DEATH OF A SALESMAN STUDY GUIDE

WENDELL
PIERCE

SHARON D
CLARKE

and ANDRÉ DE SHIELDS

Arthur Miller's

Death of a Salesman

Directed by
MIRANDA CROMWELL

Photos: Brinkhoff/Möegenburg

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THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

TIME/PLACE: 1949, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

WHERE: Willy Loman's house and backyard, tucked in amidst large, crowded apartment buildings on all sides. The play also takes place in various locations in New York and Boston as flashbacks and in Willy's present day.

HOW: The story is told from Willy's point of view, often in a dream-like style with real, imagined and remembered moments.

WHY: Willy, having recently been demoted, struggles with his failures and his pursuit of the American Dream.

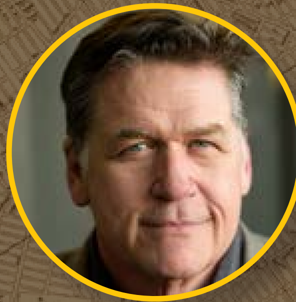
WHO:

WILLY LOMAN
63-year-old traveling salesman.

LINDA LOMAN
Willy's wife and mother to Biff and Happy. A homemaker.

BIFF LOMAN
Willy's older son. 34. Unsettled. He recently returned from the West, where he worked on a ranch in Texas.

HAPPY LOMAN
Willy's younger son. He is a junior businessman who craves his father's approval. He has his own apartment.



CHARLEY
Willy's neighbor. He loans Willy money without Linda's knowledge.

BERNARD
Charley's son. Very successful, but not respected by the Lomans.

HOWARD WAGNER
Willy's boss and son of the Wagner Company's founder.

THE WOMAN
Willy's mistress on the road.

BEN LOMAN
Willy's older brother. Seen only in flashbacks, he made a fortune in diamond mines. Willy idolizes him.

Background: **Map of Segregated Brooklyn, 1921. New York Public Library.**

MAP OF THE BOROUGH OF
BROOKLYN
Showing Location and Extent of Racial Colonies
THE OHMAN MAP CO.

WILLY LOMAN AND ARTHUR MILLER'S AMERICAN TIMELINE

AMERICA
THE LOMANS
MILLER

1861-1865
American Civil War

1862
The Homestead Act made all U.S. citizens, including women, Black people, freed enslaved people and immigrants eligible to apply to the federal government for a 160-acre plot of land.

1865
The United States abolished slavery with the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

April 4, 1865
The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, often called "the Freedman's Bank," opened for business to help newly freed African Americans, African American veterans, and their families.

June 19, 1865
Juneteenth. The Union Army proclaimed freedom for all enslaved people in Texas by General Order No. 3.

1866-1890s
The 10th Cavalry Regiment, an all Black-regiment, was formed and given the nickname the Buffalo Soldiers by Native American tribes.

1879
Emancipated enslaved people, known as Exodusters, left the South to settle Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado. It is estimated that in the two decades following the Civil War, one in four cowboys was Black.

1886
Willy Loman was born.

1889
South Dakota became a state. By the late 1880s, a thriving community of Black Americans was scattered along the Yankton riverfront.

1890s
Willy's family traveled across Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and all the Western states. Willy can remember being 3 or 4 years old in South Dakota.

1915
Biff was born. Willy took a job at Wagner Company.

1915
Arthur Miller was born in Harlem, New York.
He was raised in Brooklyn, New York.

1924-49
Brooklyn experienced an influx of Black Americans and the completion of the subway (IRT-1/2/3 and A trains) that connected Harlem to Brooklyn.

1924
Willy and Linda Loman purchased their Brooklyn home.

1929
The Wall Street stock market crashed, beginning the Great Depression (1929-39).

1933-34
Biff was a high school football star with prospects for major universities.

1934
Arthur Miller enrolled in the University of Michigan's journalism program.

1938
Miller earned his Bachelor of Arts degree and married his first wife.

1938-47
Miller was a struggling playwright, working at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and wrote radio plays to support his family.

1939
Jackie Robinson, Kenny Washington and Woody Strode all played together on the undefeated UCLA Bruins college football team.

1940
Biff left home and became a farmhand in the West.

1941
The United States entered World War II on Dec. 11.

1945
John H. Johnson launched Ebony magazine.

1946
Kenny Washington and Woody Strode were signed to the L.A. Rams, making history by reintegrating the NFL.

1947
Jackie Robinson became the first Black American in the major leagues when he was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers.

1947
Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* was produced and won two Tony Awards.

1948
President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to end segregation in the armed services.

1948
Miller finished *Death of a Salesman.*

1949
Paradise Park, Florida, opened. It was a popular vacation spot for Black Americans. It was the "colored only" counterpart to the Silver Springs attraction.

1949
Happy sent Willy to Florida for a break.

WILLY LOMAN AND ARTHUR MILLER'S AMERICAN TIMELINE

WILLY LOMAN'S WORLD

Willy Loman is proud of his family's hardworking heritage and his slice of the American Dream. He is an established businessman and part of the Black middle class. He finds his pride now in conflict with the encroaching development of his neighborhood. He feels a sense of loss of both his identity and his space. Willy occupies a unique time and sees his changing neighborhood as a reflection of his inability to change with it. Willy is being left behind.

Willy: "There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! And another one on the other side..."

BROOKLYN

"African Americans comprised more of Brooklyn's population than ever before. During the Second Great Migration, hundreds of thousands of Black southerners had migrated to New York City. Others set sail from the Caribbean. Some even made the move from Harlem to Central Brooklyn. They helped to transform Brooklyn's social fabric.

In 1940, 103,000 African Americans called Brooklyn home; the borough was 95 percent white. By the end of the 1940s, 210,000 African Americans lived in Brooklyn.

Between 1950 and 1957, Brooklyn welcomed another 100,000 Blacks, said farewell to 340,000 whites, and saw its Puerto Rican population rise from 40,000 to 160,000."

–from *Something in the Air - Jackie Robinson's Brooklyn (1947-1957)*.

Photo from London Production.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

FREEWRITE:

Think about a time when there was a change in your life that upset you or you couldn't seem to keep up with. What did you do? How did you get through it? Write a letter to Willy offering him advice on how to accept change, adapt and move forward.

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Bedford and Stuyvesant Heights were neighboring farmlands that quickly became developed in the 19th century.

The two names were eventually joined to create Bedford-Stuyvesant, or Bed-Stuy.

In 1838, Weeksville, an independent Black community, was founded. It flourished for several decades before being absorbed into the Bed-Stuy/Crown Heights neighborhood.

In the 1920s and '30s, the neighborhood received a large influx of Black Americans, aided by the completion of railroads that connected Harlem to Brooklyn.

By the 1920s, Bed-Stuy was a mixed immigrant neighborhood. However, there were some racial divisions as Arthur Miller's own biography suggests that certain enclaves were segregated or territorial.

Once Anglo-Saxon Protestant, Bed-Stuy saw more Italian and Irish Catholic immigrants in the 19th century, with Jewish families following in the '30s.

During the time of the Lomans, the neighborhood would have gone through a series of transformations, from ethnic communities living side by side to predominantly Black and low-income housing.

WILLY LOMAN'S WORLD
(CONTINUED)

On the African American fife and drum tradition: "This is a widespread musical tradition in many parts of the New World that represents a fusion of European and African instrumentation, style, and social function. In African American traditions, bands usually consist of a single fife of wood, metal, or bamboo, and a bass drum, snare drum, and sometimes a second snare drum or a kettle drum...As Black musicians participated in this music for militia units, they gradually introduced stylistic and repertoire elements from their own traditions. The popularity of minstrel music from the 1830s onward also brought Black musical elements into this genre, as fife and drum bands typically played the popular tunes of the day for both marching and dancing. After emancipation, the music became increasingly dance-oriented and fitted to the social needs of developing Black communities in the American South. A number of bands were affiliated with fraternal organizations, whereas others were made up of family members or neighbors."

–from *Encyclopedia of African American Music*.

Photo from London Production.

WILLY LOMAN'S SOUNDSCAPE
Sound and music is used throughout the production to evoke feelings and set a mood for a scene.

- **As you watch the play, when do you notice specific music and sound?**
- **How did the designer decide to use instrumentation to set a scene?**
- **When Willy's mind wanders, what is the background sound?**
- **When do you hear fife and drums? (Fife: a small shrill flute)**
- **What other references to instruments are discussed in the play?**

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

CREATE AN INVENTORY OF YOUR WORLD. HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- **Where are you from?**
- **Where is your family from?**
- **What are you proud of in your neighborhood?**
- **Who lives in your neighborhood?**
- **Who lives in your house or apartment?**
- **What is something unique to your neighborhood?**
- **What is your neighborhood's history as you know it?**
- **How has your neighborhood changed since you've lived there?**

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

What sounds make up your day, life, neighborhood? Is there a culturally significant aspect to what you hear? Other languages being spoken? Reggaeton? Jazz? Hip-Hop? Opera?

- **Take one day to be aware of the sounds around you and jot them down as you go about your day.**
- **Select the sounds that evoke the most feeling for you.**
- **Capture these sounds on a recording device (the Voice Memos app is free on iPhone and iPad; there are a number of free applications on Chromebook) and then use this to make a soundscape for your own life. Feel free to enhance your recordings by adding other sounds to them. You could also add a voiceover, poem, rap or spoken word.**
- **Share your design with your class.**
- **Group activity - try working together to create your unique class soundscape, i.e. is your teacher's voice the lead instrument?**
- **Create a schoolwide soundscape.**

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SALESMAN AND BUSINESS OF THE '20s-'40s

The modern traveling salesman role rose to prominence in the late 19th century and early 20th century with the rise of large manufacturers. Companies like the Fuller Brush Company employed Black salesmen to sell to Black neighborhoods as early as 1922. However, Fuller's was a local effort in Oklahoma and the employment of Black representatives did not occur nationally until the 1930s. Loman's Wagner Company would use salesmen to travel specified routes to peddle goods and establish relationships with vendors. They often had monthly or weekly quotas to meet, and sometimes only earned money on commissions. The terrain was lonely and dangerous, especially for Black men.

Photo from London Production.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

Write a sales pitch for a product you like or use the most. What makes it unique, what niche does it fill, and why is it a must-have? Find a partner and read your sales pitch to them. Your partner should decide whether or not they would buy the product based on the pitch. Switch roles.

Guidelines for a sales pitch:

- **Introduce yourself. Present the product and company you are representing.**
- **Keep your pitch short and clear.**
- **Explain how your product addresses a need.**
- **Describe how your product will make someone's life better.**
- **Optional: Include a personal anecdote about your relationship with the product.**

ARTHUR MILLER: PLAYWRIGHT & ACTIVIST

"THE MISSION OF THE THEATER, AFTER ALL, IS TO CHANGE, TO RAISE THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PEOPLE TO HUMAN POSSIBILITIES." - ARTHUR MILLER (1915-2005)

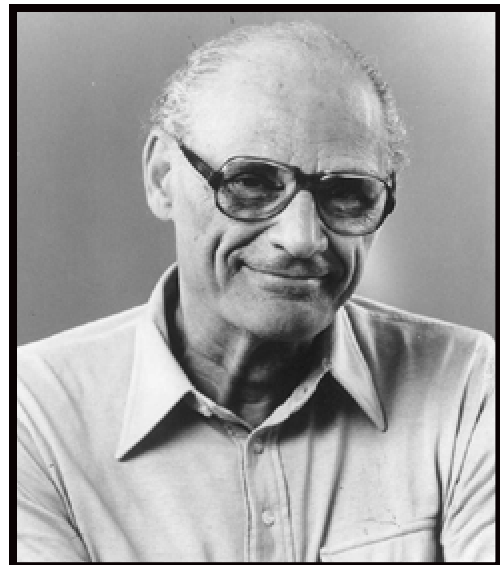
Arthur Miller is best known as one of America's most critically acclaimed playwrights who penned more than 30 plays. He won multiple awards, including several Tony Awards® and a Pulitzer for *Death of a Salesman*. Miller was also a lauded essayist, screenwriter and activist.

Born into a Polish-Jewish household in 1915, Miller was the second of three children. His family was affluent until the Wall Street Stock Market Crash of 1929, which forced them to leave Manhattan and move to a smaller home in Brooklyn. Miller was educated in New York City public schools, graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School, and paid his own way through the University of Michigan. Although he majored in journalism, Miller began writing plays in college and continued after graduating. He struggled at first, but had his first critical success with *All My Sons* on Broadway in 1947, followed in quick succession by *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridg*e (1955).

In his plays, Miller explored themes and ideas that were important to him, such as the "hardworking common man" seen in *Death of a Salesman* and *A View from the Bridg*e. Perhaps the most direct example was *The Crucible*, a response to Senator Joseph McCarthy's hunt for communists and "homosexuals" in the entertainment world. In fact, Arthur Miller was subpoenaed by the House Committee on Un-American Activities to testify and identify communists in the writing community. Refusing to give any names, he was convicted of contempt of Congress. The following year, the United States Court of Appeals overturned the conviction.

Continuing his commitment to social justice, Miller, in an interview with WNYC Radio in 1963, praised the March on Washington, an important protest in the Civil Rights Movement. He also stated his policy for refusing performances for segregated audiences and urged for the same desegregation policies to be put in place in the film industry. Late in the 1960s, Miller was an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War. He went to the 1968 Democratic National Convention as a delegate in support of the anti-war protests. In 2008, *The London Time*s reported that Miller left a box of unpublished writing to scholar and novelist Christopher Bigsby. In these early novels and short stories, Miller bitterly critiqued the injustices of racism in America.

Hear more from Miller in his own words in this archived WNYC interview. https://www.wnyc.org/story/arthur-miller-phone-interview-reaction-to-the-march-on-washington/



Arthur Miller: Picture courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

QUESTION: Is there something you feel so passionately about, you would be willing to be convicted of contempt of Congress?

ACTION: Create a first-person monologue of you or a character of your own creation delivering your remarks to Congress.

TAKE IT FURTHER: Set up a Congressional panel in the classroom and present monologues and a court hearing.

APPLY TO THE PLAY: What issues do you feel are important to Willy Loman? Biff Loman? Linda Loman? Can you imagine a monologue from their perspectives?

DEATH OF A SALESMAN: ON THE ROAD AND AT HOME WITH WILLY LOMAN BY ARMINDA THOMAS

Our Willy Loman's career would have been made possible by the first wave of the Great Migration (1910-1940), particularly the period between the First World War and the onset of the Great Depression. As millions of African Americans left Southern farms for Northern cities and higher wages, their purchasing power increased in a way that began to attract the attention of businesses and advertisers. As H.R. Haring would note in the trade journal *Advertising and Selling*, "Now they have the money to spend, they are potentially a market such as they never were before." William Ziff Sr.'s booklet, *The Negro Market* (1932), went even further, encouraging white businesses to direct their advertising dollars into Black newspapers and magazines with the admonition that "Blacks were willing and able to buy a variety of products, but they reserved their loyalty for companies that appealed for their patronage." While it would take several years for many companies to heed Ziff's advice on a national level, some did take a more direct approach to soliciting Black patronage.

The Fuller Brush Company, for instance, began employing Black salesmen as early as 1922 to hawk their wares in Black neighborhoods. Starting at Wagner just as the Great Migration was getting underway, Willy would have been part of the earliest efforts to engage this new, untapped market. Alas, his territory would have been especially volatile. New England states experienced the smallest growth in African American population, and many who traveled up for military jobs at naval bases in Hartford, Portsmouth, Newport, Portland, and Boston were the first fired in peacetime, and unable to find better than the most menial jobs after. While some Black businesses managed to take hold and even thrive – particularly in Boston, home to a small but enduring Black upper class – it would have been challenging for Willy to sustain himself on that business alone.

WILLY: I tell ya why, Howard ... Speaking frankly and between the two of us, y'know? — I'm just a little tired.

HOWARD: Oh, I could understand that, Willy. But you're a road man, Willy, and we do a road business. We've only got a half dozen salesmen on the floor here.

During the Great Depression and in the years after, Black New Yorkers had some success using their purchasing power to pressure white businesses in their neighborhoods to hire Blacks in visible positions (e.g. clerks, cashiers, waitstaff) and in substantial numbers. Progress was slower in downtown retail stores. While a 1948 survey of New York City shoppers showed a majority did not object to Black clerks (21% didn't want them handling clothes or food), retail store owners and managers were concerned that Black clerks would encourage more in-store shopping by Black customers – which might chase away white customers.

THE LOMANS BUY A HOME IN BROOKLYN

While Harlem in the 1920s was held up as the home of the New Negro and a symbol of Black artistic and intellectual flourishing, Brooklyn held the memory of Black prosperity. It was in Brooklyn that Weeksville, one of the first communities of free Blacks in the United States, was established in the 1830s. In the years after emancipation came to New York, voting rights were tied to property ownership

Photo from London Production.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN: ON THE ROAD AND AT HOME WITH WILLY LOMAN BY ARMINDA THOMAS (CONTINUED)

(that requirement was removed from white male suffrage in 1821). With its high rate of property ownership, the denizens of Weeksville were able to achieve a measure of autonomy. The community had two newspapers and several churches, was a major station on the Underground Railroad, and its public school was the first in New York City to fully integrate its teaching staff.

By 1924, when the Lomans would have purchased their home, Weeksville was a fading memory, partially folded into what was becoming known as the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood – a diverse community of middle- and working-class Italian, Jewish, and African Americans - where some older wood-framed homes still resided among the area's more famous brownstone row houses.

LINDA: Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

WILLY: No, there's more people now.

In 1929, the stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression brought a wave of bankruptcies and foreclosures to Bedford-Stuyvesant, but the abandoned properties were soon filled, as Black Southerners continued their northern migration along with Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Moreover, 1936 marked the opening of the A train, cutting down the distance into and out of Manhattan and inspiring many Harlemites to take that train away from their overcrowded neighborhood and try their hand at home ownership in Bed-Stuy. Those who could not afford to purchase often found rooms for rent in the homes of those who needed help making the mortgage payments.

Two years after the arrival of the A train, an appraiser from the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) came to do an assessment of the neighborhood's credit worth. The HOLC was a New Deal organization, created to help keep homeowners out of foreclosure and help stabilize real estate that had depreciated during the Depression. Arguably, their assessment did more lasting damage to Bed-Stuy than the market crash had done. Listed among the neighborhood's "detrimental influences" – along with poor upkeep and obsolescence – was an "infiltration of Negros." In their clarifying remarks, while the appraiser allowed that the Negroes in question tended to buy homes at fair prices and usually rented rooms, they reiterated, "Colored infiltration a definitely adverse influence on neighborhood desirability." The appraiser also noted that a single-family home purchased for $7,000 in 1929 (or $6,750 in 1924) was worth only $2,500 in 1938. With eleven years left on the mortgage, the Lomans would have been stuck with property worth less than half its original price.

Photo from London Production.

The appraiser finished the assessment by assigning Bed-Stuy a "D" rating – the highest risk investment for banks – and circling the neighborhood in red ink, a practice that came to be known as redlining. This rating meant that potential buyers would find it impossible to get a mortgage, current owners would find it likewise impossible to get loans for home improvements, and the neighborhood was left vulnerable to predatory real estate practices. Jack Newfield, a reporter who grew up in Bed-Stuy in the 1940s and 1950s, recalled the neighborhood's descent:

"Real estate speculators easily obtained loans from banks, but the stable, hardworking Negro family next door to my house could not get a bank loan to rehabilitate their dirty, peeling frame house... Quite rapidly the community became segregated. Garbage collection grew less frequent. Bopping youth gangs were organized. Newspapers began to write about the 'crime wave' in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Unemployment increased. The hospitals, high schools, and libraries in the community continued to decay, and the city would not build any new ones to replace them."

Sources: Judith Wellman, *Brooklyn's Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville, New York* (2014). Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (2008). Jan Whitaker, *Service and Style: How the Department Store Fashioned the American Middle Class* (2006). Jack Newfield, Robert Kennedy: a memoir (1988). University of Richmond, Mapping Inequality: *Redlining in New Deal America* (website).

THE AMERICAN DREAM
BY DR. NICOLE KING

DR. NICOLE KING LOOKS AT HOW THIS PRODUCTION OF *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* SETS THE STAGE FOR AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERVASIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CONCEPTS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

THE NEW CENTURY

At the dawn of the 20th century, the majority of Black Americans were located in the South (9 out of 10 according to the 1910 census) and most were living in rural areas. Despite the abolition of slavery in 1863, when those who could left plantation life behind forever, many became trapped in a system of de facto serfdom known as share-cropping, a scurrilous form of tenant farming. With the new century, however, came increased demands of industrialization and the need for factory workers for enterprises such as the mass production of automobiles by Ford and General Motors and, later, World War I munitions manufacturing. Black people seized this chance to pursue better lives for themselves and their children and an exodus from the South began - what is now known as the "Great Migration." While Black Americans had long populated cities and towns across the United States, the Migration profoundly shifted the demographics of urban and rural America. From the 1910s and continuing up to the 1970s, waves of Black people moved to cities such as Pittsburgh, Boston, and New York City in the North, Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit in the Midwest, and Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle in the West. Wherever people chose to go, and the destinations were not always urban, the migration was, fundamentally, about pursuing the American dream. *Death of a Salesman* presents a stinging critique of this ideal, and this production's casting of the Lomans as an African American family invites the audience to contemplate not only the stakes of such dreams given America's racial hierarchy, but to also consider African Americans' careful negotiation, and in turn, defiance of the limits they were expected to live by.

James Hopkinson's plantation, South Carolina, 1862.

At home in Brooklyn, 1936.

American identity, and by extension the American dream, celebrates the notion of rugged individualism and the pursuit of material wealth. In the early 20th century, New York City was emblematic of the country as a whole; while it had a reputation as a place of wealth and opportunity for anyone willing to work hard to make something of themselves, the reality was drastically different. New York attracted European and Caribbean immigrants alongside Black American migrants from the Southern states eager to escape cycles of poverty and the South's pervasive culture of white violence, epitomized by lynching. For these Americans, each new to the limited privileges that their citizenship afforded them, the American dream, and New York were a beacon of possibility. A key aspect of the American dream was the desire to own a home on a patch of land no matter how modest, thereby offering one's children the prospect of a brighter economic future. Such goals animated Black people as much as any other population group, and it might have affected them even more deeply given how the system of racial slavery had used generations of Black people's unpaid labor and land stolen from Indigenous people as the capital to build the extraordinary wealth of the nation.

Booker T. Washington, an influential Black leader at the turn of the century, advocated for vocational education and a cautious approach to the advancement of African Americans, one which was accommodating of the racial segregation made legal by the Supreme Court in 1896. Washington's leadership can be contrasted with that of W. E. B. Du Bois, who felt that no limits should be set on Black aspirations, nor should Black people accept any delay in gaining equal rights and political representation. Another perspective was offered by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, who, in the 1920s, argued for Black economic separatism and pushed for a return to Africa, such was his pessimism regarding the prospects of Black people in America. Other activists like journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett used white and Black newspapers to expose the terrorist activities of Southern lynch mobs, while simultaneously debunking the carefully crafted myth of the Black male rapist. Thus, among such activists and leaders as much as among average African Americans, there were diverse approaches to the concept of individual and collective progress.

We imagine that Willy Loman was burdened by these contrasting ideologies - they certainly would have been circulating as he came of age and as he and Linda made their first house payment in 1924. Willy cannot subdivide his masculinity from his Blackness, nor his

THE AMERICAN DREAM BY DR. NICOLE KING (CONTINUED)

Booker T. Washington, c 1895.

Washington alongside President Theodore Roosevelt reviewing the 61 'industry' floats, Tuskegee, 1905.

W.E.B. Du Bois, 1919.

Marcus Garvey, 1936.

The opening parade in Harlem of the 1920 International Convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), which Garvey founded.

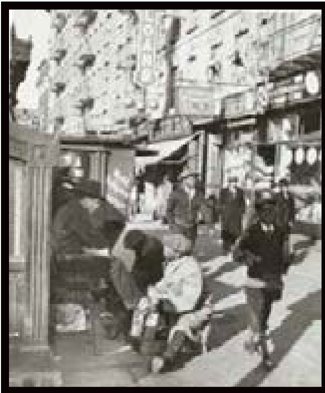
personal anguish from his ambition. He is shaped by a capitalist economic ethos and is enthralled as well as entrapped by the idea of money as indicative of self-worth. Nor can he escape the gendered expectations of him as patriarch and head of his household. All Willy Lomans are molded by an implicit racial identity that informs how he sees himself relative to ideas of masculinity and belonging; it also influences how his family, friends, and associates view him. This production simply makes that explicit, asking its audience to think differently and with greater complexity about America's racial politics. The play presents a sweeping commentary about mid-century America, but it simultaneously insists on according Willy Loman a privilege nearly always extended to white characters - the privilege of individuality, or of not representing an entire race or culture. Even if Willy and the Lomans are representative of some African Americans in their desire to alternately ignore or rise above the limitations of racism and racial discrimination, they nevertheless feel its insidious and debilitating effects.

NEW YORK: FROM THE GILDED AGE TO WORLD WAR II

The hope embedded in the American dream is rarely diminished by America's long history of unequal access to advancement and thus, the ideology of the self-made man (or woman) finds devoted adherents in every American population and generation. For most Americans, doing even a little bit better than the previous generation took great tenacity, but New York in the 1920s suggested many possible pathways. Willy and Linda Loman settle in their Brooklyn home during the "Gilded Age" - named for the fortunes made by tycoons like John D. Rockefeller - which seemed like it would last forever. Black wealth reached extraordinary heights too as epitomized by the fortune made by Madam C. J. Walker from her line of cosmetics and hair care products for Black women, and the million-dollar townhouses of "Strivers' Row" in Harlem. The 1920s saw the rise of jazz music and the Harlem, or "New Negro," Renaissance, an artistic and cultural outpouring of creativity by Black people across the nation. Black culture became popular culture and Broadway premiered all-Black musicals like *Shuffle Along*, which launched the illustrious careers of Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson, among others. It was a marvelous place for self-invention and reinvention and, more than other places, New York could also boast an established Black middle class and Black elite. Black newcomers began to swell the numbers of long-standing Black enclaves in the racially mixed but still predominantly white neighborhoods of upper Manhattan (Harlem) and Brooklyn (Bedford–Stuyvesant and Crown Heights).

At the same time, Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants who had typically occupied areas of lower and upper Manhattan began to move to Brooklyn too, as it offered lower rents and more choice than the increasingly crowded areas of Manhattan. The stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression ruined many

THE AMERICAN DREAM BY DR. NICOLE KING (CONTINUED)



Harlem shoeshiners on the corner of 135th Street and Lenox (now also known as Malcolm X Boulevard), 1939.

lives, obliterated fortunes, and jobs became harder to find for everyone. For Black people, who were regularly paid lower wages than white people for the same jobs, the fallout was catastrophic: while 25 percent of all Americans were unemployed during the Depression, 50 percent of African Americans were out of work - sometimes their jobs were taken away from them and given to white people. Still, Black migrant workers from the South and abroad kept arriving, attracted by the opportunities of the metropole, and Brooklyn in particular. All quickly learned that anti-Black racism was not just a Southern phenomenon. While transparent in the South, it was necessary for the workers to learn the rules of racism in the North. Which restaurants might hire you but not serve you? Which hospitals would pay you to mop floors but not care for you in an emergency? In some neighborhoods, as their numbers increased, Black people faced a severe housing backlash, but elsewhere this was not the case. Anglo-American prejudice extended to Jewish people and to Catholics. And where wealth could not buy exclusivity, Black, Jewish, Italian, and Irish people sometimes found themselves living, working, and going to school side by side.

Through the Depression, the World War II era, and beyond, in good and in bad economic times, everyday life for Black Brooklynites would have been varied and included most professions and every socio-economic category; the Lomans would not have been unusual. Black people worked as teachers, nurses, engineers, stevedores,

Vocational training and skills in action. Left: welders on the merchant ship SS Booker T. Washington. Right: a trainee mechanic learning plane construction techniques at the Brooklyn Aviation Trade Center.

secretaries, salesmen, factory workers, cooks, seamstresses, domestics, and homemakers. They were newspaper editors, landlords, grocers, undertakers, barbers, and beauticians. Artists, politicians, and successful entertainers also made Brooklyn their home. In smaller numbers, they were lawyers, doctors, dentists, and pharmacists. Black-owned and operated enterprises developed out of necessity - their Black clientele often could not be served elsewhere - but thrived due to excellence. Many people would have worked more than one job. Leisure time, if it was to be had, would have included community and charity work and going to church. Playing and watching sporting greats like boxer Joe Louis and the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, where Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball in 1947, provided unifying moments of cultural pride. Whether they laid claim to generations in the borough or were newly arrived from Georgia or Jamaica, Black New Yorkers like the Lomans were integral to the city.

THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Everyday life for all African Americans would nevertheless have been affected by entrenched systems of racial discrimination and eruptions of violent racialized conflicts, which suggest another important context for understanding this Loman family. As the Great Migration shifted America's demographics, racial hierarchies remained rooted in American culture, and the struggle for civil rights continued to develop along multiple fronts. In 1941, months before the US entered World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt outlined four fundamental freedoms "for people everywhere in the world." These were freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. African Americans had been and would be fighting for those freedoms long before and long after the War ended. Black soldiers, both men and women, were systematically relegated to menial service units while civilians were discriminated against in jobs, housing, and education on the home front. Highly skilled, heroic all-Black units like the Tuskegee Airmen countered the prevailing notion that Black people lacked the mental capacity and bravery to be pilots, but this right to fight was one which itself had to be fought for.

Race riots broke out after World War I and World War II in cities such as Chicago and Washington D.C., sparked by labor shortages as well as white resentment at seeing Black soldiers walking American streets in uniform - such was the ongoing refusal to view African Americans as part of the US national family. Organized Civil Rights activist techniques developed in the 1940s, such as the first "sit-in" demonstration staged by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1943, would be perfected in decades to come. Given this historical and political context, it is perhaps incredible that some African Americans remained invested in the seductive qualities of the American dream, but they did, and they do. As best-selling novels like

THE AMERICAN DREAM BY DR. NICOLE KING (CONTINUED)

The Tuskegee Airmen, 1945.

Protest preparation: CORE activists try to provoke a trainee in order to build strong resistance skills, 1960.

Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) and award-winning plays like Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) attest, at mid century, African Americans like the Lomans were simply American in their desire to belong, to have the perceived security of a family home and a better future.

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PRE-SHOW

Can you define the American Dream? What is it? Is it the same for every person? Has the American Dream changed over time? How?

POST-SHOW

"A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises. Before us is the Salesman's house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality." - At rise, *Death of a Salesman*

Miller opens the play with these words. The description is an indicator of Willy's American Dream.

-We see a home that Willy owns.

-We see space and land that Willy values.

-For Willy, home ownership and owning land is an indicator of success.

DISCUSSION:

Does Biff have the same values as Willy? What is his American Dream?

What about Happy? What are his values? How do you know?

What does Linda value? How is it different from her sons? Her husband?

How would you define your American Dream? What is success to you?

THE BLACK AMERICAN SPORTS HERO

BIFF WAS A HIGH SCHOOL STAR "BUILT LIKE AN ADONIS" AND WILLY WAS PARTICULARLY PROUD OF HIM FOR THAT. HE SAW BIFF'S ATHLETICISM AS A TICKET TO SUCCESS. HAPPY WAS ALWAYS IN BIFF'S SHADOW, VYING FOR HIS FATHER'S ATTENTION. HAPPY EVEN USED BIFF'S ATHLETICISM TO HELP HIM PICK UP GIRLS.

Happy: "His name is Biff. You might have heard of him. Great football player..."

There were a number of rising Black athletes in the American consciousness at this time who helped define the American dream for America – and for Willy.

Paul Robeson was named All American twice while at Rutgers. While earning his law degree from Columbia University, Robeson played for two NFL teams, the Akron Pros (1920) and the Milwaukee Badgers (1923) – both lead by Fritz Pollard, the first Black man to coach white players in a professional American sport. He also started a professional theater career at the same time.

Jesse Owens matched the world record for the 100-yard dash while competing in the 1933 National High School Championship. At Ohio State University, Owens won eight individual NCAA championships in 1935 and 1936, but he still had to live off-campus and didn't receive a scholarship. In 1936, Owens won four gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Germany.

Jackie Robinson enrolled at UCLA in the fall of 1939, where he became the first student there to win varsity letters in four sports: baseball, basketball, football, and track. He went on to break the color barrier in baseball when he started on first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

Joe Louis Considered one of the greatest boxers of all time, Joe Louis was the world heavyweight champion for 12 consecutive years – from 1937 to 1949. However, the so-called "Brown Bomber" achieved national hero status when he defeated German boxer Max Schmeling in 1938, an event that came to symbolize the prewar anti-Nazi sentiment of the time.

Paul Robeson attended Rutgers on a full scholarship, becoming the university's third Black student and its first Black football player. Photo: Rutgers University.

Jesse Owens displaying excellent form during his victory in the long jump at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. Photo: German Federal Archives.

Jackie Robinson broke MLB's color barrier playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

Joe Louis, 1941. Photo by Carl van Vechten.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

- **Who are the sports stars who represent the American Dream today? Do some research and find sports icons who broke barriers in their sport.**
- **Design a magazine cover featuring your favorite athlete to share with your classmates. You could draw a design, make a collage, cut and paste photos or use a computer program for your cover.**

BIFF'S DREAM: THE AMERICAN FRONTIER AND EXODUSTERS

The Great Migration saw Black people moving out of the South after slavery ended, with an exodus of roughly 60,000 Black Americans between 1879 and 1881. They traveled to Kansas, Oklahoma and Indigenous territories to escape further persecution and pursue economic freedom. In Oklahoma, Black American migration is closely related to westward expansion and the desire for land. In the Land Run of 1889, settlers flooded Oklahoma to set up their own homesteads. The Black population grew due to the "promise" of a land of opportunity and freedom.

John Summer and his family standing in front of their home located two miles northeast of Dunlap, Kansas.

Nat Love, one of the most famous Black cowboys of the Old West. Photo: Unknown. Prints and Photographs Division.

Bill Picket. c.1902. Courtesy North Fort Worth Historical Society, Public Domain.

Black Americans who migrated from states along the Mississippi to Kansas were known as Exodusters. Nicodemus, one of the first well-known Black settlements in the West, was founded in 1877 as part of the "Great Exodus" of African Americans. By 1879, approximately 50,000 freedmen known as "Exodusters" had migrated from the South to escape poverty and racial violence following whites' regaining political control across the former Confederacy.

Nat (pronounced Nate) Love, also known as Deadwood Dick, was one of the most famous Exodusters and western Black cowboys as a result of his widely published memoirs. Born an enslaved person in Tennessee in 1854, Love headed west at the age of 14 to seek adventure. He found it as a cowboy working for large cattle operations in Texas and Arizona. Love drove cattle and horses all over the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains and even down into Mexico. His autobiography recalls many trail drives to Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota that took him through such states as New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Utah. In addition, he mentions many exciting experiences he lived through on the cattle frontier of the late-nineteenth century. He recounts being captured by Indians, surviving storms and Indian attacks, participating in and witnessing gunfights, and meeting many famous Western characters like Billy the Kid, Buffalo Bill Cody, Jesse James, and Kit Carson.

Written with an air of braggadocio, Love's story is, in places, of questionable veracity. Nevertheless, it is a charming first-hand account of the life of one cowboy that emphasizes the necessity of cooperation

and camaraderie in the performance of work on the trails, ranges, and ranches of the cattle kingdom. Love married in 1889 and quit the cowboy business a year later. He moved to Colorado, and became a Pullman porter on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. He later worked as a bank guard before his death in 1921 in Los Angeles, California.

He summed up a cowboy's life when he said, "There a man's work was to be done, and a man's life to be lived, and when death was to be met, he met it like a man."

The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as "Deadwood Dick," By Himself: A True History of Slavery Days, Life on the Great Cattle Ranges and on the Plains of the "Wild and Woolly" West, Based on Facts, and Personal Experiences of the Author, Nat Love, 1907.

Black Professional Cowboys & Cowgirls Association, Inc. BPCCA Presents Black Heritage Day & Rodeo Humble Civic Center. Photo: 2C2K Photography.

A cowboy finishes his competition in the calf-roping event at the Martin Luther King, Jr. African American Heritage Rodeo, one of the National Western Stock Show events in Denver, Colorado. Photo: Carol M. Highsmith.

RESEARCH BLACK COWBOYS IN HISTORY USING THE FOLLOWING LINKS:

Black cowboys in history. http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ranchhouse/pop_blackcowboy.html

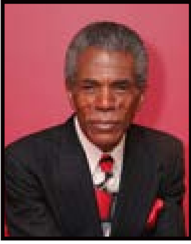
Rodeo and Black cowboys. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLSwRx_9HbQ&t=159s

Fletcher Street Cowboys of Philadelphia, modern-day riders. http://fsurc.com/

While cowboy is the most widely used term, there were also cowgirls. Learn about a modern-day group of Black women cowgirls.
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/arts/for-these-black-women-in-texas-rodeo-is-a-way-of-life.html

Source: WNET Public Television

THE ROAD NOT TRAVELED: BEN


André De Shields.

We don't learn the full story of Willy's older brother Ben Loman, played in this production by Tony Award winner André De Shields. Ben appears exclusively to Willy throughout the play. Is the Ben we see onstage a ghost? Does he represent a memory? Or is Ben a source of regret? For Willy, Ben seems to represent the success he never had.

"Why, boys, when I was seventeen, I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one, I walked out. And by God I was rich." - Ben Loman

To Biff and Happy, their uncle Ben was a mythical character who lived this wild and lavish life, one of luxury they could only dream about. Linda, however, doesn't seem to fully trust her brother-in-law. She believes her reckless husband would better provide for his family by being at home.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

PARTNER ACTIVITY:
Partner one: Write a letter to Willy as Ben describing your life and great success. Be specific about what you've discovered in the jungle. In your letter, plead with Willy to join you.

Partner two: Write a reply as Willy. Remember that Ben exists in Willy's imagination, so anything goes. You can make the choice to join Ben or not in the jungle, but be clear about your reasons.

LINDA'S TURN

Photo from London Production.

Alongside Willy Loman as one of the great iconic roles for an actor is the part of Linda Loman. Linda is the glue that holds the entire Loman family together. Besides the domestic duties assigned to most women of the time, Linda was very thorough in keeping up with the family's accounting while also serving as a wise, even-keeled sounding board for the loud, tempestuous, emotional men in her life.

In the 1940s women did not have the same rights and privileges as men. They were often treated as less than. For example, in *Death of a Salesman*, Willy is dismissive of Linda. He plays down her concerns about his health. He pays more attention to his sons than Linda. Willy is unfaithful to her with "The Woman," and is dishonest with Linda about the money he makes. Nonetheless, she adores and defends Willy. Linda has one of the most famous monologues in this play.

"I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But, he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person." – Linda, Act II

Linda's selflessness and love is evident, but we rarely get a glimpse of Linda outside of her relationship to Willy. What does she have to say that we don't get to hear?

The role of Linda is a coveted one. The women who have portrayed the honored role on Broadway include Mildred Dunnock, Teresa Wright, Kate Reid, Elizabeth Franz, Linda Emond, and, most recently, Sharon D Clarke.

ACTIVATION FOR CLASSROOMS:

Write a first-person monologue from Linda's point of view, where she says the thing(s) she always wanted to say. What does she want from life? What kind of person does she want to be? What is her emotional state? To whom is she speaking? You can have Linda address the audience, Willy, her sons, "The Woman," or anyone else.

TAKE IT FURTHER:
Feel free to share your monologue with the class.

The New York Times

Arthur Miller's Dying *Salesman* Is Reborn in London

An electrifying revival, starring a heartbreaking Wendell Pierce, reimagines Willy Loman as a Black man in a white man's world.

By Ben Brantley Jan. 2, 2020

LONDON — The tired old man has had an unexpected transfusion. And he has seldom seemed more alive — or more doomed.

What's most surprising about Marianne Elliott and Miranda Cromwell's beautiful revival of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," which I mercifully caught near the end of its West End run here at the Piccadilly Theater, is how vital it is. As Willy Loman, the title character of this epochal 1949 drama, lives out his last, despondent days, what has often felt like a plodding walk to the grave in previous incarnations becomes a propulsive — and compulsively watchable — dance of death.

Portrayed by a splendid Wendell Pierce ("The Wire" and "Treme" on television), Willy lacks the stooped shoulders and slumped back with which he is traditionally associated. (It's the posture immortalized in the book cover for the original script.)

This electrically alert and eager Willy nearly always stands ramrod tall in this production, which originated at the Young Vic Theater, though you sense it's an effort. When we first see him, newly returned to his Brooklyn home from an aborted road trip, he bends to put down the sample case he holds in each hand. And for a painful second, he registers how much it hurts him to straighten up again.

He has shown a sign of weakness. And that is something he can never afford to do, not even with his unflinchingly supportive wife, Linda (the formidable Sharon D Clarke).

This is partly because Willy is 60, working in a Darwinian business that belongs to the young and the fit. But in this version, he has another, heavier handicap: Willy is a Black man in a nation where white is the color of success.

While he has absorbed and abides by the mythology and rules of the American dream of self-advancement, there's a part of Willy that worries the odds are fatally stacked against him. The adrenaline that courses through Pierce's performance never lets up, even — no, especially — when Willy is recalling a supposedly happier, easier past. It's no wonder that this overcharged defense system is finally starting to short-circuit.

Elliott is fast proving herself to be one of the great transformative alchemists of classic plays — shifting perspectives in ways that make us see the familiar with virgin eyes. She does so without altering the innate substance of such works, carefully achieving her alterations from within.

Her Tony Award-winning interpretation of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," seen on Broadway in 2018, presented a New York at the height of the AIDS crisis as a land of endless night. More radically, her London-born, Broadway-bound revival of the 1970 Stephen Sondheim musical "Company" transformed the unhappily swinging single at its center from a man into a woman.

That gender reversal required little textual surgery other than changes of pronouns. And the "Salesman" that Elliott has devised with Cromwell leaves the original script intact. But there's much more than colorblind casting going on here.

"Salesman" has always been a study in cancerous denial, an interior portrait of a man long out of touch with who he is. (Miller had at first thought of calling his play "The Inside of His Head.") This production finds the desperate exertion in such denial, the paradoxical energy in the exhaustion of playing a losing game for too many seasons.

When Willy summons idealized memories of earlier days with his family — centered on his sons, the adored, firstborn Biff and the younger, attention-starved Happy (Sope Dirisu and Natey Jones, both first-rate) — these visions take on the stylized artificiality of period advertisements or burlesque sketches, in which cherished watchwords of uplift are not merely spoken but sometimes sung.

The idylls are punctuated by the discordant sounds of a tape rewinding at hyper-speed. But there's sweet music in Willy's head, too. The show begins (and, less judiciously, ends) with a gospel hymn promising blessed rest and relief. And sometimes, though it unnerves him, Willy hears the wandering melody of the flute his father played (rendered here as a clarinet).

That father materializes briefly as a gentle, spectral frontiersman from an earlier age. (It feels poetically appropriate that this apparition is portrayed by the show's composer and musical director, Femi Temowo.)

Willy doesn't talk much about his dad, except to say that he moved the family a lot. And we are vouchsafed a fleeting, unsettling image that explains why, of a white man with a rifle trained on the back of the music-playing father. It is an apparition that comes and goes like lightning, and you may even wonder if your eyes deceived you.

Such moments are part of an inspired, continuing pattern in this production, wherein ugly truths flare up only to be extinguished. The same rhythms animate Pierce's performance. Willy explodes without warning when his next-door neighbor, Charley (Trevor Cooper), asks him, "When are you going to grow up, boy?" (That "boy" is one of the few interpolations in the script.)

Or watch how Willy's fedora morphs from a boulevardier's proudly brandished accessory to something like a humbly proffered beggar's hat. That's in the heartbreaking scene when Willy, begging his young boss (Matthew Seadon-Young) not to fire him, softly grabs the shoulder of the other man, who recoils as if he had been stung.

Such moments are never lingered over. And if this "Salesman" had been retooled to be solely about race, it would shrink and oversimplify Miller's play. Instead, race expands and exacerbates Willy's suppressed fears that the world regards him as an outcast, a loser, a clown.

The tightly wired intensity of Pierce's performance lends a new ferocity to the dysfunction of the Loman family dynamic. The scenes between Willy and Biff (whom Dirisu endows with full Method angst) have the wrenching, visceral charge of full Oedipal tragedy. And the magnificent Clarke (who arrives on Broadway later this season in the title role of "Caroline, or Change") transforms a character often portrayed as a whimpering doormat into a strong, self-aware woman who knows the choices she has made and is determined to honor them.

But there's not a performance here that doesn't serve the production's governing vision of Willy's sense of life as he most longs — and fears — it to be. Even the usually throwaway part of a woman with whom Willy has a one-night stand assumes a magnified, haunting menace as embodied by Victoria Hamilton-Barritt.

The life summoned here is a rapidly tarnishing illusion, built on crumbling values that Willy has fought against himself to believe in. That little house in Brooklyn, which he has worked so hard to maintain and pay off, is rendered in Anna Fleischle's set (lighted by Aideen Malone) with ephemeral-looking furniture, doors and windows all suspended on wires. Everything can disappear in a twinkling.

When a singer in a restaurant scene is heard crooning, "They can't take that away from me," those hopeful, wistful lyrics sound unbearably cruel. In this "Salesman," when Willy, in a rare moment of insight, says he feels "kind of temporary," the terror that he ultimately owns nothing — not even his own identity — has never felt so profound.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Education Guide by

TDF EDUCATION

THE PRODUCERS OF *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

wish to thank the scholars whose research affirms that the world in which our African American Loman family lives really existed.

PROFESSOR TALVIN WILKS, THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA,

investigated and verified the historical background for this production of *Death of a Salesman*.

DR. NICOLE KING, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON,

served as the historical consultant for the acclaimed London production of the play, and further explored the society in which our Loman family rose and fell.

ARMINDA THOMAS, LECTURER IN THE LEWIS CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY,

researched the ways in which external forces between the early 1920s and the late 1940s would have affected a family like the Lomans.