Welcome to Center Theatre Group and The Royale by Marco Ramirez

Set in the early 1900’s, when black fighters were not offered fights with white fighters, Jay “the Sport” Jackson wants only one thing: to be the first African American crowned undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. This world premiere play is a vivid picture of a man battling for his place in history and dreaming bigger than the world wanted him to.

Take a moment to think about dreaming big. What happens to a person when their dream is bigger than the limits or expectations the world has of them based on race, gender, ethnicity and other labels? How do you keep your dream alive in the face of these limits? How big should a person dare to dream?

Is there a connection between dreams and change? Is there a personal dream you would fight for? Do you have a dream for the world that is worth battling for? Can daring to dream big change our world?

Turn the page to learn about boxing’s long history and why this sport captures our imagination. Read an interview with playwright Marco Ramirez and discover how music influences his writing. Think about what it means to be a champion and what it takes to be the very best.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers. See what questions this information raises for you and what questions and answers the performance provides.

Thank you so much for joining us for The Royale. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!
By the late 19th century, the Civil War and Reconstruction had left the old social order challenged and those people whose way of life was being challenged didn’t always like it. And those people whose way of life was being challenged didn’t always like it.

In the South, Jim Crow laws challenged the boundaries of acceptable behavior routinely found themselves facing Lynch mobs. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded in 1909 estimated that there were 5,500 lynchings between 1895-1922. Lynch was rampant. Black people stepping outside of the boundaries of the laws were being lynched.

Race riots were another way black progress was attacked. In the summer of 1919, there were more than 30 race riots throughout the country, resulting in hundreds of black deaths and thousands left homeless.

Black Americans resisted racism and fought for change, individually and collectively, in many forms. From the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the sit-ins of the 1960s, their fight was for the right to vote, for equal education, for fair housing, for an end to violence and discrimination.

American playwrights, activists and artistic innovators sought to tell the stories of their people through their art. Many of these works were inspired by the realities of their lives and the struggles they faced. From the theatre of the 1920s to the present day, Black American playwrights have used the stage to speak truth to power and to give voice to the experiences of Black Americans.

The question of whether the world is ready for change is not one that can be answered with a simple yes or no. It requires a deeper understanding of the historical context in which change is taking place, as well as an examination of the forces that are both driving and resisting change.

Are there freedoms, privileges, or rights that you enjoy now because someone created a barrier or fought a fight for you? What freedoms still need to be fought for? What conditions or beliefs still need to be changed?

Black Americans in the early 20th century (1900-1920) fought their status in society. Their fight was for the right to vote, for equal education, for fair housing, for an end to violence and discrimination.

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ON The Surface Boxing Seems like A Simple SPORT.
You hit someone, you avoid getting hit and you keep on hitting your opponent until they cannot get up anymore. Yet this... how power is distributed in a society. It is a place to put our collective anxieties and a framework for our stories.

**BOXING**
—The Royale

After 1865 — Boxers develop a more sophisticated set of defensive moves—footwork, bobbing and weaving,
1838 — The Pugilistic Society sets fights on a platform instead of within a ring of spectators – hence the term »
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1743 — Jack Broughton develops the first set of boxing rules as a result of a bout where he accidentally kills his butcher. (The butcher won.)
1681 — The first officially recorded boxing match. The Duke of Albemarle sets up a fight between his butler and "The Sweet Science" by writer A.J. Liebling, appears
regulations and safety rules and limits bouts to 15 rounds.

**Brooklyn Blackbird** the Russian boxer who was 111 years old and 5 feet 8 inches short. He was known for his speed and agility, and his ability to outlast his opponents. The Brooklyn Blackbird was so skilled and quick that he was often compared to a bird, hence the name.

**Boxiana; or Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism**

In ancient Rome gladiators box to the death with their hands and forearms wrapped in leather studded with metal spikes.

8th century B.C. — Homer writes about boxing in The Iliad.
In ancient Rome, gladiators fight to the death with their hands and forearms wrapped in leather studded with metal spikes.

1920 — The Walker Law passed in New York state institutes regulations and safety rules and limits bouts to 15 rounds.
1918 — The National Boxing Association is formed. The National Boxing Association sanctions matches and awards championship titles.

"THE SWEET SCIENCE"

"I fought him in my mind... every day since I was six years old..."

On the surface boxing appears to be a sport that only demands physical strength, but in reality, it is a sport that requires mental strength as well. To be a successful boxer, one must have the ability to think several steps ahead, anticipate their opponent's moves, and adjust their strategy accordingly. The mental aspect of boxing is just as important as the physical aspect, and it is what sets the great boxers apart from the rest.

**SPORTS**

Sports are a way for us to express our own desires and fears of the spectators. They allow us to transform our lives into something better, either individually or as a group. Sports often reflect what we value. They tell the stories of our country's race and class dynamics. In boxing, the history of the sport is deeply intertwined with the history of race and class in the United States.

**CHAMPION**

"IT'S ABOUT BEIN' CHAMPION, PERIOD."
—The Royale

A person who has defeated all opponents in a competition or series of competitions, to hold first place: the heavyweight boxing champion.
A person who wins the title of champion or is recognized as a champion: the winner of the Olympic Games.

What does it mean to be a champion? To win a title or a championship. To be the best in your field. To overcome adversity and emerge victorious. To be admired and respected by your peers. To be remembered as a legend. The journey to becoming a champion is as important as the title itself. It is the story of hard work, determination, and resilience. It is the story of never giving up, no matter what. It is the story of the sweet science, the sport of boxing.
AUDACITY & SWAGGER

AUDACITY

Baldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought, or other restrictions.

SWAGGER

To move through the world with confidence, sophistication and coolness.

The character Jay in The Royale is described as having “swagger.” 30 days. He has the audacity to dream of being the heavyweight champion of the world. He does it to be the first black man to ever hold the title. We often think of sports stars, celebrities and top hip-hop artists as having audacity and swagger. But, audacity and swagger are much more than fame and bling. Audacity is the desire to defy a worldview bigger that your current circumstances. Swagger is the will and courage to attempt change.

Anyone who has ever said “the world doesn’t get to tell me how to live my life based on the color of my skin, my gender, my sexual orientation,” is audacious. Audacity and swagger can look like Trayvon Martin who in 2012 was killed by a neighborhood watchman, or Mahatma Gandhi who led the successful civil rights movement in India. Or Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot in the head by the Taliban because of her advocacy for girls’ education.

Swag looks like Milk who in the 1970’s gave voice to the LGBTQ community in San Francisco. It can be an aspiration for the world. It can look like hope, possibility and the will and courage to attempt change.

“Any good play that is worth you paying to go see should make you feel like ‘Tag! You’re it!’”

PLAYWRIGHT MARCO RAMIREZ TALKS WITH CENTER THEATRE GROUP TEACHING ARTIST MARCOS NAJERA.

Marcos Najera. Can we go back to the high school story you were telling me about? What was the inspiration for The Royale?

Marco Ramirez. Yeah! I went to a public visual and performing arts magnet high school. And I went because the alternative would have been a school in a really bad neighborhood that my parents didn’t want me to go to. I went in as a painter and I didn’t even have a drama class. I wasn’t very good at it, but I still tried. And there was a theater program at the school, too. So I started painting sets for the theater program because they needed help.

And I was always a big reader, and I knew I wanted to write. I didn’t really think about setting for theater, but it definitely seemed easier than writing for film or TV because I didn’t see it as a career. But TV and comic books were the first two things that I really fell in love with as a kid. I read a lot of Batman comics as a kid, I watched a lot of Batman cartoons. And the X-Men and shows like that. As a writer, that always felt like something I wanted to aspire to. So TV and film, I definitely felt drawn to them. I don’t think I’ll go to a play until I was maybe 14 or 15.

Do you have any favorite plays or films?

No, I was a freshman and they took everyone in the English classes to go see a play. There was a monologue in it—oh, this was my world. This is pretty dark.

Dante’s Inferno is about Virgil leading Dante. And so, he is encountering all these people who are in hell for one reason or another. This play was just people in suits sitting in chairs and a music stand. They were talking about the devils, and they were just trying to translate the mental process of the narrator and his emotions had been tortured all the doors to his castle. And instead of trying to kill him from the outside, they were just going to let him starve on the inside. So, he steadily watches his kids and his wife die. And all his soldiers die. And he’s opened to the last one standing. And he can’t fight the hunger in his body. So, he ends up eating one of his soldier’s feet. I told you I’d tell you! [laughing]

And out of the actors hands this guy sat a monologue. And he starts eating from the wakemakers with his bare hands. And everyone in the theater gasped! It was like the grossest, grossest, grossest thing I had ever seen. And it was super-theatrical, and that’s when I knew “Oh, that’s what this is all about!” This is about presentation. About theatricality—between the audience and them. It’s not like writing film or TV. It would have been for the bloody producers! It’d look like a Wes Craven movie. Or a horror movie. This is about other stuff. We are all imagining the same scene in the same time.

What is your biggest, most audacious dream?

It’s a big dream. And once I have a good handle on what it is I’m writing, I put together a two or three hour play. It’s like I’m going to be writing a play about boxing with a lot of hip-hop infused energy and period blues energy. Like dust from South Delta blues.

PLAYWRIGHTS NOT ONLY choose the subject matter of their works, they also make specific choices about how the story is told. In The Royale, playwright Marco Ramirez created a distinct style for how the play looks, sounds and feels.

In what way?

In a weird way, there is something really theatrical about playing a board game. When you play CLUE, everyone is favoring a suspect in a way. The game is entirely about this imagined dinner party and this imagined murderer that never happened.

Playing any game, playing Bridge, just the clue line, “You’re it!” and “You’re out!” and “It’s your turn!” and “It’s my turn!” It’s just being. Okay, “It’s your turn!” “It’s your turn!” “It’s your turn!” “It’s your turn!” “It’s my turn!” “It’s my turn!” “It’s my turn!” “It’s your turn!”

Like, these are the rules of the game, this is fun (or not), and you will pretend this for the next two hours. In real life, we hate listening to the rules, but in storytelling, no one cares. So, I made it a rule of the board game that the rules are going to be followed.

What do you think of The Royale?”

I think August Wilson is the best American playwright who ever lived and his plays are about storytelling and magic and spirituality and history and blood and family. And I highly recommend you read The Piano Lesson. I think it’s the best American play ever written. And in a way, in my tiny way, I think The Royale is like my cover of The Piano Lesson.

What was your inspiration for The Royale?”

I sampled, Yes, if I had to sample the structure or the DNA of The Royale, it’s The Piano Lesson, the Philip Glass piece. It’s the Piano Lesson for the 21st generation. Or the [Laurel] Drayton piece, my sister. [Laughing]
STICK, MOVE, SWITCH, IT’S TIME.
—The Royale