

The Caplin Foundation presents

# CRUMBS from the TABLE OF JOY

by Lynn Nottage

**MARCH 3-19**

Directed by  
**Ti Ames**

Sponsored by  
**Allison Partners**



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**STUDY GUIDE**

# CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY

by Lynn Nottage

March 3-19, 2023 in the Gibson Theater

Directed by Ti Ames

*The play runs for approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes with a 15-minute intermission.*

“Imagine a pairing ... between Tennessee Williams and Lorraine Hansberry, a memory play about a black family, a glass menagerie in the sun.” — *NY Post*

“The interplay between reality and fantasy makes for a lively narrative structure, ensuring standard kitchen-sink dramatics are balanced with emotionally heightened scenes that might as well be set in Joan Crawford’s living room.” — *Variety*

“Through the death of a loved one, and a birth of another, this memory play about coming into the type of person you always knew you'd be is a sucker-punch and one I still felt hours after leaving the performance.” — *Broadway World*

Study Guide compiled for Live Arts by Education Director Ti Ames



*Production photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): Simeon Brown, Stephanie Finn, Christiana Mitchell, and Jean Edwards.*

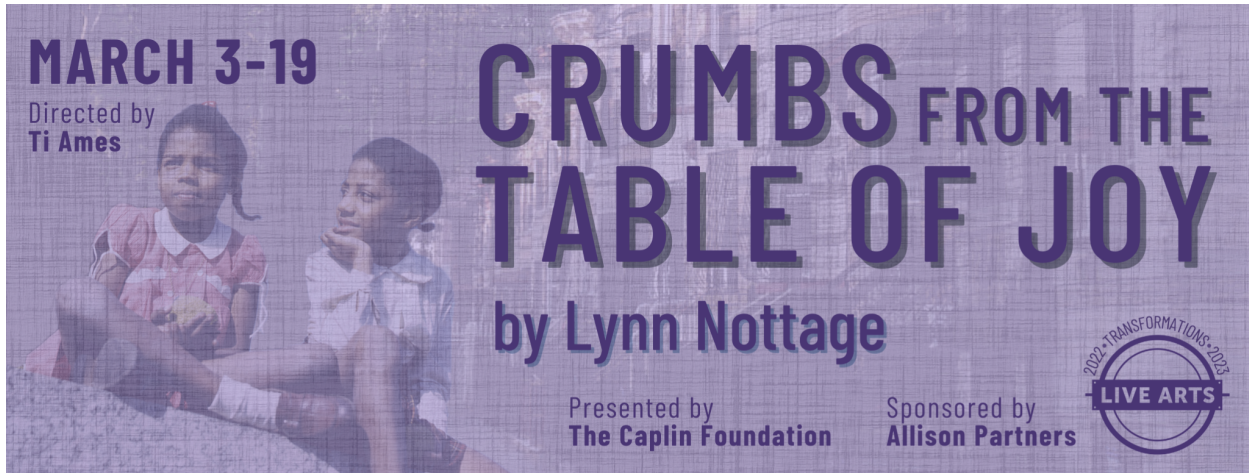


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\*More information, captions, and descriptions of all featured panels from The Migration Series can be found [here](#).





## Plot Summary

The date is 1950 in Brooklyn, New York, a time where racial tensions in the U.S. are on the verge of spilling over. America is dealing with the after effects of World War II and the start of the Cold War and is bracing itself for the Civil Rights movement. It truly is a time of change, something that is familiar to the Crump household. CRUMBS is a memory play told through Ernestine, a 17-year-old African American woman whose family is dealing with their own realities of change. Reeling from the loss of his wife, Godfrey Crump, Ernestine's father, is left with the sole responsibility of raising his two maturing daughters. He finds peace in a televangelist named "Father Divine," and moves his family from the south and customs of Florida to Brooklyn to follow the preacher's teachings. Adjusting to this culture shift, Ernestine and her younger sister, Ermina, seek to find their own way of coping. For Ernestine, her solace is escaping into the actresses she sees in the movies, and for Ermina, it is the attention of young boys. Laced with communist notions and talk of the Black revolution, Aunt Lily, the sister to Ernestine's mother, shakes up the conservative world that Godfrey desires to create by moving in with the family. Her aim is to mother her young nieces, and to release them of their father's teachings. The tension between free thought and conservative views proves to be too much for Godfrey, and he again runs away to find solace—this time without his girls. While away, he meets a German woman named Gerte, whom he falls in love with and decides to marry. He returns home with his new wife, and his daughters must then grapple with the idea of having a German stepmother. Gerte and Godfrey's relationship is challenged, as they are victims of the cruel world of racism. Can the family truly "cope" this time and how?

## Time & Setting

Brooklyn, 1950

## Play Trigger & Content Warnings

- Use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
- Mature language
- Descriptions of death, violence, and racist encounters
- Historical xenophobia and allusions to anti-Semitism
- References to World War II and Adolf Hitler
- Alcohol and cigarette smoking
- Brief sighting of blood

## Characters

**ERNESTINE CRUMP** | 17, African American. The play is told through the eyes of Ernestine, the older daughter of Godfrey Crump. Ernestine breaks the fourth wall throughout the show to spin the stories of her daily life and the Crump family. She is mature for her age, nostalgic, and shy.

**ERMINA CRUMP** | 15, African American. Ermina is the younger sister of Ernestine and the second daughter of Godfrey Crump. She is sharp, smart-alecky, and anxious.

**GODFREY CRUMP** | African American. The family patriarch who, overcome by grief for his recently dead wife, just moved to Brooklyn with his two daughters. He is loving, religious, and often both stoic and awkward.

**LILY ANN GREEN** | African American. Lily is the sister of Godfrey's Crump's deceased wife. Lily is a communist, a free thinker from Harlem. She is bold, sexually liberated, and troubled.

**GERTE CRUMP** | White, German. Gerte is an immigrant who just moved to America after World War II. She is sweet and impressionable and longs for acceptance.



*Promo Photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): Jean Edwards and Nik Scott.*



## About the Playwright



Lynn Nottage is the first and only woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice. Widely produced in the United States and throughout the world, she recently premiered *MJ the Musical* and *Clyde's* on Broadway, and an opera adaptation of her play *Intimate Apparel* commissioned by The Met/Lincoln Center. Other work includes the musical adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees*; *Mlima's Tale*; *Sweat* (Pulitzer Prize, OBIE Award, Tony and Drama Desk Nominations); *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Drama Desk Nomination); *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, OBIE, Lucille Lortel, New York Drama Critics' Circle, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award); *Intimate Apparel* (American Theatre Critics and New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Play); *Fabulation*,

or *The Re-Education of Undine* (OBIE Award); *Las Meninas*; *Mud, River, Stone*; *Por'knockers*; and *POOF!*. Nottage's numerous awards and honors include a MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, the Dramatists Guild Hull-Warriner Award, TIME 100 (2019), the inaugural Horton Foote Prize, the Helen Hayes Award, the National Black Theatre Fest's August Wilson Playwriting Award, a Guggenheim Grant, and a PEN/Laura Pels Award. She is an associate professor in the Theater Department at Columbia School of the Arts and artist-in-residence at the Park Avenue Armory.

## Performance History

CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY received its world premiere at Second Stage Theatre in New York in 1995, and its West Coast premiere at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California, in 1996.



Group photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): (background) Savannah Meriwether, Maddie Chin, Jean Edwards; (foreground) Director Ti Ames, Ty Daniels, and Christiana Mitchell.

## **About the Director**

Ti Ames (they/them/theirs) is a director, actor, and educator native to Charlottesville. As a Black, nonbinary, and queer person, Ti approaches theater with a focus on ritual, healing, and collective survival to uplift underrepresented voices in the Charlottesville community and beyond. They are the education director at Live Arts and teach African American History at the Renaissance School. They are also an accomplished playwright, script adapter, acting/vocal coach, and dramaturg. At Live Arts, Ti directed the teen summer musical *RENT* in 2019 and Shelby Edwards' *LOST HOME, WIN HOME*, which opened the 2020/21 Forging Ahead Season. Other directing credits include: *Seven Guitars* (University of Virginia, associate director); *Black Mac: A Macbeth Adaptation* and *See About the Girls* (Charlottesville Players Guild); *The Brothers Size* and *Olympus* (Oberlin College, director, vocal and associate director); *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* (Renaissance School); *Lights Out, Nice to See You Again* (Virtual). Ti's next project is directing August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's*

*Black Bottom* with the Charlottesville Players Guild at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center.

### **“Luck,” a Poem by Langston Hughes**

The title of CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY takes inspiration from Langston Hughes’ 1947 poem, entitled “Luck.” It reads:

*Sometimes a crumb falls  
From the tables of joy,  
Sometimes a bone  
Is flung.*

*To some people  
Love is given,  
To others  
Only heaven.*

“Personally, Luck speaks more to access and levels of privilege within the Black community more than anything,” Ti explained. “Some folks have more access than others—to joy, money, resources, love, even understanding. That access ebbs and flows regularly, hence why some may see it as ‘luck.’”

### **[The Migration Series by Jacob Armstead Lawrence\\*](#)**

Jacob Armstead Lawrence was a prolific African American visual artist of the 20th century, heavily influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and the everyday human condition of Black people in America. According to the Phillips Collection, “He received a grant from the Rosenwald Foundation (in 1940) to create a 60-panel epic, *The Migration of the Negro*, now known as *The Migration Series*.” *The Migration Series* tells the story of the great migration of African Americans and their culture from the American South to the North and beyond after Reconstruction amidst the rise of Jim Crow. Families fled North in search of a better life and greater opportunities for both themselves and their future descendants.



**An excerpt from the Introduction to The Migration Series as a part of the Phillips Collection:**



“Lawrence found a way to tell his own story through the power and vibrancy of the painted image, weaving together 60 same-sized panels into one grand epic statement. Before painting the series, Lawrence researched the subject and wrote captions to accompany each panel. Like the storyboards of a film, he saw the panels as one unit, painting all 60 simultaneously, color by color, to

ensure their overall visual unity. The poetry of Lawrence's epic statement emerges from its staccato-like rhythms and repetitive symbols of movement: the train, the station, ladders, stairs, windows, and the surge of people on the move carrying bags and luggage.

Following the example of the West African storyteller or griot, who spins tales of the past that have meaning for the present and the future, Lawrence tells a story that reminds us of our shared history and at the same time invites us to reflect on the universal theme of struggle in the world today: ‘To me, migration means movement. There was conflict and struggle. But out of the struggle came kind of power and even beauty.’ ‘And the migrants kept coming’ is a refrain of triumph over adversity. If it rings true for you today, then it must still strike a chord in our American experience.”



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## Glossary of Terms

(In order of appearance)

[The Fox Cinema](#): The Fox Theatre was once a centerpiece of Downtown Brooklyn. It was opened by William Fox on August 31, 1928 with Janet Gaynor in “Street Angel,” a silent film, and a stage show named “Carnival des Naples.” It had 4,305 seats. Interior decorations were in a mix of Spanish Baroque and Marine motifs.

[Joan Crawford](#): An American motion-picture actress who made her initial impact as a vivacious Jazz Age flapper but later matured into a star of psychological melodramas. She developed a glamorous screen image, appearing often as a sumptuously gowned, fur-draped, successful career woman.

[Senator McCarthy](#): Elected to the Senate in 1946, Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) did not draw major national attention until 1950. On February 9 of that year, he delivered a Lincoln Day address in Wheeling, West Virginia, blaming failures in American foreign policy on communist infiltration of the U.S. government.

[Amos and Andy](#): The Amos ‘n’ Andy Show was a popular radio and television program that had its roots in a 1926 radio program called “Sam ‘n’ Henry.” Because Amos ‘n’ Andy was based on the model of minstrel shows and thus based on racial stereotypes, and was voiced by two white entertainers from the late 1920s to 1951, it was considered highly objectionable.

[Father Divine & The Peace Mission](#): The International Peace Mission Movement, an American communitarian religion founded in the early decades of the 20th century, established a significant presence in Philadelphia under the leadership of its African American minister, the Reverend Major Jealous Divine, better known as Father Divine (1879?-1965). As an American sectarian religious innovator, Father Divine reached the height of his national renown during and following the Great Depression. Believed by his followers to be an incarnation of the creator God of the Christian Trinity, he has been both appreciated as an early leader in the movement for African American civil rights and social justice and criticized as a self-promoter and instigator of a “cultic” religion.

[Scottsboro Boys](#): The Scottsboro Boys were nine Black teenagers falsely accused of sexually assaulting two white women aboard a train near Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931. The trials and repeated retrials of the Scottsboro Boys sparked an international uproar

and produced two landmark U.S. Supreme Court verdicts, even as the defendants were forced to spend years battling the courts and enduring the harsh conditions of the Alabama prison system.

[The New Day Paper](#): A commercial, bi-weekly tabloid published by a group of followers of Father Divine that featured his work, including lectures, sermons, interviews, and informal talks. The paper first appeared in 1937 but was suspended in 1992.

[Holy Communion Banquet](#): An annual Thanksgiving dinner that Father Divine was well-known for hosting. The banquets were free and racially integrated meals. Divine would pass out bowls of food, pour coffee, and sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the participants. He called these events a “Holy Communion Banquet Service” and fed thousands of people each year.

[“Period. Stop!”](#): Telegrams reached their peak popularity in the 1920s and 1930s when it was cheaper to send a telegram than to place a long-distance telephone call. People would save money by using “stop” instead of periods to end sentences because punctuation was extra while the four-character word was free.

[Pensacola](#): Established in 1559 by Don Tristan de Luna and Spanish settlers, Pensacola is America’s First Settlement. Located in Florida’s panhandle, Pensacola is surrounded by 50-plus



*Promo photo by Will Kerner featuring Nik Scott.*

miles of coastline which includes the emerald-green Gulf of Mexico waters and crystal clear bay areas.



[Alligator Bait](#): A racial slur referencing the utilization of Black babies as live bait for alligator hunting. This became a form of debate in the U.S. Some argued that these incidents did not happen. However, several news articles about the gruesome activity were written in the 19th and 20th centuries.

[Communism](#): A political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

[Bette Davis](#): American actress Bette Davis was born on April 5, 1908, in Lowell, Massachusetts. After a brief theater career, she became one of the biggest stars in the Hollywood studio system, appearing in nearly 100 films before her death in 1989.

[Dixie Peach](#): A hair pomade popular in the mid-1950s in both Black and white households for its strong hold.

[Charlie Parker](#): An American alto saxophonist, composer, bandleader, and lyric artist generally considered the greatest jazz saxophonist. Parker was the principal stimulus of the modern jazz idiom known as bebop, and—together with Louis Armstrong and Ornette Coleman—was one of the three great revolutionary geniuses in jazz.

[Desi Arnez](#): A Cuban-born actor and musician who is most remembered for his marriage to Lucille Ball and their TV show, “I Love Lucy.”

[Mambo](#): A fast ballroom dance of Caribbean origin, rhythmically similar to the rumba and cha-cha but having a more complex pattern of steps.

[Rubbers](#): An article of footwear worn over a shoe as protection from water, snow, or cold.

[Pierre Boussard](#): Most likely a compilation of many different jazz artists during the early 20th century created by playwright Lynn Nottage.

[Olivia DeHavilland](#): An American motion-picture actress remembered for the lovely and gentle ingenues of her early career as well as for the later, more substantial roles she fought to secure.

[Marlene Dietrich](#): An German American motion-picture actress whose beauty, voice, aura of sophistication, and languid sensuality made her one of the world's most glamorous film stars.



*Production photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): Stephanie Finn and Simeon Brown.*

[Duesenberg](#): A large, fast, expensive car made in the U.S. between 1920 and 1937 during the Jazz Age. Its popular name was a “Duesie,” and Americans still use the informal word “doozy” or “doozie” to mean something that is special. It was the first U.S. car to win the Grand Prix at Le Mans, France, in 1921.

[Nazis](#): The National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party, grew into a mass movement and ruled Germany through totalitarian means from 1933 to 1945 under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.

[Woolworth's](#): A chain of large shops in Britain, the United States, and other countries that sold a wide variety of goods at low prices.

[Eva Braun](#): The mistress and later wife of Adolf Hitler.

[Jim Crow](#): Often used to describe the segregation laws, rules, and customs which arose after Reconstruction ended in 1877 and continued until the mid-1960s.

[City College](#): A public research university within the City University of New York (CUNY) system in New York City. Founded in 1847, City College was the first free public institution of higher education in the United States. Located in Hamilton Heights overlooking Harlem in Manhattan, City College's 35-acre collegiate gothic campus spans Convent Avenue from 130th to 141st Streets.

[“Communist Manifesto”](#): A pamphlet written in 1848 by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, summarizing their theory of, and program for, communism.

[“The Souls of Black Folks”](#): A series of essays in which W.E.B. Du Bois presents his argument about a path toward progress for African Americans: enfranchisement, political power, and education. This book, both a primary source and a literary work, provides insight about the experiences of African Americans in the early 20th century. Du Bois discusses segregation and “color lines” and chronicles the “double consciousness” experienced by African Americans—“this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”

[Black Skin, White Masks](#): First published in 1952, the book authored by Frantz Fanon offers a potent philosophical, clinical, literary, and political analysis of the deep effects of racism and colonialism on the experiences, lives, minds, and relationships of Black people and people of color.

[Freedom Bus \(Freedom Riders\)](#): Freedom Riders were groups of white and African American civil rights activists who participated in Freedom Rides—bus trips through the American South in 1961 to protest segregated bus terminals.

[Vietnam War](#): A conflict, starting in 1954 and ending in 1975, between South Vietnam (later aided by the U.S., South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and New Zealand) and the Vietcong and North Vietnam.



Integration: The term used to describe the process of desegregating and bringing together people of different races, especially Blacks and whites, in schools and other settings throughout the mid-20th century.

Black Panther Movement: Began as a revolutionary movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It emphasized racial pride, economic empowerment, and the creation of political and cultural institutions. During this era, there was a rise in the demand for Black history courses, a greater embrace of African culture, and a spread of raw artistic expression displaying the realities of African Americans.



*Rehearsal photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): Christiana Mitchell, Simeon Brown, and Jean Edwards.*

## Mentor/Apprentice Program

The Mentor/Apprentice Program reflects Live Arts' commitment to developing future theater artists both on stage and behind the scenes. Every season, teenagers learn about a technical aspect of theater by being paired with experienced theater professionals on the production team. CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY is the 2022/23 season Mentor/Apprentice show.

Apprentices, ages 13 to 19, are tasked with attending all weekly production meetings and frequently meeting with their mentors. Each apprentice also contributes to tech week rehearsals and show performances. They've worked (and continue to work) incredibly hard to help bring CRUMBS to life. Thank you to both our mentors and apprentices for such a successful process!



*Group photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): (top row) Lighting Designer Heather Hutton, Stage Manager Scott Dunn, Costume Designer Martha Adekunle, Apprentice Costume Designer Kiera Davis, (bottom row), Apprentice Scenic Designer Will Kelly, Apprentice Lighting Designer Caroline Jareb, Apprentice Stage Manager Maddie Chin, and Apprentice Costume Designer Elliot Armour.*

## **Talkback Information**

The audience talkback for Live Arts' CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY is scheduled for 10pm on Thursday, March 16, 2023, in Gibson Theater (123 E. Water St., 2nd floor) with members of the cast and crew, facilitated by Education Director Ti Ames. You do not need to purchase a ticket to the March 16 show to attend the talkback. This program is provided free of charge to the Charlottesville community. Please email Education Director Ti Ames at [ti@livearts.org](mailto:ti@livearts.org) with questions about the event.

## **Additional Resources**

[Tracing the Great Migration by train - \*The Washington Post\*](#)

[Community Conversation with Costume Apprentice Elliot Armour - Live Arts 2-24-23](#)

## **Works Cited**

[Crums From the Table of Joy - Miami University.](#)





*Group photo by Will Kerner featuring (L-R): (back row) Director Ti Ames, Sound Designer Ivan Orr, Sound Board Operator Etta Feigert, Light Board Operator Caroline Jareb, Stephanie Finn, Stage Manager Scott Dunn, Costume Designer Martha Adekunle, Props Designer Maggie Rogers, Sharon Millner, Simeon Brown; (middle row) Lighting Designer Heather Hutton, Apprentice Set Designer Will Kelly, Apprentice Costume Designer Elliot Armour, Apprentice Costume Designer Kiera Davis, Stagehand Savannah Meriwether, Ty Daniels; (bottom row) Apprentice Stage Manager Maddie Chin, Christiana Mitchell, Jean Edwards, Nik Scott.*