

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George C. Wolfe

PERSON

**Wolfe, George C.**

**Alternative Names:** George C. Wolfe;

**Life Dates:** September 23, 1954-

**Place of Birth:** Frankfort, Kentucky, USA

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Work:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Playwright; Artistic Director

## Biographical Note

Playwright and artistic director George C. Wolfe was born on September 23, 1954 in Frankfort, Kentucky. His mother, a teacher, was among the first African Americans to study library science through the University of Kentucky Extension Program. Wolfe's mother became the principal at the private, all-black, Rosenwald Laboratory School, where Wolfe received his elementary education, and discovered an interest in

staging and directing. As a teenager, Wolfe attended a summer theater workshop at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and began directing plays. He graduated from Frankfort High School in 1972, where he wrote for the literary journal. Wolfe attended Kentucky State University in Frankfort but, in 1973, transferred to Pomona College in Claremont, California, graduating in 1976 with his B.A. degree in theater.

Wolfe wrote and directed his first play, *Up for Grabs*, in 1975. In *Up for Grabs*, Wolfe debuted his sketch framing technique and the motif of passage through doors, which became common elements in his later works. The following year, he premiered *Block Party*. Wolfe completed a six-month postgraduate artist residency at Pomona College before meeting C. Bernard Jackson, who funded the first production of Wolfe's *Tribal Rites* at the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Wolfe staged several plays in Los Angeles before moving to New York in 1979, where he graduated with his M.F.A. degree in 1983 from New York University School of the Arts. He premiered *Paradise!* in 1985, and *The Colored Museum* in 1986, which garnered Wolfe national attention, as well as the attention of New York Shakespeare Festival founder Joseph Papp. Following the premiere of *Spunk* (1989), Papp named Wolfe a resident director in 1990. Wolfe won his first Obie award for *Spunk's* New York production that same year. In 1992, Wolfe made his Broadway debut with *Jelly's Last Jam* at the Virginia Theatre, and achieved widespread recognition when he directed the Broadway premiere of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* in 1993. He was named producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival that year and went on to produce ten seasons. Wolfe also directed the 1997 world premiere of *Amistad* at the Lyric Opera in Chicago, Illinois. He staged *Shuffle Along, or The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* at the Music Box Theatre in New York City in 2016.

In 1975, Wolfe won the Pacific Southern Regional

Award for playwriting at the American College Theater Festival for Up for Grabs. The following year, he premiered Block Party, receiving the Pacific Southern Regional Award for playwriting a second year in a row.

George C. Wolfe was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 9, 2016.

## Related Entries

**Rosenwald Laboratory School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Frankfort High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**High School Diploma**

**Kentucky State University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Pomona College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**New York University Tisch School of the Arts**  
[STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**M.F.A.**

**Various** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1975 to ?]

**Playwright & Director**

**Pomona College** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1977 to 1977]

**Artist-in-Residence**

**Inner City Cultural Center** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1977 to 1979]

**Teacher and Playwright**

**City College of New York** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1979 to 1984]

**Professor**

**Margo Lion** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1987 to 1992]

**Playwright**

**Public Theater of New York** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1990 to 1993]

**Resident Director**

**New York Shakespeare Festival/Joseph Papp Public  
Theatre** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1993 to 2004]

**Producer**