INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

JUL 27 — WINSTON-SALEM, NC — AUG 1

2026

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG

Norfolk State University

Tuesday, July 28, 2:00pm
Tuesday, July 28, 8:00pm
Wednesday, July 29, 2:00pm
Wednesday, July 29, 8:00pm

Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts Mountcastle Forum/Theatre

PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG • PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON • RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE • SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL • MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE • NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM • MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY • JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD • ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME • OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES

INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

Winston-Salem | The City of Winston-Salem salutes the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival.

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY
THEATRE COMPANY

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG

Written by Suzan-Lori Parks

Under the direction of founder, award-winning actor, director, and educator Anthony Mark Stockard, the Norfolk State University Theatre Company produces all theatrical productions at Norfolk State University. Nationally recognized for artistic excellence, the company has earned critical acclaim, broken box office records, and received numerous honors, making it one of the nation's most distinguished collegiate theatre programs. Celebrating 90 years of theatre, the company proudly represents Norfolk State University's oldest student organization.

The company provides hands-on production experience in acting, directing, design, playwriting, and technical theatre. Through faculty mentorship and professional-level productions, students develop the skills, discipline, and creativity needed for successful careers.

The company also serves as a cultural ambassador to the university, presenting dynamic works centered on the African diaspora while fostering education, community engagement, and transformative storytelling.

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DIRECTION & DESIGN

Producer & Director ..... Anthony Mark Stockard
Technical Director.....Korey Michael Washington
Lighting, Costume, Sound & Scenic Designer..... Anthony Mark Stockard

CAST

(Alphabetically, by order of appearance)

Booth..... Keighton Bell & RaMelle Marshall (Alternating)
Lincoln.....LeVonte Herbert

CREW

Lightboard Operator.....Treveon Jackson
Soundboard Operator..... Kahlen Boston

SETTING

Topdog/Underdog takes place on the top floor of an urban boarding house building, at the end of the 20th Century.

WHO'S WHO

Anthony Mark Stockard (Producer/Director/Lighting, Costume, Sound & Scenic Designer) Professor Anthony Mark Stockard is the *Founder and Artistic Director of* the *Norfolk State University Theatre Company*, America's most nationally recognized HBCU theatre program of the last decade. Under his leadership, the program has earned historic national acclaim, received numerous prestigious honors, and attracted record-breaking audiences while establishing Norfolk State as a leader in collegiate theatre.

Professor Stockard also founded Norfolk State University's Bachelor of Arts in Drama & Theatre program, creating a curriculum that blends academic excellence with professional production experience. In 2021, *Black Masks* named him one of its *25 Game Changers in Black Theatre*. In 2022, he became only the fourth recipient nationwide of the *University Resident Theatre Association*'s *Sustained Excellence in Teaching Award*. He and the partnership he curated with *Virginia Stage Company* has been featured in *American Theatre* and *Southern Theatre* magazines. His productions of *Thoughts of a Colored Man* and *The Brothers Size* earned national recognition from the *Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival*, receiving more than 22 national festival awards in total. Each time both productions were selected from more than 1,300 productions involving over 200,000 students nationwide. They rank as Norfolk State's most award-winning theatrical achievements in university history.

Professor Stockard's additional honors include being a national finalist for *The HBCU Awards' Best Male Faculty of the Year*, an inaugural recipient of Alabama State University's *50 Under 50*, recipient of the Norfolk State University Faculty Senate's *Excellence in Teaching & Research Award*, is a Presidentially appointed *NSU Honors College Senior Fellow*, and recipient of the NSU Theatre Company *Outstanding Dedication & Service Award*. He also served as

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a Senior Producer of the *Emmy Award*-winning documentary short *The Historic Attucks Theater: Apollo of the South*.

An award-winning actor, director, educator, and producer, Professor Stockard has directed more than 60 productions for professional and collegiate stages and maintains professional affiliations with the *Stage Directors & Choreographers Society*, *Actors' Equity Association*, and *SAG-AFTRA*. www.anthonystockard.com

Suzan-Lori Parks (Playwright) Named one of Time magazine's "100 Innovators for the Next New Wave," Suzan-Lori Parks is one of the most exciting and acclaimed playwrights in American drama. She is the first African American woman to receive the *Pulitzer Prize in Drama* for the Broadway hit *Topdog/Underdog* and is a MacArthur "Genius" Award recipient. She has also been awarded grants by the *National Endowment for the Arts*, the *Rockefeller Foundation*, the *Ford Foundation*, the *New York State Council on the Arts* and the *New York Foundation for the Arts*. She is recipient of a *Lila-Wallace Reader's Digest Award*, a *CalArts/Alpert Award in the Arts (Drama) for 1996*, a *Guggenheim Foundation Grant* and is an alumna of New Dramatists. In 2000, and again in 2017, Parks was awarded the *PEN/Laura Pels Award for Theater*. Her work is the subject of the *PBS* film "The Topdog Diaries." Her talks are part performance, part storytelling—always high energy, with an inspired sense of humor. She credits her writing teacher and mentor, James Baldwin, for starting her on the path of playwriting. One of the first to recognize Parks' writing skills, Mr. Baldwin declared Parks "an astonishing and beautiful creature who may become one of the most valuable artists of our time."

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WHO'S WHO

Keighton Bell (Booth) Keighton is a newly minted graduate of Norfolk State University's BA in Drama in Theatre Program making his second appearance at the *International Black Theatre Festival* after having previously appeared as a student in the NSU 2024 Fringe Production of *Thoughts of a Colored Man* as Love. His previous performance credits include *A Soldier's Play*, *The Color Purple*, and *Thoughts of a Colored Man* (Norfolk State University Theatre Company); *The Whitney & Aretha Tribute* and *The Luther Vandross Tribute* (Virginia Arts Festival); and *The Three Musketeers*, *Dreamgirls*, and *The Earth Remembers* (Virginia Stage Company). Keighton also had the distinct honor of portraying L. Douglas Wilder and delivering Governor Wilder's historic, inauguration speech in Washington, D.C., before Governor Wilder himself, during *A National Ovation to L. Douglas Wilder* hosted by Emmy winner, journalist and *CBS News* interviewer, the legendary Ed Gordon.

Keighton is grateful to God, his family, friends, coworkers, and Professor Anthony Mark Stockard for their unwavering encouragement and support throughout his artistic journey. Their belief in his potential has inspired him to continue pursuing excellence both on and off the stage while embracing every opportunity to grow as a performer and theatre professional. He lives by the words of David Goggins: "Don't focus on what you think you deserve; take aim at what you are willing to earn." Follow him on all social media platforms: @keightoncbell

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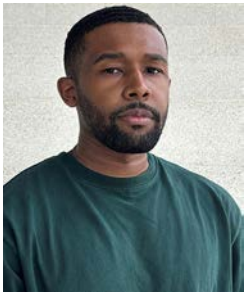
WHO'S WHO

LeVonte Herbert (Lincoln) LeVonte is excited to be making his IBTF debut with *Topdog/Underdog*. He recently appeared in *Primary Trust* and *Topdog/Underdog* (Norfolk Theatre Festival/NSU) and has previously appeared in *The Wiz*, *The Bluest Eye*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Earth Remembers* (Virginia Stage Company); *Bury Child*, *Wintertime*, *Miss Julie: Freedom Summer*, *As You Like It* and *Wedlock of the Gods* (Univ. of Southern California); *Black Nativity*, *Fences* and *The Color Purple* (Norfolk State University Theatre Company). He is a graduate of Norfolk State University's BA in Drama in Theatre Program where he serves as an Assistant Professor of Drama and University of Southern California's MFA in Acting program. He would like to thank his parents, family and friends for their love and support.



Ra'Melle Marshall (Booth) Ra'melle Marshall is honored to appear as a guest artist with Norfolk State University Theatre Company's production of *Topdog/Underdog*, marking his debut at the *International Black Theatre Festival*. RaMelle is from Virginia Beach, Virginia and his previous credits include *Stick Fly*, *45 Seconds from Broadway* and *A Raisin in the Sun* (Little Theatre of Virginia Beach); *Choir Boy* (Little Theatre of Norfolk). Ra'melle is passionate about character-driven storytelling and exploring the human experience through theatre. He would like to thank his family, friends, mentors, and fellow artists for their continued support and encouragement.

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International Black Theater Festival

Join Forsyth County in rolling out the purple carpet for the 2026 International Black Theater Festival.

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A NC Black Rep Experience

2026 Forsyth County Commissioners

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

More than two decades after its Pulitzer Prize-winning premiere, Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* remains one of the most urgent and consequential works in the American theatrical canon. In 2026, its exploration of brotherhood, identity, economic instability, masculinity, and the relentless pursuit of the American Dream feels not only relevant, but remarkably prophetic. Parks masterfully examines the invisible systems that shape individual lives, revealing how history, race, and circumstance continue to influence opportunity, self-worth, and survival.

At the heart of the play are Lincoln and Booth—two brothers whose names evoke the nation's deepest contradictions. Their struggle extends far beyond sibling rivalry, becoming a profound meditation on inheritance, ambition, and the cyclical forces that challenge generations of Black men. While the social and political landscape has evolved since the play's debut, the questions Parks raises remain strikingly contemporary: What does success truly cost? How do individuals escape the narratives imposed upon them? And how can hope survive when survival itself becomes the daily contest?

In today's climate, marked by ongoing conversations surrounding economic inequity, mental health, family dynamics, and the evolving definition of Black masculinity, *Topdog/Underdog* resonates with renewed power. Its language is lyrical yet razor-sharp, its humor disarming, and its emotional depth unwavering. Parks refuses simple answers, instead inviting audiences into a complex examination of humanity where triumph and tragedy exist simultaneously.

The inclusion of *Topdog/Underdog* in the *2026 International Black Theatre Festival* underscores the festival's enduring commitment to celebrating transformative works that define and expand the Black theatrical experience at our nation's universities and colleges. Since its founding, *the International Black Theatre Festival* has served as

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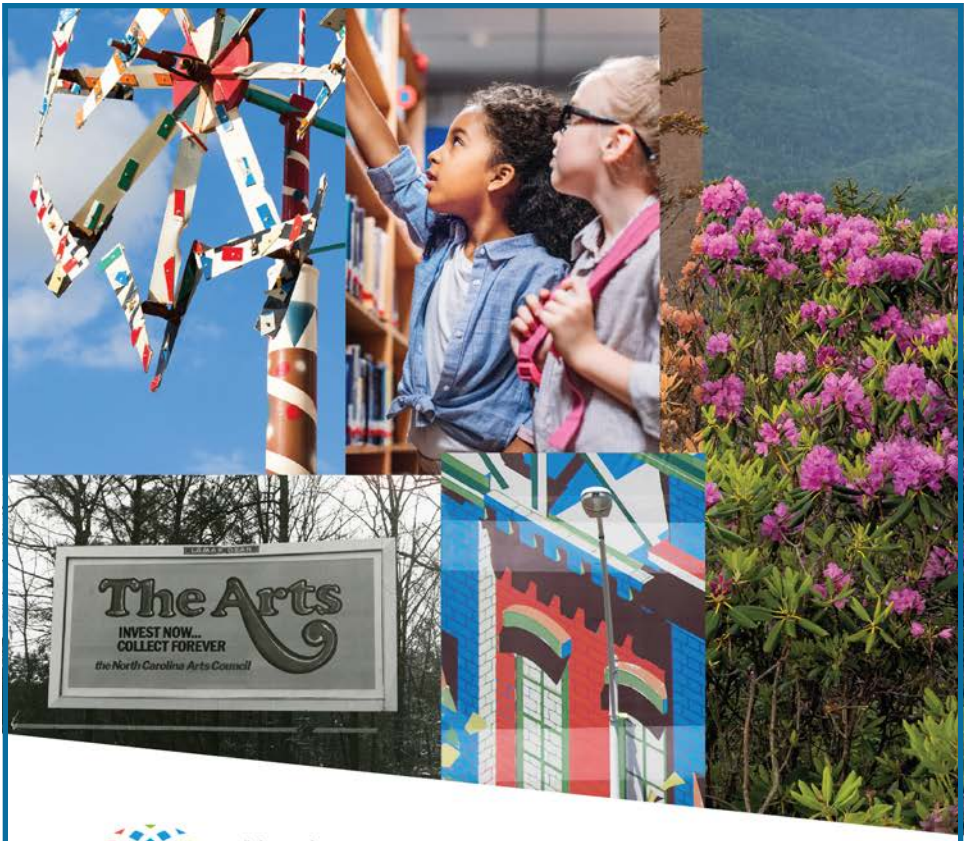
a global gathering place for artists and audiences committed to preserving, advancing, and reimagining Black storytelling. Parks' groundbreaking play stands firmly within that tradition, challenging performers and audiences alike to engage with narratives that are both deeply personal and universally resonant.

This production reflects *Norfolk State University Theatre Company*'s mission of combining artistic excellence with cultural engagement and educational purpose. As one of the nation's leading theatre programs, the company embraces works that inspire dialogue, cultivate empathy, and illuminate the complexities of the human condition.

In bringing *Topdog/Underdog* to the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival, Norfolk State University Theatre honors a modern masterpiece whose brilliance continues to illuminate America's unfinished conversations—proving that truly great theatre does not simply reflect its time; it speaks powerfully across generations.



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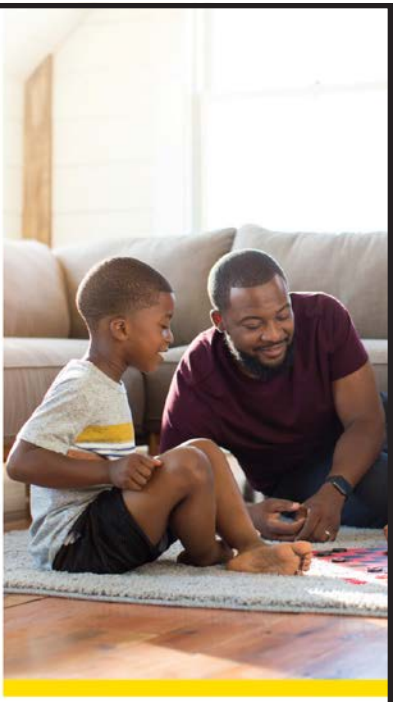

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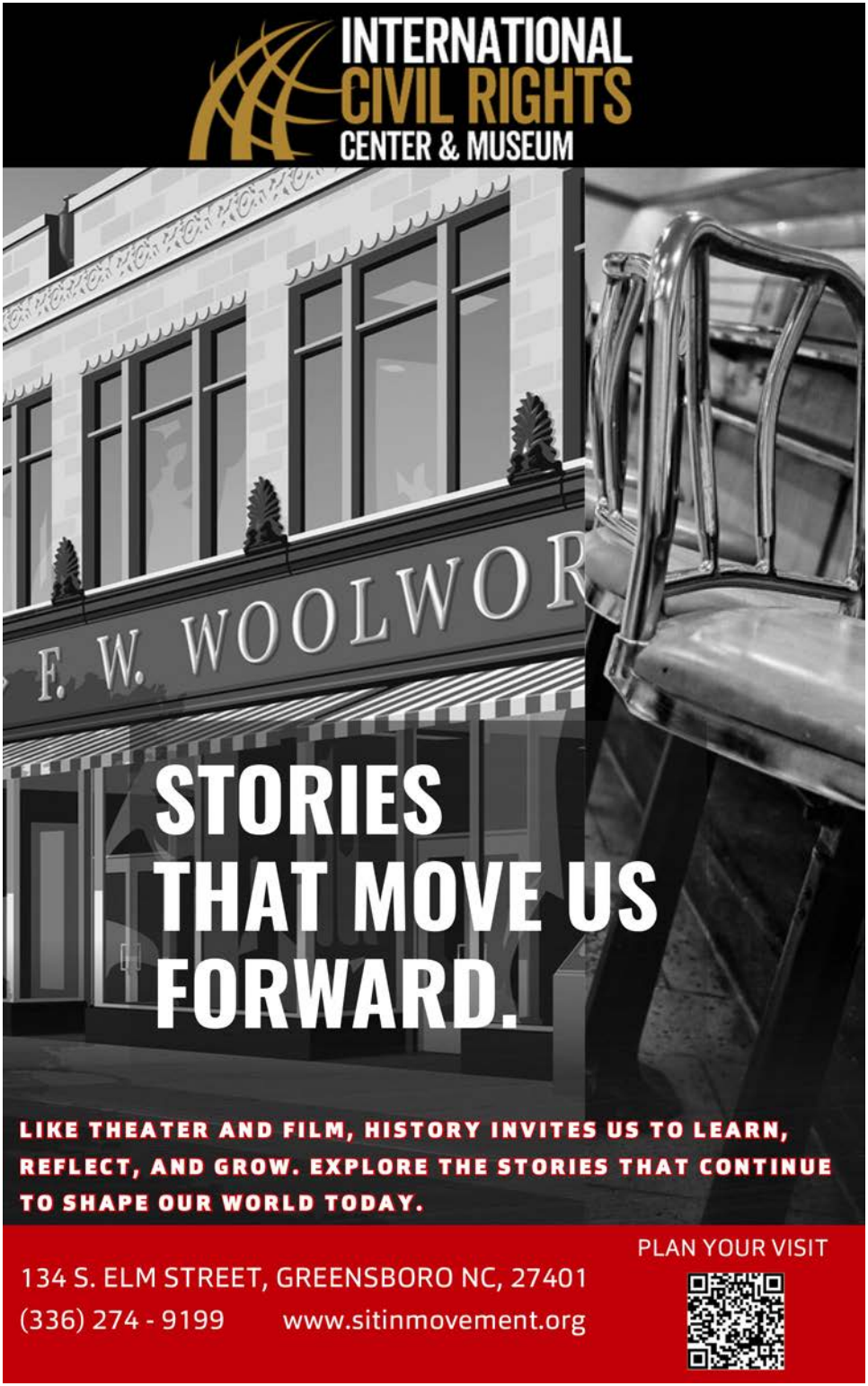
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Nico Amortegui, *Be a Wildflower*, 2025. © 2025 Nico Amortegui. Courtesy of the artist.

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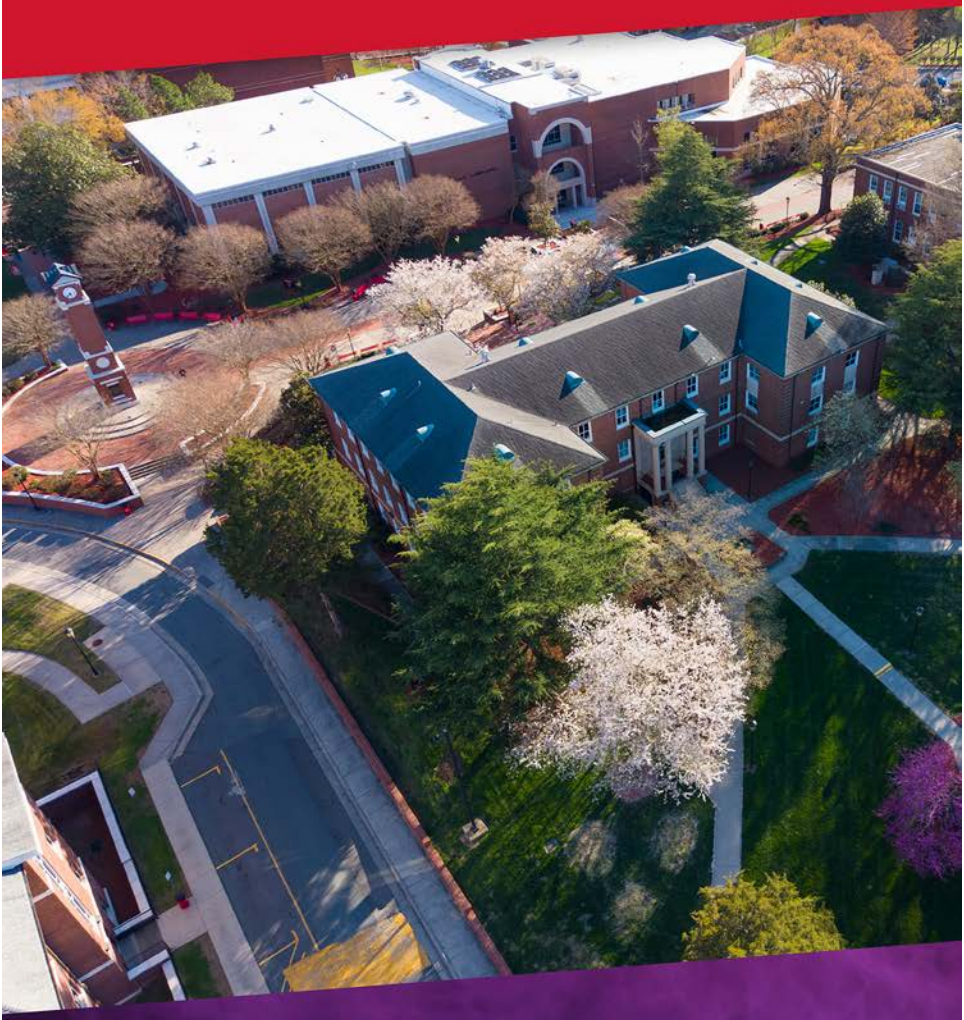

INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

WINSTON-SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY

BTU
BLACK THEATRE UNITED
GALA
MONDAY, OCTOBER 5TH
141 W 54TH ST, NEW YORK, NY
ZIEGFELD BALLROOM
WORK
TO DO
Join us for Black Theatre United's Fourth Annual Gala.
TOWN HALL
SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFO OR CONTACT SHOLANTI@BLACKTHEATREUNITED.COM

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Our Mission: "Helping all people reach their God-given potential in spirit, mind and body."