

2026 Study Guide



Turks and Caicos Islands

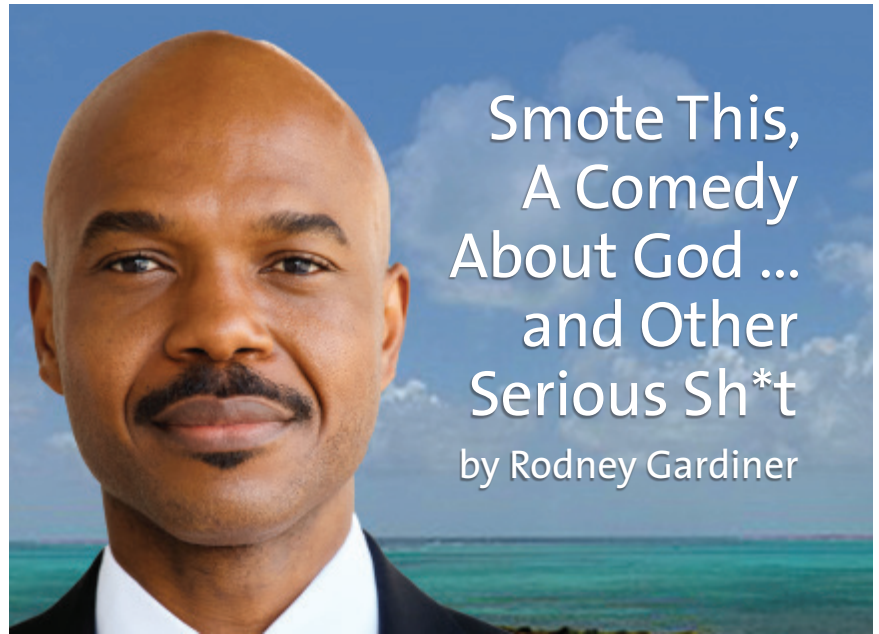
Rodney and his family are originally from these islands. Specifically, they lived on the island North Caicos.

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.

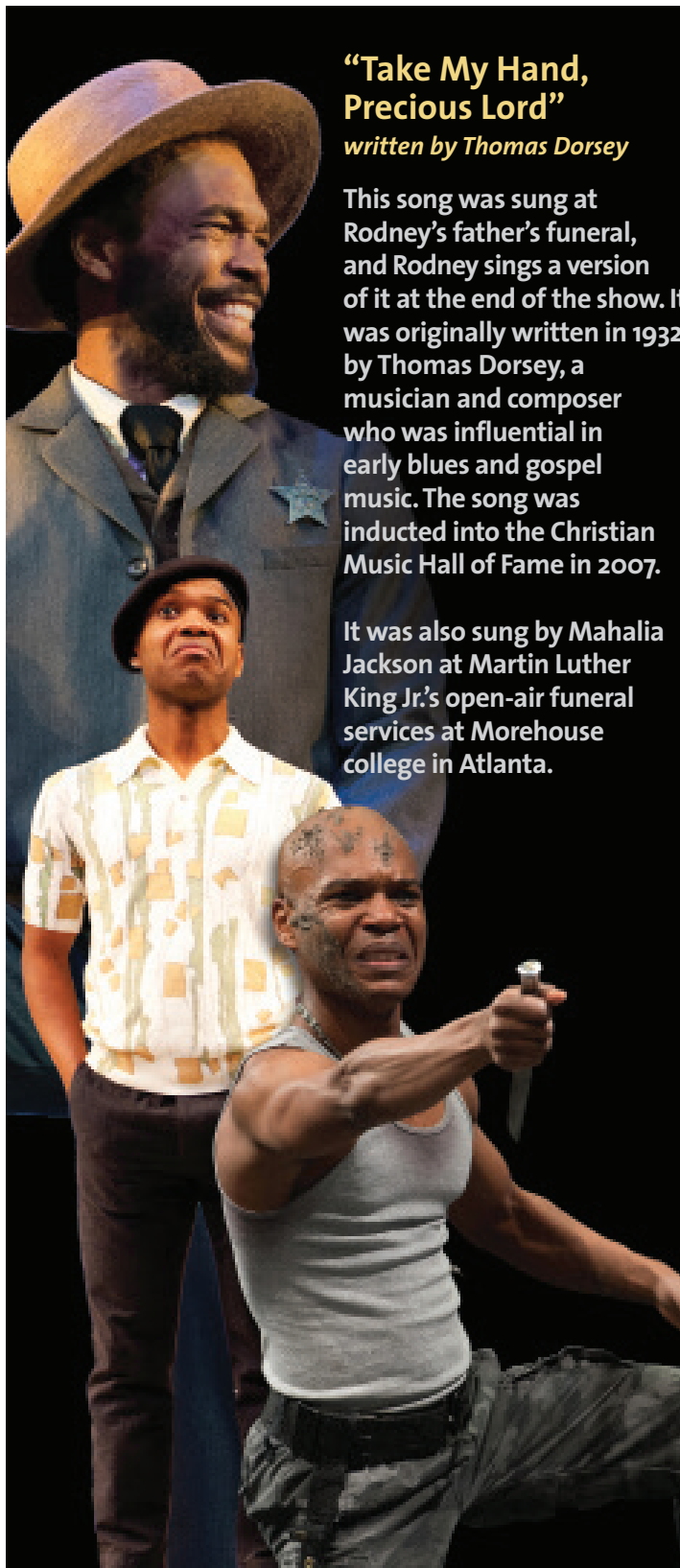
This year will be Rodney's 11th season performing at OSF. Ashland has been very important to him and his journey as an artist. He is excited to be back in Ashland performing this show in his artistic home.



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_Act

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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www.osfashland.org/education

Smote Show Intro

by Sarah Lozoff

I've lived with this show for the past 3 and a half years.

I've lived with our playwright and protagonist, our storyteller, for over 22 years.

But I've lived with the other character in this play and the only vehicle this story could've existed in, for my entire life.

Miami, Florida is the city I was born and raised in, as well as the city my father was born and raised in. As a second generation native, my family's history with this show's backdrop spans over 85 years. I grew up hearing stories of Miami in the 40's and 50's. How the diner my father took us to on Saturday mornings sits squarely in what was still everglades when he was a teen. The outskirts of the much smaller Miami of those days were untamed and swampy, and a bargain of course for developers. My grandparents, who had escaped pogroms and come through Ellis Island as children, had eloped to Miami from Milwaukee in 1940. It was a land grab of sorts for those brave enough to face the unrelenting heat, humidity, and mosquitoes of the tropics.

The 80's, when this story takes place, is when much of that bravery and development paid off, in ways both good and bad. 1980 was the year I was born. Mercy Hospital. Coconut Grove, Miami, FL. My parents bought the home they're still in later that year, which came with a pony and a goat (the latter of which was killed by a bobcat two yrs later). It was the same year Rodney's family arrived in this now rapidly expanding city from teeny tiny North Caicos in the Caribbean. The same year the Mariel boat lift would bring 125,000 Cubans to Miami shores and the year we'd experience the 1st of 3 major race riots to take place over the next decade. We had an economic boom. We had an immigration boom. We had a cocaine boom. I say all this to say that 1980's Miami was WILD.

I've been asked several times how different my Miami childhood was to Rodney's. It was different in myriad ways, of course. My family came to this country at a time when the statue of liberty welcomed immigrants seeking better lives ashore. To my knowledge, they didn't worry about being stopped and asked for papers. They were able to be entrepreneurial, moving freely in order to build better lives for their kids.

I am compelled to depart from my own story here to note that in our present time, in the summer of 2026, Haitian communities all over the US have lost their federally granted temporary protected status. In Ohio, the people of the Haitian community have been offered a "choice" to either wear an ankle monitor which will alarm if they leave a 75 mile radius, or leave the country altogether.

With that, I'll reiterate... my family was able to move freely to build better lives for themselves and their children. My father (like Rodney actually) was the 1st in his family to attend college, and later attended University of Miami law school. My parents were able to raise us in a mostly suburban area, where two cars sat in driveways, and things got quiet once it was dark enough for streetlights to come on.

However, the suburbs of Miami were not like the suburbs of the rest of this country. Thus, despite living 20 miles apart, Rodney and I have undeniably and very specifically similar experiences of Miami. So much



(from left to right) Author's father Mike, with her grandparents Al and Molly Lozoff.

so it feels almost as if the very air we breathed down there back then was just as thick with these things as it was with humidity.

English was not the first language for most of our neighbors. My favorite teacher in preschool spoke with a thick Jamaican dialect. Passion flowers grew rampant in backyards and mango trees lined our streets. Did I mention the pony and goat my house CAME with? And the bobcat?

Miami Vice and Scarface felt pretty realistic, especially when the former was filming at our elementary school. The city's canals were lined with gators, who notoriously went after small dogs and children. There were drive by shootings at our suburban mall and we were warned to steer clear of Yahwehs (members of a local cult) as though these were cautions every parent had to establish with their kids.

As parents now, many of these things sound terrifying and daunting. But as kids, we don't recall being fearful. This was just life.... full of saturated color and lush tropical foliage, drug dealers and drive bys, glamor and gators, and always a breeze no matter how far from the ocean you were.

This show truly could not be set at any other time, in any other place. The specific forces shaping Miami at that time also shaped us. And in true form, Miami continues to change at breakneck speed. The era in which we were raised, the Miami this story takes place in, no longer exists, just as my father's Miami no longer exists. Today's Miami boasts the highest concentration and growth rate of millionaires per capita. They now have over 40,000 millionaires across the city, no state taxes, and the lowest possible ranking for unemployment benefits.

In between, the time of swampy land grabs and today's millionaire enclaves, existed a decade like no other. We fed cocaine cowboys and bred a generation of artists. We endured severe riots and built the most diverse communities. We all spoke Spanglish, understood creole slang and Jamaican pas tois, AND knew how to order at a Jewish deli.

Not only does this story allow for us to appreciate a coming of age journey that grapples with religion, grief, belonging, and legacy, but it also allows for a deep and humorous appreciation of the very specific time and very specific place which nurtured it.

Rodney, thank you for allowing us all this glimpse at 1980's Miami.
Thank you, for *Smote This*.

