

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenny Leon

PERSON

Leon, Kenny

Alternative Names: Kenny Leon;

Life Dates: February 10, 1956-

Place of Birth: Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Residence: Mableton, GA

Work: Atlanta, GA

Occupations: Stage Director; Theater Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Theatrical and television director and actor Kenny Leon was born Kenneth Leroy Leon on February 10, 1956, in Tallahassee, Florida, to Annie Ruth and Leroy Leon. The oldest of five siblings, Leon's family moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, when he was nine years old. At Northeast High School in St. Petersburg, Leon got involved in the federal government's Upward Bound Program which encouraged him to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer. In 1978, Leon graduated from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, with his B.A. degree in political science. He attended Southwestern University School of Law in Los Angeles for a brief period before returning to Atlanta.

In 1979, Leon returned to Atlanta to try his hand at theater. He soon became a member of the Academy Theater in Atlanta where he worked as an actor and director. Often times, Leon would run outreach programs at prisons and schools; one such play was performed entirely by the homeless. All of the profits from the homeless-cast play were contributed to local homeless shelters. In 1988, after years of touring and directing across the country, Leon was offered a job as associate artistic director at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta. By 1990, he was the senior artistic director and would lead the company for the next ten years. By selecting a wide range of multicultural plays for the theater, Leon increased the minority attendance and the national reputation of the Alliance, and quintupled the endowment.

In 2002, after leaving the Alliance, Leon founded his own theater company in Atlanta, the True Colors Theater Company, which focused on promulgating and preserving Negro-American theatrical classics. Leon has continued to make waves in the theater world outside of Atlanta. In 2004, he directed his first Broadway play, reviving

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* for which he cast hip hop mogul, Sean Combs in the role of Walter Lee Younger; in 2007, Leon directed a television adaptation of the play. Between 2004 and 2007, Leon directed the world and Broadway premieres of August Wilson's final two plays, *Gem of the Ocean* and *Radio Golf*; he also directed the world premiere of Toni Morrison's first opera, *Margaret Garner*. While he continues to ensure the success of *True Colors*, Leon plans to put together all of August Wilson's ten plays at the Kennedy Center as a tribute to the deceased playwright.

Leon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 9, 2007.

Related Entries

Northeast High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Clark Atlanta University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Campbell Park Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

John Hopkins Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Academy Theater [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Fellow

Alliance Theatre [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

True Colors Theatre Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

People of the Brick [MEMBEROF]
[from 2008 to ?]

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1995 to ?]

True Colors Theatre [MEMBEROF]
[from 1985 to 2012]

