

2026 Study Guide



Turks and Caicos Islands

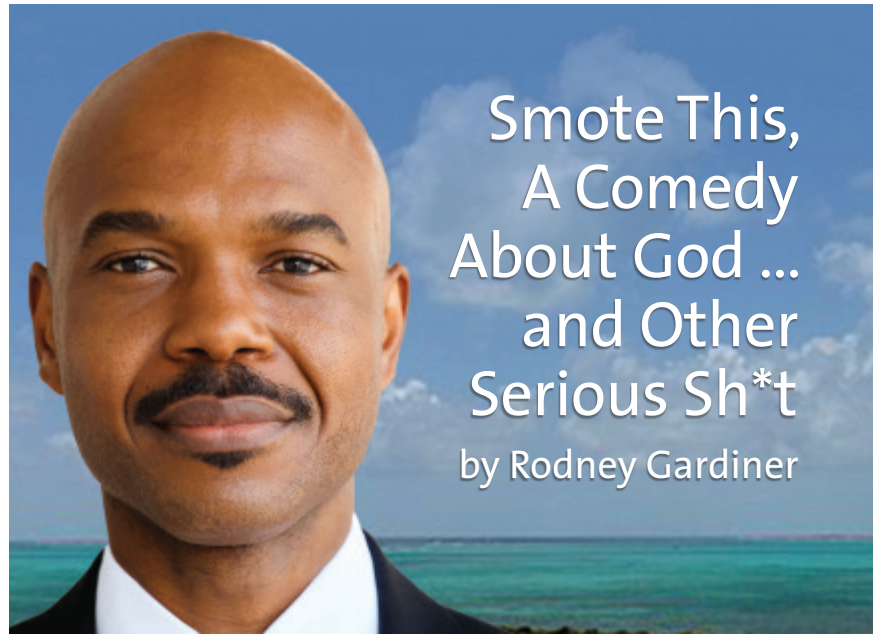
Rodney and his family are originally from these islands. Specifically, they lived on the island North Caicos.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are a territory of the United Kingdom and are made up of more than 40 small islands and cays, with 8 of the islands inhabited by residents.

The population of the Turks and Caicos Islands, in 1980, was estimated to be 7,598. In 2023, the estimated population was 59,367.

From the Turks and Caicos Islands, Rodney and his family traveled around 571 miles to Miami, Florida. The two places were worlds apart culturally. One being a quiet settlement where everyone knew one another and the other being a city in the throes of an escalating crime wave.

That distance the family traveled is the same distance as a round-trip car ride between Ashland and Portland, Oregon.



Smote This, A Comedy About God ... and Other Serious Sh*t by Rodney Gardiner

Rodney Gardiner

Rodney has been writing and performing stand-up comedy in Los Angeles for the last couple of years. As he was writing material for his stand-up shows, the idea for *Smote This...* was born.

The show comes from a place of love and fun. The choice to make this show a comedy was made because humor has always been Rodney's way of processing things.

This year will be Rodney's 11th season performing at OSF. Ashland has been very important to him and his journey as an artist. He is excited to be back in Ashland performing this show in his artistic home.

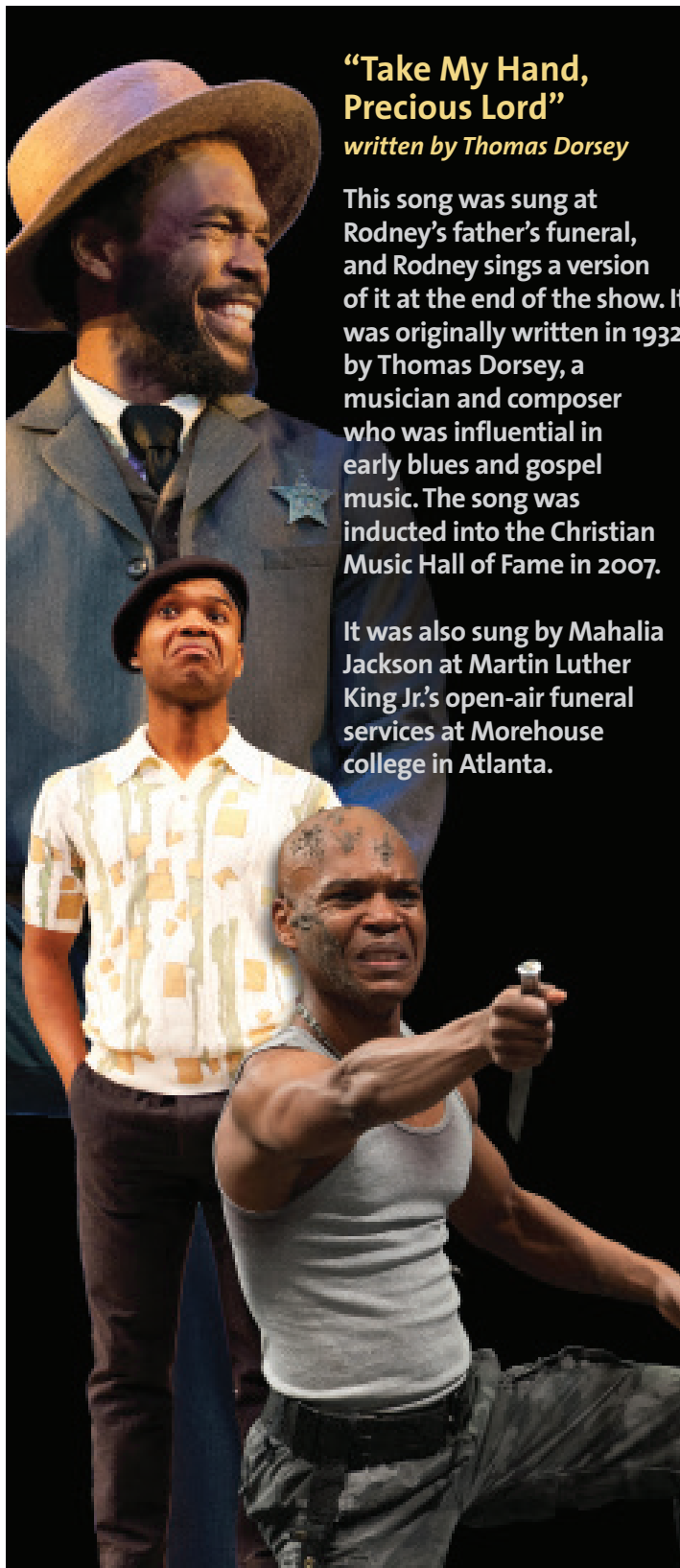


Miami, Florida

In 1980, the city of Miami's population was estimated to be 346,865.

Rodney grew up in a neighborhood of Miami called Little Haiti where mostly Haitian and Caribbean immigrants resided.

Later, Rodney's family moved to a neighborhood in North Miami. Both neighborhoods felt isolated. The only white people that Rodney would come into contact with regularly were his teachers, law enforcement, and his family's landlord.



“Take My Hand, Precious Lord”

written by Thomas Dorsey

This song was sung at Rodney’s father’s funeral, and Rodney sings a version of it at the end of the show. It was originally written in 1932 by Thomas Dorsey, a musician and composer who was influential in early blues and gospel music. The song was inducted into the Christian Music Hall of Fame in 2007.

It was also sung by Mahalia Jackson at Martin Luther King Jr.’s open-air funeral services at Morehouse college in Atlanta.

BEFORE THE PLAY

Stand-up Comedy

Smote This ... was written from stand-up comedy material. A few famous stand-up comics are Kevin Hart, Jerry Seinfeld, and Ali Wong. More research about stand-up comedy can be done at these websites and others:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stand-up_comedy

<https://www.britannica.com/art/stand-up-comedy>

President Ronald Reagan Grants Amnesty to Immigrants in 1986

Known as the Immigration Reform and Control Act, this bill allowed for anyone who had entered the United States before January 1, 1982, and did not have immigration documentation to receive their documentation. Signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on November 6, 1986, this bill granted amnesty for over 3 million undocumented immigrants.

In the show, it is mentioned that Rodney’s father had written letters to President Reagan for help with the immigration process. This bill may have helped Rodney’s father receive his documentation.

More information can be found here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Reform_](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Reform_Act_of_1986)

AFTER THE PLAY

1. Rodney chose to do this show as a comedy. In what ways is humor good for processing grief? What does laughter provide in times of sorrow?
2. In the show, Rodney talks about the amount of stress and pressure that his mother is under. How would living in Miami be so different from living in the Turks and Caicos? What other factors may have caused this stress for her? How does Rodney handle the stress in the past and how does he handle it in the present?
3. What is the role of God, religion, and prayer in the play? What are the various religious influences in Rodney’s life? What is Rodney’s relationship with these influences at the beginning of the play and how have they changed by the end of the play?

From top: Rodney Gardiner as a Federal Marshal in *Oklahoma*; as Guy in *The Imaginary Invalid* and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*. Photos by Jenny Graham.

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