



FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY  
**ESSENTIAL  
THEATRE**



2026-2027 SEASON | October 14-18, 2026

Maintstage Series | Charles Winter Wood Theatre

WHAT ARE YOU CARRYING  
THAT EVEN DEATH  
CANNOT TAKE AWAY?



BOOK  
— OF —  
LAYMAN

A NEW PLAY BY JAMES WEBB

SPONSORED BY  
SHARON LETTMAN-HICKS

# BOOK — OF — LAYMAN

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JAMES WEBB



**SET DESIGN**  
RUBEN ARANA

**SOUND DESIGN**  
JAMES WEBB

**COSTUME DESIGN**  
EDITH CARNLEY

**DRAMATURG**  
TALEYAH BELCHER



**LIGHTING DESIGN**  
C. BACOTE ROBINSON

**STAGE MANAGER**  
CLARENCE "CJ." O'NEAL JR.

PRODUCED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH DR. JAMES WEBB

## CONTENT WARNINGS

Cigarette Smoke, Profanity, Simulated Nudity, Gunshot, Death,  
Loud Noises, Flashing Lights

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Cameras and recording devices of any kind are absolutely prohibited in the theatre. Please turn off or set to silent mode, your cell phones and any alarm watches before the show begins. Please refrain from cell phone usage during the performance. The house manager reserves the right to ask disruptive audience members to leave without refund.

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# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

JAMES WEBB

*Book of Layman* began with a question that has followed me for years: What are we carrying that keeps us from experiencing the love, peace, and freedom already available to us? I wanted to explore that question through a Black Southern family—through fathers

and sons, husbands and wives, faith and doubt, old wounds, and the things we inherit from one another without ever choosing them. In this play, those things become literal baggage. We carry it. We protect it. We sometimes put it down, only to pick it right back up.

Returning to FAMU to develop and direct this play has made the journey especially meaningful to me. *Book of Layman* is ultimately not a play about death, but about what it means to live: to wrestle with God, to question what we have been taught, to confront what we carry, and perhaps to discover that grace has never required us to be perfect in order to receive it. My hope is that somewhere within *Layman's* family, you recognize a little of your own and perhaps leave the theatre wondering what might happen if you finally put down a bag of your own.



**The  
Kennedy  
Center**

*The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, part of the Rubenstein Arts Access Program, is generously funded by David M. Rubenstein.*

*Special thanks to The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust for supporting the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.*

*Additional support is provided by The Honorable Stuart Bernstein and Wilma E. Bernstein; and the Dr. Gerald and Paula McNicholas Foundation.*

*Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts.*

This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers, and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival and may also be considered for the national awards recognizing outstanding achievement in production, design, direction and performances.

# SETTING

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The Crossroads—a resting place between Heaven and Earth. A backyard in Moss Point, Mississippi

# TIME

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2005, the Eve of  
Hurricane Katrina

## PROLOGUE

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The Crossroads — Thursday Morning

## ACT ONE

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|          |                                                  |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Scene 1  | The Crossroads, Friday Evening                   |
| Scene 2  | Moss Point, Friday Evening                       |
| Scene 3  | The Crossroads, Friday Evening                   |
| Scene 4  | Moss Point, Friday Evening                       |
| Scene 5  | The Crossroads, Friday Evening                   |
| Scene 6  | Moss Point & The Crossroads, Friday Evening      |
| Scene 7  | The Crossroads, Friday Evening                   |
| Scene 8  | Moss Point, Friday Evening                       |
| Scene 9  | The Crossroads, Friday Evening                   |
| Scene 10 | Moss Point, Late Friday Evening                  |
| Scene 11 | The Crossroads & Moss Point, Late Friday Evening |

*There will be a*

# 10-MINUTE INTERMISSION.

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*The sound of the chime  
indicates the time to return  
to your seat.*

## ACT TWO

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|          |                                     |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| Scene 1  | Moss Point, Saturday Morning        |
| Scene 2  | The Crossroads, Saturday Morning    |
| Scene 3  | The Crossroads, Saturday Afternoon  |
| Scene 4  | Moss Point, Late Saturday Afternoon |
| Scene 5  | Moss Point, Late Saturday Afternoon |
| Scene 6  | Moss Point, Late Saturday Afternoon |
| Scene 7  | Moss Point, Saturday Evening        |
| Scene 8  | Moss Point, Saturday Evening        |
| Scene 9  | The Crossroads, Sunday Morning      |
| Scene 10 | Moss Point, Sunday Morning          |

## EPILOGUE

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The Crossroads — Sunday Morning

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# DRAMATURG'S NOTES

TALEYAH BELCHER

The main theme explored in *Book of Layman* is the relationship between the spiritual and physical worlds. The play takes place in Moss Point, Mississippi, and at the Crossroads, a resting place between Heaven and Earth. The play reveals that these two worlds—the physical and the spiritual—are not completely separate. The characters at the Crossroads and those still living on Earth occupy the same theatrical space, even when they cannot see or interact with one another.

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The Crossroads represents more than a space between the spiritual and physical. Characters who arrive there do not necessarily appear at the age at which they died; instead, they appear at the age they consider the prime of their lives. This raises an interesting question: Could the age at which they appear be connected to when they began carrying their baggage? Although the characters are no longer living on Earth, they remain connected to their relationships, pain, and experiences. Death does not necessarily free them from their emotional struggles or unresolved relationships.

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Another important element of the play is how the physical environment reflects what is happening within the characters emotionally and spiritually. Among the first objects the audience encounters are suitcases. These are not merely ordinary objects onstage; they represent the emotional baggage people carry: guilt, resentment, shame, pain, and other unresolved experiences. As the play unfolds, we begin to see what each character continues to carry and how, at the Crossroads, they must confront what they brought with them from Earth.



## PLAYWRIGHT'S BIOGRAPHY

J A M E S   W E B B

**D**r. James Webb is a playwright, director, actor, educator, and scholar whose work centers Black lives and experiences. A proud graduate of Florida A&M University, he returns to the Hill to write and direct *Book of Layman*, which received a 2023 playwrighting fellowship from the Queen City New Play Initiative.

Webb's full-length plays include *The House of Jean-René*, *Sibling Rivalry*, *Wrestling with Angels*, and *The Contract*, the winner of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival's Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award. His work has been presented at Theatre Row, National Black Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre/LA, Confrontation Theatre, African Continuum Theatre Company, and FAMU Essential Theatre. *The Contract* will receive its professional Philadelphia premiere at InterAct Theatre Company in February 2027.

As a Charlotte-based director, Webb has worked with Children's Theatre of Charlotte and Three Bone Theatre. He directed the national tour of *Dissonance*, featured in the 2024 International Black Theatre Festival, and has spent many years creating original work with young performers through FAMU's Irene C. Edmonds Youth Theatre.

Webb holds an MFA in Acting from the University of Florida and a Ph.D. in Educational Theatre from New York University. He currently serves as the Dickson Foundation Assistant Professor of Theatre at Davidson College and as a member of the Black Theatre Network Executive Board.

## CAST PROFILES



### COURTNEY ABAZIE (Loretta)

is a senior Health Science scholar from Jacksonville, FL. She has performed in *She Kills Monsters* at Tallahassee State College as Vera and *The Black Card* at Florida State University as Imani. This performance marks her Essential Theatre debut.



### KIERRA COLEMAN (Sweet Sallie)

is a sophomore Theatre scholar at Florida A&M University, hailing from Atlanta, GA. She has previously performed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Hermia. This performance marks her Essential Theatre debut.



### CAMRON CURRY (Layman)

is a junior Environmental Studies major with a minor in English Literature at Florida A&M University, originally from Clayton County, GA. Curry also appeared in the Essential Theatre's production of *Fat Ham* as Tio.



### SAMUEL KING (Messenger)

is a junior Theatre Performance scholar from Tallahassee, FL. Before attending Florida A&M University, he performed in *Five Guys Named Moe* at the Monticello Opera House. This performance marks his Essential Theatre debut.



### **MYLES MUSE (Johnny Frank)**

is a Baltimore City, MD native and a senior Psychology major at Florida A&M University. His previous performances include *Seussical Jr.*, *Mulan Jr.*, and *Willy Wonka Jr.* at Mount Royal Elementary/Middle School, directed by Rian Pryor. He has also performed in *Caroline, or Change*, *Ragtime*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*. This performance marks his Essential Theatre debut.



### **QUINNES PARKER JR. (Shame)**

is a graduating Theatre Performance scholar from Atlanta, GA. His most recent performances include *The Mountaintop* as Dr. King, *Thoughts of a Colored Man* as Love, and *Sibling Rivalry* as Man 2. Quinnes is also a Spring 2025 initiate of the Omicron Gamma Chapter of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America.



### **ZAHRIA PATTERSON (Miss Rita)**

is a senior Theatre Performance scholar from Charlotte, NC. She has showcased her talent in a range of productions, including *Poof!* as Florence, *Pipeline* as Jasmine, and most recently in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* as Lucille/Backup Shirelle. In addition to her work on stage, Zahria has made meaningful contributions behind the scenes, serving as Dramaturg and Projection Operator for the Essential Theatre's production of *Single Black Female*, Wig Stylist for *The Wiz*, and Creative Director/Assistant Choreographer for *Echoes of the Heart: A Musical Revue*.



### **KENDALL SMITH (Shamis Jr.)**

is a sophomore Theatre Performance major from Jacksonville, FL. He previously performed with Essential Theatre, making his debut in *Sibling Rivalry*.

# STUDENT MANAGERS



**CLARENCE "CJ" O'NEAL JR.**  
Stage Manager

Is a junior Graphic Design major and theatre minor from Pensacola, FL. He has served as a stage hand for *Confederates* and *Disappearing Acts: Poof!* and *Day of Absence*. Previously, he performed in the Essential Theatre's production of *Fat Ham* as Larry and in the student directing scenes showcase.



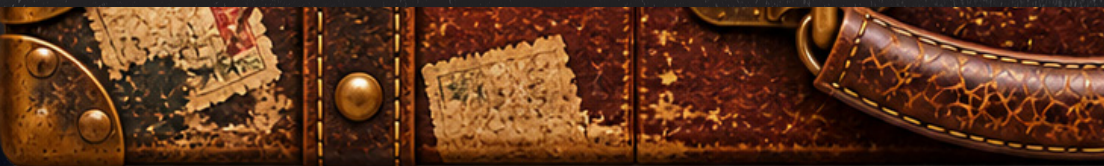
**ZION WILCHER**  
Assistant Stage Manager

is a first-year Biology major from Atlanta, GA. Zion has performed in shows such as *Beauty and the Beast* (Gaston), *Dreamgirls* (Frank/Wade), and *Sister Act* (Curtis), and has also directed the musical *Mean Girls*. This marks his first Essential Theatre production.



**FAITH WELLINGTON**  
Production Assistant

is a first-year Theatre Performance major from Jacksonville, FL. Before arriving here, she was in *The Lion King* as the Giraffe. This marks her first production with the Essential Theatre.





**JUSTIN B. TROUPE**  
Company Manager

is graduating senior Theatre major from Miami, FL. Justin has performed in *Day of Absence* (Jackson), served as ASM 1 for *Echoes of the Heart: A Musical Revue*, and was a house manager for *Fat Ham* and *Sibling Rivalry*, the current Sound Board Operator for the FAMU Connection.



**TALEYAH BELCHER**  
Dramaturg

is a third-year Theatre Scholar from Valdosta, GA. Taleyah has worked on the marketing team for *Echoes of the Heart: A Musical Revue*, and *Sibling Rivalry*. Taleyah was also a costume assistant for *The Wiz*.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FAMU Office of Communications, FAMU Parking Services,  
FAMU Plant Operations and Maintenance,  
FAMU Police Department, FAMU TV 20, FAMUAN,  
FSU Scenic and Props Shop, Tallahassee Democrat



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IN OUR VISION**



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Become a sponsor of FAMU Essential Theatre and help nurture emerging talent, inspire creativity, and bring powerful stories to life. Your support makes a lasting impact!

**CONTACT**

Willis Fedd | Marketing Director  
willis.fedd@fam.u.edu  
or call (850) 412-5532



# FACULTY & STAFF

---

Valencia E. Matthews

Director of Theatre | Dean, College of  
Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

Ruben Arana

Scene Design

Edith Carnley

Costume Design

Kaye Celeste Evans

Visiting Professor

Willis Fedd

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C. Bacote Robinson

Technical Director | Lighting Designer

Anedra Small

Performance | Vocal Coach  
Criticism | Recruitment

Luther D. Wells

Associate Director of Theatre  
Performance | Recruitment



# PRODUCTION STAFF

|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Productions Manager                             | Luther D. Wells                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Technical Director                              | C. Bacote Robinson                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Stage Manager                                   | “C.J.” O’Neal Jr.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Asst. Stage Manager(s)                          | Faith Wellington, Zion Wilcher                                                                                                                                                     |
| Company Manager                                 | Justin B. Troupe                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Dramaturg                                       | Taleyah Belcher                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Light Board Operator                            | Jordan Noland                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sound Board Operator                            | Oksana Sun                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Sound Programmer                                | Kimberly K. Harding                                                                                                                                                                |
| Paint/Construction Crew                         | Shya Lee, Kyndal Jones, Janiya Sparrow,<br>Layla Brown                                                                                                                             |
| Stage Hand                                      | Desmond Lewis                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Properties Artisan/Buyer                        | Evelyn Harris                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Prop Assistant                                  | Laylah Holloway, Ashleigh Charles                                                                                                                                                  |
| Costume Supervisor                              | Edith Carnley                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Wardrobe & Costume Crew                         | Kara Mullings, Azaria McCants,<br>Brandon Charles, Kristian Holland                                                                                                                |
| Stitcher                                        | Neveah Sylvester                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Costume Assistant                               | Zahria Patterson                                                                                                                                                                   |
| House Manager                                   | Dana Ladd                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Assistant House Manager                         | Aisha Pope                                                                                                                                                                         |
| House Staff                                     | Ruth Belizaire, Imani Britton, Anya Brown,<br>Richard Brown, Yakari Bryant,<br>Trichelle Jackson, Jaya Knight, Sonae Means,<br>Jakyra Estiverne, Jania Sparrow,<br>Brandon Charles |
| Director of Ticket Sales and<br>Patron Services | Kimberly K. Harding                                                                                                                                                                |
| Box Office Manager                              | Monica R. Woods                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| Box Office Staff                                | Tommye Campbell, Layla Holloway,<br>Jordan James                                                                                                                                   |
| Public Relations and<br>Advertising             | Willis Fedd                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Social Media & Marketing<br>Assistants          | Kendall Smith, Sion Brown,<br>Taleyah Belcher                                                                                                                                      |
| Publicity Graphic Artist                        | Willis Fedd                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Program Layout                                  | Willis Fedd                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Photography & Videography                       | Willis Fedd                                                                                                                                                                        |

# ESSENTIAL THEATRE

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