

► Preview at CAV

JUNE 24, 2009
5:00 – 8:00 PM AT
14 IMPERIAL PLACE
PROV., RI

► Theatre Plans

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George Wiley *legacy*

A SPECIAL NEWSLETTER FOR THE
GEORGE A. WILEY LEGACY PROJECT

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley's deep voice rumbles like thunder and crackles like lightning as he depicts "the perfect storm" that enveloped the United States through most of the 1960s and early 70s.

George A. Wiley, "the eye of that perfect storm" ...

That era resonated with the civil rights struggle, Vietnam, the War on Poverty and names for the ages, Martin Luther King Jr., John and Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, James Farmer and so many more.

But for actor-playwright Pitts-Wiley, the eye of that perfect storm was the late George Wiley, a pioneering social activist.

"He was in a time," Pitts-Wiley said, "in which black leadership and particularly black male leadership was being redefined."

"Fair-skinned man from New England with a New England way of speaking, an Ivy League education, second or third generation African-American."

Today, Pitts-Wiley says, Wiley would be a high-ranking official in the Obama administration. But back then this chemistry professor championed welfare reform that nobody wanted to touch because it came with a stigma, Pitts-Wiley said, and fought for the rights of welfare mothers as the Vietnam War shredded countless families by leaving thousands of young black men dead or irretrievably damaged. Welfare rules restricting aid to poor families with a man in the house

exacerbated the problem, he said.

Gradually, Pitts-Wiley has been peeling away the multiple layers of his complex namesake who grew up in Rhode Island and gave up his tenured professorship at Syracuse University to pursue the rights of others. Pitts-Wiley's research, initiated by the George Wiley Center, has been fueled by a \$2,000 grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and two recent \$2,000 mini-grants from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, one to the center, the other to the playwright.

Pitts-Wiley himself is in the eye of many a storm. He was a member of the Trinity Repertory Company for 18 years and is an interpreter of African-American cultural history. He and his wife Bernadet formed the Mixed Magic Theatre in Pawtucket dedicated to presenting a diversity of cultural and ethnic images and ideas on stage. This fall he will teach at MIT on a Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship in a joint venture of the theater and English departments.

His plate brims with new ideas, but his desire to tell the George Wiley story drives him, a perfect storm that he hopes to complete and share with the larger community in a play next June.

REST IN PEACE, JOSHUA T. HALL

Nephew to George Wiley and son of Shirley Wiley Green, Joshua T. Hall, passed away at age 54 on April 29, 2009. Under George's wing, Joshua attended the 1968 Poor People's Encampment with the New York Delegation of the National Welfare Rights Organization. He "worked hard for the 'movement' ever since discovering it," Shirley tells us in the autobiographical novel, *God Within the Shadow.* Memorial contributions can be made to the Joshua Hall Scholarship Fund or Brain Injury Research Project at Weill-Cornell Medical College, New York City, New York.