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The Emancipated Century: A Staged Reading Series

Robert Lublin  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, robert.lubin@umb.edu*

Clifford Odle  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, cliff.odle@umb.edu*

Barbara Lewis  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, barbara.lewis@umb.edu*

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The Emancipated Century: A Staged Reading Series
Robert Lublin and Clifford Odle, Performing Arts Department and Barbara Lewis, Trotter Institute for the Study of Black History and Culture

Summary
A coordinated series of dramatic staged readings of the plays of August Wilson in theatres throughout greater Boston. This project aims to pay tribute to the 150th anniversary of the Emancipated Proclamation with a full presentation of August Wilson’s monumental 10-play cycle on African American life in each decade of the twentieth century. The accompanying Re-Visioning Tomorrow Forums explored ongoing themes in urban communities.

Goals and Objectives
1. To join and contribute to a growing public discourse around citizenship and empathy, which are through-lines in August Wilson’s plays and were brought to the fore with the April 15 Boston marathon bombing and its aftermath.
2. To highlight an untapped reserve of talent in Boston, those actors and actresses adept at interpreting urban-based work.
3. To research and grow new theatre audiences, so necessary to theater’s continued growth in an age of shifting demographics and growing economic insecurity.
4. To mentor an upcoming generation of performers, playwrights, and technical theatre talent.
5. To nurture and bring more resources to the middle segment of Boston’s cultural pipeline, creating more opportunities and pathways for artistic and cultural success.
6. To model collaboration, led by the five partner theaters, each located in a distinct district, across greater Boston’s neighborhoods, thus combating a silo mentality that is often entrenched in Boston.

Results
- Barbara Lewis’s ongoing scholarly works (2010-current) led to The Emancipated Century project, and the staged reading series continue to inform her scholarship; Lewis will be a Religion and Theater panelist at Association for Theater in Higher Education’s Conference in July 2014, discussing her new essay on the theme of redemption and resurrection in Joe Turner’s Come and Gone.
- Staged 10 plays at 5 local theatres.
- Employed over 70 actors, 9 different directors, 10 academic specialists, and 10 stage managers.
- 15 UMass Boston students earned roles in the productions.
- More than 800 audience members from throughout greater Boston attended productions, and engaged in dialogue.

Conclusion/Next Steps
- Partnership Information:
  UMass Boston McCormack Theatre
  100 Morrissey Blvd. Boston, MA 02125
  The Strand Theatre
  543 Columbia Rd., Dorchester, MA 02125
  Hibernian Hall
  184 Dudley St., Boston, MA 02119
  Central Square Theater
  450 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139
  Boston Playwrights’ Theatre
  949 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215

- The Trotter Institute is leading next steps: April 14, Emancipated Century Reception: Celebrate the success of the August Wilson readings and Re-Visioning Tomorrow forums, reflect on the impact of the staged readings, and explore future enhancements.

  May 8-9, Cultural Equity Forum, Strand Theatre: Join the conversation to amplify and express the cultural and creative community voice in order to build a more culturally inclusive Boston.