



The Impact of Race: Theatre and Culture

By Jr., Woodie King

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Here is a major work by a contemporary American artist at the top of his game. Woodie King, Jr.'s book is an impassioned stand against racism, sexism and classism in theatre and culture. King has been an active producer and director in the trenches for social justice through Black theatre for 35 years. As he says, "I am a witness, I was there." The retelling of his history serves a purpose, as King calls on young Black artists to start their own theatre, and provides the inspiration and advice for them to do so. King explores the politics of art, the funding for Black organizations, the critics' reviews of Black theatre, and the way in which awards are handed out, among many other pertinent topics. *The Impact of Race* provides readers with a mosaic of current thinking in Black culture. Specific entries range from producing James Brown in concert in Liberia, an essay on jazz, the Japanese engagement of the musical *Shades of Harlem*, and August Wilson's notorious 1996 keynote address at the national Theatre Communications Group conference. This is a powerful reference for those who want to know more about those who wish to be heard, but who have had to struggle just to speak.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sometimes, while reading King's book on black America and theater, readers may start feeling like they're flipping through the pages of a stage manager's notebook. Names, productions, more names and a litany of economic concerns abound; with the exception of the introductory chapter and a few others, this is little but a record of what has been created on the stage and who has been responsible for creating it. But perhaps, in a world where black theater is still scarce and severely underfunded, that's enough. King isn't interested in proposing grand theories or constructing coherent arguments. Instead, the founder and producing director of New York's New Federal Theatre does what every great director must do: he looks around at his resources and comes up with a way to build. He writes, "What we're trying to do down here in the Lower East Side of New York is turn bricks into sentences, suppressed intellectual energy into art." Alas, King occasionally diverges from this voice and rambles on about the various playwrights and productions he's encountered throughout his career, which will hold the attention of only practitioners of theater or those who study it. However, there are some shining moments of clarity, as when King considers how grand and important his work and the work of other black thespians has been. He is nothing short of visionary: "A kind of first anger in the art and the films may be just tough enough and honest enough to save us all." B&w photos not seen by PW.

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