

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-35958-0 – The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre  
2nd Edition  
Edited by Harvey Young  
Frontmatter  
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## THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRE

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.

HARVEY YOUNG is Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Professor of Theatre at Boston University. He is the author or editor of ten books, including *Embodying Black Experience*, *Theatre & Race*, and most recently *Theatre after Empire*.

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EDITED BY

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*Boston University*



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*For my parents,  
Harvey Young, Sr.  
and  
Regina Huff Young*

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## *Acknowledgments*

An edited collection brings together an array of voices and talents for a common purpose. In addition to those whose names appear in the table of contents, I would like to acknowledge the following individuals whose presence and efforts were instrumental to the completion of the first (2013) edition of this book. Vicki Cooper, Fleur Jones, and Rebecca Taylor at Cambridge University Press saw the potential in this project and served as the book's earliest advocates. Project manager Emma Wildsmith at Out of House Publishing Solutions arranged for copyediting, typesetting, and proofreading. Robert Whitelock copyedited this manuscript. Christine Simonian Bean and Katie Zien provided general (but vital) editorial assistance, including reformatting chapters and reading chapter drafts.

This revised and expanded second edition was embraced by Emily Hockley at Cambridge University Press. Vignesh Viswanathan and Vinod Kumar Prasad at Integra Software Services managed production, including copyediting and proofreading. I am thankful that Khalid Y. Long, Ariel Nereson, and Leticia Ridley accepted my invitation to contribute original chapters. Stacy McKenna provided a range of support, from managing my calendar to printing out drafts, that assisted this project.

In mapping out the direction for this new edition, I regularly conferred with a group of Boston University students who were enrolled in my African American Theatre seminar in spring 2021. I appreciate the insights provided by Khadija Bangoura, Maddy Bedenko, Allison Donahue, Julia Goldberg, Mya Ison, Brittani McBride, Daniel Perkins, Bree Perry, Ireon Roach, John Tomlinson, Michael Valladares, and Sara Vargas.

When the first edition of this book was published in 2013, my son, Zeke, was an energetic three-year-old. A decade later, he's a voracious reader and a kind, caring teenager with an emerging interest in theatre. His performance of Dennis/Sir Galahad in a middle-school production of *Spamalot* remains a wonderful memory. My daughter Cora, who is eight, is

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*Acknowledgments*

a storyteller, dancer, and aspiring artisan who has brightened and improved my life in ways that I could have never imagined when I began working on the original *Companion*.

## Chronology

- 1529 First enslaved Africans arrive in North America
- 1741 Enslaved Africans allegedly attempt to kill the White men of Manhattan, known as “The Great Negro Plot”
- 1821 William Alexander Brown opens the African Theatre (also known as the Minor Theatre, African Grove, or the African Company), the first African American theatre in New York City
- 1823 Brown’s *The Drama of King Shotaway* produced; thought to be the first African-American-authored play produced in the United States. Charles Mathews performs *A Trip to America* in London
- 1827 The first African-American-owned and operated newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, published
- 1830 Thomas Dartmouth Rice (a White blackface performer) makes the Jim Crow character his signature act
- 1831 Nat Turner leads a slave rebellion in Virginia; known as Nat Turner’s Rebellion or the Southampton Insurrection
- 1833 Ira Aldridge performs at Covent Garden in London
- 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published
- 1861 Civil War begins
- 1863 Abraham Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation
- 1865 Civil War ends
- 1876 First Jim Crow laws enacted
- 1896 *The Gold Bug* opens; George Walker and Bert Williams become the first African Americans on Broadway
- 1902 *In Dahomey* opens as the first full-length musical written and performed by African Americans on Broadway
- 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois publishes *The Souls of Black Folk*
- 1909 Formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Bert Williams stars in the Ziegfeld Follies, becoming the first African American to receive top billing

- xviii *Chronology*
- 1912 The Lafayette Theatre becomes the first New York City theatre to desegregate
- 1914 The Great War (World War I) begins
- 1915 Anita Bush founds the Anita Bush Stock Company (later renamed the Lafayette Players), becoming the first major professional Black dramatic company in the United States. The NAACP forms a Drama Committee. The Playhouse Settlement (later the Karamu Theatre of Cleveland) founded
- 1916 Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel* opens. Harlem Renaissance begins
- 1918 The Great War ends
- 1920 Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* opens on Broadway, starring Charles Gilpin
- 1922 Ethiopian Art Theatre of Chicago opens
- 1923 Willis Richardson's one-act *The Chip Woman's Fortune* opens: the first drama by an African American playwright on Broadway
- 1925 Garland Anderson's *Appearances* opens: the first full-length drama by an African American on Broadway. Georgia Douglas Johnson founds the S Street Salon
- 1926 W. E. B. Du Bois founds the Krigwa Players
- 1929 US stock market crash, indicating the start of the Great Depression. The Negro Experimental Players founded. The Harlem Experimental Theatre founded
- 1931 The Harlem Players founded
- 1935 Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* premieres on Broadway. The Federal Theatre Project created by the New Deal Works Progress Administration: includes "Negro Units"
- 1938 Langston Hughes and Louise Thompson form The Harlem Suitcase Theatre
- 1939 World War II begins
- 1940 Frederick O'Neal and Abram Hill found the American Negro Theatre in Harlem
- 1945 World War II ends
- 1948 President Harry Truman signs Executive Order 9981, declaring equal treatment for all in the armed services
- 1952 Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* published
- 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court ruling, declares segregation in public schools unconstitutional
- 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* debuts on Broadway: the first play staged on Broadway by an African American woman



## Chronology

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- playwright. Lloyd Richards, the director of *A Raisin in the Sun*, becomes the first African American director of a Broadway play
- 1961 Ellen Stewart founds Café La Mama (later La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club)
- 1963 March on Washington; Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech
- 1964 President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- 1965 Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black Arts Movement begins. Amiri Baraka opens the Black Arts Repertory and School. Assassination of Malcolm X
- 1966 Black Panther Party forms
- 1967 Robert Macbeth opens the New Lafayette Theatre. Douglas Turner Ward founds the Negro Ensemble Company. Death of Langston Hughes
- 1968 Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Barbara Ann Teer founds the National Black Theatre
- 1969 James Earl Jones wins Tony Award for Best Actor for *The Great White Hope*
- 1970 Woody King, Jr. starts the New Federal Theatre
- 1971 Melvin Van Peebles’s *Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death* opens on Broadway
- 1974 Joseph Walker wins Tony Award for Best Play for *The River Niger*
- 1975 Charlie Small’s *The Wiz* opens on Broadway and wins Tony Award for Best Musical
- 1976 Ntozake Shange’s choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* opens on Broadway. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine publish *Black Theatre USA*
- 1981 *Dreamgirls* opens on Broadway
- 1982 Charles Fuller receives Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *A Soldier’s Play*
- 1984 Jawole Willa Jo Zollar founds Urban Bush Women
- 1986 Black Theatre Network founded. Margaret Wilkerson publishes *9 Plays by Black Women*
- 1987 August Wilson receives Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Fences*. James Earl Jones receives Tony Award for Best Actor for *Fences*
- 1989 Larry Leon Hamlin founds the National Black Theatre Festival
- 1990 August Wilson receives Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *The Piano Lesson*
- 1991 Pomo Afro Homos premiere *Fierce Love: Stories from Black Gay Life*

- 1992 Los Angeles Uprising (also known as Los Angeles Riots)
- 1994 Anna Deveare Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* opens on Broadway
- 1996 Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus* premieres at the Yale Repertory Theatre
- 1997 Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* premieres in Toronto
- 1999 Hip-hop Theatre Junction formed in Washington, DC
- 2002 Suzan-Lori Parks receives the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Topdog/Underdog*. Kenny Leon and Jane Bishop found True Colors Theatre Company
- 2003 Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch publish *A History of African American Theatre*
- 2004 Phylicia Rashād wins Tony Award for Best Actress for revival of *A Raisin in the Sun*
- 2005 Hurricane Katrina strikes New Orleans, killing approximately 1,800 people
- 2008 Barack Obama elected president of the United States
- 2009 Lynn Nottage wins Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Ruined*
- 2010 Denzel Washington and Viola Davis win Tony Awards for Best Actor and Best Actress for Broadway revival of *Fences*
- 2011 Plays by three African American women appear on Broadway: Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*, Lydia Diamond's *Stick Fly*, and *The Gershwins's Porgy and Bess*, a musical revival adapted by Suzan-Lori Parks
- 2013 *Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* first published. Black Lives Matter movement begins
- 2016 Reñee Elise Goldsberry, Daveed Diggs, and Leslie Odom, Jr. win Tony Awards for their performances in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*
- 2019 Nataki Garrett named sixth Artistic Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Fairview* wins Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the first of four consecutive plays by Black playwrights awarded the Pulitzer
- 2020 Broadway closes for seventeen months because of COVID-19 global health pandemic. Alliance of artists of color launch 'We See You White American Theatre' movement to address racism and bias in theatre industry; Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play* receives record-setting twelve Tony nominations
- 2021 Broadway reopens with seven Black plays: Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu's *Pass Over*, Ruben Santiago-Hudson's *Lackawanna Blues*, Douglas Lyons's *Chicken & Biscuits*, Keenan Scott II's

*Chronology*

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*Thoughts of a Colored Man*, Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind*,  
Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's*, and Dominique Morisseau's *Skeleton  
Crew*

2022 Michael R. Jackson's *A Strange Loop* wins Tony Award for Best  
Musical. James Ijames's *Fat Ham* wins Pulitzer Prize for Drama.  
Two Broadway theatres renamed in honor of James Earl Jones  
and Lena Horne