



Experiments in Democracy: Interracial and Cross-Cultural Exchange in American Theatre, 1912-1945 (Theater in the Americas)

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In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of American theatres and theatre artists fostered interracial collaboration and socialization on stage, behind the scenes, and among audiences. In an era marked by entrenched racial segregation and inequality, these artists used performance to bridge America's persistent racial divide and to bring African American, Latino/Latina, Asian American, Native American, and Jewish American communities and traditions into the nation's broader cultural conversation.

In *Experiments in Democracy*, edited by Cheryl Black and Jonathan Shandell, theatre historians examine a wide range of performances—from Broadway, folk plays and dance productions to scripted political rallies and radio dramas. Contributors look at such diverse groups as the Theatre Union, La Unión Martí-Maceo, and the American Negro Theatre, as well as individual playwrights and their works, including Theodore Browne's folk opera *Natural Man*, Josefina Niggli's *Soldadera*, and playwright Lynn Riggs's *Cherokee Night* and *Green Grow the Lilacs* (the basis for the musical *Oklahoma!*). Exploring the ways progressive artists sought to connect isolated racial and cultural groups in pursuit of a more just and democratic society, contributors take into account the blind spots, compromised methods, and unacknowledged biases at play in their practices and strategies. Essays demonstrate how the gap between the ideal of American democracy and its practice—mired in entrenched systems of white privilege, economic inequality, and social prejudice—complicated the work of these artists.

Focusing on questions of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality on the stage in the decades preceding the Civil Rights era, *Experiments in Democracy* fills an important gap in our understanding of the history of the American stage—and sheds light on these still-relevant questions in contemporary American society.

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