



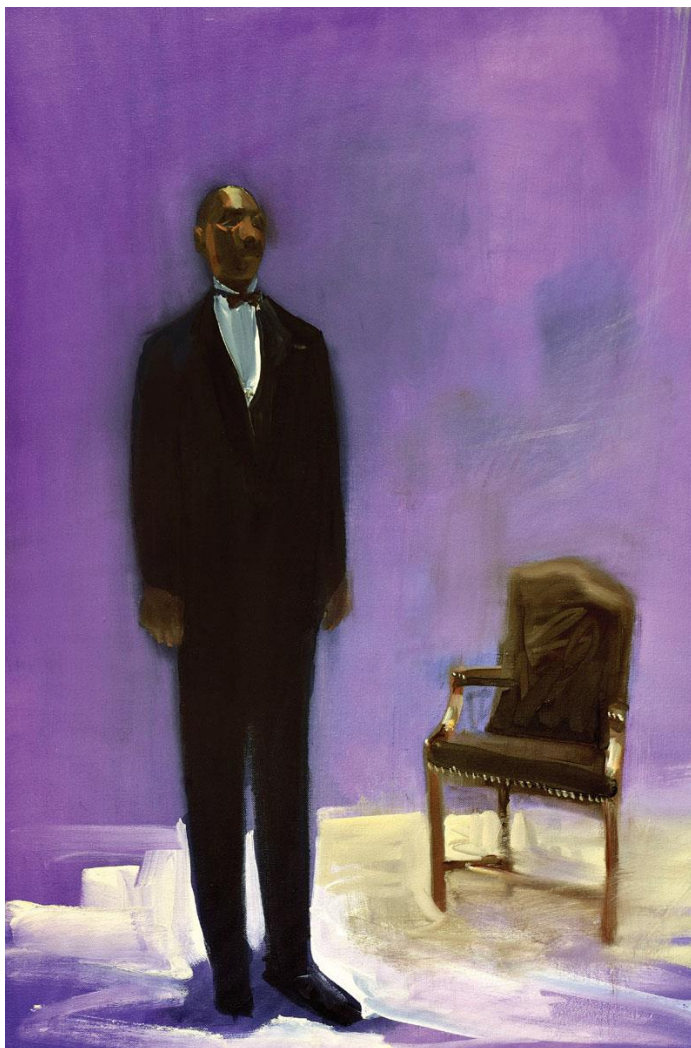
INDIANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE

# Looking Over the President's Shoulder

by James Still

March 27 –  
May 6, 2018

on the IRT's  
Upperstage



## STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg

with contributions by Janet Allen • James Still  
Robert M. Koharchik • Martin Chapman-Bowman  
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# LOOKING OVER THE PRESIDENT'S SHOULDER

## BY JAMES STILL

Hoosier Alonzo Fields spent two decades as Chief Butler at the White House, serving Presidents Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. A hit in theatres across the country, this funny, poignant, uplifting memoir returns to the IRT by popular demand. *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* is based closely on Fields' memoir *My 21 Years in the White House* and offers us not only an insider's view of daily life in the presidential household, but also a deeply personal account of American politics and world events.

As an African-American and domestic servant during the first half of the 20th century, Alonzo Fields is not a typical historian. He offers a glimpse behind the scenes of power, revealing a fuller picture, and perhaps a deeper truth. Through Fields's experience, we learn about presidents as individuals, and see the face behind many now-famous (or infamous) policies and headlines. We also learn of Fields's search for respect as he recounts the civil rights decisions of each administration. Through Alonzo Fields, we are reminded of the value and strength of the individual's voice: every person counts, and every story matters.

**STUDENT MATINEES** 10:00 AM on April 3, 4, 10, 11, 17-20, 24-27

**ESTIMATED LENGTH** Approximately 2 hours

**AGE RANGE** Recommended for grades 7-12

### CONTENT ADVISORY

*Looking Over the President's Shoulder* is an historical drama that contains some mild language. A script preview is available upon request. Recommended for grades 7-12.

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# THE LIFE OF ALONZO FIELDS

As Chief Butler at the White House, Alonzo Fields served four Presidents: Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. He dealt with heads of state, government officials, Hollywood celebrities, and everyone else who visited the White House, whether for an afternoon reception or a state dinner or an overnight stay. He worked closely with not only the President but also the First Lady, constantly learning to adapt as new families moved in and out of the White House. He worked with great skill and pride, although this job was far from the life he had planned for himself.

Alonzo Fields was born in 1900, in Lyles Station, Indiana, in Gibson County just north of Evansville. Lyles Station was an all-black community founded by free slaves; Alonzo's grandfather had been a slave. Alonzo's family moved to Indianapolis when he was 11; there he developed his talents as a singer, which eventually led him to study at the Boston Conservatory of Music. To earn money for his studies he worked as a butler in the home of the president of MIT.

In October 1931 Mr. Fields's employer died unexpectedly. It was the height of the Depression, and with a family to support, Mr. Fields felt he had no choice but to suspend his music studies and accept his only job offer: to be a butler at the White House. Although he accepted this job as a temporary detour, his new career occupied him for 21 years.

The health of Mr. Fields's wife, Edna, was deteriorating, and in 1953 when Eisenhower was elected, Mr. Fields decided to leave the White House. The couple moved back to Massachusetts, where they settled in Medford, a suburb of Boston. President Truman helped Mr. Fields get a job in Boston with the General Services Administration (GSA). Although he never became the musician he had aspired to be, during his later years Mr. Fields used his love of performing to gain recognition as a popular speaker and storyteller. He traveled to various churches, gentlemen's clubs, and civic groups entertaining audiences with stories from his years at the White House. His memoir, *My 21 Years in the White House*, was published in 1961. At the age of 80, he married his second wife, Mayland. Alonzo Fields died in 1994.



*Alonzo Fields (at right)  
with President & Mrs. Truman  
at the front door of the White House.*



# A REMINDER IN OUR CHANGING WORLD

BY JANET ALLEN, EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

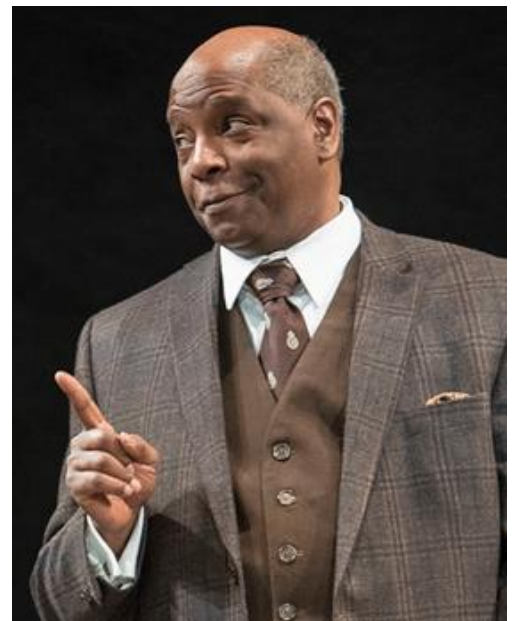
Much has changed in our world since last we produced *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* in 2008. We have had a black president, not just black men serving the president. We have experienced many violent racial events in our country, and been called to the cry of Black Lives Matter. We have seen *The Butler*, based on a different African American butler at the White House—one who, by the way, was trained on the job by the subject of our play, Alonzo Fields. We have witnessed the creation of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the mall in Washington DC—which includes an exhibit dedicated to the story of Lyles Station, Indiana, Alonzo Fields's hometown.

In 1999, James Still, then IRT's newly minted playwright-in-residence, found an old yellowed newspaper clipping in the Indiana Historical Society library, brought to him by now-retired reference librarian Wilma Gibbs Moore, that outlined the story of Alonzo Fields: a young man from Lyles Station, Indiana, one of Indiana's many all-black towns, who trained to be an opera singer, then spent 21 years as a butler in the White House, serving four presidents. A beguiling seed for a play. James eventually found his way to Alonzo's widow, Mayland Fields, who gave him the handwritten first draft of Alonzo's long-out-of-print memoir, *My 21 Years in the White House*. A new play was born, our third Indiana Series commission. Now, almost 20 years later, we are creating our third production of the play, and celebrating its many productions all over our country. Mr. Fields's view of the world, from behind the president's chair, continues to command our attention and respect.

We are blessed to have David Alan Anderson take on the role of Alonzo Fields again. We would not have produced the play again without him. David is nothing short of an Indianapolis treasure. While he has played the role several times, including at the IRT in 2008, he now revisits it at a point in his professional career where looking back on a 21-year experience has richer meaning. He also brings to it more of the wisdom and craft that comes to a highly skilled performer with each great role he takes on, accruing experience and a deepening connection to story and audience. Thank you, David, for taking Alonzo's journey again with and for us.

There are many ways, in our current times, in which we imagine life in the White House—we deduce various things from the media, turning press stories into inklings of lifestyle and photos into imagined interactions. The stories of the various presidents in the play seem a far cry from the stories that emanate from today's White House. Alonzo Fields reminds us of a time when civility, and perhaps an old-fashioned idea of respect and privacy, were practiced in the White House in ways that social media and the internet seem now to have abolished. I often wonder what Lonny Fields would make of his workplace today.

*David Alan Anderson in the IRT's 2018 production of Looking Over the President's Shoulder. Photo by Drew Endicott.*



# OUR FRIEND IN THE WHITE HOUSE

BY JAMES STILL, PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE

*Looking Over the President's Shoulder* is a one-person play. Why? It was my instinct from the beginning to write this play for one actor. There is something intimate and exhilarating and shared about watching one character tell his or her story. As an audience, we feel close to that character, we feel as though we've been cast as his confidant, we feel essential to the experience. We're here to hear a story. And on a technical level, there is something dangerous and thrilling about watching one actor bravely inhabit the stage for two hours.. But secretly, there was more to it than that.

As the chief butler in the White House, Alonzo Fields was required to be silent, to stare straight ahead, not to smile or acknowledge any of the conversations taking place. As an African American in the White House from 1931 to 1953, he stood behind four presidents as the country struggled with its complicated history of racism and classism. I remember feeling there was something perfectly subversive and bold about a one-man play whose character hadn't been allowed to talk on the job. Finally, Alonzo Fields would get to tell his story. Through the years I've also discovered there were many audiences who want to hear his story.

It is fitting that I'm sharing my 20th season as playwright-in-residence with Alonzo Fields. It's one of the first plays of mine the IRT commissioned. If you're like me, you might never have heard of Alonzo Fields. I first ran across his name in 1999 while doing research on another project for the IRT. Soon I was making phone calls to the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, to the White House, and to the Smithsonian. I would travel to Boston and spend time with Alonzo Fields's second wife, Mayland (whom I recently visited on the occasion of her 100th birthday!). I would travel to Washington DC and talk to White House staff, spend time in the White House kitchen and the butler's pantry, and walk up and down the back stairs. I would also walk across Pennsylvania Avenue, sit on a park bench, and look back at the White House—just as Alonzo Fields does in the play. Many years and many productions later, and I'm reminded anew what a wonderful man Fields was, what a complicated moment in history he shares with us, and what a unique role he played. He really was “in the front row watching the passing parade of history....”

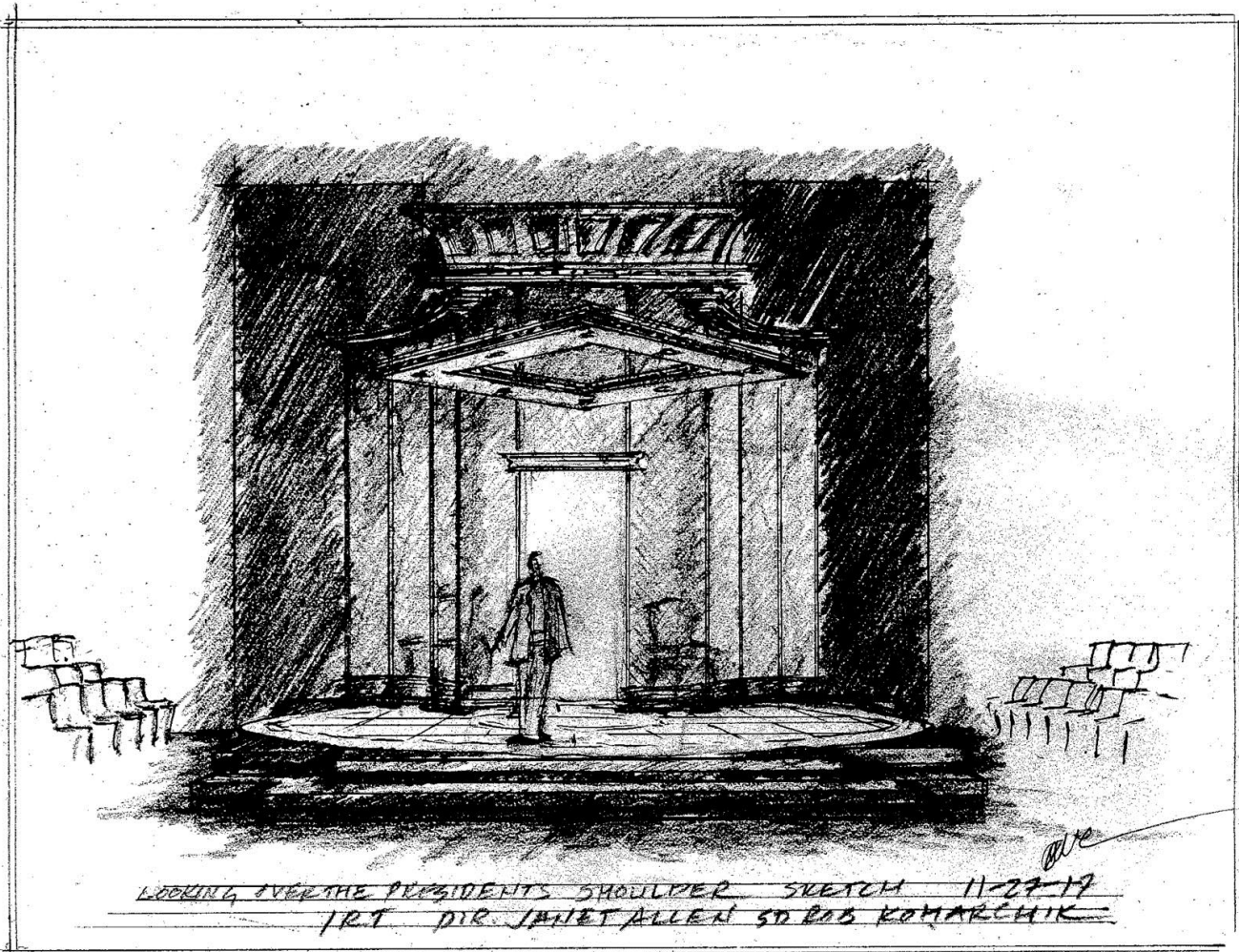
Alonzo Fields died in 1994, so I'll never know what he might have thought about this play and all the attention he's gotten through the many actors who have played him on many stages through the years. If he were here, there are things I'd love to ask him. But mostly I'd want to say thank you. Thank you for teaching me about living a life with grace and elegance, about doing a job with a sense of purpose and pride, and about being an artist who served dinner to four presidents and their families—and served his country too.

I dedicate this production to the memory of John Henry Redwood who originated the role. And to David Alan Anderson who so beautifully accepted the baton from “Pops” and brings Alonzo Fields to life yet again.

# THE VIEW FROM THE BUTLER'S PANTRY

## ROBERT M. KOHARCHIK SCENIC DESIGNER

Being a big fan of history and of this script, I am delighted to be designing *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* for the second time. The set design for this production is inspired by the architecture of Washington DC and its many monuments. The result is an open and formal space that includes surfaces for projected images.



Preliminary model by scenic designer Robert M. Koharchik.

## CHRIS BERCHILD PROJECTION DESIGNER

The visual world of *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* is a very engaging one, as the play is both a memory play (based on the memoirs of Alonzo Fields) and a dramatization of very real and recognizable places, people, and events from modern American history. The challenge in this design is to strike the balance between these two poles—offering historical anchors for the audience while still respecting and exploring the perspective of this remarkable man and his own experiences. Some of the visuals will be instantly recognizable, as though they came from the archives of the mainstream media, while others may seem abstract or fragmented as seen through the lens of Alonzo Fields as he remembers his time in the White House.



## MARTIN CHAPMAN-BOWMAN COSTUME DESIGNER

Alonzo Fields was a classically trained singer who suddenly found himself at the White House as a butler. We only have two looks to help create Mr. Fields's taste, style, and position: a travel ensemble and the formal livery worn by the White House staff. The uniform has its own style: black tailcoat, white gloves, the classic look of formal service. The travel outfit is where as designer I can speak to Mr. Fields's personal taste. He was not a man of great wealth; he had a daughter to support, and his wife was seriously ill. His style is one of class but not ostentation. I felt it important that he be shown in warm tones to reflect his more private side—as his family and friends saw him.

*Preliminary costume sketch  
by designer Martin Bowman.*

## MICHAEL KECK COMPOSER

I am inspired by James's inclusion of Schubert's Ave Maria, a recurring motif heard as Alonso Fields sings it from the stage and in his memory through a recording of Marian Anderson. To help set the tone and mark the period, I am pulled toward the intimate sound of a piano and small string ensemble as might have performed for dinner guests of the First Family in the splendor of the White House East Room. Using historical broadcast recordings stitched together with original compositions and playfully quaint campaign songs supporting Fields's personal narrative, I join our creative team in offering a window into Alonso Fields's service from 1931 through 1953.



# ALONZO FIELDS 21 YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

1931

**Alonzo Fields joins the White House staff as a butler; Herbert Hoover (below) is president.**



U.S. unemployment  
4–5 million

"The Star-Spangled Banner" is officially designated the United States national anthem

Nine black youths convicted of raping two white girls in Alabama in the Scottsboro case

The Empire State Building opens

**Movies:**

*Dracula*  
*Frankenstein*

**Books:**

*The Story of Babar*

**New in 1931:**

Alka-Seltzer  
Bisquick  
Dick Tracy  
Clairol hair dye  
electric razors

1932

U.S. unemployment reaches 20 million

**FDR (bottom) defeats Herbert Hoover for President**

**Movies:**

*Grand Hotel*  
*Scarface*

**Books:**

*Brave New World*

**New in 1932:**

Zippo lighter  
Fritos corn chips  
Sippy peanut butter  
Revlon cosmetics

1933

Hitler elected chancellor of Germany

**Franklin Roosevelt inaugurated, saying, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."**

**Alonzo Fields promoted to Chief Butler**

The 21st Amendment repeals Prohibition

**Movies:**

*King Kong*  
*Duck Soup*

**Books:**

*Lost Horizon*

**New in 1933:**

Ritz crackers  
Monopoly  
Windex





## 1934

SEC created to regulate stock market

FCC created to regulate broadcast and telegraph services

Public Enemy #1  
John Dillinger (below)  
gunned down by  
FBI agents



The Dust Bowl:  
drought and years  
of over-farming turn  
150,000 square miles  
of prairie into desert

**Movies:**

*It Happened One Night*

**Music:**

Rachmaninoff's  
*Paganini Rhapsody*

**New in 1934:**

Donald Duck  
laundromats

## 1935

WPA set up to employ  
1/3 of the nation's  
11 million unemployed

Hitler enacts the  
Nuremberg laws,  
rescinding the civil rights  
of German Jews

Mussolini invades  
Ethiopia

**Music:**

*Porgy and Bess*

**New in 1935:**

Social Security  
beer in cans  
fluorescent lights  
parking meters

## 1936

Civil War in Spain

Jesse Owens (below)  
wins 4 gold medals at  
the Berlin Olympics



**Roosevelt re-elected**

Edward VIII abdicates  
British throne to marry  
American divorcee  
Wallis Simpson

**New in 1936:**

Hoover Dam  
Polaroid  
sunglasses  
Waring blender

## 1937

German bombers  
destroy the Spanish  
town of Guernica.  
(See Picasso's painting  
*Guernica* below.)

The Hindenburg erupts  
in flames while  
attempting to land

Pilot Amelia Earhart  
disappears while  
attempting to fly  
around the world

Japan invades China

**Books:**

*Of Mice and Men*

**Music:**

Orff's *Carmina Burana*

**New in 1937:**

Golden Gate Bridge  
shopping carts  
drive-in banks  
antihistamines



1938

Fission discovered

The Mercury Theatre's radio broadcast of "War of the Worlds" causes panic across America

*Kristallnacht*: synagogues burnt, shops smashed, and Jews beaten by Nazis (below)

Kate Smith first sings "God Bless America"

**Movies:**  
*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

**Theatre:**  
*Our Town*

**Music:**  
"Body and Soul"  
Coleman Hawkins

**New in 1938:**  
Superman  
instant coffee  
Fiberglass



1939

Hitler invades Poland

Marian Anderson (below) sings for 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial after the DAR refuse her permission to sing in Constitution Hall because she is black



**Movies:**  
*Gone with the Wind*  
*The Wizard of Oz*

**Books:**  
*The Grapes of Wrath*

**New in 1939:**  
microfilm  
food stamps  
automatic dishwashers

1940

British ships rescue 340,000 allied troops trapped by the Nazis in Dunkirk

Paris occupied by Nazis

The London Blitz: German bombers attack England

**FDR wins unprecedented third term**

**Books:**  
*Native Son*

**New in 1940:**  
Bugs Bunny  
Jeep  
M&Ms

1941

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

**Winston Churchill visits the White House**

Mount Rushmore Memorial completed

**Movies:**  
*Citizen Kane*  
*The Maltese Falcon*

**New in 1941:**  
aerosol insect spray  
Cheerios  
Wonder Woman

*Below, Alonzo Fields.*





1942

Sugar and gasoline are the first goods rationed for wartime use

U.S. defeats Japan at Midway

115,000 Japanese-American citizens imprisoned in internment camps

**Music:**  
"White Christmas"

**Movies:**  
*Casablanca* (below)

**New in 1942:**  
Napalm  
Kellogg's Raisin Bran  
K rations

1943

U.S. defeats Japan at Guadalcanal

Dwight D. Eisenhower named supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe

Italy surrenders

**Theatre:**  
*Oklahoma!*  
Paul Robeson in *Othello*

**New in 1943:**  
Jefferson Memorial

1944

D-Day:  
150,000 Allied troops storm beaches at Normandy

**FDR wins fourth term**

**Theatre:**  
*No Exit*

**Dance:**  
*Appalachian Spring*

**New in 1944:**  
*Seventeen* magazine  
Chiquita Banana

1945

**FDR dies**

**Truman sworn in as President (bottom)**

Allied troops liberate survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, where more than 6 million Jews were killed

Germany surrenders

Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—more than 110,000 people killed; Japan surrenders.

**Music:**  
*Peter Grimes*

**New in 1945:**  
bumper stickers  
frozen orange juice  
Tupperware





1946

Churchill refers to Communist occupation of eastern Europe as "an iron curtain"

Massive strikes in U.S.—coal, auto, electric, and steel industries

**Movies:**

*It's a Wonderful Life*  
*Notorious*

**Books:**

*All the King's Men*

**New in 1946:**

United Nations  
Tide detergent  
Timex watches  
bikini bathing suits  
the Slinky



1947

The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered

**Alonzo Fields's mother dies**

India and Pakistan granted independence from Great Britain

Jackie Robinson (*below*) is first black player in Major League Baseball

House Un-American Activities Committee investigates Hollywood; many film artists blacklisted by studios

**Broadway:**

*A Streetcar Named Desire*

**Books:**

*The Diary of Anne Frank*

**New in 1947:**

transistors  
Ajax cleanser

1948

State of Israel created

President Truman integrates the armed forces

Apartheid established in South Africa

**Truman re-elected President**

**New in 1948:**

McDonald's  
the LP  
Velcro  
Porsche

1949

**White House under renovation (*below*); Trumans move to Blair House**

NATO formed

Steel workers strike

Communists create People's Republic of China

**Broadway:**

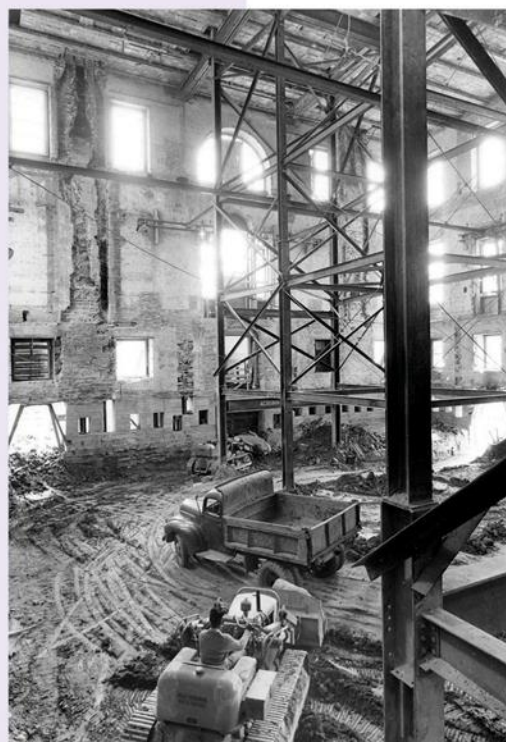
*Death of a Salesman*  
*South Pacific*

**Books:**

1984

**New in 1949:**

Silly Putty  
TV soap operas  
Scrabble  
Legos  
cake mixes



## 1950

Korean War begins

Truman orders government to seize U.S. railways to avert a strike

**Movies:**

*All about Eve*  
*Sunset Boulevard*

**Theatre:**

*The Bald Soprano*

**New in 1950:**

credit cards  
Minute Rice

## 1951

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (*below*) convicted of espionage



**Books:**

*Catcher in the Rye*

**Movies:**

*The Day the Earth Stood Still*

**New in 1951:**

power steering  
rock 'n' roll  
Tropicana  
*I Love Lucy* (*below*)



## 1952

The first hydrogen bomb exploded

**Trumans move back into the newly renovated White House**

Elizabeth II crowned queen of England

China begins 5-Year Plan for industrialization

Eva Peron dies

**Eisenhower elected**

**Theatre:**

*Waiting for Godot*

**Books:**

*The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemmingway

**New in 1952:**

Holiday Inn  
transistor radios  
*Mad* magazine  
sugar-free soda  
3-D movies



## 1953

Double helix structure of DNA discovered

**Eisenhower's inauguration is the first telecast coast to coast (*below*)**

**Alonzo Fields leaves his White House job to return to Boston**

The peak of Mount Everest reached for the first time

Korean War ends

**Theatre:**

*The Crucible*

**New in 1953:**

Irish coffee  
the Corvette  
TV Guide  
instant iced tea



# HERBERT HOOVER

Born the son of an Iowa blacksmith in 1874, Herbert Hoover grew up in Oregon. He graduated from Stanford University as a mining engineer and married Lou Henry. In 1900, while working in China, the couple was caught in the Boxer Rebellion. While his wife worked in the hospitals, Hoover directed the building of barricades, and once risked his life rescuing Chinese children.

When World War I began in 1914, Hoover was in London, and the American Consul General asked his help in getting stranded tourists home. In six weeks his committee helped 120,000 return to the United States. Next Hoover headed the Commission for Relief in Belgium, feeding millions. After the United States entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Hoover head of the U.S. Food Administration. He cut consumption of foods needed overseas and avoided rationing at home, yet kept the Allies fed.



After the Armistice, Hoover, as a member of the Supreme Economic Council and head of the American Relief Administration, organized food shipments for starving millions in central Europe. When he was criticized for extending aid to famine-stricken Soviet Russia in 1921, he retorted, "Twenty million people are starving. Whatever their politics, they shall be fed!"

After serving as Secretary of Commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, Hoover became the Republican presidential nominee in 1928. He said, "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land." His election seemed to ensure prosperity. Yet within months the stock market crashed, and the nation spiraled downward into the Great Depression.

After the crash, Hoover announced that, while keeping the Federal budget balanced, he would cut taxes and expand public works spending. In 1931 he proposed creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to aid business, additional help for farmers facing foreclosure, banking reform, a loan to states for feeding the unemployed, expansion of public works, and drastic governmental economy. At the same time he reiterated his view that, while people must not suffer from hunger and cold, caring for them must be primarily a local and voluntary responsibility.

Hoover's opponents in Congress unfairly painted him as callous and cruel. He became the scapegoat for the Depression and was badly defeated in 1932. In the 1930s he became a powerful critic of the New Deal, warning against tendencies toward government control of the economy.

Presidents Truman and Eisenhower both appointed Hoover chair of commissions to reorganize the Executive Departments, leading to great savings. Hoover continued to write books and articles until his death at 90 in 1964.



# FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

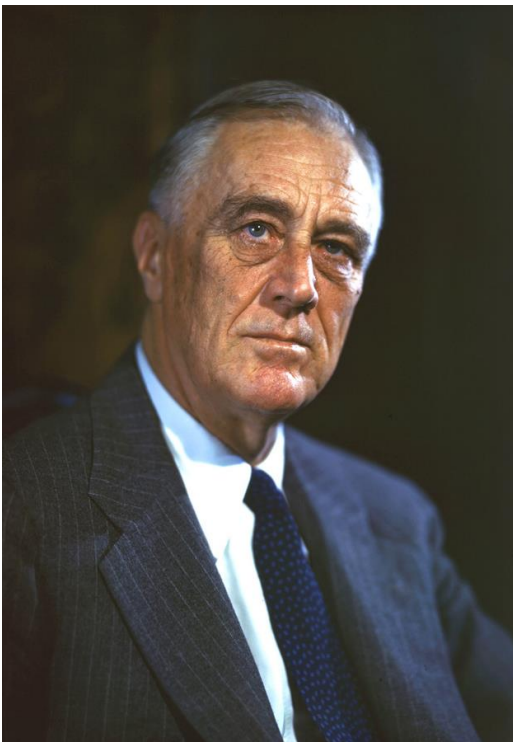
Born in 1892 at Hyde Park, New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt attended Harvard University and Columbia Law School. In 1905, he married Eleanor Roosevelt. Following the example of his fifth cousin, President Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin entered public service through politics, but as a Democrat. He won election to the New York Senate in 1910. President Wilson appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and he was the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 1920.

In the summer of 1921, when he was 39, Roosevelt was stricken with what was then thought to be poliomyelitis. Demonstrating indomitable courage, he fought to regain the use of his legs, particularly through swimming. In 1928, he became governor of New York.

Roosevelt was elected president in November 1932; by March there were 13,000,000 unemployed, and almost every bank was closed. In his first hundred days, he proposed, and Congress enacted, a sweeping program to bring recovery to business and agriculture, relief to the unemployed and to those in danger of losing farms and homes, and the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

By 1935 the nation had achieved some measure of recovery, but businessmen and bankers were turning more and more against Roosevelt's New Deal, with its budget deficits, and labor concessions. Roosevelt responded with even more reform: Social Security, heavier taxes on the wealthy, new controls over banks and public utilities, and an enormous work relief program for the unemployed.

In 1936 Roosevelt was re-elected by a heavy margin. Feeling he was armed with a popular mandate, he sought legislation to enlarge the Supreme Court, which had been invalidating key New Deal measures. He lost the Supreme Court battle, but a revolution in constitutional law took place: thereafter the government could legally regulate the economy.



In 1940, Roosevelt was elected to an unprecedented third term over Indiana native Wendell Wilkie. He sought to keep the United States out of the war in Europe, yet at the same time to strengthen nations threatened or attacked. When France fell and England came under siege in 1940, he began to send Great Britain all possible aid short of actual military involvement. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Roosevelt directed organization of the nation's manpower and resources for global war.

Feeling that the future peace of the world would depend upon relations between the United States and Russia, Roosevelt devoted much thought to the planning of a United Nations, in which, he hoped, international difficulties could be settled. As the war drew to a close, Roosevelt's health deteriorated, and in April 1945, less than three months after the start of his fourth term, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

# HARRY S TRUMAN

Harry S Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884, and prospered as a farmer. He fought in World War I as a captain in the Field Artillery. Returning, he married Elizabeth (Bess) Wallace, and opened a haberdashery in Kansas City. Active in the Democratic Party, he was elected a judge of the Jackson County Court (an administrative position) in 1922. He became a Senator in 1934. During World War II he headed the Senate war investigating committee, checking into waste and corruption and saving perhaps as much as 15 billion dollars.



During his few weeks as vice president during Roosevelt's fourth term, scarcely saw the president. He had received no briefing on the development of the atomic bomb or the unfolding difficulties with Soviet Russia when he suddenly became President in April 1945. Soon after V-E Day, the war against Japan had reached its final stage, but Japan refused to surrender. Consulting with his advisers, Truman ordered atomic bombs dropped on cities devoted to war work, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese surrender quickly followed. In June 1945 Truman witnessed the signing of the charter of the United Nations, established in hopes of preserving peace.

Soon Truman proposed to Congress the expansion of Social Security, a full-employment program, a permanent Fair Employment Practices Act, and public housing and slum clearance. The program became known as the Fair Deal.

In 1947 as the Soviet Union pressured Turkey and, through guerrillas, threatened to take over Greece, he asked Congress to aid the two countries, creating the Truman Doctrine. The Marshall Plan, named for his Secretary of State, stimulated spectacular economic recovery in war-torn Western Europe. Truman was re-elected in 1948. When the Russians blockaded the western sectors of Berlin, he created a massive airlift to supply Berliners until the Russians backed down. Meanwhile, he was negotiating a military alliance to protect Western nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, established in 1949.

In 1950, when the Communist government of North Korea attacked South Korea, a long, discouraging struggle ensued as U.N. forces held a line above the old boundary of South Korea. Truman kept the war a limited one, rather than risk a major conflict with China and perhaps Russia.

Deciding not to run again, he retired to Independence. In 1972, after a stubborn fight for life, he died at age 88.

# DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

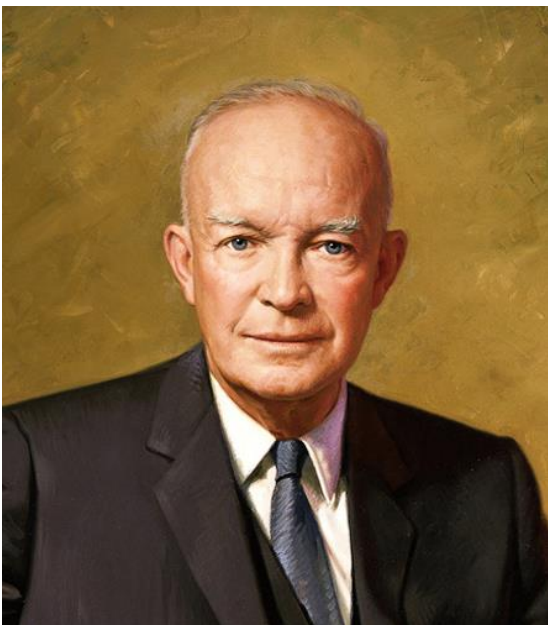
Born in Texas in 1890, and brought up in Abilene, Kansas, Eisenhower was the third of seven sons. He excelled in sports in high school, and received an appointment to West Point. Stationed in Texas as a second lieutenant, he met Mamie Doud, whom he married in 1916. He excelled in staff assignments, serving under several respected generals. After Pearl Harbor, he was assigned to the war plans office. He commanded the Allied Forces landing in North Africa in November 1942; on D-Day, 1944, he was supreme commander of the troops invading France.

After the war, Eisenhower became President of Columbia University, then took leave to assume supreme command over the new NATO forces being assembled in 1951. Republicans persuaded him to run for President in 1952. "I like Ike" was an irresistible slogan and he won a sweeping victory.

Negotiating from military strength, Eisenhower tried to reduce the strains of the Cold War. In 1953, a truce brought an armed peace along the border of South Korea. Meanwhile, both Russia and the United States had developed hydrogen bombs. With the threat of such destructive force hanging over the world, Eisenhower, with the leaders of the British, French, and Russian governments, met at Geneva in 1955. The President proposed that the United States and Russia exchange blueprints of each other's military establishments and "provide within our countries facilities for aerial photography to the other country." The Russians dismissed the proposal, but the meetings were so cordial that tensions relaxed.

In September 1955, Eisenhower suffered a heart attack. After seven weeks in the hospital, in February 1956 doctors reported his recovery. In November he was elected for his second term.

In domestic policy the president pursued a middle course, continuing most of the New Deal and Fair Deal programs, emphasizing a balanced budget. As desegregation of schools began, he sent troops into Little Rock, Arkansas, to assure compliance with the orders of a Federal court; he also ordered the complete desegregation of the Armed Forces, a process which had been begun by President Truman. "There must be no second class citizens in this country," Eisenhower wrote.



Eisenhower concentrated on maintaining world peace. He watched with pleasure the development of his "atoms for peace" program—the loan of American uranium to "have not" nations for peaceful purposes. Before he left office in 1961, Eisenhower urged the necessity of maintaining an adequate military strength, but cautioned that vast, long-continued military expenditures could breed potential dangers to our way of life. He concluded with a prayer for peace "in the goodness of time." Both themes remained timely and urgent when he died, after a long illness, in 1969.



# FIRST LADIES

## LOU HENRY HOOVER

Lou Henry Hoover (1874–1944) was the wife of Herbert Hoover and First Lady of the United States (1929-1933). Mrs. Hoover brought to the job long experience as wife of a man eminent in public affairs at home and abroad. She paid with her own money the cost of reproducing furniture owned by James Monroe for a period sitting room in the White House, and she restored Abraham Lincoln's study for her husband's use.



## ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) used her influence as First Lady from 1933 to 1945 to promote the New Deal policies of her husband and to advocate for civil rights and women's rights. After her husband's death in 1945, she continued to be an internationally prominent author and speaker for the New Deal coalition. She was a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly from 1945 to 1952, chairing the committee that drafted and approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She was one of the most admired persons of the 20th century.

## BESS TRUMAN

Bess Truman (1885-1982), the daughter of a farmer, married her childhood sweetheart Harry Truman in 1919. Although she steadfastly fulfilled the social obligations of her position as First Lady, she was uninterested in ceremony, and did only what she thought was necessary. A private person, she nevertheless exerted considerable influence over Truman's public career; every evening in the family quarters of the White House, the couple discussed the issues Mr. Truman faced in the Oval Office.



## MAMIE EISENHOWER

Mamie Eisenhower (1903–1995), the daughter of a wealthy Denver meatpacker, married Dwight Eisenhower in 1916. As a military wife traveling all around the world, she once estimated that in 37 years she had unpacked her household at least 27 times. As First Lady, her outgoing manner, her feminine love of pretty clothes and jewelry, and her obvious pride in husband and home made her a very popular First Lady.

# THE WHITE HOUSE

In 1792, Irish immigrant James Hoban won the competition to design the president's residence in the new city of Washington DC. The building was built largely African American laborers some free but many slaves, as well as employed whites. Much of the other work on the house was performed by immigrants, many not yet with citizenship.



The sandstone walls were erected by Scottish immigrants; much of the brick and plaster work was produced by Irish and Italian immigrants. Eight years after the groundbreaking, John and Abigail Adams became the first presidential family to live in the house. Until 1850, many of the household staff were African-American slaves.

The building was originally called the "President's Palace," "Presidential Mansion," or "President's House." The earliest evidence of the public calling it the "White House" was recorded in 1811. Legend has it that after the British burned it during the War of 1812, the house was painted white to mask fire damage; actually the building had been painted white since its construction. The name "Executive Mansion" was used in official contexts until 1901, when President Theodore Roosevelt established the formal name by having "White House–Washington" engraved on the stationery.

In 1948 the White House was found to be in imminent danger of collapse. Decades of poor maintenance, the construction of a fourth story attic, and the addition of a second-floor balcony over the south portico had taken a great toll on the house, a brick and sandstone structure built around a timber frame. President Truman was forced to commission a reconstruction and move across the street to Blair House from 1949 to 1952. The work required the complete dismantling of the interior



spaces, construction of a new load-bearing internal steel frame, and the reconstruction of the original rooms within the new structure. Central air conditioning was added, as well as two additional sub-basements providing space for workrooms, storage, and a bomb shelter. While the house's structure was kept intact, the original plasterwork was too damaged to reinstall. President Truman had the original timber frame sawed into paneling for the walls of the new Vermeil Room, Library, China Room, and Map Room on the ground floor. In 1961, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy established the White House Historical Association and began to collect authentic period furnishings and paintings for the house, making it a showcase for American art and history.

*The White House (above) in the early 1800s, and (left) during the 1950s renovation.*



# WINSTON CHURCHILL

*British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was perhaps the most important of many White House visitors served by chief butler Alonzo Fields.*

Sir Winston Churchill, born in 1874, was the eldest son of British aristocrat Lord Randolph Churchill. Following his graduation from the Royal Military College in Sandhurst, Churchill was commissioned in the Fourth Hussars in 1895. As a war correspondent he was captured during the Boer War. After his escape he became a national hero. Ten months later he was elected to Parliament as a member of the Conservative Party. In 1904 he joined the Liberal Party, becoming president of the Board of Trade.

In 1910 he became Home Secretary, and in 1911 First Lord of the Admiralty. His career was almost destroyed when he was forced to resign as a result of the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign during World War I. Nevertheless, he returned to government in 1917 as the Minister of Munition, joining the Coalition Party. He returned to the Conservative government in 1924 and was given the job of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

For ten years during the Depression Churchill was denied cabinet office. His support for King Edward VIII during his abdication was frowned upon by the national government. In 1939, however, when Nazi Germany declared war on Poland, the public supported Churchill's views. Once again he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty.

In 1940 Churchill succeeded Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister. During World War II he successfully secured military aid and moral support from the United States. He traveled endlessly throughout the war, establishing close ties with leaders of other nations and coordinating military strategies which ultimately ensured Hitler's defeat. Churchill's tireless efforts gained admiration from all over the world.

Churchill was defeated in the 1945 election by the Labor party, who ruled until 1951. He regained power in 1951 and led Britain once again until 1955, when ill health forced him to resign. He spent much of his latter years writing (*The History of the English-Speaking People*) and painting. In recognition of his historical studies he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953; in 1963 the U.S. Congress conferred on him honorary American citizenship. In 1965, at the age of 90, he died of a stroke. His death marked the end of an era in British History.





# MARIAN ANDERSON

*Marian Anderson was considered one of the greatest opera singers of her time, overcoming many obstacles on her way to becoming a world renowned performer. As an African American with a successful career in opera, she was a hero to Alonzo Fields, himself an aspiring singer.*

Born in Philadelphia in 1897, Anderson spent her childhood and teenage years singing in her church choir and in a trio with her sisters. The local black community in Philadelphia began a “Fund for Marian’s Future” to pay for lessons with prominent classical vocalists. These contacts led to engagements in New York and tours in the South and the Midwest. In Indianapolis, she was awarded a scholarship and gave a concert at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Alonzo Fields was the choir director.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Anderson performed abroad at nearly every major opera house and with all the major conductors of the period. She primarily sang overseas, as most American audiences were not ready to embrace a black opera star. Famed impresario Sol Hurok brought Anderson back to the United States for an appearance at New York’s Town Hall in December 1935. The *New York Times* reported that Anderson had “returned to her native land [as] one of the greatest singers of our time.” She began to tour the United States, singing for sold-out crowds far and wide.

In 1939, Howard University, which regularly sponsored Anderson’s concerts in the Washington DC area, requested that she sing at Constitution Hall, the national headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). The DAR had long barred blacks from appearing at the Hall, and the request was denied. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt immediately (and publicly) resigned her membership. She then secured a concert for Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial. More than 75,000 people attended, and the concert was broadcast on national radio. The Roosevelts also invited Anderson to sing at the White House for the visit of Britain’s King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.



Anderson was given the NAACP’s annual Spingarn Medal later that year. When the DAR invited her to sing at Constitution Hall in 1943, she gracefully accepted. Even though she claimed not to be a fighter, she performed publicly and boldly in a field that for the most part shunned blacks. In 1955 she was the first African American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. President Eisenhower appointed her Cultural Ambassador to the United Nations in 1957. She sang at President Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961, and in 1963 she was one of the first recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She died in 1993 at the age of 96.

Marian Anderson was admired and beloved by many. To Alonzo Fields and countless others, Anderson was not just an opera star, she was a “symbol of inspiration and courage.”

# AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE JAMES STILL

THIS YEAR THE IRT IS CELEBRATING JAMES STILL'S  
20TH SEASON AS PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE.

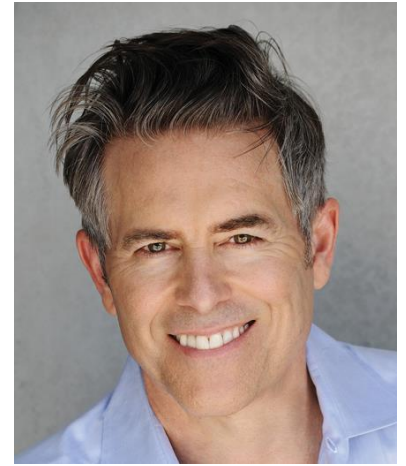
## HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED IN THEATRE?

I was read to from the time I was really young. That led me to being a reader, and I think all of that led to my interest in story. I was always writing. Like a lot of kids, I wrote poetry, I wrote stories. I won some contests as a kid. I was that cousin who got the other cousins together when we were little kids to put on plays at the family reunions—plays I wrote, of course. Our little town in Kansas would put on the school play, which I always attended. Then when I was 15 I saw a touring production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*—in a church, can you imagine? It was wildly controversial—and I was absolutely mesmerized.

Everything changed when I was 16 and started as an apprentice at a summer stock company near my hometown. It was an old barn that had been converted into a theatre called Vassar Playhouse. It had 200 seats maybe, and a tiny stage. It had an old olio roll drop curtain, and businesses bought ads, and every year we painted the ads on it. We did everything, plays, comedies, big musicals like *Oklahoma!* We'd close one show on Sunday, tear down the set, put up the new one, and open the next show on Tuesday—with no sleep! For the first time I was around other people like me, people who knew all the words to *A Chorus Line* and *Company* and *Cabaret*, people who thought it was fun to rehearse two plays in a day and do another one at night, people who were willing to clean the bathrooms and take the tickets and work the concessions bar because it also meant they got to be in plays, people who were willing to work 18-hour days, seven days a week. Not only was it my first professional job, but it was also the first experience that showed me a way forward in my life. I loved it! I worked there for four summers. I considered the owners, Bruce and Veda Rogers, to be my “theatrical parents,” and I am still very, very close to them. They taught me not to be afraid of anything. They helped shape my work ethic and my courage. They helped me be unafraid of my ambition.

## WHAT WAS YOUR FORMAL TRAINING?

I received a theatre scholarship at a small private college in Kansas. And in the first month, my very charismatic theatre professor pulled me aside and said “I’m going to leave next year, and I’m going to take ten students with me, and I’m going to start a theatre company.” I didn’t even think about it. I said yes, I’ll do it! We’d have these secret meetings in the middle of the night because we couldn’t tell anyone about our plans. I couldn’t tell my classmates, I couldn’t tell my parents. It was very CIA, like *Miranda*, my play the IRT produced last season. I didn’t really know what I was signing up for. But I was 19 years old, and it was an adventure.



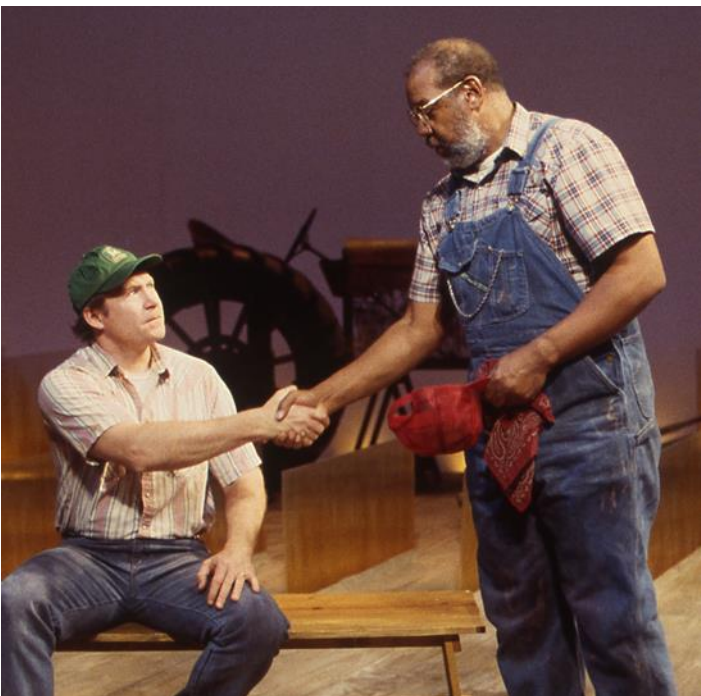
At the end of my freshman year, ten of us left school and moved to Kansas City. I got a day job in an office, had several roommates. We rehearsed at night and would perform anywhere anyone would have us. It was kind of amazing and kind of awful. We were kids, and as a theatre ensemble we imploded. But I learned so much that year about being self-sufficient.

So then I went to the University of Kansas, which is a big school with a big theatre department, and I had an incredible college experience. And that's the first time I was around new plays. We had visiting writers and graduate students working on plays, I was in readings of new plays. I started to get an idea of this other thing in the theatre I might think about.

## WHAT DID YOU DO NEXT?

I moved to Chicago and I got cast immediately in a new musical called *Summer Stock Murders*. I did that show for a year, and it was a blast. I was the murderer, actually. Peter Amster [director of *Appoggiatura*] was the choreographer! It was a crazy, campy, wonderful three-act musical that was just so much fun to do, and I loved that time.

I was also taking acting classes at Steppenwolf, which was just becoming the theatre ensemble we now revere. Jeff Perry, one of the co-founders, was my acting teacher. They were doing the first production of *Cloud Nine* outside of New York. They hired me as Jeff's understudy, and when the show moved for a commercial run, I took over the role. So there I was at 23 years old on stage with Laurie Metcalf, Rondi Reed, Joan Allen, Terry Kinney, Francis Guinan, Alan Wilder ... and me! Being in a Caryl Churchill play as an actor is the reason I became a writer. There was something about being inside that play and doing it eight times a week, where I really felt like my head kind of exploded. Her exploration of how time works in the theatre made a huge impact on me. I look at all my work, and time is kind of an obsession. But also how time is theatrical, and how you can do things with time in the theatre that are just different than novels and film even.



## HOW DID YOU START WRITING PLAYS?

After two very successful shows, I went from feeling like I was doing OK as an actor, to not getting cast, and not getting cast, and really feeling like I was hitting a wall. And I was scared. I hadn't thought about what else I might do. So I wrote a play. As self-aggrandizing as it sounds, I wrote a play to save myself. I felt myself drowning, a little bit in desperation, but also in rage and frustration that I didn't have a place at the table. And I think I wrote a play to make a place at the table for myself.

*Tim Grimm & John Henry Redwood in the IRT's 2000 production of James Still's Amber Waves.*



I wonder why I thought it would be easier as a writer. As an actor, you're waiting for somebody to cast you; but as a writer, you're waiting for someone to produce your play. So I sent my play to anybody in the world who would read it. I probably sent it to the IRT! And of course I didn't hear back from 95%, and the ones I did hear back from were rejections, form letters. But I got maybe five personal responses, and all of them said, we're not going to do your play, but we're intrigued. You have a voice. And we'd like to read your next play. And I thought, *next* play ... what? I wrote my play! I hadn't thought about a "next play." So I wrote my next play, and sent it out, and it was mostly rejected, and I started a long process of gradually teaching myself how to be a writer, and also how to be an entrepreneur.

I would say my greatest teacher as a writer has come from wrestling deeply with the art of structure. Because I came at it from more of an actor's point of view, my initial ways of thinking about plays were all about character. There came a time—I don't know, somewhere early in my IRT days probably—where I realized, I don't need to think about character so much, that's just part of who I am. But I do need to think about structure. So I went back and started studying plays as structure. How are plays put together, how are they built? Of course, for every perfect well-made play, you read some amazing play that breaks every possible rule, and works beautifully. But it's that old adage: you have to know the rules so you can break the rules.

### HOW HAS BEING AFFILIATED WITH THE IRT FOR 20 YEARS AFFECTED YOUR CAREER?

It's hard to peel back the layers now, but I've been thinking: what would it have been like if I hadn't been at the IRT? Very likely I might not have continued in the theatre. At the time we started, I was writing a lot of TV. I was trying to leave the theatre, consciously trying to uncouple. Not because I didn't love it any more, but because I was writing so much and it was still so hard to make a living. I wasn't one of those writers who hit the lottery and had a play that was done at every regional theatre or went to Broadway. I was much more like most of the playwrights in this country: I was writing plays that were being produced, but I wasn't hitting the Zeitgeist. Initially the Pew grant was for two years, and I thought, I can do anything for two years. And then the grant got renewed, and we were talking about so many possible projects. In the theatre, you sow seeds that often take a long time to grow.

But to answer your question more directly: I know of no other writer who has had one theatre do 20 productions of 16 of their plays. So when I think about my education as a writer ... you can't evolve as a playwright if your plays aren't produced. If it's not on the stage, you're not really experiencing what you've imagined, and you don't get to sharpen your skills. How do you make something work on stage? And how do you interact with your play in the rehearsal room? That's a skill as well, being in the room when people are struggling with what





you've written. Part of what you have to learn as a writer is, are the struggles just part of the process, or is it a problem with the play? Early in my career, I thought it was always the play, and I tried to fix things too quickly. And then I realized I was not only cheating the play, but I was also cheating my collaborators, because they weren't getting to work through their own process. Obviously there are times when it is the play's issue, and as the writer you've got to deal with that. But I've become much more patient as a writer. I will also say, that way of working requires a high level of artistry from your collaborators. And the IRT is a theatre that does high caliber art-making. I can't imagine that I could have spent 20 years with a theatre that wasn't of this caliber, because I don't think that I would have become a better writer, I think I would have become a worse writer.

It's a really deep thing for me to think about. I may be standing in the lobby with an audience member who has seen many of my plays. That may not be what we talk about, but there's still a shared vocabulary. And sometimes that makes me feel extremely exposed. The things that

profoundly matter to me emerge in the work, and I'm sure people sense that—wishes, warnings, politics, dreams.... There's also something unique and scary when audience members know that when they see one of my plays, they might run into me at some point, we might have a conversation about it. It's personal.

The IRT has clearly been a place where I can practice my art, and my craft, and my leadership. It's also about place, it's about investing in so many of the same people—audiences, but also staff members. I like the work that we do here. That keeps me engaged—what other artists are making on our stages. I'm moved, and often amazed.

I don't think anyone could plan to be the playwright-in-residence for 20 years at a theatre. It's not something you even aspire to, though the dividends are endless. But it's kind of unimaginable, because it hasn't happened before, not the way we've done it. So in a way, maybe other writers and theatres now will be able to think about what that might be like, because we've done it, we're doing it. Doing. It's always good for a writer to end an interview with a verb.

*(left) Constance Macy & Ryan Artzberger in the IRT's 2007 production of James Still's Iron Kisses.*

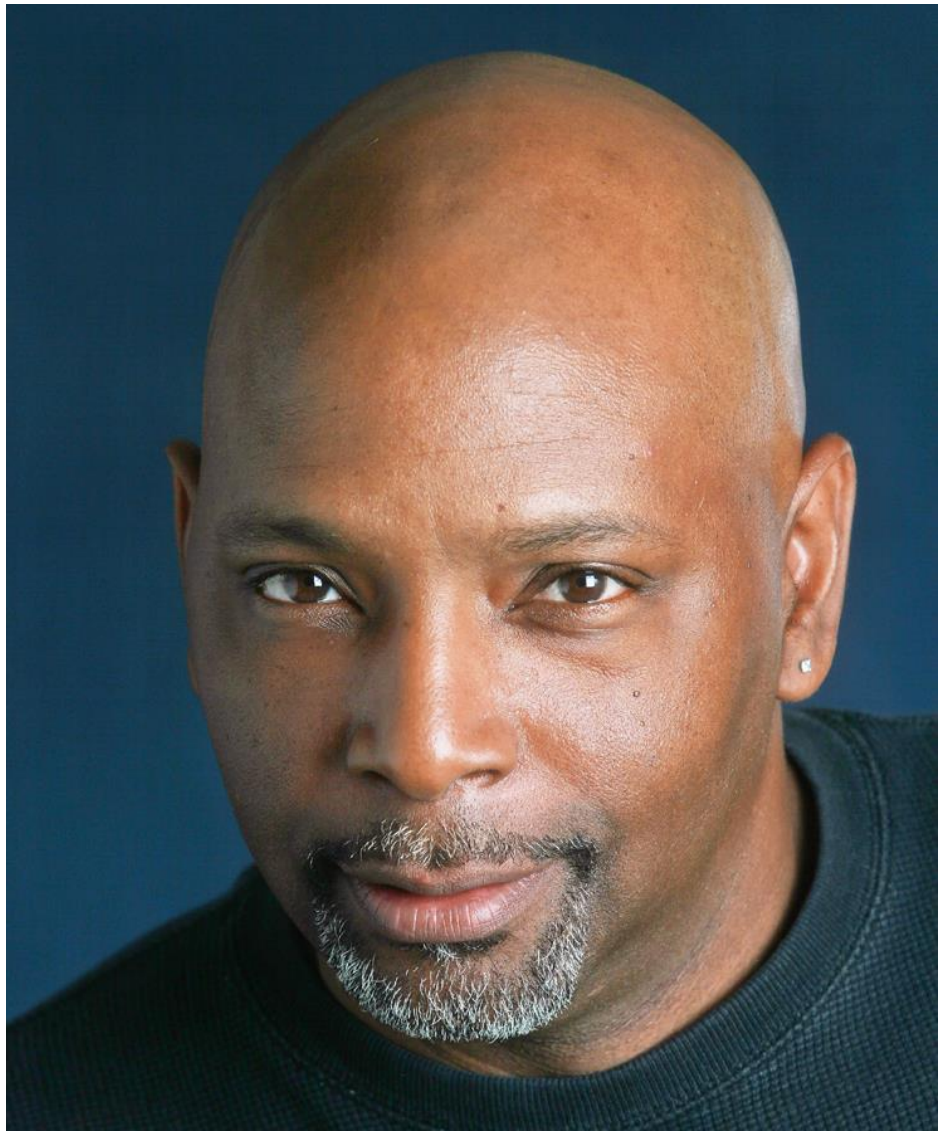
*(above) Christina D. Harper in the IRT's 2015 production of April 4, 1968: Before We Forgot How to Dream.*



# DAVID ALAN ANDERSON

## AS ALONZO FIELDS

IPS #37, #57, Arsenal Tech High School, Indiana University. David is Indianapolis born and bred, and began his association with the IRT in 1990 in *A Dickens' of a Christmas Carol* directed by Janet Allen. Since then, IRT audiences have seen him in more than 30 productions, including *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *The Cay*, *Finding Home*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Fences*, *What I Learned in Paris*, *The Mountaintop*, *The Whipping Man*, *Radio Golf*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet* (2010), *Gem of the Ocean*, and many others, including James Still's *The Heavens Are Hung in Black*, *Interpreting William*, *The Gentleman from Indiana*, *Searching for Eden*, *He Held Me Grand*, and the 2008 production of *Looking Over the President's Shoulder*. Recently David appeared at Asolo Repertory Theatre in *Morning after Grace*. He was nominated for a Jefferson Award for his work in *The Mountaintop* at the Court Theatre in Chicago, where he also appeared in *Gem of the Ocean*. Other regional credits include the Guthrie Theater; Baltimore CenterStage; Denver Theatre Center; Actors Theatre of Louisville; the Idaho, Pennsylvania, and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festivals; the Great Lakes Theatre Festival; Cleveland Play House; Arizona Theatre Company; and many more. David is a company member with the Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he has been involved in several productions of the August Wilson cycle. David's directing credits include *The Color of Justice* and *Most Valuable Player* on the IRT Upperstage and *Two Trains Running* and *Topdog/Underdog* at the Phoenix Theatre. David also works in film and television, most recently appearing as the recurring character Greavy on Showtime's new hit series *The Chi*. He received a 2007 Creative Renewal Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis, and he was honored in 2009 by the Circle City Links for his achievements in the arts. He is a 2013 recipient of the prestigious Lunt-Fontanne Fellowship sponsored by the Ten Chimneys Foundation.





# ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing a performance at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key literature standards to consider on your trip would be:

## READING - LITERATURE

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
  - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: *Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.*
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
  - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: *Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.*
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

## READING - NONFICTION

- RN.2 – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills
  - Sample: 8.RN.2.3: *Analyze how a text makes connections and distinctions among individuals, events, and ideas.*

## READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
  - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: *Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.*



## PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Alonzo Fields served as a butler in the White House. Make a list of the activities that you think a butler would do. Do you think being a butler for a President is an important job? Do you think a butler might be a role model? Discuss and debate.

Read “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Research Langston Hughes. How does this poem relate to Alonzo Fields? Do you think any of the lines describe what happened to Alonzo’s dream? What dreams do you have for the future? What can you imagine might stand in the way of realizing your dreams?

Make a list of the major issues of the recent presidential race (e.g. economy, health care, foreign policy, war, etc.). How do the questions and problems facing Americans today compare with the major issues of the Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations?

*David Alan Anderson in the IRT’s 2018 production of Looking Over the President’s Shoulder.*

*Photo by Drew Endicott.*



# POST-SHOW QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What major historical events would Fields have witnessed in his tenure at the White House? What do you think it would have been like to be around the Presidents on a daily basis during these important times? How would you have felt?

What do you think it would be like to work for the President of the United States? How would being a domestic servant differ from being on the administrative staff? How do you think Alonzo Fields would have responded to the idea that Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice would be top presidential advisors, or that Barak Obama would be the President?

How do each of the Presidents and their families differ? What relevance, if any, do you think these differences have? Can we learn anything about the Presidents' political viewpoints, values, or ideals from the way they behave in their private lives?

This season the IRT has produced two plays based on true stories: *The Originalist* and *Looking Over the President's Shoulder*. Each of these plays treats its historical subject matter with varying degrees of accuracy. Are you familiar with other plays based on history? What is the playwright's obligation when there is a conflict between historic accuracy and dramatic interest? How might this obligation vary based upon the playwright's intentions or our distance from the events depicted? When would you consider it to be definitely wrong to "bend" facts for dramatic interest? When might it be more acceptable?

What can we learn about history or politics from a personal account or memoir that we cannot learn from history books, news articles, or speeches?

Alonzo Fields was neither rich nor famous; his name appears in few history books. Yet he provided significant service to the President and the country. What other little-known figures from the past or present can you think of who have an interesting story to tell? What person or persons have you known yourself who might be an interesting subject for a play? What is it about these people that makes them interesting?

How did being an African American from the North affect Alonzo Fields's life and his choices?

Alonzo Fields ended up spending his life doing something very different from what he had planned. Do you know other persons, either famous or historical or in your own life, who have had similar experiences? Were they disappointed or pleasantly surprised (or both)? How did they handle this aspect of life?

How does a one-man show differ from a more traditional play with multiple characters? How do these differences affect you as an audience member?

What do you imagine might be the special challenges to a playwright in creating a one-man-show? What special challenges might the actor face?



This is a play which takes place in many different locations and which covers a long period of time. What are the challenges of designing scenery for such a play? What might be various solutions to these challenges? After seeing the IRT production, how effective did you find the scenic designer's choices? How did lighting help to meet these challenges? How did the use of projections enhance and/or detract from the actor's performance?

What do you know about American and world history between 1931 and 1953? What other plays or movies have you seen which take place during this time period? As you watch the play, how does your knowledge of historic events affect your reaction to the play?

Describe the performance of the actor in this play. Which moments were especially powerful for you? What made them so?

Did you find any particular moments of this production to be memorable for you? Describe them and explain what made them so. Did you find yourself responding to certain aspects of the production more strongly than others? Text? Performance? Music? Visual design elements? Plot? How did your experience of this production compare to that of others? How do you explain the similarities or differences?

## ACTIVITIES

Fields says that he knows some people might call him an "Uncle Tom." What is an "Uncle Tom"? Research Harriet Beecher Stowe. Do you think Fields might be called an "Uncle Tom"? Debate the question in groups.

Fields accepts the job to work for the Hoovers during the Great Depression. Read about the Depression. Use the Internet to find photographs and paintings of Americans of all races during the Depression era. Create a collage of the images.

Discuss how the play deals with the issue of racism. Has there ever been a time when you felt discriminated against? Interview a parent or grandparent about race relations when s/he was growing up. Have things changed? How so? Do you think race plays an important role in American society today?

What we read and learn about history depends on who is doing the recording of and writing about a particular event. Create a short scene that includes an argument for two students to enact in class (e.g. one person accuses the other of stealing, or cheating, or lying, etc.). Have the rest of the class write an eyewitness account of the interaction. Be sure to include details about what was said, how the actors looked, how they sounded, etc. What does everyone agree on? What are some differences in perception?

## WRITING PROMPTS

*Looking Over the President's Shoulder* is a one-man show. What differences are there between a solo performance piece and a multi-person show? Choose a figure from history or from your own life. How would you create a play about that person's life? What kind of research would you do? Would your play have just one actor or more? Would your play try to cover the character's entire life or only one particular aspect of that life? What actors can you think of who could play your principal character? Write a monologue or scene for your character. Have your piece read aloud by classmate(s).

Read about the four Presidents mentioned in the play: Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. Which President would you have voted for? Write a campaign speech for him.

Who is a someone important in the world whom you admire and would like to work for? As a project, write a letter to that person asking for an internship. Outline your qualifications and how you feel you could enhance his or her work. Discuss what you feel you could learn from this experience.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your impressions of the script and the strength of the story and/or themes, as well as your opinions of the production and its theatrical aspects: scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting. What moments made an impact? How do the design elements work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education.irt@gmail.com](mailto:education.irt@gmail.com)

## A CONTROVERSIAL WORD

The word *nigger* is use by Alonzo Fields in *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* as he quotes one of the President's advisors in the 1940s.

The word *nigger* was not originally used for verbal assault. It first appears in historical documents in 1587 as *negar*, an alternate spelling of *Negro*. *Nigger* was a common word in both England and America by the seventeenth century; it was considered nothing more than an alternate pronunciation of *Negro*. By 1825, however, both abolitionists and Blacks found the word offensive and began to object to its use.

Often when a word is employed as a slur against a certain group, members of the group will use that word among themselves to rob it of its negative power. Today, the word *nigger* is still controversial. While it may be heard frequently in rap songs and in conversation among younger African Americans, many older African Americans are deeply offended by it. Even within generations, not everyone agrees whether the word should be used within the African American community. Society at large, however, has condemned the word as a racial slur; its use by other races against black people demonstrates an ignorance and hatred that should not be imitated.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

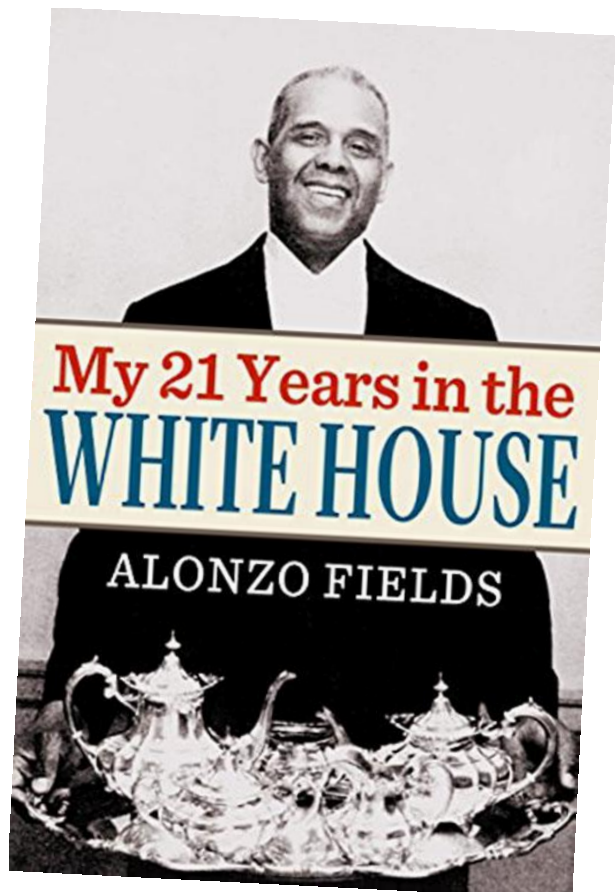
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200 Years of Daily Life at America's Most Famous Residence*. Routledge: New York. 2000.
- Debnam, Betty. *Kid's Guide to the White House*. Andrew's McMeel Publishing: Kansas City. 1997.
- Johnson, Haynes. *The Working White House*. Praeger Publishers: New York. 1975.
- West, J. B. *Upstairs at the White House*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan: New York. 1973.
- Brower, Kate Anderson. *The Residence: Inside the Private World of the White House*  
Harper: New York. 2015
- Himmelberg, Robert F. *The Great Depression and the New Deal*.  
Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut. 2001.
- Dubofsky, Melvyn and Burwood, Stephen. *Women and Minorities During the Great Depression*.  
Garland Publishing: New York. 1990.
- Smith, Richard Norton. *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*.  
Simon and Schuster: New York. 1984.
- Smith, Jean Edward, *FDR*. Random House: New York. 2007
- McCullough, David. *Truman*. Simon and Schuster: New York. 1992
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Eisenhower: The President*. Simon and Schuster: New York. 1984.
- Best, Geoffrey. *Churchill: A Study in Greatness*.  
Hambledon & London: London. 2002.
- Keiler, Allan. *Marian Anderson: A Singer's  
Journey*.  
Scribner: New York. 2000.

## DVD-VIDEO

- The White House: Inside Story*. 2016.
- The White House: Behind Closed Doors*.  
The History Channel. 2008.
- Inside the White House*.  
National Geographic Video. 2009.
- Backstairs at the White House*. Acorn Media. 1979
- Eleanor and Franklin*. HBO Home Video. 1977.
- Truman*. HBO Home Video. 1995.

## WEBSITES

- [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)  
[www.whitehouse.gov/history](http://www.whitehouse.gov/history)





# THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

*You, the audience are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:*

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

