

african american theatre history

African American Theatre History: A Rich Tapestry of Resistance, Resilience, and Representation

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Introduction: Tracing the Threads of African American Theatre History

African American theatre history is not a monolithic entity but a vibrant and multifaceted tapestry woven from threads of resistance, resilience, and representation. From the earliest forms of performance amongst enslaved people to the contemporary explosion of Black voices on and off Broadway, the history of African American theatre reflects the ongoing struggle for self-definition, cultural preservation, and social justice. Understanding this history requires acknowledging the diverse methodologies and approaches used to explore its rich and complex narratives.

The Early Years: Minstrelsy and its Counter-Narratives

The earliest forms of "Black" theatre in America were tragically steeped in the grotesque caricatures of minstrelsy. While not created by African Americans, minstrelsy's pervasive influence on American popular culture cannot be ignored in any discussion of African American theatre history. These performances, often steeped in racist stereotypes, ironically laid the groundwork for a counter-narrative: the desire amongst Black performers to reclaim their own images and stories. This desire propelled the development of independent Black theatrical traditions. Analyzing minstrelsy's impact requires employing methodologies from performance studies, analyzing its impact on both the performers and audiences, understanding the ways it shaped public perception of Black people, and how it

laid the groundwork for future acts of resistance within theatrical spaces.

The Rise of Black Theatre Companies and the Harlem Renaissance

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the rise of independent Black theatre companies. These companies, often established in response to the exclusion of Black artists from mainstream theatre, played a crucial role in fostering African American theatre history. The Harlem Renaissance (1920s-1930s), a period of extraordinary artistic flourishing, saw the emergence of playwrights like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, whose work challenged prevailing racial stereotypes and explored the complexities of Black life in America. Analyzing this period necessitates employing historical methodologies focusing on the social and political context surrounding these theatrical productions, examining the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on artistic expression, and considering the various artistic styles employed by Black playwrights during this era.

Mid-20th Century and Beyond: Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, and the Evolution of Style

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) marked a watershed moment in African American theatre history. Her groundbreaking play, with its focus on a Black family's struggle for upward mobility and racial justice, shattered existing stereotypes and paved the way for future generations of playwrights. Later, August Wilson's ten-play cycle, chronicling the African American experience throughout the 20th century, became a landmark achievement in American drama. Examining the works of Hansberry and Wilson requires analyzing dramatic techniques, exploring their use of language and dialogue to reveal complex characters and social issues, and understanding the impact their work had on challenging and expanding the possibilities of American theatre.

Contemporary African American Theatre: New Voices, New Forms

Contemporary African American theatre is characterized by its diversity of voices, styles, and approaches. Playwrights like Lynn Nottage, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and Dominique Morisseau continue to push the boundaries of theatrical expression, exploring themes of race, gender, sexuality, and class within diverse and innovative performance styles. Analyzing modern African American theatre demands engaging with postmodern methodologies, examining the intersectionality of identities within theatrical productions, understanding the role of performance art in challenging social norms, and appreciating the global and transnational dimensions of Black theatrical practices.

Methodologies in Studying African American Theatre History

Studying African American theatre history necessitates the application of multiple methodologies. These include:

Historical Research: Examining primary sources such as play scripts, letters, photographs, and archival materials.

Performance Studies: Analyzing the performance practices, physicality, and embodiment of Black actors.

Literary Criticism: Applying critical lenses to examine the themes, structures, and stylistic choices in African American plays.

Sociological Analysis: Understanding the social and political contexts that shaped the development of African American theatre.

Postcolonial Theory: Examining the legacy of colonialism and its impact on Black theatrical expression.

Feminist and Gender Studies: Analyzing the representation of women and gender in African American theatre.

Conclusion: A Continuing Legacy

African American theatre history is a dynamic and evolving field of study. It represents not just a chronicle of theatrical productions, but also a powerful reflection of the ongoing struggle for social justice, cultural preservation, and the affirmation of Black identity. By employing diverse methodologies and acknowledging the complexities of this rich history, we can gain a deeper understanding of its significance in shaping American theatre and culture as a whole. The legacy of African American theatre continues to inspire and challenge us, reminding us of the power of performance to transform perspectives and inspire social change.

FAQs

1. What were the primary challenges faced by African American theatre artists throughout history? Challenges included racial segregation, limited opportunities, stereotypical portrayals, and lack of funding.
1. How did the Civil Rights Movement impact African American theatre? The Civil Rights Movement fueled a surge in plays tackling racial injustice and the fight for equality.
1. What are some key differences between early African American theatre and contemporary productions? Early theatre often focused on survival and overcoming oppression, while contemporary theatre explores diverse themes and styles, often utilizing experimental approaches.
1. Who are some influential female playwrights in African American theatre history? Lorraine Hansberry, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Anna Deavere Smith are prominent

examples.

1. How has African American theatre influenced mainstream American theatre? African American theatre has broadened thematic concerns, enriched theatrical language, and challenged conventional storytelling techniques within mainstream theatre.
1. What role did music play in African American theatre? Music has been integral, often serving as a powerful force to express emotions, convey cultural identity, and drive the narrative.
1. How does African American theatre engage with themes of identity and representation? It tackles themes of racial identity, gender, sexuality, and class, often challenging stereotypical representations and promoting more nuanced and realistic portrayals.
1. What are some important archives and resources for researching African American theatre history? The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center are key resources.
1. How can we promote and support African American theatre today? By attending productions, supporting theatre companies, advocating for diversity in the arts, and engaging critically with the work.

Related Articles:

1. "The Minstrel Show and its Legacy in American Theatre": Explores the origins and lasting impact of minstrelsy on the development of Black theatre and American performance culture.
1. "Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance Stage": Examines Hughes's contributions to African American theatre, focusing on his innovative playwriting style and his engagement with social issues.

1. "Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun: A Critical Analysis": Provides an in-depth analysis of Hansberry's groundbreaking play, exploring its themes, characters, and enduring impact.
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1. "African American Theatre and its Global Connections": Investigates the transnational influences and exchanges within African American theatre, highlighting the connections with Black theatrical traditions worldwide.

african american theatre history: A History of African American Theatre Errol G. Hill, James V. Hatch, 2003-07-17 Table of contents

african american theatre history: Black Theater, City Life Macelle Mahala, 2022-08-15
Macelle Mahala's rich study of contemporary African American theater institutions reveals how they reflect and shape the histories and cultural realities of their cities. Arguing that the community in

which a play is staged is as important to the work's meaning as the script or set, Mahala focuses on four cities' "arts ecologies" to shed new light on the unique relationship between performance and place: Cleveland, home to the oldest continuously operating Black theater in the country; Pittsburgh, birthplace of the legendary playwright August Wilson; San Francisco, a metropolis currently experiencing displacement of its Black population; and Atlanta, a city with forty years of progressive Black leadership and reverse migration. Black Theater, City Life looks at Karamu House Theatre, the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, Pittsburgh Playwrights' Theatre Company, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, the African American Shakespeare Company, the Atlanta Black Theatre Festival, and Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre Company to demonstrate how each organization articulates the cultural specificities, sociopolitical realities, and histories of African Americans. These companies have faced challenges that mirror the larger racial and economic disparities in arts funding and social practice in America, while their achievements exemplify such institutions' vital role in enacting an artistic practice that reflects the cultural backgrounds of their local communities. Timely, significant, and deeply researched, this book spotlights the artistic and civic import of Black theaters in American cities.

african american theatre history: The Routledge Companion to African American Theatre and Performance Kathy Perkins, Sandra Richards, Renée Alexander Craft, Thomas DeFrantz, 2018-12-07
The Routledge Companion to African American Theatre and Performance is an outstanding collection of specially written essays that charts the emergence, development, and diversity of African American Theatre and Performance—from the nineteenth-century African Grove Theatre to Afrofuturism. Alongside chapters from scholars are contributions from theatre makers, including producers, theatre managers, choreographers, directors, designers, and critics. This ambitious Companion includes: A Timeline of African American theatre and performance. Part I Seeing ourselves onstage explores the important experience of Black theatrical self-representation. Analyses of diverse topics including historical dramas, Broadway musicals, and experimental theatre allow readers to discover expansive articulations of Blackness. Part II Institution building highlights institutions that have nurtured Black people both on stage and behind the scenes. Topics include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), festivals, and black actor training. Part III Theatre and social change surveys key moments when Black people harnessed the power of theatre to affirm community realities and posit new representations for themselves and the nation as a whole. Topics include Du Bois and African Muslims, women of the Black Arts Movement, Afro-Latinx theatre, youth theatre, and operatic sustenance for an Afro future. Part IV Expanding the traditional stage examines Black performance traditions that privilege Black worldviews, sense-making, rituals, and innovation in everyday life. This section explores performances that prefer the space of the kitchen, classroom, club, or field. This book engages a wide audience of scholars, students, and theatre practitioners with its unprecedented breadth. More than anything, these invaluable insights not only offer a window onto the processes of producing work, but also the labour and economic issues that have shaped and enabled African American theatre. Chapter 20 of this book is freely available as a downloadable Open Access PDF at <http://www.taylorfrancis.com> under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives (CC-BY-NC-ND) 4.0 license.

african american theatre history: African American Theatre Samuel A. Hay, 1994-03-25
This book traces the history of African American theatre from its beginnings to the present.

african american theatre history: Radical Black Theatre in the New Deal Kate Dossett, 2020-01-29
Between 1935 and 1939, the United States government paid out-of-work artists to write, act, and stage theatre as part of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), a New Deal job relief program. In segregated Negro Units set up under the FTP, African American artists took on theatre work usually reserved for whites, staged black versions of white classics, and developed radical new dramas. In this fresh history of the FTP Negro Units, Kate Dossett examines what she calls the black performance community—a broad network of actors, dramatists, audiences, critics, and community activists—who made and remade black theatre manuscripts for the Negro Units and other theatre companies from New York to Seattle. Tracing how African American playwrights and troupes

developed these manuscripts and how they were then contested, revised, and reinterpreted, Dossett argues that these texts constitute an archive of black agency, and understanding their history allows us to consider black dramas on their own terms. The cultural and intellectual labor of black theatre artists was at the heart of radical politics in 1930s America, and their work became an important battleground in a turbulent decade.

african american theatre history: *Historical Dictionary of African American Theater* Anthony D. Hill, 2018-11-09 This second edition of *Historical Dictionary of African American Theater* reflects the rich history and representation of the black aesthetic and the significance of African American theater's history, fleeting present, and promise to the future. It celebrates nearly 200 years of black theater in the United States and the thousands of black theater artists across the country—identifying representative black theaters, playwrights, plays, actors, directors, and designers and chronicling their contributions to the field from the birth of black theater in 1816 to the present. This second edition of *Historical Dictionary of African American Theater*, Second Edition contains a chronology, an introduction, appendixes, and an extensive bibliography. The dictionary section has over 700 cross-referenced entries on actors, playwrights, plays, musicals, theatres, -directors, and designers. This book is an excellent resource for students, researchers, and anyone wanting to know and more about African American Theater.

african american theatre history: *The Ground on which I Stand* August Wilson, 2001 August Wilson's radical and provocative call to arms.

african american theatre history: *African-American Performance and Theater History* Harry Justin Elam, David Krasner, 2001 An anthology of critical writings that explores the intersections of race, theater, and performance in America.

african american theatre history: *The Escape, Or, A Leap for Freedom* William Wells Brown, 2001 A well-known nineteenth-century abolitionist and former slave, William Wells Brown was a prolific writer and lecturer who captivated audiences with readings of his drama *The Escape; or, a Leap for Freedom* (1858). The first published play by an African American writer, *The Escape* explored the complexities of American culture at a time when tensions between North and South were about to explode into the Civil War. This new volume presents the first-edition text of Brown's play and features an extensive introduction that establishes the work's continuing significance. *The Escape* centers on the attempted sexual violation of a slave and involves many characters of mixed race, through which Brown commented on such themes as moral decay, white racism, and black self-determination. Rich in action and faithful in dialect, it raises issues relating not only to race but also to gender by including concepts of black and white masculinity and the culture of southern white and enslaved women. It portrays a world in which slavery provided a convenient means of distinguishing between the white North and the white South, allowing northerners to express moral sentiments without recognizing or addressing the racial prejudice pervasive among whites in both regions. John Ernest's introductory essay balances the play's historical and literary contexts, including information on Brown and his career, as well as on slavery, abolitionism, and sectional politics. It also discusses the legends and realities of the Underground Railroad, examines the role of antebellum performance art—including blackface minstrelsy and stage versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—in the construction of race and national identity, and provides an introduction to theories of identity as performance. A century and a half after its initial appearance, *The Escape* remains essential reading for students of African American literature. Ernest's keen analysis of this classic play will enrich readers' appreciation of both the drama itself and the era in which it appeared. The Editor: John Ernest is an associate professor of English at the University of New Hampshire and author of *Resistance and Reformation in Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature*: Brown, Wilson, Jacobs, Delany, Douglass, and Harper.

african american theatre history: *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* Harvey Young, 2023-05-31 This new edition provides an expanded, comprehensive history of African American theatre, from the early nineteenth century to the present day. Including discussions of slave rebellions on the national stage, African Americans on Broadway, the Harlem

Renaissance, African American women dramatists, and the New Negro and Black Arts movements, the Companion also features fresh chapters on significant contemporary developments, such as the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the mainstream successes of Black Queer Drama and the evolution of African American Dance Theatre. Leading scholars spotlight the producers, directors, playwrights, and actors who have fashioned a more accurate appearance of Black life on stage, revealing the impact of African American theatre both within the United States and around the world. Addressing recent theatre productions in the context of political and cultural change, it invites readers to reflect on where African American theatre is heading in the twenty-first century.

african american theatre history: African American Theater Buildings Eric Ledell Smith, 2011-08-17 African American theater buildings were theaters owned or managed by blacks or whites and serving an African American audience. Nearly 2,000 such theaters, including nickelodeons, vaudeville houses, storefronts, drive-ins, opera houses and neighborhood movie theaters, existed in the 20th century, yet very little has been written about them. In this book the African American theater buildings from 1900 through 1955 are arranged by state, then by city, and then alphabetically under the name by which they were known. The street address, dates of operation, number of seats, architect, whether it was a member of TOBA (Theater Owners Booking Association), type of theater (nickelodeon, vaudeville, musical, drama or picture), alternate name(s), race and name of manager or owner, whether the audience was mixed, and the fate of the theater are given where known. Commentary by theater historians is also provided.

african american theatre history: *African American Theater* Glenda Dicker/sun, 2013-08-23 Written in a clear, accessible, storytelling style, African American Theater will shine a bright new light on the culture which has historically nurtured and inspired Black Theater. Functioning as an interactive guide for students and teachers, African American Theater takes the reader on a journey to discover how social realities impacted the plays dramatists wrote and produced. The journey begins in 1850 when most African people were enslaved in America. Along the way, cultural milestones such as Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Freedom Movement are explored. The journey concludes with a discussion of how the past still plays out in the works of contemporary playwrights like August Wilson and Suzan-Lori Parks. African American Theater moves unsung heroes like Robert Abbott and Jo Ann Gibson Robinson to the foreground, but does not neglect the race giants. For actors looking for material to perform, the book offers exercises to create new monologues and scenes. Rich with myths, history and first person accounts by ordinary people telling their extraordinary stories, African American Theater will entertain while it educates.

african american theatre history: Black Theater is Black Life Harvey Young, Queen Meccasia Zabriskie, 2013 A series of interviews with prominent producers, directors, choreographers, designers, dancers, and actors who tell the history of African American culture in Chicago.

african american theatre history: White People Do Not Know how to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies & Gentlemen of Colour Marvin Edward McAllister, 2003 McAllister offers a history of black theater pioneer William Brown's career and places his productions within the broader context of U.S. social, political, and cultural history.

african american theatre history: **Women of Distinction** Lawson Andrew Scruggs, 1893 Written with a conscious sense of racial pride, a black physician presents biographical sketches of accomplished black women.

african american theatre history: *Black Patience* Julius B. Fleming Jr., 2022-03-29 This book argues that, since transatlantic slavery, patience has been used as a tool of anti-black violence and political exclusion, but shows how during the Civil Rights Movement black artists and activists used theatre to demand freedom now, staging a radical challenge to this deferral of black freedom and citizenship--

african american theatre history: *Black Broadway* Stewart F. Lane, 2015 The African-American actors and actresses whose names have shone brightly on Broadway marquees earned their place in history not only through hard work, perseverance, and talent, but also because of the legacy left by those who came before them. Like the doors of many professions, those of the

theater world were shut to minorities for decades. While the Civil War may have freed the slaves, it was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that the playing field began to level. In this remarkable book, theater producer and historian Stewart F. Lane uses words and pictures to capture this tumultuous century and to highlight the rocky road that black actors have travelled to reach recognition on the Great White Way. After the Civil War, the popularity of the minstrel shows grew by leaps and bounds throughout the country. African Americans were portrayed by whites, who would entertain audiences in black face. While the depiction of blacks was highly demeaning, it opened the door to African-American performers, and by the late 1800s, a number of them were playing to full houses. By the 1920s, the Jazz Age was in full swing, allowing black musicians and composers to reach wider audiences. And in the thirties, musicals such as George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and Eubie Blake's *Swing It* opened the door a little wider. As the years passed, black performers continued to gain ground. In the 1940s, Broadway productions of *Cabin in the Sky*, *Carmen Jones*, and *St. Louis Woman* enabled African Americans to demonstrate a fuller range of talents, and Paul Robeson reached national prominence in his award-winning portrayal of Othello. By the 1950s and '60s, more black actors—including Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, and Sidney Poitier—had found their voices on stage, and black playwrights and directors had begun to make their marks. *Black Broadway* provides an entertaining, poignant history of a Broadway of which few are aware. By focusing a spotlight on both performers long forgotten and on those whom we still hold dear, this unique book offers a story well worth telling.

african american theatre history: *Black Theatre* Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, Gus Edwards, 2002-11-08 Generating a new understanding of the past—as well as a vision for the future—this path-breaking volume contains essays written by playwrights, scholars, and critics that analyze African American theatre as it is practiced today. Even as they acknowledge that Black experience is not monolithic, these contributors argue provocatively and persuasively for a Black consciousness that creates a culturally specific theatre. This theatre, rooted in an African mythos, offers ritual rather than realism; it transcends the specifics of social relations, reaching toward revelation. The ritual performance that is intrinsic to Black theatre renews the community; in Paul Carter Harrison's words, it reveals the Form of Things Unknown in a way that binds, cleanses, and heals.

african american theatre history: Black Acting Methods Sharrell Luckett, Tia M. Shaffer, 2016-10-04 *Black Acting Methods* seeks to offer alternatives to the Euro-American performance styles that many actors find themselves working with. A wealth of contributions from directors, scholars and actor trainers address afrocentric processes and aesthetics, and interviews with key figures in Black American theatre illuminate their methods. This ground-breaking collection is an essential resource for teachers, students, actors and directors seeking to reclaim, reaffirm or even redefine the role and contributions of Black culture in theatre arts. Chapter 7 of this book is freely available as a downloadable Open Access PDF at <http://www.taylorfrancis.com> under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives (CC-BY-NC-ND) 4.0 license.

african american theatre history: *Theorizing Black Theatre* Henry D. Miller, 2014-01-10 The rich history of African-American theatre has often been overlooked, both in theoretical discourse and in practice. This volume seeks a critical engagement with black theatre artists and theorists of the twentieth century. It reveals a comprehensive view of the Art or Propaganda debate that dominated twentieth century African-American dramatic theory. Among others, this text addresses the writings of Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Alain Locke, Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy, Sidney Poitier, and August Wilson. Of particular note is the manner in which black theory collides or intersects with canonical theorists, including Aristotle, Keats, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Shaw, and O'Neill.

african american theatre history: *Staging Faith* Craig R. Prentiss, 2014 - Lively descriptions... compelling analysis... and careful attention to historical contexts. - Judith Weisenfeld, author of *Hollywood Be Thy Name* Methodically and brilliantly probes the nuances... One of the most brilliant and engaging studies on African American theater. - David Krasner, author of *A Beautiful Pageant*

african american theatre history: *The Theater of Black Americans* Errol Hill, 1987 (Applause Books). From the origins of the Negro spiritual and the birth of the Harlem Renaissance to the emergence of a national black theatre movement, *The Theatre of Black Americans* offers a penetrating look at a black art form that has exploded into an American cultural institution. Among the essays: James Hatch *Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre*; Shelby Steele *Notes on Ritual in the New Black Theatre*; Sister M. Francesca Thompson OSF *The Lafayette Players*; Ronald Ross *The Role of Blacks in the Federal Theatre*.

african american theatre history: *A Beautiful Pageant* D. Krasner, 2016-09-27 The Harlem Renaissance was an unprecedented period of vitality in the American Arts. Defined as the years between 1910 and 1927, it was the time when Harlem came alive with theater, drama, sports, dance and politics. Looking at events as diverse as the prizefight between Jack Johnson and Jim 'White Hope' Jeffries, the choreography of Aida Walker and Ethel Waters, the writing of Zora Neale Hurston and the musicals of the period, Krasner paints a vibrant portrait of those years. This was the time when the residents of northern Manhattan were leading their downtown counterparts at the vanguard of artistic ferment while at the same time playing a pivotal role in the evolution of Black nationalism. This is a thrilling piece of work by an author who has been working towards this major opus for years now. It will become a classic that will stay on the American history and theater shelves for years to come.

african american theatre history: *Stages of Struggle and Celebration* Sandra M. Mayo, Elvin Holt, 2016-01-15 From plantation performances to minstrel shows of the late nineteenth century, the roots of black theatre in Texas reflect the history of a state where black Texans have continually created powerful cultural emblems that defy the clichés of horses, cattle, and bravado. Drawing on troves of archival materials from numerous statewide sources, *Stages of Struggle and Celebration* captures the important legacies of the dramatic arts in a historical field that has paid most of its attention to black musicians. Setting the stage, the authors retrace the path of the cakewalk and African-inspired dance as forerunners to formalized productions at theaters in the major metropolitan areas. From Houston's Ensemble and Encore Theaters to the Jubilee in Fort Worth, gospel stage plays of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas, as well as San Antonio's Hornsby Entertainment Theater Company and Renaissance Guild, concluding with ProArts Collective in Austin, *Stages of Struggle and Celebration* features founding narratives, descriptions of key players and memorable productions, and enlightening discussions of community reception and the business challenges faced by each theatre. The role of drama departments in historically black colleges in training the companies' founding members is also explored, as is the role the support of national figures such as Tyler Perry plays in ensuring viability. A canon of Texas playwrights completes the tour. The result is a diverse tribute to the artistic legacies that continue to inspire new generations of producers and audiences.

african american theatre history: *American Theatre* Theresa Saxon, 2011-10-11 This book provides a brief yet informative evaluation of the variety and complexity of theatrical endeavours in the United States, embracing all epochs of theatre history and situating American theatre as a lively, dynamic and diverse arena.

african american theatre history: *A Raisin in the Sun* Lorraine Hansberry, 2016-11-01 *A Raisin in the Sun* reflects Lorraine Hansberry's childhood experiences in segregated Chicago. This electrifying masterpiece has enthralled audiences and has been heaped with critical accolades. The play that changed American theatre forever - *The New York Times*. Edition Description

african american theatre history: *The Impact of Race* Woodie King, 2003 Looks at the evolution of the American black theater movement and includes coverage of the National Black Theatre Festival and the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta.

african american theatre history: *The African American Theatrical Body* Soyica Diggs Colbert, 2011-10-06 Presenting an innovative approach to performance studies and literary history, Soyica Colbert argues for the centrality of black performance traditions to African American literature, including preaching, dancing, blues and gospel, and theatre itself, showing how these

performance traditions create the 'performative ground' of African American literary texts. Across a century of literary production using the physical space of the theatre and the discursive space of the page, W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, August Wilson and others deploy performances to re-situate black people in time and space. The study examines African American plays past and present, including *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Blues for Mister Charlie* and Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*, demonstrating how African American dramatists stage black performances in their plays as acts of recuperation and restoration, creating sites that have the potential to repair the damage caused by slavery and its aftermath.

african american theatre history: African American Theater Buildings Eric Ledell Smith, 2015-06-08 African American theater buildings were theaters owned or managed by blacks or whites and serving an African American audience. Nearly 2,000 such theaters, including nickelodeons, vaudeville houses, storefronts, drive-ins, opera houses and neighborhood movie theaters, existed in the 20th century, yet very little has been written about them. In this book the African American theater buildings from 1900 through 1955 are arranged by state, then by city, and then alphabetically under the name by which they were known. The street address, dates of operation, number of seats, architect, whether it was a member of TOBA (Theater Owners Booking Association), type of theater (nickelodeon, vaudeville, musical, drama or picture), alternate name(s), race and name of manager or owner, whether the audience was mixed, and the fate of the theater are given where known. Commentary by theater historians is also provided.

african american theatre history: *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* George Hutchinson, 2007-06-14 This 2007 Companion is a comprehensive guide to the key authors and works of the African American literary movement.

african american theatre history: *The Black Circuit* Rashida Z. Shaw McMahon, 2020-03-09 *The Black Circuit: Race, Performance, and Spectatorship in Black Popular Theatre* presents the first book-length study of Chitlin Circuit theatre, the most popular and controversial form of Black theatre to exist outside the purview of Broadway since the 1980s. Through historical and sociological research, Rashida Z. Shaw McMahon links the fraught racial histories in American slave plantations and early African American cuisine to the performance sites of nineteenth-century minstrelsy, early-twentieth-century vaudeville, and mid-twentieth-century gospel musicals. *The Black Circuit* traces this rise of a Black theatrical popular culture that exemplifies W. E. B. Du Bois's 1926 parameters of for us, near us, by us, and about us, with critical differences that, McMahon argues, complicate our understanding of performance and spectatorship in African American theatre. McMahon shows how an integrated and evolving network of consumerism, culture, circulation, exchange, ideologies, and meaning making has emerged in the performance environments of Chitlin Circuit theatre that is reflective of the broader influences at play in acts of minority spectatorship. She labels this network the Black Circuit.

african american theatre history: Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers Bernard L. Peterson Jr., Bernard L. Peterson, 1990 This reference volume addresses an often overlooked area in the history of the American theatre, the contributions of early black playwrights and dramatic writers. At a time when they were denied full participation in many aspects of American life, including the mainstream of the theatre itself, black artists were compiling an impressive record of achievement on the American stage. This book, the most comprehensive on the subject, provides a complete look at these achievements by offering biographical information and a catalog of works for approximately 200 writers, including playwrights, librettists, screenwriters, and radio scriptwriters. From the emergence of black playwrights in the time prior to the Civil War, to the early days of film and radio in this century, the efforts of early black writers are fully documented in this work. The book begins with an author's preface and is followed by an introductory essay that discusses the development of black American playwrights from the antebellum period to World War II. The heart of the book, the biographical directory, is organized alphabetically, with each entry providing highlights of the author's life and career; collected anthologies that include any works; and an annotated chronological list of individual dramatic works,

including genre, length, synopses, production history, prizes and awards, and script sources. Three appendixes offer information on other playwrights and their works, additional librettists and descriptions of their shows, and a chronology of dramatic works by genre. A bibliography cites such information sources as reference books and critical studies, dissertations, play anthologies, and newspapers and periodicals frequently consulted, as well as significant libraries and repositories. The book concludes with title and general indexes and an index to early black theatre organizations.

african american theatre history: The Civil Rights Theatre Movement in New York, 1939-1966 Julie Burrell, 2019-03-27 This book argues that African American theatre in the twentieth century represented a cultural front of the civil rights movement. Highlighting the frequently ignored decades of the 1940s and 1950s, Burrell documents a radical cohort of theatre artists who became critical players in the fight for civil rights both onstage and offstage, between the Popular Front and the Black Arts Movement periods. The Civil Rights Theatre Movement recovers knowledge of little-known groups like the Negro Playwrights Company and reconsiders Broadway hits including Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, showing how theatre artists staged radically innovative performances that protested Jim Crow and U.S. imperialism amidst a repressive Cold War atmosphere. By conceiving of class and gender as intertwining aspects of racism, this book reveals how civil rights theatre artists challenged audiences to reimagine the fundamental character of American democracy.

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Images of the black soldier, lawyer, mother, and wife helped readers assure each other that they were upstanding individuals who deserved the right to participate in national culture and politics. These powerful community coping efforts helped African Americans band together and withstand the nation's rejection of them as viable citizens. The Left of Black interview with author Koritha Mitchell begins at 14:00. An interview with Koritha Mitchell at The Ohio Channel.

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