

NEGRO ENSEMBLE COMPANY

DAY OF ABSENCE

WRITTEN BY Douglas Turner Ward

REMAINING ABSENT EPILOGUE WRITTEN BY Cris Eli Blak

DIRECTOR Patricia R. Floyd

CAST (In alphabetical order)

MARY Michele Baldwin

JOHN/AIDE Maurio Brown

ANNOUNCER #2/BRUSH MAN Nicholas Brown

CHLOE KINGSTON/ENSEMBLE Jade Elle

LUKE/PIOUS Fulton C. Hodges

THIRD OPERATOR/DOLL WOMAN/MAN #3 Jade Mason

INDUSTRIALIST/ANNOUNCER #1/COACH SAUL Sean Phillips

JACKSON/JAM EAZY Alton Ray

MAYOR Benjamin Rowe

RASTUS/BUSINESSMAN/MOP MAN Nathaniel Ryan

SECOND OPERATOR/COURIER Tatiana Skyy

CLEM/CLAN Gilbert Tucker

COMMISSIONER/FIRST OPERATOR/CLUB WOMAN Kenya Wilson

COSTUME DESIGNER Kathy Roberson

ASSISTANT TO COSTUME DESIGNER Pat Lewis

LIGHTING DESIGNER Antoinette Tynes

SOUND DESIGNERS David Wright and Patricia R. Floyd

PROJECTION DESIGNER Michele Baldwin

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER Lawrence Floyd

STAGE MANAGER Liam Riordan

Harold Prince Theatre

Thursday, February 6 @ 7:30 PM

Friday, February 7 @ 8 PM

Saturday, February 8 @ 2 PM

There will be no intermission.

BEYOND THE STAGE

Stay after the show to engage further with the themes explored in the play:

Feb 7: Discussion moderated by Penn professor Dr. Herman Beavers

Feb 8: Group discussions facilitated by Penn's SNF Paideia program

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Patricia R. Floyd (Director)

Floyd is a director, actress, writer and, more importantly, proud native of The Motor City, Detroit, MI, where her career in theatre began. She served as Guest Director in Residence for six years at Stamford Theatre Works (STW) in Stamford, CT. There, she garnered critical acclaim helming *A Lesson Before Dying*, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, *The Blood Knot*, *A Walk in the Woods*, *Medal of Honor Rag*, *Intimate Apparel* and *Bee-Luther-Haatchee*. She also appeared at STW as Sophie Washington in *Flyin' West* and as Jackie Robinson's mother, Mallie, in *National Pastime*. She is a two-time Vivian Robinson AUDELCO Award recipient, receiving one in an acting category and one for her direction of *Black Man Rising*, which was twice invited to perform at the National Black Theater Festival and invited to the City Hall Theater in Bermuda for Princess Katarina of Yugoslavia. Her direction of the controversial play, *WhoreWorks*, was well-received and the company was chosen to perform in Dublin, Ireland. She worked as a guest director/instructor at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the New York Film Academy. Floyd was fortunate enough to connect and establish a collaboration with the brilliant writer, J.E. Robinson, which resulted in two festival productions, *Spades* and *Soledad*, the latter of which was included in the Theater for the New City's Dream Up Festival. She twice participated in Harlem Nine's *48 Hours in Harlem*, both as an actress and director. Floyd is a Lifetime Member of The Actors Studio, recently directing an excerpt from *Blues for Mister Charlie* for an evening honoring renowned Black playwrights/members Lorraine Hansberry, Philip Hayes Dean, Charles Cordone and James Baldwin in conjunction with the celebration of the group's 75th anniversary. You may recognize her from her guest star appearance in "The Righteous Right Hand" episode of *New Amsterdam*, dozens of national and regional commercials, her role as Nurse Wilkins in the film, *The God Committee* with Kelsey Grammar, recurring roles as Judge Rochelle Desmond in *Law and Order* and in *The Godfather of Harlem* as Esther James, "The Bag Lady."

Michele Baldwin (Mary/Projection Designer)

Human, woman and masterful interdisciplinary artist, Baldwin is a seasoned veteran of the entertainment field. She is primarily an actor but has learned to wear many other hats: in theatre and film, she has been a producer, writer and director. Baldwin is also a talented projection designer and a technical design director/consultant, who has provided services for several well-known theatre companies. As a lifelong learner, she thrives to conquer new things daily, and has been blessed to grace numerous NYC theatres in lead and supporting roles including Cherry Lane, MST, Second Stage Theatre, 59E59 and EST, to name a few. She is looking forward to performing at Penn Live Arts in this most meaningful play, *Day of Absence*. Baldwin is a member of SAG-AFTRA, NYWIFT, The Off Broadway Alliance, TRU, Women in Media, Women in Entertainment, Women Independent Producers, Women of Color Unite, IFP, Flobel.org, Newark Arts & Media Business Hub and Frank Silvera's Writers Workshop and serves as judge for the NJ Thespians Contest. michelebaldwin.com

Maurio Brown (John/Aide)

Brown is a Charleston, SC native whose passion for performing ignited in his hometown. He began his professional career with Paramount Parks. His regional touring experience includes roles in *Buffalo Soldier*, *Jungle Book* and *The Tailor of Gloucester* with Theater IV, as well as *Junie B. Jones* with TheaterWorksUSA. On the regional theatre stage, Brown has been featured in productions such as *Common Ground*, *Black Christmas Carol*, *Black Spurs* and *Committed the Musical*.

Nicholas Brown (Announcer/Dust Man)

Brown is a multi-hyphenate artist born and raised in Winston-Salem, NC and is a graduate of the UNCSA BFA drama program. Brown is the head coach of the girls artistic team at the Wendy Hilliard Gymnastics Foundation. Off-Broadway: *Swan Song for a Starboy* (Spark Theatre Fest) and *Damages* (ArsNova). Film: *Where's Rose* (Amazon Prime).

Jade Elle (Chloe Kingston/Ensemble)

Elle is an actress based in New York City. She brings a fresh sense of humor, honesty and groundedness to the characters she portrays and the stories she shares. Originally from the DMV area, she developed her passion for the arts at a young age and continued to pursue them more professionally after moving to New York City. She is happiest when she is engaging in a community of fellow creatives, building relationships and sharing experiences! She is very passionate about forming and maintaining genuine connections with others in the arts and is ecstatic about the opportunity to do so with the Negro Ensemble Company!

Fulton C. Hodges (Luke/Pious)

Hodges is an actor, director, playwright, stage and house manager, and teaching artist. He recently directed and performed in *Twas the Night Before Kwanzaa* at the Black Spectrum Theatre Company and performed the role of Mr. Hart in its production of *The Last Block Association*. He also recently performed the title character in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* with the Caribbean American Repertory Theatre/Theatre of the Living Word. He was on tour for several years as Attorney Crump in the Chad Lawson production of *Justice on Trial*. He is a 15-time AUDELCO Award nominee and eight-time winner, as well as the 2010 recipient of AUDELCO'S Prestigious Board of Directors Award. Upcoming events include directing *Love Is* by Anthony Wisdom (Caribbean American Repertory Theatre, March 2025).

Jade Mason (Third Operator/Doll Woman/Man #3)

Mason is a talented artist from Brooklyn, NY, recognized for her skills in acting, writing, modeling and praise dance, all influenced by her faith. In 2023, she received her first AUDELCO Award for Best Ensemble for *Picking Up the Pieces*. She is also grateful to have been a part of *The Last Block Association*, a production which was nominated at the 2024 AUDELCO Awards for Best Play. She has also appeared in episodes two and eight of the YouTube series *Nurses Station*, with more episodes on the way. Additionally, she has ventured into writing short plays like *Rise Like a Phoenix* and *Walk In Your Light*. Instagram: @JadeMason4Ever.

Sean Phillips (Industrialist/Coach Saul)

Phillips is a Brooklyn based actor. Theatre credits: *Hutch* by Charles White, directed by Lawrence Floyd; *Knock Me A Kiss*, directed by Chuck Smith; *Mother Courage* with Meryl Streep; *Network* at Florida Studio Theatre; *To Kill a Mockingbird* at The Cornish Playhouse. Film/TV: *FBI*, *The Good Wife*, *Person of Interest*, *Madam Secretary*.

Alton Ray (Jackson/Jam Eazy)

Ray is a Northern CA native who received his training at SUNY Purchase, where he received his BFA in the Acting Conservatory. Ray is grateful to God for his family and the circle of community that has embraced him. He was last seen off Broadway at the Billie Holiday Theater in *The Black Narratives* and at La Mama Experimental Theatre Club in NEC's *No Policy, No Justice*. Other credits include American Theater of Actors in *Buffalo Hero of WWI: The Wayne Miner Story* by Kenthedo Robinson; NEC's *Mecca Is Burning* (Penn Live Arts, Harlem School for the Arts); Cris Eli Blak's *Clipper Cut Nation* (Penn Live Arts, Cherry Lane Theater) and NEC's *Elevator Not Necessary* by Mona Washington (Penn Live Arts). Los Angeles theatre credits include Neil Simon's *Rumors* at The Blank Stage, Los Angeles; Sam Shepard's *Cowboy Mouth* at The New Collective Theater, Fringe Festival, Hollywood.

Benjamin Rowe (Mayor)

Rowe is a New York-born-and-bred actor who has been working on stages large and small since 2000. He most recently appeared in the Negro Ensemble Company's productions of *Zooman and the Sign* and *Elevator Not Necessary* at Penn Live Arts. He also appeared in *Mecca is Burning*, another production for Negro Ensemble Company which was nominated for an AUDELCO award for Outstanding Ensemble Performance. Rowe is honored and thrilled to work with such dedicated and talented artists and even better people. Last, but not least, Rowe wishes to thank his wife, Dawn, and their children, Julian, Da'Wren, Jahanna and Indirabelle. They sacrifice and share him with this creative world.

Nathaniel J. Ryan (Rastus/Businessman/Mop Man)

Ryan is excited and grateful to be a part of this production of *Day of Absence*. Ryan has performed across the country in *Fences* as Lyons Maxson and in *One in Two*. Television shows include *Blue Bloods* and *The Blacklist*, as well as various film credits. Ryan would like to thank his family and friends for their support.

Tatiana Skyy (Second Operator/Courier)

Skyy is an actress and writer from Queens, NY. After getting her start in the Black Spectrum Theatre's youth program, she received her BA in media production at Temple University. Some of Skyy's most recent credits include the award-winning short film, *In My Garden*; Wolfsmouth Players Company's *Effigy*; and the AUDELCO-nominated play *Mecca is Burning*.

Gil Tucker (Clem/Clan)

Tucker, also known as "Gil T.," is an accomplished actor who has been recognized with AUDELCO Awards for his outstanding performances. He honed his skills at Performing Arts High School in New York City, known as FAME. Tucker was among an elite group of three students who received a prestigious certificate of merit for their exceptional acting abilities. Tucker's comedic prowess has taken him to renowned venues such as Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Madison Square Garden and The Apollo. He has also been showcased on Def-Jam, Showtime and BET. As an actor, Tucker has been in AUDELCO award-nominated plays and in some that won the coveted Best Revival AUDELCO Award. Notable among these productions is *Reunion in Barbersville*, produced by the Black Spectrum Theatre and showcased at the NBTF in 2019. Tucker was Sgt. Waters in NEC's *A Soldiers Play* and received the Best Featured Actor AUDELCO Award in 2018. He appeared in the 2022 production of *Greenwood* with the Obsidian Media Group at the NBTF. That year, two shows he performed in with Black Spectrum Theatre Company, *Black Love* and *Oya*, were nominated for Best Revival AUDELCO awards. In 2023, he was nominated for a Best Featured AUDELCO award for NEC's *Unentitled*. The same year, he won an AUDELCO Award for Outstanding Ensemble for Black Spectrum's *Picking Up The Pieces*. In 2024, he was invited to the IBTF and won a Best Revival AUDELCO award. Beyond his stage work, Tucker has also accumulated an impressive list of film credits.

Kenya Wilson (Commissioner/First Operator/Club Woman)

Wilson is honored to be part of *Day Of Absence*. Past credits: *Unentitled* by Charles White; *Resistance 2024*, written and directed by Regina Taylor; *Reunion in Barbersville* by Celeste Walker (winner, 2019 AUDELCO award, Best Revival of a Play); Ishmael Reed's *The Slave Who Loved Caviar*; Charles White's 2023 production of *Unentitled* (AUDELCO nominee, Best Actress); *Picking Up The Pieces* by Jeannette Hill (winner, 2023 AUDELCO award, Best Ensemble); *When Knights Fall* by Klehotas Tshyre; and *Mecca Is Burning* (NEC). kenyawilson.com

Douglas Turner Ward (Playwright, *A Day of Absence*)

A prolific American playwright, actor, director and theatrical producer, Ward was the co-founder and former Artistic Director of the Negro Ensemble Company. As a writer, Ward made his debut with an Off-Broadway production of a double-bill of his works, *Happy Ending* and *Day of Absence*, which earned him great acclaim, including the Drama Desk Award and the Obie Award. Other works included *Brotherhood*, *The Redeemer*, *The Tom-azz Plays* and *Billy Ebony*. In 2019, he completed a four decades-long work, a trilogy of plays called *The Haitian Chronicles*, which vividly describes the Haitian Revolution to establish a free and independent Black nation. As a director, he helmed Broadway plays including *Home*; *The River Niger* (Tony Award for Best Play, nomination for Ward for Best Featured Actor in a Play); and *The Breeze of Summer* (Tony Award nominee for Best Play). He also directed the original Off-Broadway productions of *Zooman and the Sign* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Soldier's Play*. As an actor, beyond regular appearances with NEC, his Broadway credits included *A Raisin in the Sun* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Cris Eli Blak (Playwright, *Remaining Absent*)

Blak's work has been performed off-Broadway, across the country regionally and in England, Canada, Australia and Ireland. He is the winner of the first Black Broadway Men Playwriting Initiative, the 2024 Charles M. Getchell New Play Award and Atlanta Shakespeare Company's inaugural Muse of Fire BIPOC Playwriting Festival (first place). He is currently a staff writer on the hit Starz series, *Power Book III: Raising Kanan*, an artist-in-residence with Off-Broadway's Abingdon Theatre Company and Liberation Theatre Company and is also a 2024-27 Core Writer with the Playwrights' Center.

Katherine Roberson (Costume Designer)

Roberson is glad to be back working with Negro Ensemble Company. Other productions include (partial list) *The Constant Wife*, *Egg and Butter Man* for Out Of the Box Theatre and NEC's *Day of Absence* directed by Arthur French. Roberson has worked with the Public Theatre, New Federal Theater, the National Black Theater in Harlem, *Greenwood* at the National Black Theater Festival and many more.

Patricia Lewis (Assistant Costume Designer)

Lewis has worked on various productions with NEC, OUT THE BOX and National Black Theater.

Antoinette Tynes (Lighting Designer)

Tynes is a veteran of the theatre in and out of New York. A graduate of Hampton Institute with a degree in speech and drama, and a member of United Scenic Artists, she stays busy as a lighting designer for the world. She was lighting director for the Denzel Washington School of the Arts in Mount Vernon, NY, and lighting supervisor for multiple productions and theatre companies. She received the Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design Award from the 2017 National Black Theatre Festival and won an AUDELCO for Best Lighting Design for 2019's *Looking for Leroy* and 2015's *Dutchman*. She was nominated for an AUDELCO award for lighting design in 2000 for New Federal Theatre's *James Baldwin*, *Soul On Fire* and in 2004, for *Diss Diss Dat Dat*. Her other credits include New Federal's *Sweet Songs on the Soul* starring Melba Moore, *The Stuttering Preacher*, *Champion*, *American Menu* and *Checkmates* directed by Woodie King Jr. and NFT's *Telling Tales Out of School*. On the road, her credits include Dance Al'Italia, PHILADANCO!, *Mama I want to Sing* (national/international tour), *His Woman His Wife* starring Stephanie Mills and *What's on the hearts of Men* starring Malik Yoba, Stephanie Mills and Bebe Winans. In 2003 and 2004, she was Chief Lighting Director for GospelFest at Lincoln Center. She has also worked closely with jazz Legends like Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Buddy Rich, Betty Carter, Ray Barretto and the Count Basie Orchestra. Tynes would like to express her appreciation for having the opportunity to be a part of this production.

David D. Wright (Sound Designer)

Wright has won 11 AUDELCO awards for excellence in sound design and one for musical direction. He has garnered numerous sound design awards in radio, drama and film scoring as well. Wright is grateful to be working with this play in particular because *Day of Absence* was the first Black play he ever experienced in 1968. Wright is proud to work with this group of Creators from NEC and Penn Live Arts. He thanks Olódùmarè, Gbogbo Egun and Gbogbo Orisa for his success.

Liam Riordan (Stage Manager)

Riordan is a long-time builder of theatre in NYC, both on and offstage. Most recently, he has been on the team for Negro Ensemble Company's *Zooman and the Sign*, *Mecca is Burning* and *Unentitled*, plus New Federal Theatre's *Gong Lum's Legacy* (Audelco Award-winner, Best Play) and *Telling Tales Out of School*. He has also worked with the DreamUp Festival at Theater for The New City, Castillo Theatre, Mystical Feet Company and the American Theatre of Actors. Riordan has performed at BAM, Lincoln Center and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

RENNIE HARRIS PUREMOVEMENT

**AMERICAN STREET
DANCER**

MAR 14-15

Rennie Harris, "the most brilliant hip-hop choreographer in America" (*The New Yorker*) and our 24/25 season artist-in-residence, returns with the world premiere of a commissioned work, *American Street Dancer*, honoring the impact of street dance on the arts world. The performance will also feature tap superstar Ayodele Casel, DJ Razor Ramon and more guest artists.



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