



**AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MARTHA'S VINEYARD CAMP MEETING ASSOCIATION  
PRESENTS  
ROGER GUENVEUR SMITH'S  
*FREDERICK DOUGLASS NOW*  
ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 21**

**Live, one-night-only Performance takes place at the Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs, where  
Frederick Douglass spoke 145 years ago**

**Smith also joins August Wilson African American Cultural Center as  
Guest Theater Curator for 2022-23 season**

**Pittsburgh, PA – June 21, 2021 –** The **August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC)** announces today live, in-person performances and an ongoing artistic partnership with Obie Award-winning playwright, actor, and educator, **Roger Guenveur Smith**. Kicking off with a performance of Smith's acclaimed solo show, *Frederick Douglass Now*, presented in partnership with the Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association on **Saturday, August 21 at 7:00pm ET**, the one-night-only event takes place at Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs, a National Historic Landmark on Martha's Vineyard. Smith's work, inspired by the life and legacy of pioneering abolitionist and feminist, marks his long-awaited return to the stage and the first time he has performed the work on a site where Frederick Douglass himself spoke 145 years ago.

Furthering the ongoing artistic relationship between Smith and the Center, AWAACC announces that *Frederick Douglass Now* will be presented at the Center's hometown of Pittsburgh on November 11, 2021, with Smith joining AWAACC as the first-ever guest theater curator for the 2022-23 season. The partnership will bring thought-provoking works and artists to the Center, one of the largest non-profit cultural organizations in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience and the arts of the African diaspora.

Tickets for *Frederick Douglass Now* at the Tabernacle are available now at [www.aacc-awc.org](http://www.aacc-awc.org). Tickets for *Frederick Douglass Now* and details about the 2022-23 season will be announced a later date.

"Roger Guenveur Smith is a prolific writer and performer, and ever since his performance of *Juan and John* at the Center, we've had a strong desire to build an ongoing relationship with him. I am honored to partner with him as we create a direct line from the historic tabernacle on Martha's Vineyard to the August Wilson African American Cultural Center by sharing his work with both communities, and to further expand our programming next season," said **AWAACC President and CEO Janis Burley Wilson**. "Theater has the unique ability to force us to grapple with our past while reimagining our future, and I'm incredibly grateful to Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association for partnering with us to share Frederick Douglass' invaluable words and Roger's work bringing them to life."

Smith returns to the stage with *Frederick Douglass Now*, which he began the development of as an undergraduate at Occidental College and has since played to international acclaim. He returns to the American stage combining Douglass' classic texts with jazz-infused original narrative in a work which the *Los Angeles Times* describes as "a personal benchmark for this remarkable artist." In 1841, Douglass

delivered his first public address on Nantucket at a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He is documented to have spoken in 1876 in Oak Bluffs, at the site of the Tabernacle. The performance at the Tabernacle in August marks the first time Smith has performed at the historic site.

"It is a great honor to emerge from a tragically enforced hiatus with *Frederick Douglass Now*, in partnership with the August Wilson African American Cultural Center," said **Roger Guenveur Smith**. "And it is a particular blessing to play Douglass where he played himself--in 1876, at the Tabernacle, on Martha's Vineyard. The region is rich in Douglass history. New Bedford is where he and his wife Anna Murray Douglass settled after his escape from slavery disguised in a uniform which she fabricated. Nantucket is where he improvised the first of thousands of brilliant public addresses at a convention of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He continues to speak to us, as does August Wilson, forever emblazoned in the American imagination, demanding that the nation live up to its as yet unfulfilled revolutionary promise."

AWAACC is a leader in presenting programming that reflects the diversity of Pittsburgh and the nation. In addition to its upcoming work with Smith as guest curator of the 2022-23 season, the Center continues its support of artists, particularly Pittsburgh-based emerging artists of color with its first-ever artist-in-residency program, B.U.I.L.D., creating a platform for diverse artists and organizations that have historically received unequal access to funding and resources for the development of new work.

To learn more about the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, please visit <https://aacc-awc.org/>.

**ROGER GUENVEUR SMITH** is an actor, writer, and director who initiated his signature solo performance *Frederick Douglass Now* as a senior honors project in American Studies at Occidental College. At Yale University, he worked as a graduate assistant at the Frederick Douglass Papers. He has since continued to play Douglass to international acclaim, while constructing an unparalleled body of work for the stage and screen. Mr. Smith adapted his Obie Award-winning *A Huey P. Newton Story* into a Peabody Award-winning telefilm. His Bessie Award-winning *Rodney King* is currently streaming on Netflix, both of which were directed for the screen by Mr. Smith's longtime colleague Spike Lee. Their many collaborations also include *Do the Right Thing*, for which Mr. Smith created the stuttering hero Smiley. His history-infused work for the stage includes studies of Christopher Columbus, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Marley, iconoclast artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, Simon Rodia, and Charles White, baseball greats Juan Marichal and John Roseboro, and, most recently, Otto Frank, father of diarist Anne Frank. He has also devised theatrical travelogues of Iceland, Panama, New Orleans, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Miami. His screen credits include work inspired by Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, Malcolm X, Michael Manley, Nat Turner, Madame CJ Walker, and Booker T. Washington, as well as the series "Queen Sugar," "K Street," and "Oz." Among the many distinguished venues which *Frederick Douglass Now* has played are The Public, Penumbra, and Lorraine Hansberry Theatres, the Kennedy Center, the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, and Brooklyn's Prospect Park, with the Branford Marsalis Quartet in celebration of the 2018 Douglass Bicentennial.

#### **ABOUT AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER**

The August Wilson African American Cultural Center is a non-profit cultural organization located in Pittsburgh's cultural district that generates artistic, educational, and community initiatives that advance the legacy of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. One of the largest cultural centers in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience and the celebration of Black culture and the African diaspora, the non-profit organization welcomes more than 119,000 visitors locally and nationally. Through year-round programming across multiple genres, such as the annual Pittsburgh

International Jazz Festival, Black Bottom Film Festival, AWCommunity Days, TRUTHSayers speaker series, and rotating art exhibits in its galleries, the Center provides a platform for established and emerging artists of color whose work reflects the universal issues of identity that Wilson tackled and which still resonate today.

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