

SEARCH SPONSORED BY

SEARCH




All of Theater

Search

TimesSelect

NEWS TRACKER

TIMES FILE

ONE TO WATCH | PLAYWRIGHT AND PERFORMER

# Brian Copeland

By ERIKA MILVY

Published: February 26, 2006

SAN LEANDRO, Calif.



Misha Erwitt for The New York Times

A few years back, Brian Copeland, a talk-show host on KGO radio in San Francisco, received an anonymous letter from a listener: "As an African-American," the writer said, "I'm disgusted every time I hear your voice because you are not a genuine black man." Mr. Copeland had received letters like this before. But this time, instead of throwing it in the trash, he used it as a departure point for an autobiographical one-man show.

That show, "Not a Genuine Black Man," which has been selling out in San Francisco since 2004, is now to open at the DR2 Theater in Union Square in Manhattan in May. He uses childhood

memories to provide a firsthand account of segregation in

- [E-Mail This](#)
- [Printer-Friendly](#)
- [Save Article](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS  
SPONSORED BY



Advertisement

SPECIAL SECTION



[Spring Theater 2006](#)

Readers' Opinions

[Forum: Theater](#)

suburban California. In 1971, San Leandro was 99.4 percent white and considered one of the country's most racist suburbs. It was around that time that an 8-year-old Brian Copeland and his family moved to town.

Soon after, they were evicted. How his mother came to sue her landlord and how Mr. Copeland survived an embattled childhood make for the aching heart of the play.

"What I do is I take you by the hand and you see the world through my 8-year-old eyes," said Mr. Copeland, who still lives in San Leandro with his three children and has a memoir coming out in July. The show also takes time to respond to those who would question his racial authenticity.

Mr. Copeland admits to listening to [Rick Springfield](#). He says he even TiVos "Frasier." "I don't yell at movie screens — that's not black," he observes in the show. "I like white women — that's black."

He contests the notion that "keeping it real" means being what he calls "the worst possible stereotype." "I'm sorry that I don't deal drugs," he says onstage. "I'm sorry that all of my kids were born into wedlock and I support them." Mr. Copeland had worked before as a stand-up. He admired what he called the "funny, heavy, funny, heavy" pacing of [Richard Pryor](#) and [Norman Lear](#). He studied "All in the Family" DVD's to learn the proper rhythms.

[Rob Reiner](#), who played Mike on that series, is now producing an HBO story based on Mr. Copeland's story. "I was mesmerized by the way Brian ties together important social issues, emotion and knock-down dead funny humor," Mr. Reiner said.

It was Rob Reiner's father, the comedian [Carl Reiner](#), who helped Mr. Copeland find his voice. Carl Reiner told him to "find the piece of ground that you alone stand on, and write from there."

For a story that starts out with a housing eviction and a family's struggle to find a decent place to live, Brian Copeland finally unearthed a choice bit of real estate — a piece of ground on which only he stands.

## Most E-Mailed Articles The New York Times

Past 24 Hours | [Past 7 Days](#)

1. [Growing Old Together, in New Kind of Commune](#)
2. [Cyberthieves Silently Copy Your Passwords as You Type](#)
3. [Beyond Rivalry, a Hidden World of Sibling Violence](#)
4. [A Year Abroad \(or 3\) as a Career Move](#)
5. [Protecting Yourself From Keylogging Thieves](#)

[Go to Complete List](#)


**Business**  
[nytimes.com/business](http://nytimes.com/business)

### [Everything you need to know before filing your taxes](#)

Also in Business:

- [How you can save money on your taxes](#)
- [A step-by-step guide to the 1040](#)
- [What you need to know if you inherited money](#)

[Next Article in Theater \(15 of 29\) >](#)

 [TicketWatch](#) –  
[great theater](#)  
[seats at great](#)  
[prices](#)

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

**[Affirmative Action Help](#)**

Leading Provider of Affirmative Action Services  
[www.berkshire-aap.com](http://www.berkshire-aap.com)

**[Affirmative Action](#)**

Poll & Top Deals on Affirmative action  
[FreeConsumer.org](http://FreeConsumer.org)

**[Conservative Blacks](#)**

Share ideas w/conservative blacks and other nonwhite Americans.  
[newcoalition.org](http://newcoalition.org)

**RELATED SEARCHES**

[Blacks](#) | [Theater](#)

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



[Puzzles With Body](#)  
[Parts as Pieces](#)



[Rating Those](#)  
[Olympic Ads](#)



[Snowmobiles Desert](#)  
[Yellowstone](#)



[The New Republic's](#)  
[New Editor](#)



[Theater Update](#)

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Back to Top](#)