the landmark miniseries recounting the journey of enslaved Africans to the United States and their experiences through the Civil War, is first broadcast by ABC on January 23. Featuring an all-star cast of African-American actors, the series won nine of its 37 Emmy nominations including Best Limited Series.
- President Carter appoints Patricia Roberts Harris, the first African-American woman to serve as a Cabinet Secretary. Civil Rights leader Andrew Young is the first African American to be a U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.
- The city will demolish the station in two weeks and the service will be closed.
- Becker has yet to tell his team how they will be closed.
- However, Becker has larger issues to face. He has yet to tell his team that the city will demobilize the station in two weeks and the service will be closed.
- As Becker considers what to do, his son Booster is released from a 20-year prison sentence, and arrives at the station for their first reunion in two weeks and the service will be closed.

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show. Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help them perform their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for tests, calls, or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don’t repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

In 1977 in Black America, Americans were redefining their power in art, culture, and politics. Root's hit TV screens across Baltimore city as a co-anchor on the six o'clock news — her first job on television. The landmark miniseries recounting the journey of enslaved Africans to the United States and their experiences through the Civil War, is first broadcast by ABC on January 23. Featuring an all-star cast of African-American actors, the series won nine of its 37 Emmy nominations including Best Limited Series. President Carter appoints Patricia Roberts Harris, the first African-American woman to serve as a Cabinet Secretary. Civil Rights leader Andrew Young is the first African American to be a U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.
August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel to an African-American mother and a German immigrant father in 1945. He was the fourth of six children, and grew up in a small apartment behind a grocery store in the Hill District of Pittsburgh.

Wilson dropped out of school at age 15. Instead, he spent his days reading at the Carnegie Library. In 1962, he enlisted in the U.S. Army for three years, but left after one. He worked odd jobs and bought his first typewriter for $20.

Despite his youth, Wilson had a sense of responsibility. At 20, Wilson took his mother's last name because his father had abandoned the family many years earlier. He chose "August" as his new first name because he thought it sounded like the playwright he wanted to become.

He began to write poetry and joined a group of artists who created the Centre Avenue Poets Theatre Workshop. With these same collaborators, Wilson co-founded the Black Horizons Theater with "the idea of using the theater to politicize the community or…to raise the consciousness of the people."

In 1979, Wilson wrote Jitney, which he adapted from "August Wilson’s Hill District," The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. In the preface to the Broadway edition of Jitney, the show’s director, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, writes about his first encounter with August Wilson’s work. He says that he started writing Jitney’s Black Bottom and it changed his life.

"The lights came up and when the actors began to speak, every fiber in my body began to tingle with the sense memory that I was ‘home.’ I knew these voices, these stories, these people, intimately. I knew how they smelled, the texture of their clothes and hair, the songs they sang on Sunday. I had known them my entire life. As I watched these actors wax poetic I felt moisture on my cheek and realized, ‘Damn, I’m crying.’"

Ruben Santiago-Hudson

"The Sound of Your Street"

August Wilson saw the African-American experience as sacred, unique and under threat within the United States. He aspired to protect and honor the stories of his community onstage — starting with the language spoken by his characters.

"Being an artist, I guess, and being attentive to language, you discover certain things. But it took me a long while before I could value the way blacks spoke. In my earlier attempts to write plays, I felt that in order to make art out of this, I had to change the language, and so I was trying to force words into the characters’ mouths that simply did not fit because I did not value the way they spoke. But once I stopped and began to listen in my head to the speech rhythms, I uncovered inferences in black dialogue — a lot of things are done by implication. When you give the language, you are giving the thought patterns as well. There is an impeccable logic in the use of metaphor that I noticed as I was standing around at Pat’s Place [studying my elders]. So I simply was trying to recreate that sense of style or that sense of interior logic within the characters.”

— AUGUST WILSON
August Wilson is best known for writing The American Century Cycle. These 10 plays, one for each decade of the 20th century, follow the stories of fictional characters in his real-life neighborhood – Pittsburgh's Hill District. There is only one play, _Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom_, that takes place outside of this small section of city. Through the lives of everyday Black people, the rhythm of poetic language and even elements of magic, these plays layer generations of Black experience, one upon another. Families of characters grapple with freedom, honor, redemption, love and loss across time. Wilson showcased the stories of Black Americans for the world to see, and his plays are now essential texts in the canon of the American Theater. By the end of this season, Arena Stage will have produced nine of Wilson’s 10 works.

**THE PLAYS (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER BY SETTING)**

**1904**

**GEM OF THE OCEAN**

Photo of Lynnie Godfrey and Jimonn Cole by Scott Suchman.

**1911**

**JOE TURNER’S COME AND GONE**

Photo of Mel Winkler and L. Scott Caldwell by Joan Marcus.

**1927**

**MA RAINEY’S BLACK BOTTOM**

Photo of Tina Fabrique by Scott Suchman.

**1936**

**THE PIANO LESSON**

Photo of Jeorge Watson by Scott Suchman.

**1948**

**SEVEN GUITARS**

Photo of Viola Davis and Keith David by Joan Marcus.

**1957 AND 1963**

**FENCES**

Photo of Yaphet Kotto and Wally Taylor by Joan Marcus.

**1969**

**TWO TRAINS RUNNING**

Photo of Carlton Byrd by Nate Watters for Seattle Repertory Theatre.

**1977**

**JITNEY**

Photo of John Douglas Thompson and Michael Potts by Joan Marcus.

**1985**

**KING HEDLEY II**

Photo of Bowman Wright by C. Stanley Photography.

**1997**

**RADIO GOLF**

Photo of Harry Lennix and James A. Williams by Sara Krulwich.
August Wilson grew up in the Hill District, the setting for all but one of the 10 plays in his American Century Cycle. In the early 1800s, the Hill District was a hub for immigrant families who came to work in the steel mills during the Industrial Revolution. After slavery ended, many African Americans moved to the Hill District. By the early 1900s, the Hill had become a diverse and vibrant community, rich in culture. Then its infrastructure began to crumble. Many of the inhabitants of the Hill moved on to other parts of the city, leaving a significant African-American majority. In the mid-1900s the Hill District became a lively network of African-American-owned shops, restaurants, barbershops and nightclubs.

DEMOlITION AND GENTRIFICATION

In 1955, the federal government approved a redevelopment plan which cleared 95 acres of homes and businesses on the Hill and displaced more than 8,000 residents. Meanwhile, the federal government built federally funded public housing. The Hill District had more public housing than any other neighborhood in Pittsburgh.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Pittsburgh steel industry collapsed, causing rampant unemployment. This was bad news for the Hill District. The crime rates rose and buildings deteriorated from lack of upkeep. Random demolition of these buildings left vacant lots.

In *Jitney*, Doub says, “They been planning to tear these shacks down before you was born.” He knows that the city will soon demolish Becker’s jitney station. In the play, the city envisions the transformation of the Hill District as an opportunity for revitalization and economic growth. However, the drivers know that a demolished city block rebuilt with luxury buildings will lead to businesses without buildings and people without homes.

This process of renovating and rebranding a neighborhood is often called “gentrification” and can be seen in cities throughout history. These renewal initiatives can uproot and disregard low-income residents. Washington, D.C., is no exception to gentrification. In April 2019, a study by the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity found that low-income D.C. residents are being pushed out of neighborhoods at some of the highest rates in the country. Where have you noticed a history of gentrification within D.C.? Where do you see signs of its future? What are the pros and cons of this development? What happens to the identity of a neighborhood?