

Teacher Resource Guide

LINCOLN
CENTER
THEATER

LINCOLN CENTER THEATER AT THE VIVIAN BEAUMONT

under the direction of
André Bishop and **Bernard Gersten**
presents

A Free Man of Color

A New Play by
John Guare

With deep bows to Ariadne, Aphra Behn, Napoleon Bonaparte, Barbara Bush,
Lady Byron, Lord Byron, Calderón de la Barca, Susannah Centlivre,
William Congreve, George Etherege, Euripides, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Jonson,
Lamartine, John Milton, Molière, Ossian, Lorenzo da Ponte, Thomas Shadwell,
William Shakespeare, Virgil, John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester

And
William Wycherley

with (in alphabetical order)

Yao Ababio Peter Bartlett Nicole Beharie Arnie Burton Rosal Colón
Veanne Cox Paul Dano Sara Gettelfinger Derric Harris Justina Machado
Joseph Marcell John McMartin Nick Mennell Mos Teyonah Parris
Postell Pringle Esau Pritchett Brian Reddy Reg Rogers
Triney Sandoval Robert Stanton Wendy Rich Stetson Jerome Stigler
Senfuab Stoney David Emerson Toney Jeffrey Wright

Sets **David Rockwell** Costumes **Ann Hould-Ward** Lighting **Jules Fisher & Peggy Eisenhower**

Sound **Scott Stauffer** Original Music **Jeanine Tesori** Choreography **Hope Clarke**

Stage Manager **Gwendolyn M. Gilliam** Casting **Daniel Swee** General Press Agent **Philip Rinaldi**

General Manager **Adam Siegel** Production Manager **Jeff Hamlin** Director of Development **Hattie K. Jutagir** Director of Marketing **Linda Mason Ross**

Directed by
George C. Wolfe

Originally commissioned by The Public Theater
George C. Wolfe, Producer; Mara Manus, Executive Director

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Introduction

“Lift the curtain. We begin.” *Jacques Cornet, Act 1, A Free Man of Color*

This guide aims to provide you with resources and activities to use with your students for John Guare's *A Free Man of Color*. Directed by George C. Wolfe with a cast of almost thirty led by Jeffrey Wright and involving an array of elaborate sets and costumes, this world premiere promises a spectacular theater experience. The play also offers tremendous opportunities for learning across the curriculum.

Within the first moments of *A Free Man of Color*, the audience is transported into the magnificent life of Jacques Cornet. This charismatic character bedecked in an over-the-top outfit along with his sarcastic sidekick Murmur draw us in. Plot and history entwine as intricately as the trim on Jacques' coat. Mr. Wolfe describes the stage design as “the audience is in the play and the play is in the audience.” Our students will be swept into this fascinating world and we along with them.

1801 New Orleans of *A Free Man of Color* stood on the precipice of change. A European colony for decades, by late 1803 New Orleans would be part of the United States passing in less than a month's time from Spanish to French rule and sold to the fledgling United States as part of the biggest real estate deal ever. Meanwhile, the colorful inhabitants of New Orleans knew nothing of the changes underway that would forever alter their lives. In *A Free Man of Color*, the nexus of political, social and historical activity that is 1801 New Orleans becomes a prism through which to view America's identity and to consider how these epic events shaped the landscape of our country and beliefs.



Costume design by Ann Hould-Ward for Jacques Cornet.

“This play is like an onion, if you will. Each time you peel off a layer something new is revealed. There are many rich thematic and theater learning possibilities to dig into. Although the play is set more than 200 years ago, students will find the characters intriguing and the ideas relevant.”

KATI KOERNER, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, LINCOLN CENTER THEATER

As Ms. Koerner points out, the play is constructed in layers that are thick with plot, character, theme, historical context and theatrical style. This guide is organized in layers, as well, so that you can approach the play with your students from any number of entry points. Each section focuses first on information related to the main action of the play. From there, additional layers of information provide further background and a broader context. The Table of Contents details each section.

The Classroom Activities section has practical activities that you can use or adapt for your own lessons before or after attending the performance. Each is designed to address the New York City Blueprint for Theater. We hope you and your student enjoy this voyage of discovery that is *A Free Man of Color*.

NYC Arts Blueprint: Theater

BLUEPRINT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ARTS: THEATER

Throughout this resource guide, you will find activities that connect the study of Lincoln Center Theater's production of *A Free Man of Color* to the following arts standards (the full text of the Blueprint can be downloaded from <http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/blueprint.html>)

The Five Strands of Teaching and Learning in Theater:

1 Theater Making: Acting, Playwriting/Play Making, Designing and Technical Theater, and Directing

Theater Making provides multiple avenues for active learning. Through the interpretation of dramatic literature and the creation of their own works, students engage as writers, actors, designers, directors and technicians. Students learn to use their minds, bodies, voices, emotions, and sense of artistry to examine the world and its meaning.

2 Developing Theater Literacy

Theater Literacy provides the skills and knowledge to deepen a student's understanding of the many forms and genres of theater. Students explore theater history and the multiple roles that theater plays in society. They use theater vocabulary when making and responding to performance, and develop critical, analytical and writing skills through observing, discussing and responding to live theater and dramatic literature.

In this strand, dramatic literature is also viewed as a catalyst for production and performance. Therefore, the associated activities are experiential in nature and support Theater Making as well as a deeper understanding of text.

3 Making Connections

Students make connections to theater by developing an understanding of self and others. They respond to theater by identifying personal issues and universal themes in performance and in dramatic text. They investigate theater by examining the integration of other arts into a complex multi-media art form. Additionally, students connect and apply learning in other disciplines to their inclusive understanding of theater.

4 Working With Community and Cultural Resources Community

Resources that support Theater Making, theater literacy, theater connections and career exploration, expand students' opportunities for learning. Active partnerships that combine school, professional and community resources create rich avenues for student and teacher innovation in the classroom and in production. Additionally, students validate their learning by sharing and performing outside of the classroom and in partnership with artists and organizations in support of community efforts.

5 Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning

Students develop audience skills and a connection to theater that allows them to value theater throughout their lives. They explore the scope and variety of theater careers in teaching, production, performance, criticism, design, technical theater and related occupations, and they investigate how these careers align with their personal goals and aspirations.

Synopsis

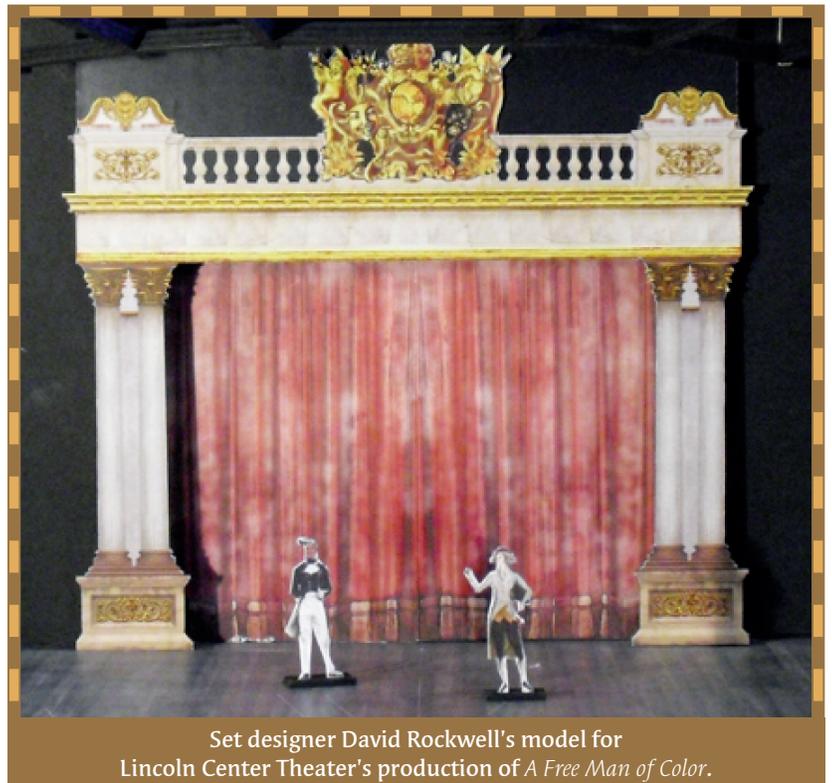
Act 1

Meet **Jacques Cornet**, fancy dresser, ladies' man, and extraordinarily popular. It's New Orleans 1801. Jacques is a *free man of color*, a former slave, now rich and successful with a slave of his own named **Murmur**. Jacques is writing a play about himself and his fabulous life with the audience as witness. He introduces **Dr. Toubib**, the play's tour guide. Jacques lavishes money on fantastic clothes and the latest maps, always searching for the quickest routes to fashion. The rest of his time he seduces women. He's irresistible. His house is full of New Orleanians attracted by his wealth and charm. Today is Mardi Gras and everyone is ready to party.

Juan Ventura Morales arrives. The Intendante of New Orleans controls the Mississippi and likes to flex his supreme ego although he is no competition for Jacques. **Pincepousse**, Jacques' half brother, shows up complaining that Jacques' inheritance belongs to him. **Margery**, Pincepousse's naïve wife, eyes Jacques who adds her to his list of intended conquests. The only woman Jacques avoids is his own wife.

Meanwhile, history appears on the sidelines. **Toussaint Louverture**, leader of the slave rebellion in Sante Domingue, pleads for support. **Napoleon Bonaparte** lays in his bathtub contemplating France's next move to conquer the world. **Thomas Jefferson** and **Meriwether Lewis** discuss the aspirations of the newly formed United States. World politics are headed for a collision with Jacques' utopian New Orleans.

Pincepousse gives Morales an encrypted message from Europe about the future of New Orleans. They try to decipher the code. Jacques applies his seduction tactics. **Creux**, a racist cousin of Morales, hopes the message will restore Le Code Noir, a set of slave laws that would strip Jacques and other men of color of their freedoms. The message is revealed: "Spain has given Louisiana to France." Shocked, Morales plans a revolution to be financed unknowingly by Jacques. Alongside this frenzy, Thomas Jefferson sends a contingent to France to buy New Orleans from Napoleon. His admirers begin to ignore him, so Jacques gathers information by seducing their wives. Determined to regain his status, he stages a hoax and has Murmur pretend to shoot him in the groin.

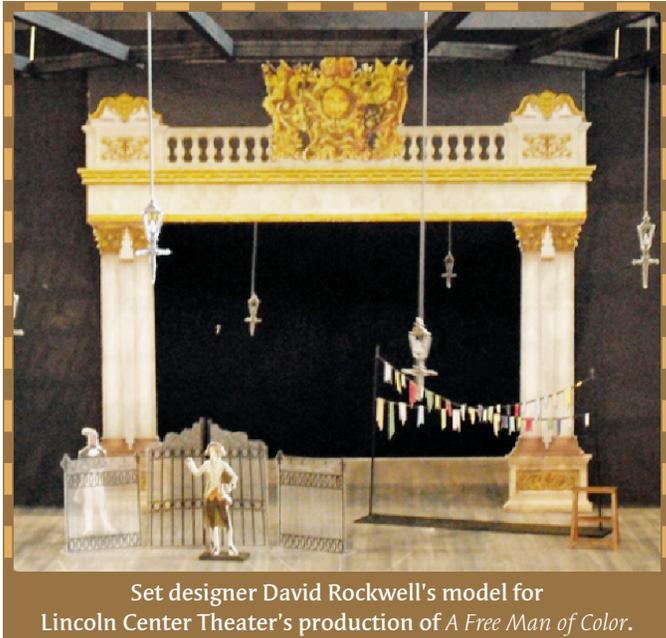


Set designer David Rockwell's model for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *A Free Man of Color*.

Act 2

Murmur interrupts the Mardi Gras celebration to announce that Jacques has been shot and lays dying. The women are distraught. Murmur tells each man that he is the heir to Jacques' fortune. Thrilled, each promises allegiance to Jacques in his final days. Margery visits him and discovers to her delight that he is not, after all, mortally injured.

Napoleon sends troops to Sante Domingue to crush Touissant Louverture's attempt at independence. Yellow fever kills thousands of French soldiers who retreat. Louverture dies in prison. Rebellious slaves are shipped to Louisiana. Curious, Jacques asks to see them. He falls into the hold of the ship and into a horrible nightmare. He escapes from the ship but is changed.



Margery tells Jacques she is pregnant, but he rejects her. His hoax is revealed. The men are livid. The women are insatiable and begin to attack Jacques. A furious Morales shuts down the Mississippi and blames Jacques for the inevitable fall of New Orleans. Jacques, Murmur and Dr. Toubib run away to the bayou to avoid the chaos and inevitable Code Noir. Pincepousse tracks down Jacques who kills him in self-defense. A mob comes after him, and Margery tries to help, but Jacques flees with his maps.

During this melee, a major real estate deal is underway. Eager to recoup from his loss in Sante Domingue, Napoleon finalizes France's takeover of New Orleans from Spain and abruptly sells the entire Louisiana territory to the eager but surprised United States.

Back in terra incognita, Jacques encounters Meriwether Lewis who is exploring America's new land acquisition,

the uncharted "white spaces" on the map. Jacques learns from Meriwether that America now owns New Orleans and the surrounding land and that the new nation is based on the idea that "all men are created equal."

Convinced that New Orleans has returned to its former glory days, Jacques plans his return home. He arrives to discover that much has changed. In 1803 America, the "land of the free," skin color matters. Jacques is arrested and auctioned as a slave. Before he is taken away, Jacques, as playwright, summons Thomas Jefferson and argues with him about the hypocrisy of this new nation based on freedom and equality. Jefferson shrugs. Slavery is economics. Jacques confronts Napoleon who says, "we all want history to go our way. It rarely does." A defeated Meriwether Lewis enters declaring his failure in finding the western waterway and the promised paradise. He dies.

Jacques' new owner takes him as Margery declares her love. Creux warns the audience of the danger of blacks. Jacques has a premonition of Hurricane Katrina, and there is a flashback moment from the play's happy opening. Dr. Toubib closes the play with the line: "Jacques Cornet. *A Free Man of Color or How One Man Became an American.*"

The Playwright: John Guare

A Free Man of Color is John Guare's fifth play produced at Lincoln Center Theater (LCT). His other works that graced the LCT stages are *Four Baboons Adoring the Sun*, *Chaucer in Rome*, *The House of Blue Leaves* and *Six Degrees of Separation* that was later made into the 1993 film starring Stockard Channing, Donald Sutherland and Will Smith. During his decades long career, Mr. Guare has written fifteen full-length plays and won countless awards. He is celebrated as one of the most important playwrights in American theater. The quotes included here are from an interview with Mr. Guare for the resource guide.

A Free Man of Color

Bringing *A Free Man of Color* to LCT has been a long journey. Six years ago, while working as Artistic Director at the Public Theater, George C. Wolfe approached Mr. Guare to write a play about American history that would feature the multi-talented actor Jeffrey Wright. Mr. Wolfe had loved Mr. Guare's play *A Few Stout Individuals*, a comedy about the death of Ulysses S. Grant. They talked about a Restoration comedy-style play set in New Orleans during the Louisiana Purchase. Mr. Guare was intrigued and went away to research and draft. He soon discovered the exciting and enormous challenge he had assumed:

"I realized doing my research that the Louisiana Purchase – which is what made America America – was a story whose intricate realities nobody knows! We know the main facts of it but the story of how our nation came together became so intriguing and insane a challenge to pull off that it took over my life for a few years. How to reimagine a Restoration comedy and charge it with a new energy by playing it against this historical panorama became an exhilarating mountain to scale."

Two years later, he presented Mr. Wolfe with a script that was five and a half hours long. Mr. Wolfe said in an interview for the *LCT Review* that Mr. Guare's passion for the history was undeniable. The two worked together to revise and shape the play, eventually staging a workshop production at LCT in summer 2009 directed by Mr. Wolfe. LCT Artistic Director Andre Bishop recalls his response to the remarkable play, "I had an experience I've never had at the end of a reading or workshop presentation. I felt that all of us had participated in something better than we were."

Non-naturalistic Drama

In *A Free Man of Color* and his other work, Mr. Guare has forged an approach to writing plays that departs from conventional naturalistic theater. Even as a young person, Guare was suspicious of theater that tried to copy real life down to having running water in the sink on the set. "Why did the kitchen sink need to look real?" he often



John Guare by Paul Kolnik

asked, after seeing a naturalistic play. He believed that this attempt to make something on stage appear actual carried a falseness that undermined the point of theater. His aim as a playwright is to devise drama that reveals truth in our lives rather than tries to mimic elements of “real life.” For Mr. Guare, the purpose of theater should be to explore life theatrically, to seek truth by departing from the conventions that trap us into falsely representing who and what we are.

“I hate the pseudo reality of naturalism, where if things look real, they are real. The surface reality of TV is not reality. Theater is the only medium that shows things the way they really are, that reveals the spirit of the event. We get to the unconscious, the place within us where the truth is, only through the heightened stylization of language and action. For me, poetry is reality, the heart and heat and guts of life, the full compression of truth.”

Stylistically, Mr. Guare is known for his absurd humor and poetic sense of language. His plays are full of literary, political and philosophical references. He combines the mundane with the fantastical. His plays can begin in one style and veer suddenly into another going abruptly from farce to comedy to tragedy. His characters often speak directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall. Thematically, his plays explore life’s contradictions and interconnectedness, the failure of human relationships and aspirations, the search for identity and the struggle with the chaotic nature of the universe. His plays *Lydie Breeze*, *A Few Stout Individuals* and *A Free Man of Color* draw sharp parallels between contemporary society and the past and explore the root of American identity and the loss of utopian aspirations.

The Young Playwright

Mr. Guare’s own life story confirms the argument that young people must have opportunities to learn in and through theater. Mr. Guare knew very early on that he was destined for a life in the theater. A New York native born in 1938 and raised in Jackson Heights, Queens, he has lived in Manhattan for many years. At age eleven, he wrote and produced his first play in a neighbor’s garage. “I bothered my parents to take me,” he remembers about his early love of theater and his insistence on seeing the latest play. He was barely in his teens when he attended a production of *Tamburlaine the Great* that would forever change his sensibility about theater and his ideas about how plays can live on stage. *Tamburlaine* included non-naturalistic elements. The main character metaphorically traveled across the world by striding the stage while carrying a world map. “Yes!,” thought the young Guare who had always been suspicious of realism in the theater. The play confirmed his desires to make theater that was *theatrical*.

Mr. Guare urges teachers and students to read the plays of Thornton Wilder and Edward Albee’s *Zoo Story*. These works had an early and profound influence on Mr. Guare and his understanding of non-naturalistic theater. For young playwrights just starting out, he offers this advice:

“Don’t censor yourself. Get it all down on paper without any judgment and then start working.”

When asked what students may need to know to be prepared to see the production, Mr. Guare wants students to know that the theater is for them and not to be intimidated. He hopes young people can experience theater as a place to come and LISTEN and to be ready to learn new truths.

Background

“...history is spilling on these characters.” *George C. Wolfe, Director*

“New Orleans was like a teenager, whose parents were away on vacation, with a house full of friends on a Saturday. Nothing but mayhem and debauchery could occur.”

Chuck Burks, LCT Teaching Artist

“Not since the splendor of Ancient Greece has there been the equal of New Orleans in 1801.”

Dr. Toubib, Act 1, A Free Man of Color

THE HISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS

1801: The Age of Enlightenment

A strong will was required to live in New Orleans at the turn of the 19th century. Oppressive weather, relentless mosquitos and a Wild West atmosphere made for a rough and tumble lifestyle. But for those with an adventurous spirit and money in their pocket, New Orleans offered an unparalleled exuberance and diverse social and cultural opportunities. Mr. Wolfe explains that the vision of New Orleans in the play is of a “**utopian landscape where difference and complexity are celebrated.**” While the dawn of jazz was still decades away, New Orleans was already known as a city of celebration and pleasure. People of financial and social means took full advantage of it.

When the play opens in 1801, New Orleans is technically under French rule, Spain having ceded control in a secret treaty in 1800. But, news travels so slowly that the New Orleans inhabitants and their Spanish governors have no idea what has taken place.

Who Owned New Orleans?

Native Americans settled in the Mississippi River Delta more than 3,000 years before the first European explorers arrived to the “New World” from Spain in the early 1600s. The Conquistadors were disappointed not to find an Inca-like civilization to plunder so they moved on. France, via Canada, lay claim to the region in the early



The city of New Orleans, and the Mississippi River Lake Pontchartrain in distance. Currier & Ives, ca. 1885. Library of Congress.

Avantures mal-heureuses du Sieur de la Salle. Engraved by Jan Van Vianen, 1698. Library of Congress.



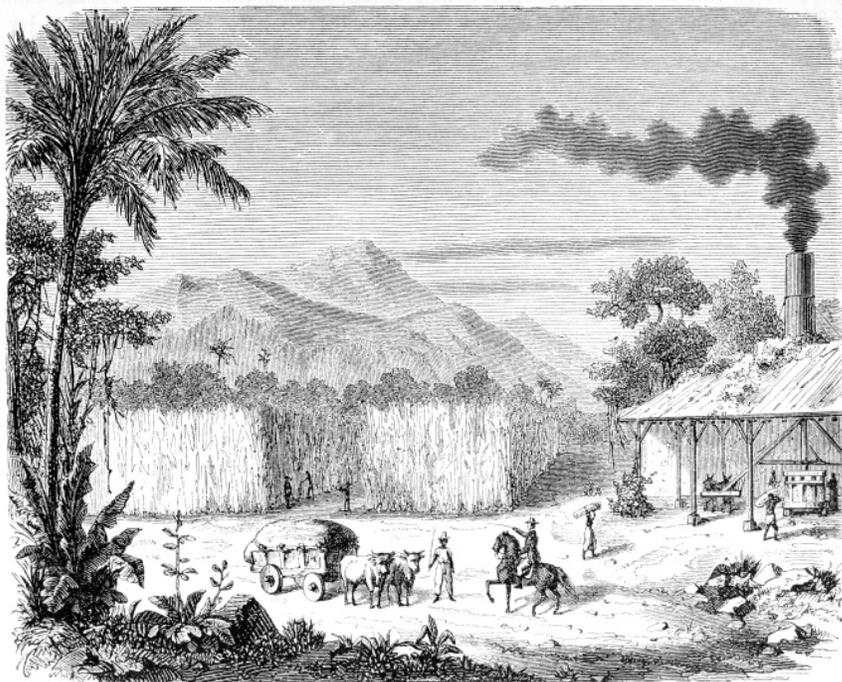
1700s christening it "Louisiana" for King Louis XIV and established New Orleans in 1718. The French controlled the area until after the Seven Years War (1756-1763) when it lost nearly all of its colonial holdings in North America to Britain. As payback to its ally Spain, France turned over the rest of its New World interests — New Orleans, Louisiana, the Mississippi River and all of the land to the west. Spain ruled from its seat in New Orleans until 1800 when the financially strapped government ceded power back to France. In a bold move to relieve its own fiscal burdens, France sold the entire Louisiana Purchase to the United States who officially took control in 1803. Louisiana became the eighteenth state in the union in 1812.

Geography & Politics

For centuries, the story of New Orleans has been one of geography and politics. Straddling the great **Mississippi River** that connected the world to the interior continent, the city became an invaluable port of travel and trade. Although built on swamplands that host disease-carrying mosquitoes and that are susceptible to devastating floods, New Orleans held an undeniable attraction. Its early potential as an economic hub depended upon who controlled the river and the surrounding watershed. Long-time rivals, **Britain, France, and Spain** had jockeyed for dominance for decades. In 1776, the brand new United States emerged as a minor contender. While the European powers struggled to maintain control across their vast global empires, the United States focused solely on North America and securing permanent access to this crucial port.



The Cabildo (Supreme Court), New Orleans, LA. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection,



Slaves working on a sugar plantation. © Bettmann/CORBIS

New Orleans is entwined geographically and politically with the Caribbean, particularly the island of Hispaniola that today consists of the Dominican Republic in the east and Haiti in the west. Back in 1697, after years of rogue colonization, a treaty formally divided the island into the Spanish "**Santo Domingo**" and the French "**Sante Domingue.**" The French colony was a vast plantation that supplied Europe with sugar, coffee and other valuable exports. One third of the slaves brought to the New World through the slave trade ended up in Sante Domingue where as many as 500,000 slaves worked at one time overseen by 30,000 white colonists. In 1791, a slave rebellion in Sante Domingue be-

gan a thirteen-year fight to escape French rule. A former slave and gifted military strategist inspired by the French and American Revolutions, **Toussaint Louverture** emerged as a leader and helped to stabilize the movement for independence while maintaining allegiance to France. In 1799, just before the play opens, Louverture invaded the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo to attempt to end slavery and unite the island in independence. Many blacks fled the conflict and ended up in New Orleans.

In the play, characters say “Sante Domingue” to refer to the French colony and “Santo Domingo” to refer to the Spanish colony on the island now known as “Hispaniola.” When the ship arrives at the end of the play, it has refugees fleeing from Santo Domingo. Napoleon sends LeClerc to regain control of the entire island.

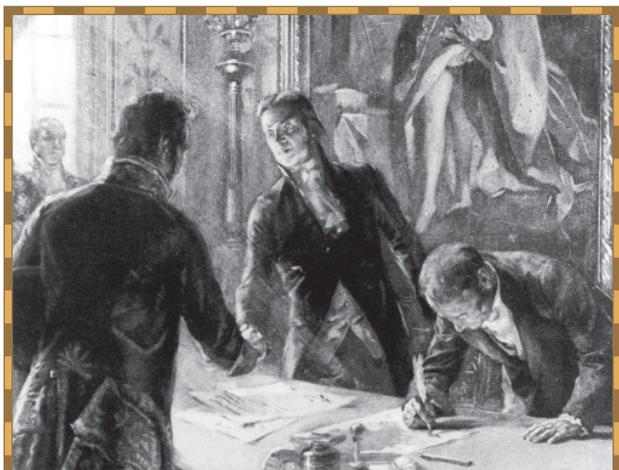
Culture & People

The spirit of New Orleans is expressed by its diverse ethnic groups. French and Spanish influences permeated the city’s language, architecture and traditions such as Mardi Gras.



Kentucky—The Carnival—Mardi-Gras Ball at Louisville. © Bettmann/CORBIS

French Canadians (Acadians) contributed to the evolution of New Orleans’ Cajun culture. In the late 1700s, the influx of Africans, mostly from West African, as well as former slaves fleeing the rebellion in Santo Domingo brought a rich black culture including dance, music and religion. Listen in the play for mention of “Congo Square,” a place in New Orleans where African Americans gathered on their days off to dance and play music. Formed in the 1700s, Congo Square remains a place of music today.



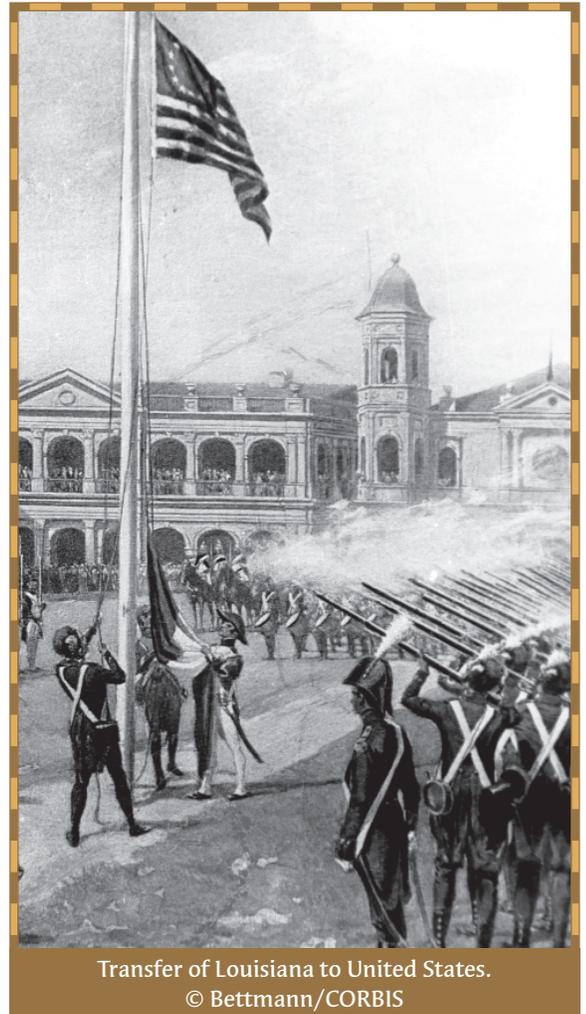
Signing of the Louisiana Purchase by Marbois (left), Livingstone (center), Monroe (right). © Bettmann/CORBIS

The destiny of New Orleans is tied inextricably to THOMAS JEFFERSON and NAPOLEON BONAPARTE and each man’s ambition and actions as a major world leader. These men, each hewn from a revolution, shaped the future of America and the world.

Details Surrounding The Louisiana Purchase

Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in France in 1799 as the First Consul following the French Revolution. He immediately began making plans to regain the global French empire. His first step was to squash the revolution led by Toussaint Louverture in Sante Domingue and in neighboring Santo Domingo. He aimed to rein-

state slavery to the entire island. He then planned to continue on to seize New Orleans from Spanish control. Back in Europe, Spain's King Carlos IV caved easily to Napoleon's threats, eagerly exchanging Louisiana for a piece of Italy in honor of his daughter "the Infanta." President Thomas Jefferson immediately sent an envoy to France to buy New Orleans. Napoleon sent his brother-in-law General LeClerc to thwart the revolution in Santo Domingo/Sante Domingue. It was a disaster. While the French army killed many island inhabitants and regained some control of Santo Domingo, they were unable to quell the rebellion in Sante Domingue. Thousands of French soldiers perished in the conflict and many others, including LeClerc, died of yellow fever. Following the defeat, Napoleon decided to cut his losses and abruptly offered all of Louisiana Territory to the United States. Never one to turn down a great deal, the United States paid \$15 million, or about 3 cents an acre, to double its size.



Transfer of Louisiana to United States.
© Bettmann/CORBIS

RACE IN NEW ORLEANS: THE TEXTURE OF IDENTITY

"No city on this planet can be more varied, more motley, more multifarious. Is there another place where no barriers exist between people? A world where people join, meet, all equals. Oh, there are slaves but if you're a slave you can work to buy your freedom because the more people there are free, the better we all will be."

MARGERY, ACT I

In 1801, New Orleans was like no other city in terms of racial and cultural diversity. More than half the population was black slaves and **free men of color** — former slaves who were granted or had purchased their freedom. Slavery existed across the continent, but under Spanish rule, the boundaries of race in New Orleans were less restrictive than in other colonies, and free men, like Jacques, enjoyed many liberties. One reason for the relaxed rules was **plaçage**, a law allowing a white man to enter into an official arrangement with a woman of color. It was not uncommon for white slave owners to have relationships with their slaves resulting in children. Plaçage granted rights to the woman and her offspring. If the slave owner freed the woman, her children would also be freed. Interracial coupling resulted in multiracial citizens and a city that was a collage of skin color. Director George C. Wolfe calls race in New Orleans the "**texture of identity**." As they play cards in the play's opening scene, the characters announce the gradations of their racial diversity:

Dr. Toubib: See the lush palette of skin tones in New Orleans.

Dorilante: ...I am a shade called Meamelouc - white and metif.

Sparks: ...I'm Quarteron - white and meamelouc.

Harcourt: I'm truly white...Here it's just another color.

A Mulatto was half White and half Black. A Quadroon was half White and half Mulatto. A Metif was half White and half Quadroon. These classifications told how much black heritage a person had. Even the Spanish governor, Juan Ventura Morales was thought to have “**a touch of the brush**” (black heritage) in his lineage.

Free men owned property, became skilled tradesmen and operated small businesses. Louisiana had the largest number of freed slaves on the continent and some of the most prosperous African American farmers and businessmen. Many owned their own slaves adding to the complexities of the meaning of race. In this enlightened society, racism still existed as well as other cultural ironies.



Un employé du gouvernement sortant de chez lui, 1834-39. Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Le Code Noir

When Jacques learns that the French have regained control of New Orleans, his primary concern is that they will reinstate a set of slave laws called **Le Code Noir** that would ostensibly erase the freedoms of **plaçage** and destroy his life. Le Code Noir was first enacted in 1685 by Louis XIV as a way to control slavery in the Caribbean. It was imposed on Louisiana in 1724 but largely ignored when the Spanish came into power in 1763. Le Code Noir did not allow interracial marriage or relationships nor did it recognize any rights of slaves who bore children of white masters. It severely limited the rights of free men, and specifically stated that blacks were property and were to be treated as such. In the play, the return of Code Noir means the end of New Orleans as Jacques knows it and the death of his “Age of Enlightenment” when race is a spectrum of color to be celebrated.

Jefferson, Napoleon And Slavery

“We are the slaves to slavery,” Thomas Jefferson admits when Jacques asks how he can condone slavery yet can proclaim that “all men are created equal.” Jefferson, a founding father, represented the paradox of American ideals and slavery. Like his fellow Virginians, he valued the ownership of blacks as an economic necessity essential to the growth of an independent and free America. For Jefferson, opposing slavery - no matter how wrong - was inconvenient. Some historians believe Jefferson fathered several children with his slave Sally Hemings. Meanwhile, France abolished slavery in 1794, but after coming to power as First Consul of France in 1799, Napo-



Le Code Noir. Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

leon sets out to restore it. In 1802, Napoleon reinstates slavery in the colonies to support the need for labor. When the Louisiana Purchase transferred to the United States, Code Noir transferred, too, in the form of harsh restrictions on slaves and free men and a strict view of skin color that determined status.

Revolution

Three revolutions weave through the play: the American Revolution, the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution. “Come to the West Indies and enforce the ideals of the Revolution,” pleads Toussaint Louverture. Gifted but struggling, the leader of the island attempting to gain its independence seeks help from his inspirations the French and Americans who also fought for independence, freedom and equality. But, they reject him. Jefferson reverses the promises John Adams made to support Louverture and instead signs on to join with Napoleon to crush the revolution although he never follows through. Napoleon’s troops are defeated but not before they capture Louverture who dies in prison in 1803. The revolution continues and results in Haiti establishing itself as a free republic in 1804.



Le Gal. Toussaint-L’ouverture, a qui Gal. Leclerc avait envoye ses enfans. Library of Congress.

BEYOND NEW ORLEANS: EXPLORATION AND “WHITENESS”

“Students will be excited about the metaphor of the “white space,” the notion that we can have a hand in shaping the future. The belief that students themselves can affect change in their school or community allows for lots of possibilities.”

JODI DICK GELBMAN, LCT TEACHING ARTIST



Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1805. Drawing by Frederic Remington in Collier’s Magazine, 1906 May 12. Library of Congress.

With the Louisiana Purchase, the United States doubled its land mass adding an area that today consists of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma and most of the land in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Minnesota. At the time, no one knew exactly what was included in this massive parcel of land. Jefferson had set out to buy New Orleans but beyond that was the great unknown. While explorers had charted the Eastern seaboard to the Mississippi, much of the continent was still unmapped. These blank expanses on the existing maps led to the concept of “white space.” Before Google Earth and GPS, geography existed largely in the imagination, mysterious and full of possibilities.

In 1804, Thomas Jefferson released Meriwether Lewis from his duties as personal assistant and sent him off to lead the extraordinary Lewis and Clark expedition to map the Louisiana Purchase. Along the way, Lewis hoped to stumble upon the legendary Northwest Passage, a **western waterway** that centuries of explorers had sought. Many characters in the play mention the waterway. This elusive (and non-existent) river bewitched the minds of men who believed it would lead to riches and prosperity. Meriwether Lewis is considered an extraordinary pathfinder and a national hero for his fearless exploration. There were strange circumstances surrounding his untimely death in 1809 at age 35. Some historians believe he may have committed suicide. The play explores this idea and Lewis' struggle to find the unfindable.

Exploration and expansion fast became a major part of America's developing identity. The Louisiana Purchase occurred on the eve of Manifest Destiny, the 19th century American belief that the United States was destined to expand across the North American continent, from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean.

TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS RELATED TO A *FREE MAN OF COLOR*

1682 — France claims all territory along the Mississippi from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

1716 — New Orleans established.

1762 — France cedes New Orleans and Louisiana west of Mississippi to Spain.

1763 — France cedes territories east of the Mississippi to Britain.

1776 — Declaration of Independence in the British colonies, "All men are created equal!"

1781 — American Revolutionary war ends.

1788 — U.S. Constitution ratified.

1789 — French Revolution begins.

1791 — Slaves revolt in Sante Domingue, Haitian Revolution begins.

1794 — France abolishes slavery.

1799 — Napoleon Bonaparte comes to power as France's First Consul.

1800 — Spain secretly returns Louisiana and New Orleans to France.

1801 — Thomas Jefferson becomes the third president of the United States.

1801 — Jefferson sends Robert Livingston to France to purchase New Orleans.

1802 — Napoleon sends troops to re-establish control in Sante Domingue/Santo Domingo.

1802 — Napoleon reinstates slavery in the colonies.

1803 — Toussaint Louverture dies in a French prison.

1803 — Napoleon forgoes his plans to rule the New World.

1803 — Livingston and James Monroe pay France \$15 million for the Louisiana Purchase.

— July 4: Purchase is officially announced in the United States.

— October 20: United States ratifies Purchase treaty.

— November 30: Spain formally transfers Louisiana to France.

— December 20: France formally transfers Louisiana to United States

— December 30: United States takes formal possession of Louisiana.

1804 — Napoleon becomes Emperor of France

1804 — Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase

1809 — Meriwether Lewis dies under mysterious circumstances, possibly suicide.

The Play

“In the digital world of today, images and ideas mesh and layer as collage and kids are used to the idea of a mash up. The layering in the play will be familiar and stimulating.” *Jodi Dick Gelbman, LCT Teaching Artist*

THEATRICAL STYLE AND CONVENTIONS

A Free Man of Color emerges as non-naturalistic theater based on actual historic events with an overlay of Restoration comedy and an infusion of commedia dell'arte interrupted by serious drama and tragedy. John Guare has adapted and melded the styles of these theatrical genres to convey meaning in *A Free Man of Color*.

Restoration Comedy was a highly stylized form of theater popular in England beginning in 1660 when the government allowed theaters to reopen following an 18-year moratorium by the Puritans. The plays were very entertaining and provided a form of social satire and comedy that came as a relief after years of oppression. Mr. Guare threads the themes, plot and devices of Restoration comedy through *A Free Man of Color* and much of the play's humor, as well as its social commentary, derives from this theatrical style. Restoration comedy is **FARCE**, comedy resulting from an absurd situation such as in the many scenes of Jacques seducing women just steps away from their husbands. The plot of Restoration plays often center on a cheating wife and her “cuckolded” husband and are giddy with **ribald wit**. Jacques' line, “A seduction doesn't count unless it is taking place under the husband's nose” echoes the attitude of Restoration comedy. *The Country Wife* written by William Wycherly, a prominent Restoration playwright, includes a naïve wife like Mr. Guare's character Margery and a hoax of impotence similar to Jacques' ploy at the end of Act 1. In his Restoration plays, William Congreve wrote about the “fury of a woman scorned” that Mr. Guare reflects in Jacques' wife Doña Athene. Like *A Free Man of Color*, Restoration drama involves multiple, elaborate costumes that emphasize the



Mr. Foote as Fondlewife, 1776.
Courtesy of Furness Image Collection.

plays' focus on **surface realities** and **social conventions** such as contrived manners. The theatrical devices common in Restoration plays such as **direct address to the audience**; "**asides**," (conspiratorial comments to the audience made during a scene); and **prose and verse** are found in Mr. Guare's other plays, and he uses them here to emphasize the theatricality of the play.

Commedia dell'arte is an Italian theatrical form that emerged in the 1500s but has roots in ancient theater and was popular in France in the 17th century. Aspects of commedia can be found throughout early Mardi Gras celebrations in Europe and elements of commedia costumes and masks can be recognized in today's Mardi Gras. In the production, the wealthy Mardi Gras celebration integrates the colors and styles of commedia costumes. Like Restoration comedy, commedia dell'arte is farcical. It relies on masks, an exaggerated acting style and stock characters. Jacques, Murmur, Juan Ventura Morales and Pincepousse all have elements of stock commedia characters.

Tragedy and Serious Drama

In Act II, the style of the play interrupts when Jacques falls unexpectedly into the boat carrying refugees from the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo. The event has tragic proportions as Jacques literally falls downward into horror and desperation crammed below deck and realizes the magnitude of the suffering of his people. He is changed. His clothes are ripped from his body. He begins to speak and act differently. **From here forward, there is a change in mood.** This shift in the dramatic narrative is a signature device of Mr. Guare and references the style of Theater of the Absurd when moments of comedy turn to horror. In *A Free Man of Color*, the elements of Restoration comedy continue in fits and starts but generally, the play transforms in style to be a serious drama interlaced with tragedy. The conversations Jacques has with Meriwether Lewis and Thomas Jefferson are very serious. At this point, Meriwether had achieved so much as an explorer that he would become a national hero. When he kills himself, the scene is utterly tragic.



THEMES TO EXPLORE

Rather than expound on the meanings of his plays, John Guare insists that it is the audience who reveals what the plays are about. In *A Free Man of Color*, many ideas emerge, overlap and intersect. Explore the possible themes described below and uncover others with your students.

Fantasy vs. Reality: Jacques says his play is about "the value of veneer, the sanctity of surfaces." He celebrates fantasy. In the play, what is false and what is real? How do we know "the truth?"

Identity: "...in New Orleans, you can be whatever you declare yourself to be," says Alcibiade who claims to be Norwegian although he comes from Barbados. Jacques creates a fanciful version of himself, a former slave, in the opulent fashion of white Europeans. How is identity manipulated?

Money, Power, and Politics: All of the characters play politics to gain power and money. Before his elaborate hoax, Jacques renames his play, "A Free Man of Color or The Things We Do for Power." In what ways are money, power and politics interconnected?

Status: At the play's start, social hierarchy is based mostly on money and politics. Le Code Noir means status is determined by skin color. How does Le Code Noir fundamentally change the city?

Exploitation: The characters exploit their relationships to get what they need from one another. Slavery is the most abhorrent exploitation of human life. How do people justify exploitation?

Utopia Lost: Jacques' New Orleans of 1801 is like a utopia. By the end, his version of the city no longer exists. Jacques recites a line from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Are utopias ever sustainable?

Expansion: The play weaves through European imperialism and forecasts America's proclamation of Manifest Destiny. How and why is expansion part of these nations' identities?

Change: Dr. Toubib foreshadows a painful future with, "One thing I know is every change means something you hold dear is sure to be taken away." Do you agree with his belief?

America: Jefferson proclaims, "America is an idea!" Founded on "all men are created equal," how do the actions of a young America match up with its ideals? What about today?

Love: The women talk of love. After escaping from the hold of the slave ship, Jacques admits he feels love for his fellow black man. Does love prevail in this play? Why or why not?



Costume designs by Ann Hould-Ward for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *A Free Man of Color*.

SYMBOLS & MOTIFS

CLOTHES represent a character's identity, status and personal history.

MASKS allow anonymity and freedom. Masquerading is a form of manipulating one's identity.

MAPS signify place, possibilities and politics.

THEATER devices and references frame Jacques' story and underline the question of reality.

Watch for these **Symbolic Objects**.

What meaning do they have?

Napoleon's bathtub

The microscope

Josephine's tarot cards

The laser pointer

Louis XIV (the Sun King)

Drums

Jefferson's violin

The Imperial Decoder

Jacques' bed

Margery's baby

Cannons

Ships

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

The fictional characters in the play represent the diversity of New Orleans in 1801.

Character	Who	Quote	Questions
JACQUES CORNET	The central character of the play's title. A freed slave, rich by inheritance and his own successful business. A lothario and fashionista, his flamboyance reflects New Orleans. He is changed along with the city.	Described in Guare's opening stage directions as "a dazzling piece of work." He is in nearly every scene. Listen for his lines: "Brocade gave me confidence." And later, "Sir, I am fighting for liberty."	Jacques' clothes demand attention. What does each outfit reflect? What does it mean when his clothes are stripped from him in the hold of the ship? How does Jacques evolve? What do his final words tell you?
CUPIDON MURMUR	Jacques' slave. Sarcastic and quick-witted. He wants freedom, but claims he would stay with Jacques if freed.	"A very rich, very white father, left my boss everything. Including me. I do all the work. He does nothing."	The actor playing Murmur, also plays Toussaint. What does this emphasize? Notice how Murmur plays a sidekick.
DR. TOUBIB	An older, educated doctor who acts as narrator or tour guide for the audience. A friend to Jacques and Murmur.	"And this is how empires stumble into being."	In the end, Dr. Toubib, an escaped slave, is returned to his owner. What is the effect of his disappearance?
ZEUS-MARIE PINCEPOUSSE	Jacques' white, hate filled, half-brother. Obsessed with recovering his "rightful" inheritance and keeping his wife faithful.	"I am extremely white, and my blood extremely blue. I hate being in this house, which is rightfully mine."	How does Pincepousse's name match his personality? What do you see in his hatred for his brother?
MARGERY JOLICOUER	Naïve young wife to Pincepousse, she falls in love with New Orleans and with Jacques, eventually bearing him a child.	"What a world of fine folks here is...I have got the Louisiana disease they call love."	Margery is mesmerized by New Orleans. What does she notice about the city in her innocence?
DOÑA ATHENE	Jacques' wife who he repeatedly rejects. She leads the attack against him in the final scenes.	Jacques says of Doña Athene, "I didn't buy myself out of one slavery to move into another."	What does Jacques' rejection of her tell us? Why is her anger so strong?

Character	Who	Quote	Questions
HARCOURT ALCIBIADE DORILANTE PYTHAGORE SPARKS	Each man fawns over Jacques to gain access to his wealth and position. Later, as power shifts, they shut him out. He learns they are spies for Britain, France and Spain. They are in denial that Jacques woos their wives.	The men vie for Jacques' attention: "Jacques, see the treasures I've brought!" "I've painted your portrait! Jacques!" "Jacques! See my map!" His reply: "As if they have anything I need — other than their wives."	How are each of these characters different from one another in personality, in physicality and vocally. What aspect of New Orleans culture does each man represent? How is each one's character reflected in his costume?
MME MANDRAGOLA AND HER GIRLS	The local madam and her entourage of prostitutes happily entertain Jacques and dread the likes of Juan Morales.	"I supply New Orleans with the comfort of the most luscious kaleidoscope of flesh."	While the openness of the prostitutes may seem risqué, what else does it say about New Orleans and Jacques?
ACHILLE CREUX	Racist cousin to Morales, he and his wife begrudgingly escaped the Sante Domingue rebellion.	"The French gave too many people the idea of freedom."	Creux's words are blatantly racist. What impact do his words have on you?
DOÑA POLISSENA	Wife of Creux. A scientist. She searches for the cause of yellow fever. Jacques woos her.	"In the interest of science, I am yours!"	Notice how the microscope represents science. When does she discover the cause of yellow fever?
LADY HARCOURT MRS. SPARKS MME DORILANTE MME ALCIBIADE MME PYTHAGORE DOÑA SMERALDA	The women of Jacques' world whom he repeatedly seduces and abandons without remorse. They cannot deny their attraction for him. Wives of his "admirers," these women are one way Jacques gains status and information.	Jacques says, "A seduction doesn't count unless it's taking place under the husband's nose." Nearly all the women ask Jacques, "You love only me?"	Like their husbands, each woman has a unique personality from the other female characters. What does Jacques represent for these women? Why is each attracted to him? Do they use him as he uses them?

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

Throughout *A Free Man of Color*, John Guare drops in historical characters based on real life people who existed during the time period of the play. These characters insert historical background to the main storyline and function as an illustrated review of American and European history at the turn of the 19th century. The scenes also provide comedy, intrigue and drama. The characters resemble three-dimensional versions of *political cartoons* popular at that time. Further research into the actual people reveals how Guare remarkably captured aspects of their larger-than-life personalities.

Spain

Juan Ventura Morales (1756-1819): “Among other divinely ordained powers by the kingdom of Spain, I supervise travel on the Mississippi.” As the Supreme Intendente of New Orleans, Morales controls the waterways surrounding New Orleans. He wields his power at his convenience shutting down access to the port of New Orleans when he feels threatened. As happens in the play, Morales closed the Mississippi after learning that Spain had ceded power to France and tried unsuccessfully to take command of the city. **NOTICE:** *Describe how the actor playing Morales speaks and moves. How did the actor express Morales' pompous attitude?*

Carlos Cuarto, also known as King Carlos IV of Spain (1748-1819): “America is a nuisance.” The politically impotent King of Spain spends little time thinking of his colonies in the New World. He would rather appease his favorite daughter than trouble himself with kingly duties. During his reign, Spain had a rocky relationship with France but Napoleon ultimately strong-armed the King's allegiance. **NOTICE:** *How is Carlos Cuarto's costume appropriate to his character? What is it about him that seems weak and out of touch with what is happening?*

The Infanta (1782-1724): “A hungry Princess in Italy.” The spoiled, strange daughter of Carlos Cuarto, the Infanta (a Spanish princess) wants property for her husband but does not seem to care where or why as she long gets what she wants. The character is based on King Charles' favorite daughter Maria Luisa, one of his fourteen children, who became Queen of Etruria after Napoleon granted her father the territory in Italy. **NOTICE:** *What is your reaction to the Infanta's appearance?*

France

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821): “I'll conquer Europe. I'll humiliate the British as they have humiliated me.” As the play begins, Napoleon is France's First Consul, not yet Emperor, but he has begun his campaign to reclaim France's global empire. A shrewd strategist, he decides to opt out of the New World, at least temporarily, by selling France's holdings to the young United States, a facetious move in the face of his rivals Spain and Britain. He will be defeated in the Napoleonic Wars before he can reclaim North America. **NOTICE:** *Watch for his “cannon” representing his insatiable desire to conquer. What other details of costume or props adds to the caricature of Napoleon?*

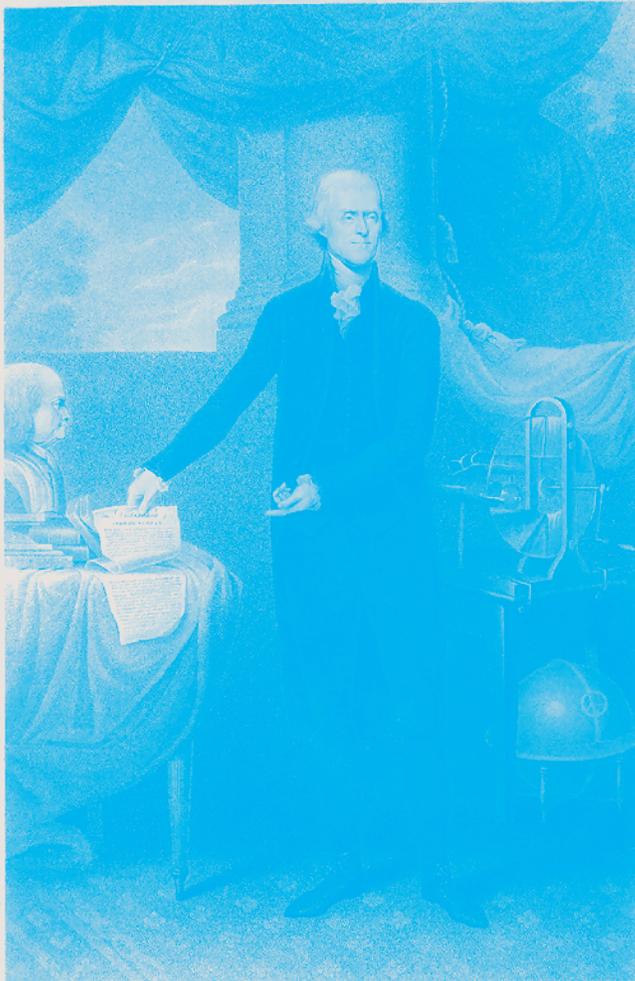


Painting of Napoleon. Library of Congress.

Josephine (1763-1814): “Not Louisiana! The Indies! I want my muslins washed!” Napoleon's self-centered wife is more concerned with her appearance than any political or social ramifications of her husband's exploits. Napoleon's “true love,” he would eventually divorce her because she could not bear him children. **NOTICE: *How do Josephine's costumes and props emphasize her silliness?***

Talleyrand, short for Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord (1754-1838): “Feel the future pulsate.” Napoleon's most skilled diplomat urges his leader to focus on the New World but to no avail. He later brokers the sale of the Louisiana Purchase. Talleyrand served France from the reign of Louis XVI to Louis Philippe, the last king of France in positions including Minister of Foreign Affairs. **NOTICE: *As a diplomat, how does Talleyrand use words to create and develop relationships?***

General Charles LeClerc (1772-1802): “I'm told in the Indies you step out of bed, scorpions wait.” Napoleon's brother-in-law, husband to his sister, known as the “blond Bonaparte,” LeClerc sets out to crush the slave rebellion in Sante Domingue but succumbs to yellow fever. **NOTICE: *LeClerc seems out of touch with reality until the end. How does the actor show his oblivious nature?***



THOMAS JEFFERSON
President of the United States.

Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States. Engraving by Cornelius Tiebout, 1801. Library of Congress.

United States

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826): “Run a country the way I run my personal life? Never!” Founding father, author of the Constitution and third president of the United States (1801-1809). Thomas Jefferson both owns slaves and runs a young country based on the idea of individual freedom. His election was contentious and the response to his bold purchase of Louisiana territory was a mix of praise and criticism, but he forever shaped America. **NOTICE: *How do we reconcile Jefferson's hypocrisy?***

Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809): “Sir! I need to be out in the white spaces!” Half of the famous “Lewis & Clark” of westward exploration, Lewis began his professional life as personal assistant to Thomas Jefferson. The president finally appointed him to lead the expedition to chart the Louisiana Territory. As the play portrays, mysterious circumstances cloud his death that some historians believe may have been a suicide due to his sense of personal failure. Lewis remains a hero of early American history for his remarkable work as an explorer. **NOTICE: *How has Lewis changed when Jacques meets him in the “white space” in the second half of the play?***

Robert Livingston (1746-1813) and James Madison (1751-1836): “Let's do it!” Livingston, Jefferson's ambassador and Madison, his vice president are sent to France with strict orders to negotiate the purchase of New Orleans. They return with all of Louisiana and then some having gone substantially over the budget

Jefferson gave them. Livingston had helped draft the Declaration of Independence but was not present to sign it. Madison, a founding father along with Jefferson, became the fourth president of the United States (1809-1817).
NOTICE: *How does Guare build the suspense and drama in the scenes of negotiation? Notice how he incorporates humor into the events.*



Map of Hispaniola. Hayti or St. Domingo, 1853. Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Sante Domingue/Haiti:

François-Dominique **Toussaint L'Ouverture (Louverture)** (1743-1803): **"Behold this land which we have watered with our blood."** A former slave of the French colony Saint-Domingue on the western side of the island of Hispanola, Louverture became the leader of the slave rebellion that eventually led to the formation of the independent nation of Haiti. Inspired by the French and American revolutions, Louverture established Sante-Domingue as an independent territory and brought peace to the slave revolts. He remained loyal to France and asked for support from both America and France to establish a new nation. In 1802, Napoleon sent troops to squash the rebellion and reinstate slavery. Louverture was captured and died in a prison in France in 1803.
NOTICE: *Listen closely to Louverture's words. Why has he been abandoned? Was he right to expect support?*



Toussaint Louverture. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

The Production

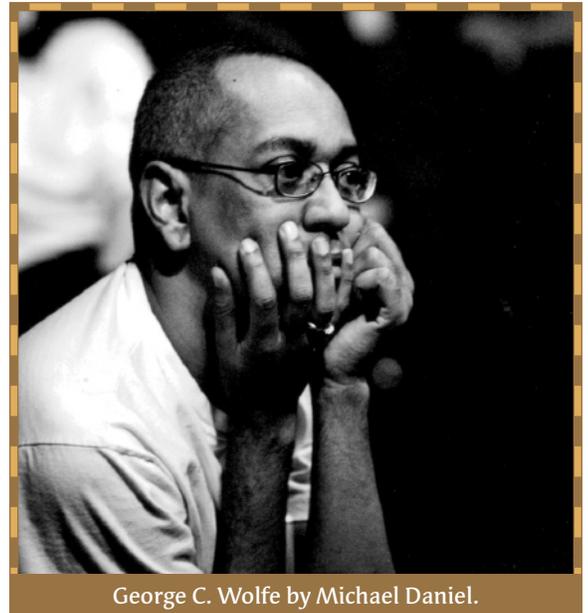
A Free Man of Color calls for an elaborate production with numerous sets, multiple costumes and a large cast. It was a monumental undertaking to conceive and stage this epic play. The team assembled to achieve this task includes some of today's leading theater professionals. **Visit the show's Backstage Blog:** <http://www.lct.org/showBlog.htm?id=198> for behind the scenes information.

DIRECTOR: GEORGE C. WOLFE

"It is an interesting and challenging balancing act to combine the buoyancy and the sense of foolish and fabulous that is Restoration comedy with the absurdity, madness, and potency that is the history of this country."

GEORGE C. WOLFE, LINCOLN CENTER THEATER REVIEW

Mr. Wolfe is an American director of film and theater and a playwright. *A Free Man of Color* marks his debut at Lincoln Center Theater. He has won Tony Awards for directing *Angels in America* and for *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*. He also directed, among others, *Jelly's Last Jam*, *Caroline or Change*, and *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*. From 1993 to 2004, he served as artistic director and producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theater.



George C. Wolfe by Michael Daniel.

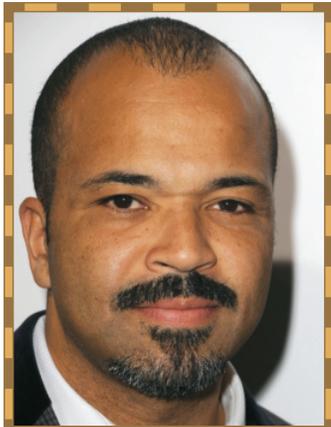
PROCESS: Mr. Wolfe and playwright John Guare began their work on *A Free Man of Color* six years ago. Mr. Wolfe was interested in doing an "über-Restoration Comedy" exploring the era of the Louisiana Purchase and set in New Orleans. He also wanted to create a play that would feature actor Jeffrey Wright. Thrilled by the ideas, Guare began writing. The first draft was five and a half hours long. They incubated the play over time, editing and revising, finally staging a workshop production at LCT in summer 2009.

VISION: Mr. Wolfe explained his inspiration, "To me what's really thrilling about New Orleans is that it has always felt like a Caribbean Island attached to the United States, because of the French and Spanish influences and the overt Africanism." He describes the primary visual experience of the play as the collision of New Orleans with "...incredible European aesthetic, combined with an incredible African aesthetic, combined with this American overlay."

NOTICE:

- An ensemble of six male slaves within the scenes who infuse a Caribbean aesthetic.
- African drums and Caribbean music that weave through the European feel of the play.
- The differences between the two Mardi Gras celebrations. What aspects of the culture emerge?
- Images that evoke black cultural history as in the slave ship scene.

CAST HIGHLIGHTS



Jeffrey Wright.

Heading up the cast of twenty-six actors are Jeffrey Wright and Mos. Mr. Wright has been involved in the project since its inception. Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Guare created the play for Wright to play Jacques Cornet. Mos appeared as Murmur in the workshop production of the play in summer 2009. Mos and Mr. Wright appeared together on Broadway in 2002 in Suzan Lori-Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* directed by George C. Wolfe.

JEFFREY WRIGHT plays Jacques Cornet. A classically trained actor, he has appeared in numerous films and stage productions. He starred as artist Jean-Michel Basquiat in Julian Schnabel's 1996 film *Basquiat* and had leading roles in *Presumed Innocent* and *Syriana*. Mr. Wright won a Tony Award for *Angels in America: Perestroika* and an Emmy Award for the television version of *Angels in America*. In 2000, he played

Marc Antony in the New York Shakespeare Festival's production of *Julius Caesar* in Central Park. He was Da Voice in *Bring in da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* directed by Mr. Wolfe.

MOS plays Murmur and Toussaint Louverture. He is an actor and a rapper formerly known by the stage name Mos Def. A major force in the late 1990s underground hip hop scene, today he collaborates with numerous artists on a range of music projects. He is the host of HBO spoken word show, *Def Poetry* and has received critical acclaim for his stage and screen acting in films. Born in Brooklyn, Mos attended Talent Unlimited High School in Manhattan.



Mos by Terrence Jennings.

NOTICE:

- The interplay of Jacques and Murmur. What does it reveal?
- Actors playing more than one role. Are there connections between the characters?
- The ways actors use physical expression and body language for comic or dramatic effect.
- The strategies used by the actors as they perform on a thrust stage. With the audience on three sides, the actors must find creative ways to communicate clearly so that everyone can see and hear.

SET DESIGNER: DAVID ROCKWELL

An award-winning architect who has designed structures and projects across the globe, David Rockwell's portfolio includes the Imagination Playground near Manhattan's South Street Seaport, the Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco, and set designs for the 2009 and 2010 Academy Awards. He grew up in theater and brought that passion to his study of architecture. His private design firm, Rockwell Group includes 160 people and has satellite offices in Madrid and Dubai.

PROCESS: Mr. Rockwell worked closely with Mr. Wolfe to develop the ideas for the multiple sets that move to transform the stage. They drew inspiration from classic and naïve visual art and from Restoration theater conventions such as moving backdrops and forced perspective. They use the entire width and depth of the stage to accommodate the range of scenes.

“The world of the play is always relevant, but in this play it is like another character.” *LaTonya Borsay, LCT Teaching Artist*

VISION: Mr. Rockwell's approach is to think of the stage pictures created by the set design as a version of storytelling. A challenge was to depict multiple places and spaces at times simultaneously. Creating a permanent proscenium arch on stage became a central focus as a means to define the play (and Jacques' "play") as a theatrical experience. The stage itself thrusts into the audience further than in most LCT productions to bring the audience as close as possible to the action. Mr. Rockwell worked to create sets that could move with grace and simplicity regardless of their immense size so that the settings of the action transform effortlessly.

NOTICE:

- Locations represented by maps.
- Stage elements that mimic grand paintings.
- How the set changes over the arc of the play.
- What does the huge American flag suggest?
- Josephine appears in a portrait frame. Is it effective?
- Why has the set turned to rubble at the play's end? What feeling does it evoke?
- How the set elements create a world of the play that evokes mood.
- Jacques' bed and what it says about him.



Set designer David Rockwell's model for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *A Free Man of Color*.



“It was amazing how Cornet used his bed as a tool for status positioning: to be the ladies man and feared by husbands, to gain pleasure and secret information, to keep him on top in more ways than one. He later used the bed to gain pity from those who wanted his inheritance.” *Chuck Burks, LCT Teaching Artist*

COSTUME DESIGNER: ANN HOULD-WARD

An accomplished costume designer for theater and dance, Ms. Hould-Ward won the 1994 Tony Award for her work on the Disney musical *Beauty and the Beast* that involved a human-size teapot and candelabra. She has designed costumes for more than 18 Broadway productions as well as for many regional theaters, opera houses and dance companies. Exhaustive research and exceptional detail are signature elements of her designs.

PROCESS: Ms. Hould-Ward collaborated with Director George C. Wolfe for several months to create a design for each of the dozens of costumes in the play. Because fashion and clothing are central to the play's story and the main character of Jacques, Hould-Ward researched the social and political aspects of clothing at the turn of the 19th century. She learned that fashion was sometimes part of a subversive culture. People used fashion to jockey for social position or to express themselves when their freedoms were otherwise oppressed.

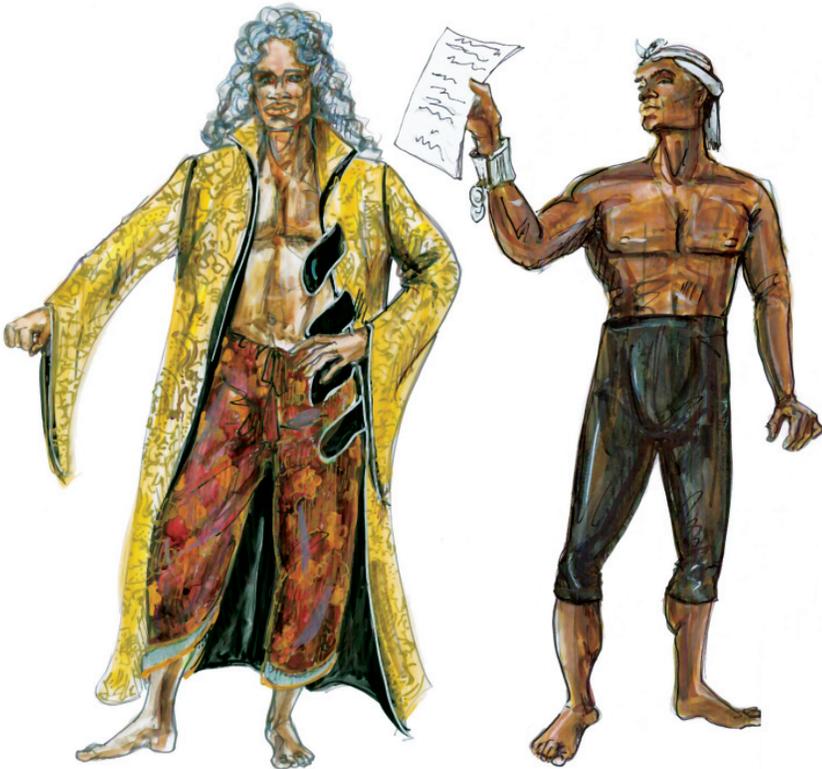
Costume designs by Ann Hould-Ward
for Lincoln Center Theater's production
of *A Free Man of Color*.



VISION: Ms. Hould-Ward turned to the silhouettes of the era to inform her designs, but she looked more broadly when selecting fabrics. The materials she selected reflect texture and geography. Because Jacques imports fabrics from around the world to make his magnificent clothes, the fabrics needed to represent these far off places. Luxurious, dimensioned, and colorful, this material represents Jacques' aspirations. Mr. Wolfe explained, "How you dress is an aspect of freedom, an act of theatricality, a form of storytelling, and part of a visual lexicon we create." Each character's costume tells something about him or her.

“(The play is about) a performance of self. If you have enough money you can perform a version of yourself.”

George C. Wolfe, Director, A Free Man of Color.



NOTICE:

- A Greek influence: the fashion of the time was neoclassic with high Empire waists and flowing skirts that mimicked the erudite ancient society that they emulated.
- Hats: women competed for attention and status by wearing elaborate hats.
- Distressed clothes: the costumes begin to reflect a character's experience such as weariness.
- Costumes as scenery: tall ships are depicted by actors wearing boats as hats.
- Color: emphasizes class and priorities. Americans wear earth tones. Wealthy New Orleanians wear jewel tones.



“With clothes, you can create whoever you want to be. You can costume yourself in your clothing. Fashion can be status. There is power in the way you look and controlling how you are perceived. The element of fashion in the show connects to identity. Students are always thinking about how to manipulate identity. How will people perceive you in a different way? A person can be expressing who they truly are or they may be deceptive.”

LaTonya Borsay, LCT Teaching Artist

Costume designs by
Ann Hould-Ward
for Jacques Cornet.

Classroom Activities

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Give students the tools to orient themselves to the “world of the play” regardless of the amount of previous knowledge they have about the history or context of the play. A set of inquiry-based questions can help students engage with a complex play, or any play, in a way that will make the experience enjoyable and educational. Cue them to respond to the play’s mood, tone and style and to consider how the production elements affect their response as an audience. In this way, students develop their ability to engage with the play on their own as critical theatergoers.

- 1 What do you notice about the set? What mood pervades and how does it affect the story?
- 2 Listen for music and sounds. What is the tone? How does it influence your response?
- 3 Describe the lighting. What feeling does it create for the characters and for the audience?
- 4 Watch the actor’s body language. What does it tell you about their lives and attitudes?
- 5 In what kind of world do these characters live? What are the rules?

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL

Lead your class in a choral reading of the first two sentences of the Declaration of Independence. Read it through a few times to become familiar with the words and discover their sound and dynamic. Or, after reading once through give students individual words or phrases that you have cut apart in advance and experiment by creating a choral poem. After you have played with the language, ask students: What do the words mean to you? How have the meanings changed since the words were first written? Create a dramatic image (tableau) that represents a key phrase selected by the students. Work with the entire class at once or in small groups. Experiment with creating “ideal” images juxtaposed with “ironic” images of the same line. How might the class improve upon or update this famous document?

FOLLOWING JACQUES

Cue students to carefully watch Jacques (Jeffrey Wright) in the production. Afterward, brainstorm a list of words that describe Jacques and his behavior. Mr. Wolfe calls Jacques, a “rogue, linguistic master, seducer, charmer.” What is your opinion of him? Can you identify contemporary versions of Jacques? As a class, have students move around the room with the energy and attitude of Jacques at the beginning of the play. How does moving in that way feel? Discuss how the character changes over the course of the play. Is there any way Jacques’s play might have had a different ending?

A CHARACTER MAP

Before seeing the play, orient students to the myriad of characters. Hand out copies of the character pages from the guide. Ask each student to choose one set of characters - either “fictional” or “historical” and create a one-page “character map,” a *visual* diagram, chart or illustration of the character group. Using the information provided on the page from the guide, students should indicate on their maps any relationships between characters and any specific traits of individual characters. The maps can be as simple or elaborate as students wish. After completing their map, students switch maps with someone who has created a map for the other character group and “read” it. What did students learn from making and reading their maps?

SLAVE TO FASHION

Ask students to bring in images from magazines, newspapers or the internet of people wearing fashion or creating an identity with clothes. Or, provide enough samples for the entire class. Have each student select a single image and answer these questions: What do you think this person is like? How are they dressed? What do their clothes communicate about who they are or who they are trying to be? What does it mean when someone is a “slave to fashion?” Students may write an essay or work in partners and discuss their responses.

NEWSFLASH! HAITIAN REVOLUTION

Have students’ research General LeClerc’s attempt to put down the Haitian Revolution and create a news report about one aspect of this historic event as if they are witnessing it live but with modern technology available. Students may choose to do a brief TV or radio report, write a news article or blog entry, or compose a series of text messages that capture the most salient aspects of the revolution.

OWNING THE PLOT TOGETHER

The synopsis is jam-packed so take time to read it together aloud. Give each student a copy of the synopsis and read around the circle, each person taking a turn to read a sentence. Ask “Who? What? Where? When?”-questions. Read it a second time. Have each student select one moment in the plot and look for it in the performance. Afterward, ask if they found the moment surprising in any way.

LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

New Orleans’ destiny has been determined in large part by its geography. Discuss how the city’s location exacerbated the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Look at past news reports to find out about the political challenges New Orleans faced related to the hurricane. How has the geography of New York City influenced its politics and evolution?

A NEW UTOPIA

In the play, Jacques loses his utopia of 1801 New Orleans. Discuss the concept of utopia, an ideal community or society like an earthly paradise. Ask students: What is your utopia? Brainstorm as a class what a contemporary utopia would be like and how it would be possible. Decide as a class the kind of rules that would govern a class utopia. Create mini-scenes of life in this utopia. What problems might this utopia face?

JEFFERSON AND THE AMERICAN PARADOX

Thomas Jefferson was a remarkable man largely responsible for shaping American ideals regarding freedom and liberty, but his involvement in slavery makes his life a paradox, if not perplexing. Talk about how Jefferson's beliefs seem contradictory. In a key scene within the play, Jacques confronts Jefferson who says it comes down to economics. In today's America, how does economics - or money - compromise our ideals?

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

Three major revolutions play into the crucible of this play: French, American and Haitian. Divide the class into three teams each representing a different revolution. Each team must research and present: 1) the causes, effects and big ideas of their revolution; and 2) why its purpose was superior to the other two revolutions. The presentation must be in the first person and everyone must participate in some way. There should be: 1) an oral presentation; 2) visual aids (illustrations, maps, or timelines); and 3) possibly, dramatic enactments in which team members recreate a key moment in the revolution.

UNDERSTANDING AESTHETIC

Before seeing the play, discuss the concept of a *visual aesthetic*. Director George C. Wolfe describes the play's visual aesthetic as a collision of the European with Carnivale. What might that mean? Brainstorm descriptive words connected to images of European experience and Carnivale celebrations. Afterward, talk about what students noticed related to aesthetic.

EXPERT GROUPS

Divide students into small expert groups and assign each group a different element of the play that they will track during the performance such as Sets, Lighting, Sound, Costumes, Staging, and Acting. Students should enjoy the show but keep their element in the back of their mind and notice how it affects and helps the production. Afterward, in a class discussion ask students to share what they discovered and give specific examples of how their element created mood and story.

BLACK CODES

Le Code Noir was one of many oppressive laws set in place to restrict the lives of people of color. How was Le Code Noir similar to the Jim Crow Laws? Ask students to uncover why people felt these terrible laws were warranted.

STATUS AND CLOTHES

Collect clothing accessories such as ties, hats, scarves, vests, enough for the entire class. Discuss with the class how clothing can denote status. Have six volunteers each choose one accessory to put on and face the class. Ask the class how the piece of clothing affects their perception of that person. Ask the volunteers to move around the room and adopt an energy and attitude to match the clothing accessory. Discuss the impact.

HISTORY OF MARDI GRAS

Mardi Gras existed long before the Europeans brought it to the New World. Have students research the cultural and religious significance of Mardi Gras. Plan a class Mardi Gras celebration during which students will present information about the cultural event.

STOCK CHARACTERS

The characters in *A Free Man of Color* recall the stock characters found in Restoration comedy and commedia dell'arte. Have students research the concept of stock characters and discuss it in class. Ask each student to select a current reality TV show or sitcom and analyze the character that falls into those stereotypes. How do these characters serve the plot or storyline of the television show? After seeing the production, discuss the characters in *A Free Man of Color*. What character types did students recognize and what role did the type play in the story?

VIRTUAL MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY.

Visit the PBS website where students can use the online resources to learn more about the history of slavery and create an online virtual museum. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/virtual.html>

POLITICAL CARTOONS

Napoleon, Josephine, Talleyrand and Livingston appear in the play as three dimensional versions of political cartoons. Discuss political cartoons, their style and purpose. Look at examples in class. How are the historical characters in the play like these cartoons?

THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE UNKNOWN

Imagine you have been asked to travel to another country where no one you know has been and where you don't speak the language. How would you begin to explore this new place with all of the tools available to you (books, internet, other technology)? Now imagine you will be exploring the same place, but without any research materials or technology. What would be the challenges? What steps would you take to explore and "map" this place?

Resources

JOHN GUARE

The War Against the Kitchen Sink: Collection of Plays Volume 1. Smith & Kraus. 1996.

"My Life at Lincoln Center Theater," by John Guare. *Lincoln Center Theater Review. A Free Man of Color.* Winter 2010 Issue No. 54. <http://www.lct.org/content/lctreview/FMOC.Review.Guare.pdf>

Biography and Interview. American Theatre Wing. http://americantheatrewing.org/biography/detail/john_guare/

NEW ORLEANS

The World That Made New Orleans by Ned Sublette. Lawrence Hill Books. Chicago 2009.

New Orleans American Experience. PBS. Film and online, interactive Resource Guide. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/neworleans/filmmore/index.html>

Institute of New Orleans History and Culture <http://www.gmc.edu/library/neworleans/NOhistory.htm>

LOUISIANA PURCHASE

America's Louisiana Purchase: Noble Bargain, Difficult Journey. Interactive website for students.

Louisiana Public Broadcasting. <http://www.lpb.org/education/tah/lapurchase/index.cfm>

Louisiana Purchase: Primary Document in American History. Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Louisiana.html>

AMERICAN HISTORY

America's story from America's Library — interactive site for students from the Library of Congress <http://www.americaslibrary.gov/about/welcome.html>

National Museum of American History <http://americanhistory.si.edu/>

BLACK EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

The African Experience in America: 1492-1992. An online Exhibition. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. <http://www2.si.umich.edu/chico/Schomburg/index.html>

Slavery and the Making of America. Public Broadcasting Service. 2005. Available on Amazon. Companion website with resources: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/>

THE LEWIS & CLARK EXPEDITION

Lewis and Clark: A journey of the Corps of Discovery. A film by Ken Burns. 1997. Companion website: <http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/>

National Archives: Teaching with Documents. The Lewis & Clark Expedition <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/lewis-clark/>

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE & THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

PBS: Africans in America/Part 3/The Haitian Revolution <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p2990.html>

Toussaint Louverture Historical Society <http://toussaintlouverturehs.org/>

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"Art in Louisiana: 1700-1900." *New Orleans Museum of Art Teacher's Manual*. noma.org. <http://www.noma.org/educationguides/LA1900.pdf> Retrieved September 5, 2010.

Brockes, Emma. "John Guare: 'Writing is Blood Sport'" The Guardian. January 5, 2010.

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Crabb, William J. "John Guare Biography." Theaterhistory.org. April 25, 2002 <http://www.theaterhistory.com/american/guare001.html> Retrieved September 5, 2010.

"Free African Americans in the Colonial Era." United States History online textbook. [ushistory.org. http://www.ushistory.org/us/6e.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/us/6e.asp) Retrieved September 7, 2010.

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