

Lecture on Multiculturalism 2006

Professor Wideman: Reading from "Brothers and Keepers"

The 12th Annual Lecture on Multiculturalism

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

7:30pm-9:30pm

Chafee Auditorium, Room 271

[[Campus Flyer](#)] [[URI Press Release](#)]

Prize winning novelist and memoirist John Edgar Wideman Asa Messer Professor and Professor of Africana Studies and English at Brown University, will present the University of Rhode Island's Twelfth Annual Lecture on Multiculturalism. Inaugurated in 1995, the lecture series provided a forum for distinguished scholars, practitioners, and activists to share their insight about the application of power, knowledge, identity and community to the elimination of social and cultural inequality.

The nation's second African-American to receive a Rhodes Scholarship, John Edgar Wideman has built a career as one of the nation's foremost creative writers. The third lecturer in the series to receive a prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius grant", he was the first writer to twice earn the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, winning for the novel *Sent for You Yesterday* (1985) and *Philadelphia Fire* (1991). His novel *The Cattle Killing* (1996) garnered for him that year's James Fenimore Cooper Award for historical fiction. His memoirs *Brothers and Keepers* (1984), *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons* (1994), and *Hoop Roots* (2001) remind us that the memoir can still retain credibility in a time of controversy about the genre. Exploring his working-class roots in *Brothers and Keepers*, he provides insights on race, class, community and identity, while comparing the divergent trajectories of his own life with that of his brother, convicted and sentenced to life for a murder committed during a robbery.

Described in the Los Angeles Times as "our most powerful and accomplished artist of the urban black world", Wideman is the recipient of numerous honors and awards for his fiction and prose. He was the first two-time winner of the PEN/Faulkner award, for his novel *Sent for You Yesterday* (1985) and his historical novel *Philadelphia Fire* (1991). He is the third lecturer in the URI series to earn a Mac Arthur Foundation "genius grant" (1993). Among his other awards are the American Book award for fiction (1990), the Lannan Literary Fellowship for fiction



(1991) and the James Fenimore Cooper award for historical fiction (1996).

Raised in a working –class family in Pittsburg, Wideman was the second African- American to receive a Rhodes scholarship earning the Bachelor of Philosophy from Oxford University in England. He has drawn generously upon his own life for his memoir "Brothers and Keepers" (1984) in which he compares the trajectory for his own life with that of his younger brother serving a life sentence for robbery and murder. According to James W. Coleman, Wideman's writing often focuses on a central theme: the quest to be a black writer, exploring struggles for identity and self-actualization within himself, his family and the larger black community. He seeks to explore the ability of language to accurately and intimately represent the lived experience.