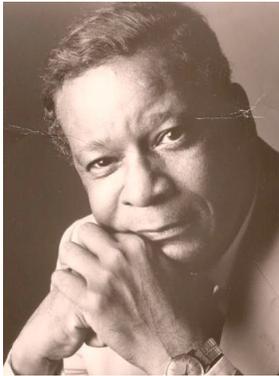




THE TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS MEMORIALS

APRIL 2019

TED SHINE



Theodis ("Ted") Shine, often called "The Dean of Black Texas Playwrights," attended Dallas's first African-American high school, ironically many years before it became the award-winning integrated Booker T. Washington High School for the Visual and Performing Arts. From there he attended Howard University and studied under Owen Dodson, a leading black poet and dramaturg. He and classmate Toni Morrison collaborated and performed under Dodson's tutelage, and there his first play, *Sho Is Hot in the Cotton Patch*, was staged in 1951. After graduation, he studied on a Rockefeller grant at Cleveland's Karamu House, the country's oldest African-American theater. Following U.S. army service, Shine earned his M.A. from the State University of Iowa, then his doctorate at University of California at Santa Barbara. He taught drama at Dillard University in New Orleans, at Howard, and finally Prairie View A&M, where he headed the drama department until retirement.

Ted Shine wrote in multiple genres, and over his prolific career he penned around 100 plays, including seven full-length dramas. He wrote more than 65 30-minute scripts for the PBS "Our Street" series from 1969 to 1973, and for another PBS venture, *Visions*, he wrote *Shoes*. According to editors of *Black Comedy: 9 Plays*, his career production credits include *Ancestors*, *Baby Cakes*, *Hamburgers are Impersonal*, *Baker's Dream*, *The Night of Baker's End*, *Come Back after the Fire*, *The Woman Who was Tampered with in Youth*, *Idabel's Fortune*, and *Herbert the Third*.

His play *Morning, Noon, and Night* garnered the Brooks-Hines Award from Howard University. A trio of short plays entitled *Contributions* was produced by the Negro Ensemble then staged off-Broadway in 1970 at Tambellini's Gate Theatre, and New York Times critic Clive Barnes noted that "Ted Shine is a new black playwright with a great eye for a funny situation.... In all three plays Mr. Shine's theme is of rapidly changing black attitudes, and the gap between the old and the new black generations.... He is an interesting newcomer who writes from the heart with a brash and bitter humor." Editors Sandra Mayo and Elvin Holt of *Acting Up and Getting Down: Plays by African American Texans* write that Shine is noted "for his mastery of the playwright's

craft," and he "consistently delivers realistic, cleverly constructed plots, finely articulated dialog, well-developed characters, as well as insightful comments on the human condition..."

Ted Shine was also the co-editor of the anthology *Black Theatre USA: Plays by African-Americans*, used as the standard textbook in theater courses for decades. As a person and mentor, he was an inspiration to students and colleagues. TIL's Celeste Bedford Walker said, "From the moment I decided to take myself seriously as a playwright, the name Ted Shine became a part of my vocabulary." Guinea Bennett-Price, of the Soul Rep Theatre Company, told a Dallas Morning News writer that "Many of us had the privilege to call him teacher, mentor and friend."

Curtis King, president of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, told the reporter that "We have lost a great American writer, a prolific voice and an amazing human being."

---C.W. Smith

NTOZAKE SHANGE



The iconic feminist poet and playwright Ntozake Shange considered herself a poet first and a playwright second. And what a poet she was! The searing beauty of her writing style, with its atypical spelling, structure, and style, challenged linguistic conventions. The language of her most famous work, the choreopoem (a term she invented) "*For Colored Girls, Who Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*," dealing with sexism, racism, and violence, threw a hand grenade into the theater world when it hit the scene in the 1976. Today it is still just as enchanting, and brutal as it was when it first premiered at the Nuyorican Poets Café in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The

Tony-nominated show went on to play some 750 performances on Broadway – only the second play by an African-American woman after "*A Raisin in the Sun*" to do this – and was produced as a feature-length film by Tyler Perry in 2010.

Ntozake Shange was born Paulette Linda Williams, October 18, 1948, in Trenton New Jersey to an upper middle-class family. Her parents, both professionals, filled the house with artists and scholars. She often recalled sitting on the stair steps and listening to conversations between her parents and such greats as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, & W.E.B. Dubois. At an early age her family moved to segregated St. Louis where she was one of the first black students to integrate an all-white public school and experienced much racial harassment there.

A 1970 cum laude graduate in American Studies from Barnard College in New York, she went on to earn her master's degree at the University of Southern California. After bitter experiences at College and the break- up of her first marriage, which caused her to try to commit suicide, she

changed her name to Ntozake Shange. Ntozake, in Zulu means “She who comes with all her things” and Shange means, “She who walks with lions.”

Shange was active in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, but she soon came to feel that women’s voices were not being addressed in the male dominated leadership. Her work championed black women and girls, in multiple genres. She was the author of 15 plays, 19 poetry collections, six novels, five children’s books, and three essay collections. Her most popular plays include *“For Colored Girls...”, Spell # 7, & Love’s Fire*, and her broad spread of other works include *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo, Betsy Brown, If I Can Cook/You Know God Can, Lillian, The Resurrection of the Daughter, A Photograph: Lovers in Motion, Natural Disasters and other Festive Occasions, Nappy Edges, Riding the Moon in Texas, & The Love that Space Demands*.

Shange taught at the University of Houston (1984-1986) where she wrote the poetry collection, *Riding the Moon in Texas: Word Paintings*, and it was during this period that she was inducted into The Texas Institute of Letters (1986.) She was a Mellon Distinguished Fellow at Rice University in Houston, 1983, taught at Prairie View University, Brown, Villanova, DePaul, & Sonoma State, and lectured at Yale, Howard, & New York University, among others.

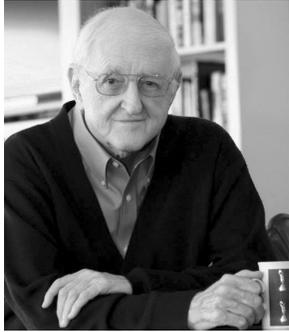
In addition to Tony, Grammy and Emmy nominations for *“For Colored Girls...”* some of her awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship for Creative Arts, Obie Award, Outer Critics, Circle Award for Outstanding Broadway Musical, National Black Theatre Festival Living Legend Award, Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Award, and the Pushcart Prize. Her works are archived at Barnard College.

Ntozake Shange was a force to be reckoned with in the writing world of women, and I was privileged to meet her in the flesh twice. Her daughter, Savannah Shange, said of her mother, “She spoke for, and in fact embodied, the ongoing struggle of black women and girls to live with dignity and respect in the context of systemic racism, sexism, and oppression.” In one of her last interviews with the New York Times in October 2013, she was asked whether her preferred genre of poetry was strong enough to challenge these injustices and answered. *“I hope it was enough. You have to keep acting like it is enough. You have to keep affirming it and bringing yourself to it. You have to keep hoping that it will move the mountain.”* After learning of Shange's death, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage called her "our warrior poet/dramatist." Shange’s sister Ifa Bayeza said, “I don’t think there is a day on the planet when there’s not a young woman who discovers herself through [her]words...” It was enough. It moved the mountain.

On October 27, 2018, Ntozake Shange died in her sleep in an assisted living facility in Bowie Maryland.

—Celeste Bedford Walker

DAN JENKINS



Dan Jenkins wasn't much for tributes. Some 20 years ago when I was books editor of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, I wrote a profile of Dan. In trying to get beyond his wise-cracking public persona I spent considerable time talking with Bud Shrake, his lifelong best friend, and Sally Jenkins, his chip-off-the-old-block sportswriter daughter. They swore that the Dan the rest of the world saw was authentic (Sally Jenkins: "He was always giving me advice. One time he told me, 'Smart women drink scotch.' I was eight"), but that the private Dan was also soft-hearted and, above all, zealously devoted to writing as a craft. My resulting story relied heavily on their insights; response indicated many readers were especially surprised to learn that Dan spent as much time painstakingly editing his work as he did kibitzing in golf course clubhouses or bending his elbow in trendy bars. Dan commented, too, in a one-line e-mail: "You forgot to mention my Nobel Peace Prize."

So much about Dan was contradictory. His novels were often gleefully politically incorrect, and much of what he wrote reflected personal philosophy, for which he made no apology. In the early 2000s Dan made headlines by loudly supporting the Augusta National Golf Club's men-only membership policy. It was their club, he insisted. It was their right to decide who could join. Yet in 2003, Dan successfully urged his beloved hometown Colonial Country Club to allow top female golfer Annika Sorenstam to compete in its prestigious, and previous all-male, tournament. When some of the male players protested, Dan laughed: "She's so good, they're just scared she'll kick their asses on TV."

He stood up for what he believed in, and damn the consequences, including threats of hell. When the powerful pastor of a prominent Metroplex fundamentalist church tried getting a teacher fired for including *Of Mice and Men* on a list of books her students could choose to read, I decided to write a strong editorial defending the educator. I knew a lot of prominent authors, and called several asking if they'd comment for my article. They all agreed, but only if I didn't identify them. "My publisher would kill me if I pissed off a big church," one told me. Then I called Dan, who e-mailed back a colorful condemnation of any attempted censorship, this in particular. I felt obligated to ask if he really wanted me to use his response. Dan responded with another one-liner: "PLEASE quote me." I did. The teacher kept her job, the minister condemned Dan, John Steinbeck and me to hell – talk about great company for eternity - and a week later as we ate cheeseburgers at Colonial Country Club (over so many years, the only things I can ever remember Dan eating are cheeseburgers and Mexican food), Dan smacked me on the shoulder, laughed, and said, "When they react like that, you know you got them good."

During his long and justly renowned career, Dan Jenkins pretty much got everybody good, and had fun doing it. The wails of his critics encouraged rather than intimidated him. Dan wasn't a saint, but he was a caring, intelligent man, and one of the finest Texas writers ever.

If he could read that last line, he'd hate it. Too bad.

---Jeff Guinn