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This email is a newsletter from the University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS) sharing news, event information, collection updates, and more from the August Wilson Archive and Black arts and culture collections.

Welcome Brenden Peifer as New August Wilson Outreach and Engagement Coordinator!

The University Library System is excited to welcome Brenden Peifer as our new August Wilson Outreach and Engagement Coordinator. A 2019 Pitt grad, Brenden arrived on campus in 2015 and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Communications and English, with a Theatre Arts minor. While a student here, he began his professional acting career and would continue to work throughout the city on a variety of stages.

Brenden auditioned and was cast in the role of Sterling in Pittsburgh Public Theatre's production of August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* directed by Justin Emeka. He got to work alongside established Wilsonian actors like Brian D. Coats and Wali Jamal. Brenden later performed as Laertes in *Hamlet* (an outdoor production at Carrie Furnaces) with Quantum Theatre.

When he was not performing, Brenden served as a K-12 educator throughout Pittsburgh. First at Shadyside Academy in Fox Chapel, he spent multiple summers as a middle school camp counselor. That experience led to him working with the Shadyside Academy Junior School as an after-school tutor. He also worked as a

substitute teacher for Pittsburgh Public Schools. Working primarily at Grandview Elementary in Mt. Washington, he became Grandview's Project Specialist after two years in the classroom. His experience in the district expanded when he was hired as a teaching artist with City Theatre Company. As a teaching artist, he taught playwriting and theater basics to students in schools like Allegheny Traditional Academy and Oliver City Wide Academy.

He learned of the August Wilson Archive through a chance encounter on the street with the Associate University Librarian for Archives & Special Collections at Pitt's Library System. Brenden recalled, "This was the first time I heard of the archive, and I was intrigued. You mean to tell me we [Pitt's ULS] have all these documents and materials? Just waiting to be researched and admired?" The two briefly spoke, shook hands and went their separate ways.

Brenden later discovered the ULS was hiring for the position of the August Wilson Outreach and Engagement Coordinator and knew he had to apply. Now a couple of weeks into the job, Brenden has quickly learned the tools of the trade to be a staff member within Archive & Special Collections.

"I can't wait to see what the future holds. I'm committed to sharing the value the August Wilson Archive has with the entire Pittsburgh community. It's a small way to repay the city and University that was a big part of my professional and personal development."

His goal is to have the Archives & Special Collections Reading Room on the third floor of Hillman Library filled with researchers, students, teachers, and local artists immersed in the writings of Wilson.

Information regarding the August Wilson Archive and the opportunities connected to it can be found at <https://augustwilson.library.pitt.edu/>.



African American Migrant and European Immigrant Oral Histories Now Online

The University of Pittsburgh Library System is pleased to announce the online availability of 300+ oral histories of African American migrant and European immigrant populations to the Steel Valley made possible through a reformatting grant from the [Recordings at Risk Program](#) of the [Council on Library and Information Resources](#).

The interviews primarily highlight the experiences of minority communities, their lives, and their voices in Western Pennsylvania from the 1970s to the early 2000s. This project digitized a selection of oral history materials related to African American and European immigrant workers in Pittsburgh's Steel Valley. Combined, these materials will create a rich digital collection of primary sources sharing first-person

accounts of African American migrants and European immigrant workers in the Pittsburgh area.

Collections included in the Project:

[Recordings of the Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh Oral History Project \(1976\)](#) Created by Dr. Peter Gottlieb as a Pitt Doctoral Student Project, this collection contains 33 cassettes/23 interviews documenting Southern Blacks' relocation to the region during the Great Migration (1916-1930). Interviews discuss personal lives, labor strikes, and activities surrounding the steel industry.

[Ethnic Fraternal Organizations Oral History Project Collection \(1975-1976\)](#) Created by Pitt's Department of History, this collection contains 422 cassettes/235 interviews exploring the roles and influences of ethnic fraternal organizations in Pittsburgh, including African American, Jewish, Croatian, Italian, and Polish groups.

[Homestead Album Oral History Project Records \(1975-1977\)](#) Created by Pitt's Pennsylvania Ethnic Heritage Studies Center, this collection contains 31 cassettes/20 interviews with individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including African American, Slovak, Irish, and Polish communities in the Steel Valley.

[State and Local Government Archives Oral History Collection \(1996-2002\)](#) Created by Pitt's Archives Service Center, nine selected interviews with local African American political figures about regional politics are included.

[Pittsburgh Renaissance Project: The Stanton Belfour Oral History Collection \(1971-1973\)](#) Created by Pitt's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, five selected interviews on six cassettes capturing the Pittsburgh Renaissance redevelopment plan are included.

Online access to these first-person narratives will enable researchers in the academic and community spheres to utilize a rich body of voices to explore the Pittsburgh region and its past.



Ricky Davii's Opening Artist Exhibit Reception

On January 20, 2024 Hillman Library celebrated the opening of artist Ricky Davii's Debut Exhibition titled "*Evry Thing that Glitta Ain't*." This exhibition was inspired by August Wilson's *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills* archival materials which can be found in the University of Pittsburgh Library System's August Wilson Archive. Davii's show features characters from this play and also reflect on Davii's own life experiences and mantras, "Evry Thing That Glitta Ain't is an ode to the sayings of our elders and ancestors: Going after the Gold but keeping in mind to stay on the paths that make you happy and not allow other's successes to rule where you should be in your journey." Davii's installation will be on display in Hillman Library, by Saxby's Café, on the Ground Floor of Hillman Library through the spring semester and then will leave to be exhibited in a local art gallery.

Ricky Davii is one of the first artists to be a part of the August Wilson Archive Community Artist-Scholar Program, which provides support and incentive for local artists and scholars to explore the August Wilson Archive and create an artistic/creative work. Through the generous funding support from both the Heinz Endowments and Henry L. Hillman Foundation, the University Library System offers several paid research opportunities for members of the Pittsburgh community to engage with the August Wilson Archive, including the Community Artist-Scholar program, the

Educator Award program, and the Student Research Award program.

To learn more or share these opportunities with interested friends, please see

<https://augustwilson.library.pitt.edu/opportunities.html>



ULS Acquires the Photographs of Frank Hightower and Father

Archives & Special Collection is pleased to announce the acquisition of the Frank F. Hightower Jr. and Frank R. Hightower Sr. photographic collections documenting over 70 years of Pittsburgh's Black community.

Frank R. Hightower Sr., an active photographer between 1950 and 1970, often shot for the *Pittsburgh Courier* and for the Allegheny County Photographic Division. Additionally, he captured events for the

Urban League Guild, the *Pittsburgh Courier* Fashion Show, African American churches, the *Urban Times* newspaper, weddings, and other Pittsburgh events. Hightower Sr. was also frequently called upon for his portrait photography including portraits of Thaddeus Mosely and Willie Stargell. The collection is currently estimated to contain over 5,000 photographic images.

Frank F. Hightower Jr. is still an active photographer today who began his career in high school during the 1960s. His extensive work features Kuntu Repertory Theater, Black Horizon Theater, August Wilson's funeral, portrait photography, Pittsburgh scenes, events, and neighborhoods including Homewood and the Hill District. Additionally, Hightower Jr. is a noted playwright and poet with his plays included in the Kuntu Repertory Theater collection. The first play he wrote, "Lifting," made its world premiere at Chicago's ETA Creative Arts Foundation in 1997-1998 and by the Kuntu Repertory Theatre in 1999. His association with Kuntu is long, having known and worked with Rob Penny and August Wilson as well as being considered a co-founder of the Black Horizon Theater with Penny and Wilson. Hightower was awarded a 2010 Keepers of the Flame Award along with awardees Roger Humphries (Pittsburgh Jazz musician) and George Gist (muralist/visual artist). Hightower Jr. holds the distinction of being the first photographic instructor for Manchester Craftsman's Guild. His photographic collection is currently estimated to contain over 10,000 photographic images in addition to manuscript items relating to his poetry and playwriting.

Both collections are currently being prepared for access with an expectation of being open for research later in 2024.





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