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FOR RELEASE: April 10, 2006

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**UW-Madison to perform award-winning satire  
about African American identity  
*"The Colored Museum" by George C. Wolfe***

MADISON—Like a prized collection of ancient copper urns on display, the characters in "The Colored Museum" by George C. Wolfe show signs of wear-and-tear left by the legacy of slavery. Human vessels to the pain, anger and struggle of African American identity, they are ready to pour it all out and leave audiences laughing through their tears.

There is the WWII soldier with a deadly secret, the saucy transvestite dealing with a double-dose of discrimination, the pin-striped businessman who only wants to be black on weekends and holidays and even a well-worn Mama sitting on her well-worn couch and praying for God to settle her son's grievances with "The Man."

Presented by the UW-Madison's PEOPLE program, the 11 sketches or "exhibits" in "The Colored Museum" represent a place and time in African American history, suggesting the baggage of the past cannot be lost, but must instead be owned, claimed and trashed at the same time.

The choice of "The Colored Museum" was intended to bring together Madison's communities of color by irreverently toppling the stereotypes of black culture and, at the same time, to compassionately address African American identity issues, according to Ray Proctor, UW-Madison theatre theory and criticism doctoral candidate and the artistic director of the performing arts component of PEOPLE.

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**PEOPLE is the UW's most successful pre-college venture in creating  
academic opportunities and improving campus diversity.**

## Add 1 – Colored Museum

When the play premiered in 1986, it won Wolfe the Dramatists Guild Award although critics viewed the playwright's work as anti-black. "Black American culture is a very fragmented thing. We're all trying to come up with some definition of what we are," Wolfe has said.

In the first of 11 sketches, "Git on Board," Miss Pat is a perky flight attendant for Celebrity Slave Lines who prepares her passengers and audience members for the journey across the middle passage by giving them instructions on how to fasten their shackles. "Please refrain from call-and-response singing as that sort of thing can lead to rebellion. And, of course, no drums are allowed on board," she trills.

Upon arrival, the slave passengers are greeted by Aunt Ethel who wears a bandana and stirs up a mysterious batch of "colored cuisine" in her big black kettle. The set dissolves to reveal a glamorous couple who "couldn't resolve yesterday's pain" and now live inside Ebony Magazine where they get to be black and fabulous all the time.

No dramatic stereotype is left untouched in the sketch "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play," which parodies Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 "A Raisin in the Sun," Ntozake Shange's "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf" and Tyler Perry's many plays.

A world-weary Mama clutches her Bible and tells her angry 30-year-old son Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones to let God settle his grievances with "The Man." The take-no-prisoners playlet tears into the typecasting of African-American actors and the racist preconception of black theater as minstrel shows and feel-good musicals.

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## Add 2 – Colored Museum

Although funny on its surface, “The Colored Museum” attempts to engross black and white audiences as witnesses, accomplices and participants in the proceedings. The characters, as prized vessels, display their time-worn layers when they pour out their fears, loathing and pain to be absorbed by visitors to “The Colored Museum.”

Proctor explains, “This play offers us exhibits so that we can stop looking at black people as victims of history and start looking at African Americans as a people who are responsible for and capable of defining their own future without having to deny their past.”

“The Colored Museum” by George C. Wolfe will be performed by the performing arts component of University of Wisconsin-Madison’s PEOPLE program on May 6 at 8 p.m. and May 7 at 6 p.m. in the Wisconsin Union Theater, 800 Langdon St.

**Admission is free.**

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