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Unique April 5 Telesymposium Examines the History, Significance and Controversy Surrounding *Native Son*

Toll-Free Callers Will Hear *Live Discussion* by Distinguished Panel of Scholars and TACT's *Native Son* Director

On Sunday evening, April 5, at 8:30 PM, E.D.T., a simple toll-free call will admit anyone in the country to a lively examination of the history, significance and controversy surrounding *Native Son*, the 1941 stage adaptation of Richard Wright's classic novel that sparked a debate about civil rights, social policy and racism that still burns hotly today. The American Century Theater is presenting this unique conference call program with the sponsorship of the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, in conjunction with the theater's upcoming production of *Native Son* beginning **April 14**.

To attend the telesymposium, callers will dial **1-866-212-0875** at or before **8:30 PM**, E.D.T. (5:30 PM Pacific time), and enter the participant **passcode 4930306**, followed by **#**. They will then be able to listen to the discussion *free of charge*, via headset, receiver or speakerphone. Callers may also submit e-mail questions to the panel during the symposium. The telesymposium is expected to be between 45 and 60 minutes in length.

The Mercury Theater's 1941 Broadway production of *Native Son* was as controversial as the Richard Wright protest novel that inspired it. The play was the tumultuous offspring of the genius of four unique American artists: novelist Wright, playwright /social activist Paul Green, producer John Houseman, and director Orson Welles, then returning to the scene of his former Broadway triumphs and awaiting RKO's release of his first, and life-altering, film "Citizen Kane." To the four, Welles' casting added a fifth remarkable figure, the ground-breaking African-American actor, Canada Lee.

The American Century Theater is mounting a new production of the Green-Wright script that **opens April 14 and will run through May 9**. To provide perspective and enlightenment on the many issues raised by the material and the turmoil surrounding it, the company has assembled a distinguished panel of authors and scholars who will engage in a spontaneous, free-wheeling and wide-ranging discussion, all available to

interested listeners across the country through a toll-free telephone conference call on **Sunday evening, April 5, at 8:30 PM, E.D.T.**

The panel members include...

- **Hazel Rowley**, author of the biography Richard Wright: The Life and Times, published by Henry Holt in August 2001, which went into its second printing this month. She authored Tête-à-Tête: The Tumultuous Lives & Loves of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, published by Harper Collins, New York, in 2005, and currently writing a book called Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: An Extraordinary Marriage, to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Ms. Rowley is a passionate speaker on many topics. Her article for The Mississippi Quarterly, “Backstage and Onstage, the Drama of *Native Son*,” is a fascinating, in-depth analysis of the creation of the play.
- **Professor Lawrence Avery**, Professor of English at the University of North Carolina, the backyard of playwright, poet, social activist and *Native Son* co-author Paul Green. His current research focuses on the development of African American drama in the context of American culture, a pursuit that naturally followed his extensive research on the life and career of Green. That research culminated in A Southern Life: the Letters of Paul Green, 1916-1981, a landmark work on the North Carolinian. Professor Avery is well-versed in theater history and playwrights, having also published several studies of the playwright Maxwell Anderson and an edition of his letters: Dramatist in American: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958.
- **Professor Arnold Rampersad**, noted biographer and literary critic, Professor of English and the Sara Hart Kimball Professor in the Humanities at Stanford. His Life Of Langston Hughes was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Prof. Rampersad’s teaching covers such areas as nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Literature; the literature of the American South; race and American literature; and the Harlem Renaissance. In 2007, he published a biography of Ralph Ellison, and was the editor of the Library of America’s two volume collection of works by Richard Wright, including the revised individual editions of Native Son. He also co-authored Slavery and the Literary Imagination, and was the co-editor of Race and American Culture, published by Oxford University Press.
- **Bob Bartlett**, director, playwright, and director of the American Century Theater’s production of *Native Son*. He is a member of the Theatre Department of Bowie State University.

The symposium will be moderated by **Jack Marshall**, co-founder and artistic director of The American Century Theater, who directed the two previous TACT revivals of Orson Welles-directed productions, both critically acclaimed: *The Cradle Will Rock*, and *Moby Dick Rehearsed*.

A brief scene from *Native Son* will be performed *live* during the telesymposium by members of the cast.

The American Century Theater performs at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206. Performances are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 pm, with Saturday or Sunday matinees at 2:30 PM. More information is available at www.americancentury.org.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing, great, important, and neglected 20th Century American playwrights. TACT is funded in part by the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, numerous foundations and many generous donors.

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