

African American Theatre and Performance

Prof. Robin Bernstein

African and African American Studies 120x
Harvard University, Fall 2013
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11am-noon
Barker Center, Room 211

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Course website:

<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k96416&login=yes>

This course investigates the history of African American theatre and performance from the antebellum era through the Depression—with an occasional leap into the present. Our goal is not to complete a comprehensive survey but instead to learn through deep engagement with local resources, particularly archival resources at Harvard and live theatrical events in Boston. Our class follows an unusual format: in a typical week, we meet on Monday in an ordinary classroom and on Wednesday in Houghton Library to work hands-on with archival materials from the Harvard

Theatre Collection. We will dig into original manuscripts, letters, photographs, programs, sheet music, and other rare items. Students will not only gain broad knowledge of the history of African American theatre but will also develop skills and confidence in archival research.

Our orientation toward local resources extends beyond our archival work. We will consider performance itself as a resource—one that African Americans have historically used and continue to use to create art and politics and to shape everyday life. Performance is a form of self-expression but it is also a means by which African Americans have generated and transmitted political analysis, shared knowledge and wisdom, organized communities, and galvanized resistance. Performance has been an especially useful resource to African Americans because of a unique quality of live theatre: it is both supremely local and persistently transnational. Live theatre is local in that it only exists as an immediate, embodied presence (unlike, say, film), but it is also transnational in that actors have historically traveled, often over great distances, to earn their livings. Through these travels, African American performers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became cosmopolitan subjects—sophisticated cultural agents who shaped the modern world.



Josephine Baker

Assignments and requirements:

Archival presentation (varying dates)	25%
Mid-semester paper, due Friday, October 17, 3pm	10%
Attendance at <i>Splendor</i> , November 1 or approved alternative evening (graded full credit/no credit)	5%
Proposal for final paper, due November 18 (graded full credit/no credit)	5%
Final Paper, due Wednesday, December 11, 3pm	30%
Thoughtful, engaged, and respectful classroom participation	25%

General information:

All books are on reserve at Lamont Library and for sale at the Harvard Coop.

Each student will co-lead one archival session with materials from the Harvard Theatre Collection. This assignment entails working in advance with curators to select relevant primary documents for the class to examine, familiarizing yourself with context that is necessary to understand the documents, sharing this knowledge formally with your colleagues, and leading the class's engagement with the materials.

Each student will complete a substantial final paper that relates clearly to the topics, ideas, or materials in this course. Undergraduates' papers should run 15 pages; graduate students' papers should run 20-25 pages.

Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each day or partial day overdue. Please note that failure to complete any assignment can lower your final grade in excess of the stated percentage.

Each student will receive a free ticket to the play *Splendor* by Kirsten Greenidge. Attendance is required. If you know you will be unable to attend with the rest of the class on Friday, November 1, please alert the professor as soon as possible and a ticket for the show on an alternative date will be provided for you.

Professor Bernstein holds office hours on Mondays from 3:15-5pm. You are welcome to drop in, but students with appointments receive priority. You may reserve time online at <http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k53419&pageid=icb.page449095>. If you have class during office hours, please email Professor Bernstein at <rbernst@fas.harvard.edu> to make alternative arrangements.

With a student's consent, meetings during office hours will be "walking meetings." The professor and student will talk while strolling around campus. *Any student may opt for a traditional, "sitting meeting" instead.* If you opt for a sitting meeting, you need not offer any explanation, and no questions will be asked. We will, of course, stay inside during inclement weather. For more information about the intellectual and health benefits of walking meetings,

see Nilofer Merchant, “Sitting is the Smoking of Our Generation,” *Harvard Business Review* 14 January 2013 <http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2013/01/sitting_is_the_smoking_of_our_generation.html>.

Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations should present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

This course adheres to Harvard University policy on permitted collaboration, which reads as follows:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

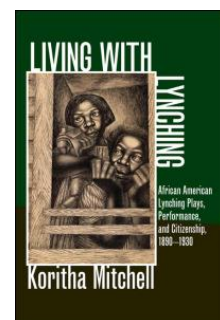
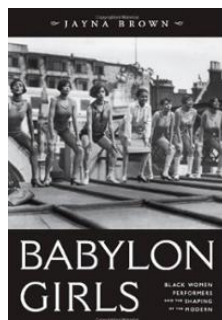
Required Books (all on reserve at Lamont Library and for sale at the Harvard Coop):

Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006)

Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008)

Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011)



SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 4. Introductions

Monday, September 9. Defining Black Theatre

- W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis*, Vol. 32 (October 1926): pp. 290-297. Online at <http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html>
- Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life* Vol. I, No. 1 (November 1928). Online at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text10/lockeartorpropaganda.pdf>

Wednesday, September 11: Introduction to the Harvard Theatre Collection

- Meet at Houghton Library to work with materials from the Harvard Theatre Collection! Please note the following rules for the Houghton Library:
 - * No food or drink is permitted in the Library and all bags, knapsacks, folders and other containers must be placed in lockers. Lockers require quarters to operate, but you will receive your quarter back when leaving.
 - * Students and faculty should bring as little as possible to the Seminar Room itself. Laptop computers are welcome; pencils and paper for note-taking are provided. The lobby guard must inspect all items that seminar participants bring in and out of the Seminar Room.
 - * All classes will be introduced briefly to the repository and provided with basic handling instructions.
 - * The material will be arranged on the Seminar Room table or in a display case. Students can circulate around the table to examine the material closely but books and manuscripts may not be passed from hand to hand.
 - * Equipment (such as scanners or light sources) that rests directly on collection material is not permitted.
- Before class, please view "Handling Harvard's Special Collections," a 4-minute video online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOv0SOQ8B68&feature=youtu.be>
- Before class, please familiarize yourself with "The Harvard Theatre Collection: A Guide for Researchers," online at <http://guides.library.harvard.edu/htc>.
- Read Asli Tekinay, "Theater," *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*. Ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Access through Hollis database, Oxford African American Studies Center.
- Read Kathy A. Perkins, "Theater," *Black Women in America, Second Edition*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Access through Hollis database, Oxford African American Studies Center.



Monday, September 16. Ira Aldridge and His Milieu

- Ira Aldridge, *The Black Doctor* (1847). Access through Hollis databases Literature Online or Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.
- Bernth Lindfors, "The Lives of Ira Aldridge," in Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1807-1833* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2011): 6-17.
- Anna Mae Duane, "'Like a Motherless Child': Racial Education at the New York African Free School and in *My Bondage and My Freedom*," *American Literature* vol. 82, no. 3 (2010): 461-488. Access online through Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost).
- Marvin McAllister, "Late-Night Pleasure Garden for People of Color: Noah's African

Grove," in McAllister, *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies & Gentlemen of Colour: William Brown's African and American Theatre* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 11-38.

Wednesday, September 18. Ira Aldridge and His Milieu

- Meet at Houghton Library for hands-on engagement with primary materials!

Monday, September 23. Resistant Performances in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

- Read all of Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) EXCEPT Chapter 4, "Alien/Nation."

Wednesday, September 25. Resistant Performances in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

- Meet at Houghton Library for hands-on engagement with primary materials!

Monday, September 30. Black Women and Modernism

- Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008)

Wednesday, October 2. Black Women and Modernism

- Meet at Houghton Library for hands-on engagement with primary materials!

Monday, October 7. Early Black Broadway: *In Dahomey*

- Paul Laurence Dunbar, *In Dahomey*, 1902. Access through Hollis database Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.

- Daphne Brooks, “Alien/Nation: Re-Imagining the Black Body (Politic) In Williams and Walker’s *In Dahomey*,” in Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, pp. 207-280.
- Monica White Ndounou, “Early Black Americans on Broadway,” in Harvey Young, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 59-84.
- Guest speaker: Monica White Ndounou, Assistant Professor of Drama and Dance, Tufts University <<http://ase.tufts.edu/drama-dance/faculty/facultyNdounou.asp>>

Wednesday, October 9. Early Black Broadway: *In Dahomey*

- Meet at Houghton Library for hands-on engagement with primary materials!

Monday, October 14. NO CLASS—COLUMBUS DAY

Wednesday, October 16. Escape and Freedom

- William Wells Brown, *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom*, 1858. Access through Hollis database Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.
- Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, *Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad*, 1879. Access through Hollis database Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.
- John Ernest, “The Reconstruction of Whiteness: William Wells Brown’s *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom*,” *PMLA* vol. 113, no. 5 (October 1998): 1108-1121. Access online through JSTOR.
- REVIEW Daphne Brooks, “Divas and Diasporic Consciousness: Song, Dance, and New Negro Womanhood in the Veil,” in Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, pp. 281-342.
- After class, we will visit a Harvard building that contains a secret room that some believe connects to the Underground Railroad. If possible, please arrange so you can spend about half an hour after class ends to participate in this visit.

FRIDAY, October 17, 3pm: Mid-semester paper due to Prof. Bernstein’s mailbox in the Department of African and African American Studies, Barker Center.

Monday, October 21. Slavery, the Gaze, and Performance

- Harvey Young, “Still Standing: Daguerreotypes, Photography, and the Black Body,” in Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010): 26-75.
- Douglas Jones, “Slavery, Performance, and the Design of African American Theatre,” in Harvey Young, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 15-33.

Wednesday, October 23. Slavery, the Gaze, and Performance

- Meet at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 11 Divinity Avenue, Collections Viewing Room B 8 (basement), for hands-on engagement with primary materials! We will work with Ilisa Barbash, Associate Curator of Visual Anthropology, and Pat Kervick, Archivist.

Monday, October 28. Living with Lynching

- Angelina Weld, Grimké, *Rachel* (1915) Access online through Harvard database, Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present
- RECOMMENDED: E. Patrick Johnson, "Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics," *The Drama Review*, 47.2 (Summer 2003): 88-116. Available online through Project Muse or JSTOR.

Wednesday, October 30. Living with Lynching

- Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 2011), Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 5, Conclusion (in other words, pages 1-77, 147-174, 193-199)

FRIDAY, November 1: Class visit to *Splendor*, by Kirsten Greenidge, directed by Shawn LaCount, Boston Center for the Arts, Plaza Theatre, 539 Tremont Street, 8pm. See http://www.companyone.org/Season15/current_season_shows.shtml#Splendor

Monday, November 4. Plays and Playwrights

- Guest speaker: Kirsten Greenidge!
- Kirsten Greenidge, *Rust* (2008). Access online through Hollis database Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.
- Megan Tench, "A Place on Stage for the Quirky: Kirsten Greenidge Aims to Broaden What Counts as Black Drama," *Boston Globe* 16 March 2008. Access online at <
http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2008/03/15/a_place_on_stage_for_the_quirky/?page=full>
- <http://newdramatists.org/kirsten-greenidge>

Wednesday, November 6. Plays and Playwrights

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Spunk*, 1935. Access through Hollis database Black Drama, Second Edition: 1850-Present.
- Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression: Drama," from *Negro: An Anthology*, 1934. In *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, ed. Cheryl Wall (New York: Library of American, 1995), pp. 830-846. Access online through Hollis database Black Thought and Culture.

Monday, November 11. Josephine Baker

- Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Wednesday, November 13.

- Meet at Houghton Library for hands-on engagement with primary materials!

Monday, November 18. **Proposals for final papers due at the beginning of class. Please bring FIVE copies of your proposal.** You will share your proposal with your colleagues in class.

Wednesday, November 20. Coming Attractions: E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea*

- Peruse <http://epatrickjohnson.com/> . Be sure to read <http://epatrickjohnson.com/performances/sweet-tea/> and to view the videos linked to that page.
- E. Patrick Johnson, "From Page to Stage: The Making of *Sweet Tea*," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 32.3 (July 2012): 248-253.
- Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, "Re-Presenting Blackness" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 32.3 (July 2012): 254-258
- Matt Saltzberg, "On Sweet Tea: A Yankee's Response," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 32.3 (July 2012): 259-268.
- Bryant Keith Alexander, "Archiving Performance/Performance as Archive: A Hybrid Book Review and Performance Commentary on E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea*," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 32.3 (July 2012): 269-284.
- HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, Or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21.1 (January 2001): 1-25.
- Please note that E. Patrick Johnson will perform *Sweet Tea* at Harvard on Saturday, February 1, 2014 at 8pm in the Adams Pool Theatre. *Johnson is retiring this show; after 2014 he will never again perform it.* So please mark your calendars now!

Monday, November 25. (Re)Defining Black Theatre

- August Wilson, "National Black Theater Festival, 1997" and "The Ground on Which I Stand," published together in *Callaloo* Vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 483-503. Access online through JSTOR or Project Muse.
- "A Forum on Black Theatre: The Questions: What is a Black Play? and/or What is Playing Black?" *Theatre Journal* Vol. 57, no. 4 (December 2005), pp. 570-616 (note that this is a series of 16 short essays by leading scholars and practitioners of black performance). Access online through Project Muse.
- RECOMMENDED: the rest of this issue of *Theatre Journal*.
- RECOMMENDED: E. Patrick Johnson, "Poor 'Black' Theatre: Mid-America Theatre Conference Keynote Address, March 7 2009," *Theatre History Studies* 30 (June 2010): 1-13. Online through EBSCOHost or Literature Online (Lion).

Wednesday, November 27. NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

Monday, December 2. (Re)Defining Black Theatre

- Aida Overton Walker, "Colored Men and Women on the Stage," 1905.

- W. E. B. Du Bois, "Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre," *The Crisis* 32.3 (July 1926): 134-136. Online at <http://isites.harvard.edu/k89609>
- Alain Locke, "Steps Toward the Negro Theatre," *The Crisis* vol. 25, no. 2 (December 1922), 66-68. Online at <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository2/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1307029316296877&view=pageturner&pageno=18>
- bell hooks, "Performance Practice as a Site of Opposition," in Catherine Ugwu, ed., *Let's Get it On: The Politics of Black Performance* (Bay Press, 1995): 210-221.
- REVIEW W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis*, Vol. 32 (October 1926): pp. 290-297. Online at <http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html>
- REVIEW Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life* Vol. I, No. 1 (November 1928). Online at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text10/lockeartorpropaganda.pdf>
- REVIEW Kortha Mitchell, "Redefining 'Black Theatre,'" in Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 2011): 43-77.

Wednesday, December 4. Wrap-up and discussion of final papers.

WEDNESDAY, December 11, 3pm: Final papers due to Prof. Bernstein's mailbox in the Department of African and African American Studies, Barker Center.



Enjoy your break!