Conversations with John Edgar Wideman

Almost 30 years before 9/11, John Edgar Wideman published his third novel, a revolutionary and controversial story about four African-American men who hatch a terrorist plot to shake a complacent America to its foundations. They see their plan to lynch a white cop as the ultimate symbolic act of protest in a racist, hypocritical society mired in fundamental inequalities that contradict its "Home of the Free" credo. Critic Saunders Redding raved, "It is all here—the history of Negro America raised to the grandeur of superb fiction, as Tolstoy did it for the history of the Russian people in the Napoleonic era in War and Peace. I think The Lynchers is far and away the truest, the most moving, and the most brilliantly crafted novel of Negro life in almost a quarter of a century—that is, since Ellison's Invisible Man, which in some ways it surpasses."

The Lynchers

One of John Wideman's most ambitious and celebrated works, the lyrical masterpiece and PEN/Faulkner winner inspired by the 1985 police bombing of the West Philadelphia row house owned by the Afrocentric cult known as Move, killing eleven people and starting a fire that destroyed sixty other houses. At the heart of Philadelphia Fire is Cudjoe, a writer and exile who returns to his old neighborhood after spending a decade fleeing from his past, and who becomes obsessed with the search for a lone survivor of the event: a young boy seen running from the flames. Award-winning author John Edgar Wideman brings these events and their repercussions to shocking life in this seminal novel. "Reminiscent of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man" (Time) and Norman Mailer’s The Executioner’s Song, Philadelphia Fire is a masterful, culturally significant work that takes on a major historical event and takes us on a brutally honest journey through the despair and horror of life in urban America.

Philadelphia Fire

"A rare triumph" (The New York Times Book Review), this powerful memoir about the divergent paths taken by two brothers is a classic work from one of the greatest figures in American literature: a reflection on John Edgar Wideman’s family and his brother’s incarceration—a classic that is as relevant now as when originally published in 1984. A “brave and brilliant” (The Philadelphia Inquirer) portrait of lives arriving at different destinies, the classic John Edgar Wideman memoir, Brothers and Keepers, is a haunting portrait of two brothers—one an award-winning writer, the other a fugitive wanted for a robbery that resulted in a murder. Wideman recalls the capture of his younger brother, Robby, details the subsequent trials that resulted in a sentence of life in prison, and provides vivid views of the American prison system. A gripping, unsettling account, Brothers and Keepers weighs the bonds of blood, affection, and guilt that connect Wideman and his brother and measures the distance that lies between them. "If you care at all about brotherhood and dignity…this is a must-read book" (The Denver Post). With a new afterword by his brother Robert Wideman, recently released after more than fifty years in prison.

Hoop Roots

In 1985 police bombed a West Philadelphia row house. Eleven people died and a fire started that destroyed sixty other houses. John Edgar Wideman brings these events and their repercussions to shocking life in this seminal novel. At the heart of Philadelphia Fire is Cudjoe, a writer and exile who returns to his old neighbourhood and who becomes obsessed with the search for a lone survivor of the event, a young boy seen running from the flames. One of Wideman’s most ambitious and celebrated works, Philadelphia Fire is about race, life and survival in urban America.

Damballah

"A powerful assemblage of short stories exploring late-in-life angst through personal myth, cultural memory, and riffs on an empire scorched by its own hubris" (O, The Oprah Magazine) from award-winning author John Edgar Wideman—his first collection in more than a decade. "Race and its reverberations are at the core of this slim, powerful volume, a blend of fiction, memoir, and reimagined history, in which the boundaries between those forms are murky and ever shifting" (The Boston Globe). In this singular collection, John Edgar Wideman blends the personal, historical, and political to invent complex, charged stories about love, death, struggle, and what we owe each other. With characters ranging from everyday Americans to...
Jean-Michel Basquiat to Nat Turner, American Histories is a journey through time, experience, and the soul of our country. In “JB & FD,” Wideman reimagines conversations between John Brown, the antislavery crusader, and Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist and orator—conversations that produce a fantastical, rich correspondence that spans years and ideologies. “Maps and Ledgers” eavesdrops on a brother and sister today as they ponder their father’s killing of another man. “Williamsburg Bridge” sits inside a man sitting on a bridge who contemplates his life before he decides to jump. “My Dead” is a story about how the already-departed demand more time, more space in the lives of those who survive them. American Histories is “an important addition to Wideman’s body of writing and a remarkable demonstration of his ability to address social issues through a range of fictional forms and styles” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette). An extended meditation on family, history, and loss, American Histories weaves together historical fact, philosophical wisdom, and deeply personal vignettes. This is Wideman at his best—emotionally precise and intellectually stimulating—an extraordinary collection by a master.

Writing to Save a Life
Stories feature individuals from all walks of life who reside in Homewood, a Black section of Pittsburgh

Look for Me and I'll Be Gone
Contains brief biographical sketches and well-known and obscure works by African-American authors from the late 1700s to the early 1900s, including Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Ida B. Wells, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Reprint.

Let It Burn
One of John Wideman’s most ambitious and celebrated works, the lyrical masterpiece and PEN/Faulkner winner inspired by the 1985 police bombing of the West Philadelphia row house owned by black liberation group Move. In 1985, police bombed a West Philadelphia row house owned by the Afrocentric cult known as Move, killing eleven people and starting a fire that destroyed sixty other houses. At the heart of Philadelphia Fire is Cudjoe, a writer and exile who returns to his old neighborhood after spending a decade fleeing from his past, and who becomes obsessed with the search for a lone survivor of the event: a young boy seen running from the flames. Award-winning author John Edgar Wideman brings these events and their repercussions to shocking life in this seminal novel. “Reminiscent of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man” (Time) and Norman Mailer’s The Executioner’s Song, Philadelphia Fire is a masterful, culturally significant work that takes on a major historical event and takes us on a brutally honest journey through the despair and horror of life in urban America.

Philadelphia Fire
An aging, highly intelligent black lawyer who lives in a cluttered trailer is the go-between for the poor blacks of Homewood who must deal with the authorities downtown

Fanon
John Edgar Wideman is one of the most prominent African American writers today. He is the first author to have been awarded the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction twice-once in 1984 for Sent for You Yesterday and again in 1990 for Philadelphia Fire. His memoir, Fatheralong, was a finalist for the National Book Award. Yet, despite all of Wideman's accolades and renown, there are only three full-length studies on his work to date. TuSmith's and Byerman's Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman takes a bold step in expanding Wideman scholarship. This volume is an indispensable study of Wideman's oeuvre, covering the full range of his career by addressing the key features of his fiction and nonfiction from 1967 to the present. The essays in this book reflect the most advanced thinking on Wideman's prolific, extraordinary art. The collection features at least one article on each major work and includes the voices of both well-established and emerging scholars. Though their critical perspectives are diverse, the contributors place Wideman squarely at the center of contemporary African American literature as an exemplar of postmodern approaches to literary art. Several position Wideman within the context of his predecessors-Wright, Baldwin, Ellison—and within a larger cultural context of music and collective history. The essays examine Wideman's complex style and his blending of African and Western cosmologies and aesthetics, the use of personal narrative, and his imaginative revisioning of forgotten historical events. These insightful analyses cover virtually every stage of Wideman's career and every genre in which he has written. A detailed bibliography of Wideman's work is also included. Informed yet accessible, this collection will be a rich source of information and intellectual stimulus for teachers, students, and scholars in American and African American literature, as well as general readers interested in Wideman's multilayered and challenging texts. Bonnie TuSmith is the author or editor of several books, including Conversations with John Edgar Wideman. Past president of MELUS, the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States, she is an associate professor of English at Northeastern University. Keith E. Byerman serves on the editorial board of African American Review and is president of the John Edgar Wideman Society. He is the author of several books, including The Short Fiction of John Edgar Wideman. He is a professor of English at Indiana State University.

A Glance Away
A powerful selection of the best of John Edgar Wideman’s short stories over his fifty-year career, representing the wide range of his intellectual and artistic pursuits. When John Edgar Wideman won the PEN Malamud Award in 2019, he joined a list of esteemed writers—from Eudora Welty to George Saunders—all of whom are acknowledged masters of the short story. Wideman’s commitment to short fiction has been lifelong, and here he gathers a representative selection from throughout his career, stories that challenge what defines, separates, and unites us; dare to push form and defy convention; and, to quote Wideman, seek to “deconstruct the given formulas of African American culture and life.” Wideman’s stories are grounded in the streets and the people of Homewood, the Pittsburgh neighborhood of his childhood, but they range far beyond there, to the small western towns of Wyoming and historic Philadelphia, the contemporary world and the ancient past. He explores the interior lives of his characters, and the external pressures that shape them. These stories are as intellectually intricate as they are rich with the language and character. “John Edgar Wideman's short stories render an internal and external world as vivid and intricate as Faulkner’s, as emotionally painful as Baldwin’s, and as unique as his own streets and stoops of Homewood,” wrote the PEN/Malamud Award selection committee. Comprised of thirty-five stories drawn from past collections (American Histories, Briefs, God’s Gym, All Stories Are True, Fever, and Damballah), and an introductory essay by the National Book Critics Circle board member and scholar Walton Muyumba, this volume of Wideman’s selected stories celebrates the lifelong significance of this major American writer’s essential contribution to a form—illuminating the ways that he has made it his own.

Native Speaker

In this compelling travel memoir, two-time PEN/Faulkner Award winner John Edgar Wideman explores Martinique's seductive natural beauty and culture, as well as its vexed history of colonial violence and racism. Attempting to decipher the strange, alluring mixture of African and European that is Creole, he and his French traveling companion develop a powerful attraction to one another which they find at once threatened and elevated by a third party - the island itself. 

Hurry Home

Third and Indiana

In the Philadelphia neighborhood known as the Badlands, drug gangs rule absolutely. Each time a life is lost in the carnage of the local drug wars, a boldly drawn chalk outline of a body appears on the street leading up to City hall: a teenaged dealer, a priest, a little girl with a jump rope. Ofelia Santoro rides her bicycle through the dark, decaying streets, looking for her fourteen-year-old-son, Gabriel. She’s afraid of what she might find. Gabriel has fallen in with the most savage of the drug dealers, but now wants to get out—if he can. In this gritty, fast-moving novel, acclaimed Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Steve Lopez brings home the violence that is scarring America’s vast urban wastelands, and the humanity that might save them. “An unfancy prose is streaked by strong, cinematic images . . . Lopez aims to prick consciences, in the tradition of the documentary novelist, and he does so with considerable style.”—The Daily Telegraph “Lopez has done what Balzac, Dickens . . . and Dostoevsky did so masterfully: he has taken a torch to the back of the cave and returned to tell us what he has seen.” –Pete Hamill, The Philadelphia Inquirer

Philadelphia Fire

In God’s Gym, the celebrated author John Edgar Wideman offers stories that pulse with emotional electricity. The ten pieces here explore strength, both physical and spiritual. The collection opens with a man paying tribute to the quiet fortitude of his mother, a woman who “should wear a T-shirt: God’s Gym.” In the stories that follow, Wideman delivers powerful riffs on family and fate, basketball and belief. His mesmerizing prose features guest appearances by cultural luminaries as diverse as the Harlem Globetrotters, Frantz Fanon, Thelonious Monk, and Marilyn Monroe. As always, Wideman astounds with writing that moves from the intimate to the political, from shock to transcendence.

The Island Martinique

2020 Chautauqua Prize Finalist 2020 NAACP Image Award Nominee · Outstanding Literary Work (Nonfiction) Best-of Lists: Best Nonfiction Books of 2019 (Kirkus Reviews) · 25 Can’t-Miss Books of 2019 (The Undefeated) Explores the terror, grace, and beauty of coming of age as a Black person in contemporary America and what it means to parent our children in a persistently unjust world. Emotionally raw and deeply reflective, Imani Perry issues an unflinching challenge to society to see Black children as deserving of humanity. She admits fear and frustration for her African American sons in a society that is increasingly racist and at times seems irredeemable. However, as a mother, feminist, writer, and intellectual, Perry offers an unfettered expression of love—finding beauty and possibility in life—and she exhorts her children and their peers to find the courage to chart their own paths and find steady footing and inspiration in Black tradition. Perry draws upon the ideas of figures such as James Baldwin, W. E. B. DuBois, Emily Dickinson, Toni Morrison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Ida B. Wells.
She shares vulnerabilities and insight from her own life and from encounters in places as varied as the West Side of Chicago; Birmingham, Alabama; and New England prep schools. With original art for the cover by Ekua Holmes, Breathe offers a broader meditation on race, gender, and the meaning of a life well lived and is also an unforgettable lesson in Black resistance and resilience.

**Reuben**

At once personal and political, this novel about being black and male in white America depicts an unyielding core of individual resistance and demonstrates with tragic immediacy how America's mixed signals foster false hopes. Reprint.

**My Soul Has Grown Deep**

"Homewood was to be a place in his fiction but also more than that, a metaphor for the African American experience".

**American Histories**

"A balanced, well-written account which provides the best overall understanding of these events." ?Library Journal "Compelling." ?Publishers Weekly "A solid report from an unusual perspective." ?Kirkus Reviews "A balanced view." ?Booklist On a narrow street in a working-class neighborhood, the police are held at bay by a small band of armed radicals. Two assaults have already failed. After a morning-long battle involving machine guns, explosives, and tear gas, the radicals remain defiant. In a command post across the street from the boarded-up row house that serves as the militants' headquarters, the beleaguered police commissioner weighs his options and decides on a new plan. He will bomb the house. Let It Burn is the true-life story of the confrontation between the Philadelphia Police Department and the MOVE organization—a group that rejected modern technology and fought for what it called "natural law." The police commissioner's decision to drop an "explosive device" onto the house's roof and then to let the resulting fire burn while adults and children remained in the house was the final tragic chapter in a decades-long series of clashes that had already left one policeman dead and others injured, dozens of MOVE members behind bars, and their original compound razed to the ground. By the time the fire burned itself out, eleven MOVE members, many of them women and small children, would be dead. Sixty-one houses in the neighborhood would be destroyed. There would be a city inquiry, numerous civil suits, and two grand-jury inquests following the confrontation. Michael Boyette served on one of the grand juries, where he had a front-row seat as the key players and witnesses—including Mayor Wilson Goode and future Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell—recounted their roles in the tragedy. After the grand jury concluded its investigation, he and coauthor Randi Boyette conducted additional independent research including exclusive interviews with police who had been on the scene and with MOVE members to create this moment-by-moment account of the confrontation and the events leading up to it.

**All Stories Are True**

The six novels that John Edgar Wideman wrote from 1987 to 2017 enable reassessment of the quarantining of the Black Arts movement by African American literary history. These works transform the novel into a charm or functional tool of the black arts, taking writing beyond the act of written representation.

**Breathe**

The author recalls his experiences playing basketball with whites and African Americans in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh, describing how African Americans slowly but surely changed the nature of the sport.

**The Cattle Killing**

Interviews with the author of The Homewood Trilogy, Brothers and Keepers, and Philadelphia Fire.

**All Stories are True**

The debut novel from critically-acclaimed and New York Times—bestselling author of On Such a Full Sea and My Year Abroad. In Native Speaker, author Chang-rae Lee introduces readers to Henry Park. Park has spent his entire life trying to become a true American—a native speaker. But even as the essence of his adopted country continues to elude him, his Korean heritage seems to drift further and further away. Park's harsh Korean upbringing has taught him to hide his emotions, to remember everything he learns, and most of all to feel an overwhelming sense of alienation. In other words, it has shaped him as a natural spy. But the very attributes that help him to excel in his profession put a strain on his marriage to his American wife and stand in the way of his coming to terms with his young son's death. When he is assigned to spy on a rising Korean-American politician, his very identity is tested, and
he must figure out who he is amid not only the conflicts within himself but also within the ethnic and political tensions of the New York City streets. Native Speaker is a story of cultural alienation. It is about fathers and sons, about the desire to connect with the world rather than stand apart from it, about loyalty and betrayal, about the alien in all of us and who we finally are.

**Philadelphia Fire**

Wideman "traces the life of the father of iconic civil rights martyr Emmett Till--a man who was executed by the Army ten years before Emmett's murder--presenting an exploration of individual and collective memory in America by one of the most formidable black intellectuals of our time"--Amazon.com.

**Two Cities**

**You Made Me Love You**

Narrator Gladys Cailiff is eleven years old in 1938 when a worldly schoolteacher turns the small town of Threestep, Georgia, upside down. Miss Grace Spivey defies the traditional curriculum and racial boundaries alike, regaling her charges with readings from the Thousand Nights and a Night and casting a gifted African American student as "chief engineer" of the town's annual festival, newly reinvented as the Baghdad Bazaar. But her progressive actions are not without consequence and ultimately culminate in a night of death-defying stories that take readers on a magic carpet ride from a schoolroom in the South to the banks of the Tigris (and back again).

**Coming Apart at the Seams**

When a man is murdered and he is unfairly accused, Tommy hides out with Mother Bess--a relative who is mean and mentally unbalanced--and together they wallow in trepidation and anger desperately trying to find the nerve to face the world. Reprint.

**African American Literature of the Twenty-First Century and the Black Arts**

From a disciple of the late Chinua Achebe comes a masterful and universally acclaimed novel that is at once a taut, literary thriller and an indictment of greed's power to subsume all things, including the sacred. Foreign Gods, Inc., tells the story of Ike, a New York-based Nigerian cab driver who sets out to steal the statue of an ancient war deity from his home village and sell it to a New York gallery. Ike's plan is fueled by desperation. Despite a degree in economics from a major American college, his strong accent has barred him from the corporate world. Forced to eke out a living as a cab driver, he is unable to manage the emotional and material needs of a temperamental African American bride and a widowed mother demanding financial support. When he turns to gambling, his mounting losses compound his woes. And so he travels back to Nigeria to steal the statue, where he has to deal with old friends, family, and a mounting conflict between those in the village who worship the deity, and those who practice Christianity. A meditation on the dreams, promises and frustrations of the immigrant life in America; the nature and impact of religious conflicts; an examination of the ways in which modern culture creates or heightens infatuation with the "exotic," including the desire to own strange objects and hanker after ineffable illusions; and an exploration of the shifting nature of memory, Foreign Gods is a brilliant work of fiction that illuminates our globally interconnected world like no other. From the Hardcover edition.

**Foreign Gods, Inc.**

A philosopher, psychiatrist, and political activist, Frantz Fanon was a fierce, acute critic of racism and oppression. Born of African descent in Martinique in 1925, Fanon fought in defense of France during World War II but later against France in Algeria’s war for independence. His last book, The Wretched of the Earth, published in 1961, inspired leaders of diverse liberation movements: Steve Biko in South Africa, Che Guevara in Latin America, the Black Panthers in the States. Wideman's novel is disguised as the project of a contemporary African American novelist, Thomas, who undertakes writing a life of Fanon. The result is an electrifying mix of perspectives, traveling from Manhattan to Paris to Algeria to Pittsburgh. Part whodunit, part screenplay, part love story, Fanon introduces the French film director Jean-Luc Godard to the ailing Mrs. Wideman in Homewood and chases the meaning of Fanon’s legacy through our violent, post-9/11 world, which seems determined to perpetuate the evils Fanon sought to rectify.

**Fatheralong**

Traces the experiences of a Black family from just after the Civil War to the radical sixties
Hiding Place

From John Edgar Wideman, “a master [who] boldly subverts what a short story can be” (Publishers Weekly) comes a stunning story collection that spans a range of topics from Michael Jordan to Emmett Till, from childhood memories to the final day in a prison cell. Forty years after John Edgar Wideman’s first collection of stories was published, he continues to produce new stories of the highest caliber and relevancy. Here, in his sixth story collection, he revisits themes that have infused his work for the duration of his career: family, loss, the penal system, Pittsburgh, physical and emotional life, art, and memory. Stories include “Separation,” which begins with a boy standing alone beside his grandfather’s coffin, progressing to a scene with the narrator’s grandmother paying the funeral director weekly installments for the price of the casket. “Arizona,” which appeared in The New Yorker, is written in the form of a letter to singer Freddie Jackson, whose song “You Are My Lady,” enters the story through a car radio—a car that conveys the narrator’s son and his lawyers to a prison cell in Arizona. “Atlanta Murders” contemplates James Baldwin’s Evidence of Things Not Seen, written about the Atlanta child murders from 1979 to 1981, beginning with a riff on a “why-did-the-chicken-cross-the-road” joke that takes a dark turn. Never satisfied to simply tell a story—with writing that is “layered and interwoven...understanding that perspective is various, varied” (The New Statesman)—Wideman continues to push form, with stories within stories, sentences that rise like a jazz solo with every connecting clause, voices that reflect who he is and where he’s from, and an exploration of time that entangles past and present. Whether historical or contemporary, intimate or expansive, the stories here represent the most recent work of a treasured American writer whose innovation, imagination, and intellect “prove his continued vitality...with vigor and soul” (Entertainment Weekly).

Sent for You Yesterday

A young woman mourning the deaths of her husband and sons, victims of urban violence, Kassima finds redemption in a love affair with the gentle Robert Jones and in a collection of photographs, taken by her late, eccentric tenant, that document a half-century of African-American history. Tour.

The Stories of John Edgar Wideman

Eddie Lawson returns to Pittsburgh, where his crippled mother’s poisonous anger drives him to the streets. With his friend, Brother, Eddie is forced to confront his fears of Bum’s Forest and the class alienation which controls his life.

Critical Essays on John Edgar Wideman

In plague-ridden eighteenth-century Philadelphia, a young itinerant Black preacher struggles to save a mysterious, endangered African woman from a racially explosive society.

The Homewood Trilogy

In All Stories Are True, Tracie Church Guzzio provides the first full-length study of John Edgar Wideman’s entire oeuvre to date. Specifically, Guzzio examines the ways in which Wideman (b. 1941) engages with three crucial themes-history, myth, and trauma-throughout his career, showing how they intertwine. Guzzio argues that, for four decades, the influential African American writer has endeavored to create a version of the African American experience that runs counter to mainstream interpretations, using history and myth to confront and then heal the trauma caused by slavery and racism. Wideman’s work intentionally blurs boundaries between fiction and autobiography, myth and history, particularly as that history relates to African American experience in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The fusion of fiction, national history, and Wideman’s personal life is characteristic of his style, which—due to its complexity and smudging of genre distinctions—has presented analytic difficulties for literary scholars. Despite winning the PEN/Faulkner award twice, for Sent for You Yesterday (1984) and Philadelphia Fire (1990), Wideman remains under-studied. Of particular value is Guzzio’s analysis of the many ways in which Wideman alludes to his previous works. This intertextuality allows Wideman to engage his books in direct, intentional dialogue with each other through repeated characters, images, folktales, and songs. In Wideman’s challenging of a monolithic view of history and presenting alternative perspectives to it, and his allowing past, present, and future time to remain fluid in the narratives, Guzzio finds an author firm in his notion that all stories and all perspectives have merit.

Brothers and Keepers

Lucy and Carl struggle to prevent the extinction of the Black community of Homewood and to keep alive the musical heritage of the blues piano player, Albert Wilkes.

God’s Gym

Stories feature individuals from all walks of life who reside in Homewood, a Black section of Pittsburgh.
The Cailiffs of Baghdad, Georgia: A Novel

The winner of the 1984 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction presents three portraits of life in Homewood, an American ghetto, recounting the pains, passions, dreams, and memories of the generations of the American family.

The Homewood Books

In 1970, The New York Times wrote, "Hurry Home is a dazzling display we have nothing but admiration for Mr. Wideman's talent." Wideman's second novel is the powerful and remarkably prescient story of a highly educated, multiracial man's struggle to find himself and understand his place in a country walled off by sharp racial and class divisions which seem to preempt the very possibility of his existence. Cecil Braithwaite works as a janitor while earning a law degree, yet discovers faithful adherence to the script promising the American Dream is not enough. He travels abroad, looking to Europe and Africa, but can't escape the abiding sense of rootlessness, of being trapped in a halfway house of questions the world's not yet ready or willing to answer. Wideman starkly portrays how difficult it is to shake free of the shackles one is born to, claim an identity that transgresses society's most fundamental boundaries, and find one's true Home.

Copyright code: 0f05f2b2c9440aff6e828e658b228dfd