

A History Of African American Theatre

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Black Theatre USA Revised and Expanded Edition, Vol. 1
African American Performance and Theater History
A Beautiful Pageant
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Elam D. Krasner

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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

this book traces the history of african american theatre from its beginnings to the present

african american theater is a vibrant and unique entity enriched by ancient egyptian rituals west african folklore and european theatrical practices a continuum of african folk traditions it combines storytelling mythology rituals music song and dance with ancestor worship from ancient times to the present it afforded black artists a cultural gold mine to celebrate what it was like to be an african american in the new world the historical dictionary of african american theater celebrates nearly 200 years of black theater in the united states identifying representative african american theater producing organizations and chronicling their contributions to the field from its birth in 1816 to the present this is done through a chronology an introductory essay a bibliography and over 500 cross referenced dictionary entries on actors directors playwrights plays theater producing organizations themes locations and theater movements and awards

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

while chronicling the development of theater s national black theatre of harlem this study explores the national black theatre s quest to develop a new black theory of acting theater s theory of performance was realized in a theater that combined elements of pentacostal worship and african ritual melding spontaneity from the performers percussive music singing dancing emotional expression from both actors and audience and spectacle the national black theatre s major achievement is the creation of an original art form that helps african americans identify with their roots and invites spontaneous audience interaction the study offers the national black theatre as a model african american community theater with valuable lessons for other theaters the innovative methods of the national black theatre provide a model for enlightening and sensitizing audiences to cultural diversity a pioneering institution the national black theatre has proven itself over its 25 year history to be a cultural treasure and the quintessential theater in harlem also includes maps bibliography and index foreword by dr winona fletcher professor emeritus of theater and drama and afro american studies founder of the national black theatre

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 taylorfrancis.com under a creative commons attribution non commercial no derivatives cc by nc nd 4.0 license

the history of african american performance and theatre is a topic that few scholars have closely studied or discussed as a critical part of american culture in this fascinating interdisciplinary volume david krasner reveals such a history to be a tremendously rich one focusing particularly on the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the 20th century the fields of history black literary theory cultural studies performance studies and postcolonial theory are utilized in an examination of several major productions in addition krasner looks at the aesthetic significance of african american performers on the american stage and the meaning of the technique entitled cakewalking investigating expressions of protest within the theatre krasner reveals that this period was replete with moments of resistance to racism parodies of the minstrel tradition and double consciousness on the part of performers an enlightening work which unveils new information about its subject resistance parody and double consciousness in african american theatre offers insights into african american artistry during an era of racism and conflict

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

many playwrights authors poets and historians have used images metaphors and references to and from greek tragedy myth and epic to describe the african experience in the new world the complex relationship between ancient greek tragedy and modern african american theatre is primarily rooted in america where the connection between ancient greece and ancient africa is explored and debated the most the different ways in which greek tragedy has been used by playwrights directors and others to represent and define african american history and identity are explored in this work two models are offered for an afro greek connection black orpheus in which the greek connection is metaphorical expressing the african in terms of the european and black athena in which ancient greek culture is reclaimed as part of an afrocentric tradition african american adaptations of greek tragedy on the continuum of these two models are then discussed and plays by peter sellars adrienne kennedy lee breuer rita dove jim magnuson ernest ferlita steve carter silas jones rhodessa jones and derek walcott are analyzed the concepts of colorblind and nontraditional casting and how such practices can shape the reception and meaning of greek tragedy in modern american productions are also covered

our intention explain the mollettes is to describe the nature of african american theatre as an expression of culture and a medium for communicating values we have divided this book into two sections part one premise describes the terms and concepts needed to examine african american theatre from an afrocentric point of view essential to that discourse is an understanding of culture and values and their impact upon an individual s point of view and subsequent interpretation of what is seen and heard we cite examples of historical interpretations and analyses to illustrate the differences in these statements of evaluation that result from variations in culture and values part two presentation delineates values that influence theatrical presentations by and for african americans and their impact upon style form and the performance environment the values of specific cultures also control concepts such as space and time that are crucial to the way in which performance art is perceived both afrocentric and eurocentric concepts of time and space

are described in order to contrast afrocentric and eurocentric conventions of theatrical presentations

a comprehensive directory of more than 600 entries this detailed ready reference features professional semi professional and academic stage organizations and theatres that have been in the forefront in pioneering most of the advances that african americans have made in the theatre it includes groups from the early 19th century to the dawn of the revolutionary black theatre movement of the 1960s it is an effort to bring together into one volume information that has hitherto been scattered throughout a number of different sources the volume begins with an illuminating foreword by errol hill a noted critic playwright scholar and willard professor of drama emeritus dartmouth college a comprehensive directory of more than 600 entries this detailed ready reference features professional semi professional and academic stage organizations and theatres that have been in the forefront in pioneering most of the advances that african americans have made in the theatre it includes groups from the early 19th century to the dawn of the revolutionary black theatre movement of the 1960s it is an effort to bring together into one volume information that has hitherto been scattered throughout a number of different sources the volume begins with an illuminating foreword by errol hill a noted critic playwright scholar and willard professor of drama emeritus dartmouth college included in the volume are the earliest organizations that existed before the civil war black minstrel troupes pioneer musical show companies selected vaudeville and road show troupes professional theatrical associations booking agencies stock companies significant amateur and little theatre groups black units of the wpa federal theatre and semi professional groups in harlem after the federal theatre the a z entries are supplemented with a classified appendix that also includes additional organizations not listed in the main directory a bibliography and three indexes for shows showpeople and general subjects cross referencing makes related information easy to find

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penumbra theatre company was founded in 1976 by lou bellamy as a venue for african american voices within the twin cities theatre scene and has stood for more than thirty five years at the intersection of art culture politics and local community engagement it has helped launch the careers of many internationally respected theatre artists and has been repeatedly recognized for its artistic excellence as the nation s foremost african american theatre penumbra is the first ever history of this barrier breaking institution based on extensive interviews with actors directors playwrights producers funders and critics macelle mahala s book offers a multifaceted view of the theatre and its evolution penumbra follows the company s emergence from the influential black arts and settlement house movements the pivotal role penumbra played in the development of august wilson s career and in turn how wilson became an avid supporter and advocate throughout his life the annual production of black nativity as a community building performance and the difficult economics of african american theatre production and how penumbra has faced these challenges for nearly four decades penumbra is a testament to how a theatre can respond to and thrive within changing political and cultural realities while contributing on a national scale to the african american presence on the american stage it is a celebration of theatre as a means of social and cultural involvement both local and national and ultimately of penumbra s continuing legacy of theatre that is vibrant diverse and vital

in august 1821 william brown a free man of color and a retired ship s steward opened a pleasure garden on manhattan s west side it catered to black new yorkers who were barred admittance to whites only venues offering drama music and refreshment over the following two years brown expanded his enterprises founding a series of theaters that featured african americans playing a range of roles unprecedented on the american stage and that drew increasingly integrated audiences marvin mcallister explores brown s pioneering career and reveals how each of brown s ventures the african grove the minor theatre the

american theatre and the african company explicitly cultivated an intercultural multiracial environment he also investigates the negative white reactions verbal and physical that led to brown s managerial retirement in 1823 brown left his mark on american theater by shaping the careers of his performers and creating new genres of performance beyond that legacy says mcallister this nearly forgotten theatrical innovator offered a blueprint for a truly inclusive national theater

a collection of 51 plays that features previously unpublished works contemporary plays by women and the modern classics

african american performance and theater history is an anthology of critical writings that explores the intersections of race theater and performance in america assembled by two esteemed scholars in black theater harry j elam jr and david krasner and composed of essays from acknowledged authorities in the field this anthology is organized into four sections representative of the ways black theater drama and performance interact and enact continual social cultural and political dialogues ranging from a discussion of dramatic performances of uncle tom s cabin to the black art movement of the 1960s and early 1970s articles gathered in the first section social protest and the politics of representation discuss the ways in which african american theater and performance have operated as social weapons and tools of protest the second section of the volume cultural traditions cultural memory and performance features among other essays joseph roach s chronicle of the slave performances at congo square in new orleans and henry louis gates jr s critique of august wilson s cultural polemics intersections of race and gender the third section includes analyses of the intersections of race and gender on the minstrel stage the plight of black female choreographers at the inception of modern dance and contemporary representations of black homosexuality by pmoafro homo using theories of performance and performativity articles in the fourth section african american performativity and the performance of race probe into the ways blackness and racial identity have been constructed in and through performance the final section is a round table assessment of the past and present state of african american theater and performance studies by some of the leading senior scholars in the field james v hatch sandra l richards and margaret b wilkerson revealing the dynamic relationship between race and theater this volume illustrates how the social and historical contexts of production critically affect theatrical performances of blackness and their meanings and at the same time how african

american cultural social and political struggles have been profoundly affected by theatrical representations and performances this one volume collection is sure to become an important reference for those studying black theater and an engrossing survey for all readers of african american literature

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

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