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**The emergence and development of the black dramatic actress,
1890–1917**

Tanner, Jo Ann, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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A

THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE BLACK DRAMATIC ACTRESS, 1890-1917
by
JO A. TANNER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1989

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLACK DRAMATIC ACTRESS, 1890-1917

by

Jo A. Tanner

Adviser: Professor Stanley A. Warren

It was not until the 1890s, in Black musicals, that Black women gained real prominence on the American stage. Later, some made a transition from musicals to straight dramatic plays. This study will examine the theatrical activity of selected Black women (from the more than 200 recorded) who performed on the mainstream professional stage and on the professional Black stage (e.g., the Lafayette Theatre) in New York from 1890-1917. What was the impact of these entertainers on the image and development of the Black performer, on the development of Black musical comedy and legitimate drama, and on the evolution of mainstream American theatre, itself?

A direct almost evolutionary line can be traced from the Black musicals of the 1890s to Ridgeley Torrence's Three Plays for a Negro Theatre (1917),

the first dramatic presentation on the Broadway stage in America in which Black actresses appeared. A number of these actresses began their careers in Black musical shows at the turn of the century, careers that would last over forty years. These turn-of-the-century actresses helped to lay the foundation for the contemporary Black actress. Of particular significance are those who did make the successful transition from musicals to dramas, and refuted the generally held-belief that while Black performers were natural singers and dancers, they did not possess the ability to portray dramatic characters. In so doing, they began the odyssey of the evolving performing pattern of many a Black dramatic actress. The study will provide a sampling of these performers.

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Introduction

Originally, the focus of the study was to be on the emergence and development of the Black dramatic actress. Research has revealed, however, that prior to 1917 Black performers had little opportunity professionally to act in serious plays. On the other hand, since late 19th century minstrelsy, Blacks have been accepted on the professional stage as singers, dancers, and comedians. Therefore, the project has been expanded to include singers and dancers.

It was not until the 1890s, in Black musicals, that Black women gained real prominence on the American stage. Later, some made a transition from musicals to straight dramatic plays. This study will examine the theatrical activity of selected Black women (from the more than 200 recorded) who performed on the mainstream professional stage and on the professional Black stage (e.g., the Lafayette Theatre) in New York from 1890-1917. What was the impact of these entertainers on the image and development of the Black performer,

on the development of Black musical comedy and legitimate drama, and on the evolution of mainstream American theatre, itself?

A direct almost evolutionary line can be traced from the Black musicals of the 1890s to Ridgeley Torrence's Three Plays for a Negro Theatre (1917), the first dramatic presentation on the Broadway stage in America in which Black actresses appeared. A number of these actresses began their careers in Black musical shows at the turn of the century, careers that would last over forty years. These turn-of-the-century actresses helped to lay the foundation for the contemporary Black actress. Of particular significance are those who did make the successful transition from musicals to dramas, and refuted the generally held-belief that while Black performers were natural singers and dancers, they did not possess the ability to portray dramatic characters. The study will provide a sampling of these performers.

According to Willia Daughtry in her dissertation, Sissieretta Jones: A Study of the Negro's Contribution to Nineteenth Century American Concert and Theatrical Life,

The attributes and achievements assigned to Negro

men and women of the 19th and 20th century American stage would seem to presuppose their recognition by the journals, dictionaries, and biographical references of their time on a basis equal to that of white performers. This is not the case, however. The records of Negro performers have fallen into an undeserved obscurity, a situation which does not apply for the most mediocre white performer of this period.

This omission of Black women performers is widespread and occurs in books on theatrical musical history, such as The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle by Gerald M. Bordman and Musical Comedy in America by Cecil Smith and Glenn Litton. Basic histories of American Theatre and of the New York stage, if they do not omit Black women, barely mention them. For example, note George C. D. Odell's Annals of the New York Stage, Thomas Allston Brown's A History of the New York Stage from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901; A History of American Acting by Garff B. Wilson; Stephen M. Archer's American Actors and Actresses: A Guide to Information Sources; and Barnard Hewitt's Theatre U.S.A., 1668-1959. Histories of Blacks in American Theatre, among them Edith Isaacs' The Negro in the American Theatre, Lofton Mitchell's Black Drama, and James Haskins' Black Theater in American, do include some references to women, but to date there has been no study that has focused attention primarily on women.

The criteria used for selecting the women for detailed study are these: 1) Women who began their careers in turn-of-the-century musical shows and went on to perform in dramatic productions on the professional stage. 2) A significant number and variety of performances for each entertainer. 3) Women who began their theatrical careers as singers and dancers in turn-of-the-century musical shows and made significant contributions to the evolution of the Black artist in American Theatre and abroad. 4) Availability of material on individual performers.

Critical documentation in this study is of three types: (1) reactions of contemporary critics, (2) reactions of critics of today, (3) this researcher's analysis of materials.

Materials for the study include articles, reviews, plays, playbills, personal scrapbooks, dissertations, books, bibliographies, and taped interviews. However, because full biographical data on Black women entertainers of this period is often lacking, I have tried to piece together biographies relying on varying sources. Even so, some details of lives and careers must remain sketchy, e.g., several dates of birth and death. In addition, other apparent gaps in biographies or

names are mainly due to one of two reasons: (1) What the performer was doing is not documented, or (2) The woman dropped out and was not involved with performance at the time.

Available bibliographies on Black performers, such as Eileen Southern's Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians, Henry Sampson's Blacks in Blackface: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows, Edward Mapp's Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts, and Rayford Logan's and Michael Winston's Directory of American Negro Biography, only begin to suggest the number of women involved. Each bibliography does contain some entries on female performers, but none is concerned exclusively with the Black woman performer. Therefore, as a corollary to the study I have constructed an annotated directory of Black women performers, 1821-1946, which may prove of value to other researchers. This compilation (of more than 400 entries) consists mostly of women who performed on the New York stage, but it does include women who performed both nationally and internationally; it appears as an Appendix.

Throughout this dissertation, the terms "African-American," "Afro-American," "Black," "Black American,"

"colored," and "Negro" are used synonymously to refer to Americans of African descent. The terms "colored" and "Negro," which lately have been considered derogatory, are used when historically appropriate.

Chapter 2 provides necessary background material covering the Black woman in America from 1890-1917. Chapter 3, a historical overview of Black Theatre, highlights the role of the Black woman. Chapter 4 is a historical sketch of the lives and careers of Black women performers prior to 1890. Chapter 5 focuses on the involvement and participation of Black women performers in Black theatricals from 1890-1917. Chapter 6 features the lives and careers of three turn-of-the-century Black women singers and dancers who made significant contributions in the evolution of the Black artist. Chapter 7 traces the growth of the Black dramatic actress 1890-1917. Chapter 8, the Conclusion, is followed by the Appendix and a Bibliography.

II

The Black Woman in America, 1890-1917

"The black woman is the forgotten heroine of our history," writes feminist historian Gerda Lerner.¹ She continues:

Sentimentalized and stereotyped as the "Mammy" of fiction, the black woman has never yet received her due. Her accomplishment in bearing her hard lot without rancor and caring for the master's offspring with warmth and affection, and in providing her own family with whatever stability was possible, was truly remarkable.²

Like White women, Black women were denied the ballot until 1920.³ One of the conspicuous facts concerning the history of Black women is that they have been faced with double discrimination. In addition to sharing all the restrictions of sex oppression with White women, they have been further handicapped by the restrictions of race oppression shared in common by Black Americans.

The generation of Blacks following the failure of Reconstruction governments and the Compromise of 1877 experienced increasing discrimination and prejudice, especially in the South, writes August Meier. "Through

violence, fraud, and complicated registration and voting procedures," says Meier, "Negro political influence was effectively curtailed in the Southern states."⁴

In 1890, Mississippi became the first state to include disfranchisement laws in its constitution. During the 1880s and 1890s other Southern states adopted segregated school and railroad systems. Lynchings, mostly in the South, peaked during the 1880s and early 1890s averaging 150 yearly and reaching 235 in 1892.⁵

Even though Blacks in the North held on to their civil and political rights legally, their position was only little better than Blacks in the South. In 1883, after the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, most Northern states enacted legislation supporting the fourteenth amendment, which prohibited discrimination in public places.⁶ "Such laws, however, were often of little value in the face of hostile public opinion, relatively few cases came before the courts, and local customs, particularly in areas contiguous to the South, often acted as an effective deterrent to the exercise of the rights guaranteed by legislation," explains Meier.⁷

By 1880, Northern Blacks had established their right to an education, and by 1900, had achieved legal

integration in public schools. Black teachers, however, were often not permitted to work in "the mixed school system." Moreover, along the Mason-Dixon line and in the Ohio Valley, education laws were usually ignored. The economic picture for Blacks in the nation was bleak. In the North, they were limited to unskilled labor and menial jobs, while most Blacks in the South continued to barely earn a living as laborers and share-croppers. Both Northern and Southern unions and urban employers practiced discrimination. Unions became segregated during the 1890s, causing Black workers in skilled trades to decline in the South. Also, Northern Blacks were being replaced by immigrants in domestic service.⁸

After Reconstruction, reconciliation between the states was the main political issue. With the rise of nationalism throughout the country also came increased anti-Black prejudice. "By the end of the century," observes Meier, "public opinion in the North had come to feel that Negroes were an inferior race, unfitted for franchise, and that white domination was justified."⁹ Furthermore, the Republican party, which had originally championed the cause of Black folk, began to accept the discriminatory practices

of the South. By the late nineteenth century, the growth of industrialism in the South, the change in social reform attitudes, the rise in anti-Black sentiment, and the strong emphasis on economic development as a symbol of success had influenced Black thinking. As Whites grew more hostile, Blacks reacted by adopting racial solidarity, self-help doctrines, and better economic development as more effective ways of obtaining racial advancement than integration and politics.¹⁰

Meier concludes:

Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise of 1895, summing up--in a phraseology acceptable to the dominant elements of the New South--the shift in Negro thought from political to economic action, from immediate integration and protest to self-help, and from rights to duties; and uniting Northern and Southern whites and Negroes upon a common, even if ambiguous, platform, expressed Negro accommodation to the social conditions, implicit in the earlier Compromise of 1877.¹¹

Because of the social and cultural issues, questions, and dilemmas concerning Blacks at the turn of the century, they were faced with the problem of defining and clarifying their status. Due to their cultural history in American society, however, Blacks experienced what Black scholar and founding editor of The Crisis W. E. B. DuBois refers to as "double consciousness." Writing in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), DuBois

states:

. . . the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American nation,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecoiled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹²

From 1865 to 1917, nearly 90 percent of all Black Americans lived in the South, according to LaFrances Rodgers-Rose. They made up 30 percent of the total Southern population; more than half of them lived in counties that were 50 percent or more Black. As late as 1900, the life expectancy of Black women was only 33.5 years. Rodgers-Rose correlates the early deaths of Black women to the high mortality rate among Black infants.¹³ Yet, the first generation of Black women after slavery were making progress in controlling their lives. They were marrying later and having fewer children, notes Paula Giddings.¹⁴

At the turn of the century, most Black women were married and living with their husbands. Even though racial oppression deeply affected family life, establishing patterns different from the prevailing

male-dominated family of White Americans, families headed by Black women from slavery to 1960 never exceeded 25 percent. More female-headed households, however, existed in urban areas than in rural areas.¹⁵

There did, however, develop the extended family structure. "Extended families include other relatives or in-laws of the family head, sharing the same household with the nuclear family," explains sociologist Andrew Billingsley.¹⁶ In spite of its origins, there was an advantage to the development of this type of Black family pattern. "This family structure, in which all children, regardless of the marital or economic status of their families, are ensured a modicum of security," writes Lerner, "represents a useful adaptation for group survival by an economically depressed community."¹⁷

Due to racial discrimination, most Black men have been economically oppressed. Consequently, in contrast to White women who came into the job market in large numbers only in the 20th century, many Black women had to work to take care of themselves and their families. Because of race and sex restrictions, the job opportunities available to Black women were limited. The first Black female lawyer graduated in 1887 and

some Black women physicians were practicing as early as the 1860s.¹⁸ At the end of the first decade of the 20th century, however, there were only two Black women attorneys compared to 796 Black men. Out of 3,007 Black doctors, only 333 were women. Of all female workers, only 1 percent or 22,450 were teachers. There were 135 Black bankers, but only 13 were women.¹⁹

For the most part, Black women earned their living working in menial occupations. Out of a labor force of 2,013,981 Black female workers, 1,828,124 were relegated to three categories: "By 1910, the percentage of Black women in agriculture had dropped to 52, but over 90 percent of all Black female workers were in agriculture or working as servants (21 percent), or laundresses (18 percent), not in laundries," notes Rodgers-Rose.²⁰

From 1890 to 1910, nearly 200,000 Blacks left the farms and migrated to the cities, both Northern and Southern.²¹ Most were employed as servants, janitors, waiters, and laundresses, writes Seth Scheiner. By 1890, in New York City, 70 percent of all Black men were either personal or domestic servants compared to 25 percent of foreign-born men and 20 percent of the city's male population. On the other hand, Black

women were employed as domestics to a greater degree than all other New Yorkers. In addition, when they entered the industrial field, Black women were placed in the least desirable positions at the poorest pay. By 1910, only 4.2 percent of the city's married White women worked compared to 31.4 percent of the city's married Black women. From 1890 to 1920, a higher rate of widowhood among New York's Black women than among foreign and native born women was one of the factors that forced them to seek employment.²²

Lerner observes that "the only hope for a [Black] girl to escape the unskilled, service job trap was in getting a professional education."²³ During this time, one of the few educational opportunities open to Black women was teaching. Black women attended both Black and White colleges including Wellesley, Radcliffe, Cornell, and Oberlin, among others both here and abroad. In an attempt to overcome some of the political, social, and economic problems facing Black women enrolled in college, the two largest sororities were founded: Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta in 1911 and 1913, respectively.²⁴

After graduating, many of these women went on to help educate their people. Among them was Lucy

Laney, who in 1886 started the Haines Normal Institute in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1902 Charlotte Hawkins Brown founded a school for Black girls, the Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina. In 1904, Mary McLeod Bethune began a school on a garbage dump in Daytona Beach, Florida. Today, it is the well-known Bethune-Cookman College.²⁵ Both Brown and Bethune were proteges of Lucy Laney.²⁶ "Although growing numbers of Black women had the opportunity to enter college and the professions, the masses of Black women were still relegated to domestic and menial work," writes Giddings. "They were excluded from such job categories as clerk and secretary, newly opened to women (who were being hired to replace men at lower wages), because White women wanted them."²⁷

According to Lerner, the sexual exploitation of Black women by White men is a key feature of racial oppression in America that has continued from slavery until the late 1960s when it was checked by the rise of the militancy of the Black nationalist movement.²⁸ "The issue of sexual oppression, more than any other issue," writes Lerner, "differentiates the history of black women from that of black men and white women."²⁹ In an attempt to justify the myth that Black women

were totally responsible for their own victimization, regardless of class, they were stereotyped as being immoral.³⁰ As Giddings puts it, "at a time when their White peers were riding the wave of moral superiority that sanctioned their activism, Black women were seen as immoral scourges."³¹ Summing up the dominant attitudes toward Black women, Giddings quotes material published in The Independent, a contemporary newspaper, "'Like White women,' one writer said, 'Black women had the brains of a child, the passions of a woman,' but unlike Whites, Black women were 'steeped in centuries of ignorance and savagery, and wrapped about with immoral vices.'"³² (No date available.)

This was the time for Black women to defend their moral integrity. One of the first public opportunities to do so came during The World Columbian Exposition of 1893. Even though Haiti participated in the exhibit featuring women's accomplishments,³³ "Afro-Americans as a group were not allowed to participate. Black women were told by the board of Lady Managers [the group that selected the participants] that only national women's organizations could take part."³⁴ However, a few Black women, the "exceptions," speakers who were considered "safe" by the Lady Managers, were

invited. Among them, Fannie Barrier Williams, who was born of middle-class parents, graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music, and was one of the few Black members of the Chicago Women's Club, did not side-step the issue.³⁵ She told her audience, "I regret the necessity of speaking of the moral question of our women, . . . the morality of our home life has been commented on so disparagingly and meanly that we are placed in the unfortunate position of being defenders of our name."³⁶ Anna Julia Cooper, a Black writer and educator, also attended the event. "What White feminists hardly realized," observes Giddings, "was that Black women were providing them a means for their own liberation. For inherent in the Black women's defense of their integrity was a challenge to the Victorian ideas that kept all women oppressed."³⁷

As indicated above, during the 1890s one of the problems of racism was the lynching of Black men who were usually charged with raping White women. Ida B. Wells, an educator and Black spokesperson for women's rights and civil rights, linked the sexual oppression of Black women with the lynching (racial oppression) of Black men, which reinforced the double sex standards. A most outspoken fighter against lynching, Wells had

always been a person who demanded justice. In 1884, Wells was dragged from her seat in the "Ladies' Coach" on a train to Memphis because she refused to sit in the smoking car. She sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad and won.³⁸ "Wells was the first Afro-American to challenge the 1883 nullification of the Civil Rights Bill passed during Reconstruction," writes Giddings. "Her victory would have set a significant precedent--a fact not lost on the Tennessee Supreme Court, which reversed the lower court's decision."³⁹

During the 1880s, there were nearly 200 Black newspapers and Wells' articles "about everything from compelling national issues to local community ones,"⁴⁰ appeared in the best papers. In 1891, after she was fired from her teaching job for writing an article in the Memphis Free Press exposing discrimination in the Memphis school system, Wells (whose pen name was "Iola"), began writing full-time. As she was investigating 728 cases of lynching that had taken place during the last ten years, two more occurred. Angered, Wells took to the press and told the readers, "Nobody in this section of the country believed the threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach

themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction. A conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women."⁴¹

Wells, who was in New York when the editorial appeared, was banned from returning to the South. She purchased a gun and began raising money to publish her findings in a booklet entitled "Southern Horror: Lynch Law in All Its Phases." On 5 June 1892, the New York Age printed her article on lynching. The study, which included cases involving women and children, reported "names, dates, places, and circumstances of hundreds of lynchings for alleged rape. The response to the article was sensational and Fortune [the editor] published ten thousand copies of the issue; one thousand were sold in the streets of Memphis alone."⁴² A good businesswoman, Wells used her 3,000 name subscription list from the Free Press, of which she was part owner, to buy one-fourth of the New York Age.⁴³

Wells toured the Northern states and the British Isles speaking against lynching and for women's rights, gaining international attention. After returning from England, Wells attended the Columbian Exposition where she, Frederick Douglass, and her husband-to-be, Ferdinand Barnett, a lawyer and publisher of The

Conservator, Chicago's first Black newspaper, distributed their pamphlet on "The Reason Why The Colored American Is Not in the Columbian Exposition."⁴⁴

On Wells' second trip to England, after the Exposition, she accused liberal White Americans of condoning lynching. Frances Willard, the liberal president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, was also in England at the time. Angered by Wells' comment, Willard and Lady Somerset, her English counterpart, tried to keep Wells from the press. In America, Wells did receive bad press.⁴⁵ "The New Times ran an article insisting that Black men were prone to rape, and that Wells was a 'slanderous and nasty-minded mulatress, who was looking for more 'income' than 'outcome.'"⁴⁶ The negative responses of the American press to Wells' charges served to rally the English to her cause. As one British editor writes, "It is idle for men to say that the conditions which Miss Wells describes do not exist."⁴⁷ This trip to England, which was a personal triumph for Wells, had an impact on the anti-lynching campaign. Several of the British elite joined the British Anti-Lynching Committee, making their influence available to her here and abroad. Through the efforts of Wells, lynchings

declined in 1893 and continued to do so. Inspired by Wells' determination and success, other Black women began to organize on behalf of Blacks and women.⁴⁸ Both Giddings and Lerner credit Ida B. Wells with being the catalyst which provided the platform that sparked the Black women's clubs movement.

In 1895, Josephine St. Piere Ruffin, wife of the first Black judge in Massachusetts and a Black member of the New England Women's Club,⁴⁹ called for a national convention of Black women in Boston. In July, over 100 women from ten states attended, forming the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Margaret Murray Washington, Booker T. Washington's third wife, was elected president. Meanwhile, Mary Church Terrell, the daughter of one of the first Black millionaires, had founded the League of Colored Women in Washington, D.C. In 1896, the two groups joined, forming the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the first national Black organization, predating the NAACP (1909) and the National Urban League (1911). By 1916, the club represented over 50,000 women in more than 1,000 clubs.⁵⁰ Giddings notes the similarities between the NACW and

its White counterpart, the General Federation of Women's Clubs:

the membership of both organizations consisted mostly of middle-class educated women who were steeped in the Protestant ethic. Neither group questioned the superiority of middle-class values or way of life, or had any romantic notions of the inherent nobility of the poor, uneducated masses; education and material progress were values that Black and White women shared. Black and White women saw the family as a microcosm and cornerstone of society. In the broadest sense, this idea imbued all female reformers with a new self-awareness and a stronger sense of importance.⁵¹

Although both groups were concerned with social reform and women's rights, the Black women understood that the gaining of their rights was bound to advancing the civil rights of all Black Americans. These women accepted the responsibility of uplifting their people. Their aim, said Terrell, was to "build the foundation of the next generation upon such a rock of morality, intelligence and strength, that the floods of proscription, prejudice and persecution may descend upon it in torrents and yet it will not be moved."⁵²

The NACW achieved a number of accomplishments in a short time. By 1916 they had provided scholarship

loans for women to attend college; aided toward employment and training for both urban and rural Blacks; founded health care centers and child care programs. The breakthroughs of the NACW were also reflected in the social and artistic achievements of Black women at large. They were being recognized in literature: Emma Dunham Kelly's novel Megda (1891), Frances Ellen Harper's Iola Leroy (1892), and Pauline Hopkins' Contending Forces (1900). Alice Dunbar Nelson published two volumes of poetry, Violets and Other Tales (1894) and The Goodness of St. Tocque (1899). Marie Selika⁺ and Flora Batson⁺ were breaking into the classical music field.⁵³ As Giddings points out,

It may have been no coincidence that during the same years that Black women began demanding to be recognized as "an integral part of the general womanhood of American civilization" . . . , they also began to express the full range of their artistic talents. As the club movement shattered the stereotypes of Black women, so did the women emerge in a new light. By the turn of the century, The Creole Show became the first theatrical production to break with the minstrel tradition and the first production to feature attractively costumed, "glamorous" Black women.⁵⁴

This landmark production paved the way for Black female stars like Sissieretta Jones,⁺ Dora Dean,⁺ Ida Forsythe,⁺ Laura Bowman,⁺ Anita Bush,⁺ and Abbie Mitchell.⁺ Because of such developments, they gained

prominence and respect on the American stage. As Ada Overton Walker⁺ (wife of the famous comic George Walker and a star in her own right) points out, the Black woman "no longer lost her dignity when she entered the theater."⁵⁵

III

Overview of the Development of the Black Theatre

Show business provided a major opportunity for Blacks to merge into mainstream American society. However, the Black performer and American show business have endured a symbiotic, but bittersweet, relationship. Despite their many contributions, Black entertainers have generally been restricted to performing within a prescribed framework that permits only limited opportunity and acceptance. Allan Morrison, in an article called "One Hundred Years of Negro Entertainment," describes the paradox of the Black performer.

It is one of the supreme ironies of history that the Negro, whose folklore furnished the authentic core of popular culture in the United States and shaped its growth, should have had to fight against odds and obstacles to make his contribution to the performing arts and to express his talent. The vitality of the Negro's influence on American music, dance and drama has been irresistible, its impact profound and lasting.¹

Due to the impact of racism and sexism, participation in American theatre by Black women has been severely

restricted. According to Jeanne-Marie Miller, in an article entitled "Images of Black Women in Plays by Black Playwrights," Blacks have "been depicted most often as negative stereotypes: the contented slave, the wretched freeman, the comic Negro, and the exotic primitive."² Miller continues:

Black female characters have been scarce in only one of these categories--the brute Negro. They have been more plentiful as the faithful servant. In American drama, where seemingly many more roles have been written for men than women, Black or white, it is the Black female who has faced double discrimination--that of sex and race.³

The first Black female character appeared on the American stage as a comic servant in William Milns' All in a Bustle or The New House on 29 January 1798 at the Park Theatre in New York.⁴ This farce:

describes the difficulties under which John Hodgkins labored as stage manager of the new theatre. The jealousy of the actresses as to their dressing rooms is well portrayed, and there is a "black wench" who, in the intervals of waiting on them, falls⁵ on the scenery and wipes it up with her head.

A White actress played the part; at the time, Black women were not allowed to perform on the professional stage. In 1823, a Black woman did "perform," as a comic servant, on the American stage. Edwin Forrest was preparing to play the role of Rubin, a Black, in a farce, The Tailor in Distress, at the Globe Theatre

in Cincinnati. Unable to find a White actress willing to blacken her face, he hired an old Black washerwoman to assist him. It is reported that they were hilarious and Forrest was a success.⁶

In this period in New York, Blacks, who were not welcome in the legitimate theatre as either audience or artists, attempted to establish their own theatre. In August of 1821, the African Grove, a garden where Blacks could enjoy light refreshments, opened at the corner of Bleecker and Mercer Streets. The following month, in September, the African Theatre (the upper apartment of the African Grove) opened in conjunction with the tea garden.⁷ Between 1821 and 1823, William Brown, a West Indian, managed the African Theatre. This semiprofessional stock acting group performed Richard III, Othello, and Tom and Jerry or, Life In London, as well as "opera," pantomime, and original material.⁸

The first presentation given by the African Company was an adaptation of Richard III. Because the White press found these actors and their efforts a subject for ridicule, the reviews may not give an accurate impression of their performances. Nonetheless, the 21 September 1821 edition of the National Advocate

satirically reports:

. . . a little dapper, woolly-headed waiter at the City Hotel personated the royal Plantagenet. As may be supposed, some difficulties occurred in the cast of characters and suitable costumes. Richard III had some robes made up from discarded merino curtains of the ball-rooms; and from a paucity of actors, some doublets occurred, as these: King Henry and the Duchess Dowager were represented by one and the same person, while Lady Ann and Catesby were sustained by another. The room was decorated with some taste, and chairs were placed by the wings for clarionets.

The person of Richard was on the whole not amiss; it was perceived that the actor had made the King hump-backed instead of crooked back, having literally a hump behind his neck little less than a camel's. Shaping "the legs of unequal size" was also difficult, but was overcome by placing false calves before, and wearing a high-heeled shoe. The entrance of Richard was greeted with loud applause and shaking of handkerchiefs by the black ladies in the front seats and many whispers went around of "How well he looks." . . . Several fashionable songs, sung with no mean taste, concluded the evenings amusement, and the sable audience retired peaceable to their homes. Richard and Catesby were unfortunately taken up by the watch [i.e. they were arrested].⁹

Black women were an integral part of the company.

Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer have an undated playbill for the African Company in their book Black Magic. The evening's bill presented Tom & Jerry, or, Life in London, with a Miss Peterson playing Miss Tartan; a Miss Johnson was Jane and later on, in the last scene, she doubled as Mr. Davis; a Miss Davis also played a male part, Cate, and a Miss Foot was

Sue. The program also included On the Slave Market, Songs & Dances, and ended with the pantomime of OBI; or, Three Finger'd Jack. The house seated 300 to 400 patrons, and the prices for this performance were 75¢, 50¢, and 37½¢ for the box, pit, and gallery, respectively.¹⁰ George C. D. Odell's Annals of the New York Stage includes a playbill, dated 1 October 1821, announcing a benefit for the company's leading actor, James Hewlett. The evening's offering included Richard III, with a Miss S. Welsh playing both the Prince of Wales and Lady Ann and a Miss J. Welsh as Elizabeth. There was also a pantomime, Asama by Hewlett, in which Miss S. Welsh played Asana and Hewlett played Asama, and a ballet, with Miss S. Welsh as Columbine.¹¹ As the popularity of the African Theatre grew, Whites began to attend. In order to "accommodate" them, the 27 October 1821 edition of the National Advocate reports that "they have graciously made a partition at the back of their house for the accommodation of the whites."¹²

In January of 1822, the African Company moved to the hotel next door to the Park Theatre, challenging the White theatre establishment. This intrusion did not go unnoticed by Whites. They reacted immediately,

showing this troupe that they were not welcome. The 10 January 1822 edition of the American reports that "the audiences were generally of a riotous character, and amused themselves by throwing crackers on the stage, and cracking their jokes with the actors, until danger from fire and civil discord rendered it necessary to break up the establishment."¹³ Defying the police, they continued to act nightly. During a performance of Richard III, however, they were arrested and jailed. The group was released only after "they plead [sic] so hard in blank verse, and promised [sic] never to act Shakespeare again that the Police Magistrates released them at a very late hour."¹⁴

Another account of this incident is described in Memoir and Theatrical Career of Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius, published in 1849:

One Stephen Price, a manager of some repute, became acutally jealous of the success of the "real Ethiopians" and emissaries were employed to put them down. They attracted considerable notice; and people who went to ridicule remained to admire, albeit there must have been ample scope for the suggestion of the ridiculous. Riots ensued, and destruction fell upon the little theatre. Of course, there was no protection or redress to be obtained from the magistracy (for, unhappily, they were whites), and the company dissolved, much to the chargin of the Juliet elect, who declared that nothing but envy prevented the blacks from putting the whites completely out of countenance.¹⁵

The African Company did not dissolve, moving back to the theatre on Bleecker and Mercer streets where they continued to perform. A last public notice of the troupe announced a benefit for Brown, the manager, on 20 and 21 June 1823. For this program, they presented King Shotaway. Written by William Brown and featuring Hewlett as Shotaway, the play is significant as the first American drama by a Black playwright.¹⁶ King Shotaway chronicled some of Brown's experiences with the insurrection of the Caravs against the British on the Island of St. Vincent.¹⁷ Odell acknowledges the event, saying "First Negro drama, Hail!"¹⁸ The African Theatre was forced to close due to rowdy White spectators, but James Hewlett continued to entertain until 1831. On 22 September, Mrs. Hewlett accompanied her husband, on piano, at his retirement benefit at Columbian Hall.¹⁹

Despite its brief and turbulent existence, the African Company encouraged the development of the talents of the great Black tragedian Ira Aldridge. "Aldridge made his acting debut at the theatre in Mercer Street in 1820 or 1821 as Rolla in Pizarro. He also performed Romeo, and his work in the African Theatre helped him decide to become an actor."²⁰

From the 1849 Memoir, we learn that the actress who played Cora opposite Aldridge's Rolla "' was very black, requiring no small quantity of whiting, yellow ochre, and vermilion to bring her cheeks to the hue of roses and lilies', such a face as Sheridan describes in the text."²¹ Unfortunately, the names of the actresses who played Cora and Juliet were not mentioned. As with the identities of other Black women in American theatre, they are lost to history.

During the same time of the suppression of the African Theatre, a new image of Black Americans began to appear on the stage, an image that would dominate until the turn of the century. Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock observe a connection between the two occurrences.

Growing reaction throughout the country and the hardening of white prejudice against the blacks carried with it the demise of the Negro theatre, but curiously, it was at this very time (1823) that the white actor, Edwin Forrest, "represented on the stage the Southern plantation Negro with all his peculiarities of dress, gait, accent, dialect, and manners". So the genuine Negro performers in America were forced out to make way for the white "nigger minstrels", .
22
. .

Blacks entering show business after slavery had two objectives: "first, to make money to help educate

our younger ones," points out pioneer entertainer Tom Fletcher," and second, to try to break down the ill feeling that existed toward the colored people."²³ Early Black performers knew that they would be confronted with contempt and scorn. Nevertheless, they eagerly accepted the challenge of embarking on an uncharted, yet promising, path. By so doing, they began the odyssey that led to the development of the Black theatre.

The Black performer made his debut on the professional legitimate stage in the late 1860s in minstrelsy,²⁴ the most popular form of entertainment during the mid-nineteenth century. The humor and laughter of the Southern plantation slave was encouraged by the master. According to Margaret Butcher,

Because the comic side of the Negro offered no offense or challenge to the South's tradition of the Negro's subordinate status, it richly colored Southern local and regional culture, and eventually that of the whole nation. The impoverished plantation entertainment of ragamuffin groups of dancing, singing, jigging, and grinning slaves, was the genesis of a major form of the American theater: blackface minstrelsy and its later stepchild, vaudeville. Together they dominated the national stage for a period of at least seventy years (1830-1900).²⁵

At a time when slavery and race were main issues in the country, minstrels provided an antidote for

some deep-seated racial and sociological problems. Minstrelsy, with its negative stereotypical images of Blacks, emphasized the differences between Blacks and Whites, differences that assured the White "common" man of his identity and status. It was no accident that black-face entertainment dominated the American stage during this period.²⁶ "The minstrel show," notes Robert Toll, "in which white entertainers blackened their faces and literally acted out images of Negroes that satisfied their patrons, provided its primarily Northern white audiences with a non-threatening way to work out their feelings about race and slavery."²⁷

In addition to establishing Blacks in show business, minstrelsy provided theatrical experience for a generation of Black entertainers who could not have received this essential training from another source. Nonetheless, despite the theatrical training, Morrison concludes that minstrelsy also performed a disservice:

Minstrelsy left a damaging imprint on entertainment in the United States because it caricatured Negro life and pictured the Negro as an irresponsible, grinning, banjo-playing and dancing type devoid of dignity and depth. . . . terrible damage had [also] been done to the image of the Negro entertainer: he had been forced to don a mask decreed by white society. . . . For nearly a century, Negro entertainers strove to rid themselves of the stigma symbolized by the mask they had to wear.²⁸

Except as comic relief, there was little interest by White playwrights in Blacks as dramatic material until just before the Civil War. The emotional and moral issue of slavery prompted Harriet Beecher Stowe to write the novel Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Six months after publication, without Stowe's permission, the novel was adapted by George L. Aiken into a play.²⁹ Blacks and the conflicts of slavery were brought to the American stage.

Besides minstrelsy, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853), one of the most popular plays of the mid-nineteenth century, provided one of the earliest opportunities for Blacks to appear on the legitimate stage.³⁰ The way in which the Black woman was depicted in the drama of the Civil War period was directly related to the way in which she was viewed in American culture. The prototype female character of this era was Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin. "George L. Aiken, adapter of the best-known version of Uncle Tom's Cabin, heightened the sentimentality and the melodrama," according to Lofton Mitchell. "His treatment of the character Topsy lacked Mrs. Stowe's understanding and it was, in fact, close to black-face minstrelsy."³¹ The stock character, whose purpose was to authenticate scenes,

create atmosphere and comedy, or provide contrast to the virtues and vices of White characters, helped to establish a pattern for the portrayal of Afro-American women on the stage.

Montgomery Gregory, feels that Uncle Tom's Cabin helped to promote stereotyping in the stage image of Black Americans.

Although Uncle Tom's Cabin passed into obscurity, Topsy survived. She was blissfully ignorant of any ancestors but she has given a fearful progeny. With her, popular dramatic interest in the Negro changed from serious moralistic drama to the comic phase. We cannot say that as yet the public taste has generally recovered from this descent from sentimentalism to grotesque comedy, and from that in turn to farce, mimicry and sheer burlesque. The earliest expression of Topsy's baneful influence is to be found in the Minstrels.³²

In the period after the Civil War, Uncle Tom's Cabin was possibly the most produced play in America. The show was so successful that touring companies, called "Tommers" or "Tom Shows," traveled throughout the country presenting versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the 1870s Tommer troupes began to incorporate material from minstrel shows, as well as novelties and their own special features (including Black spirituals and up to one hundred Black jubilee singers), in the productions.³³ Ironically, even though Uncle Tom's Cabin depicted the stereotypical "Stage Negro," by the late

1870s, "Tom troupes were the only racially integrated shows in the country."³⁴

The first production of Uncle Tom's Cabin was presented in 1853, but interestingly it was not until 1879 that a Black woman is recorded to have performed the part of Topsy.³⁵ Up to 1890, because of Topsy and "darky" roles, productions of Uncle Tom's Cabin were the only shows (except for specialty acts) in which Black women were seen.³⁶ By the Nineties, Black jubilee singers and Black specialty acts had become the major attractions for Tommers. By this time, Uncle Tom's Cabin bore little resemblance to the original;³⁷ it was, in fact, closely related to minstrels. "By the end of the century," notes Toll, "when Negro musicals and stars like Williams and Walker created public sensation, many so-called Tom Shows were in reality little more than vehicles for Negroes to perform the plantation caricatures and other 'Negro specialties' that white audiences loved."³⁸

Nevertheless, even these productions, in which the role of the Black woman was cast, set, and stereotyped, provided opportunities for the Black female performer to develop and expand her stage image:

According to a note in the New York Dramatic

Mirror in 1890 "Uncle Tom's Cabin is playing in the English provinces with a ballet of negro girls. They dress entirely in black and send the audience home feeling as though they attended a funeral." By 1892 Topsy, played by Jennie Chapman, was introducing "several clever breakdowns"; and by 1899 the drama was graced by a Cake-Walk.³⁹

By 1890, many Black parents had been able to educate their children. There were educated poets, songwriters, musicians, and singers among other skilled and talented artists and professionals. Many of them played a significant role in developing show business into the large industry it has become today.⁴⁰ Edith Isaacs calls the years 1890-1917 "The Middle Distance."⁴¹ Not only had Blacks begun to be accepted as subject matter for the legitimate stage, but they had received limited access to the theatre, both as audience and artists. Isaacs notes the important contributions which African-American artists made to the theatre during this time.

Not much is left in actual performance of the things that were then most popular, but, on the other hand, almost everything that Negro theatre artists and musicians are doing today had its beginning in the Middle Distance and much of what our theatres and concert halls and radio, and most of what our night clubs are doing had its source or its flood-tide here.⁴²

The first significant challenge to the black-face minstrel tradition occurred in 1890 with the appearance

of The Creole Show. Black entertainers circumvented racial restrictions by utilizing the pathway opened to them. As Nathan Huggins points out,

Black performers accommodated themselves to the tradition, while at the same time they tried to innovate and find more room for their talents within the convention; they moved toward the musical review. Sam T. Jack's The Creole Show . . . featured girls for the first time in a major minstrel. They were lightskinned dancers whose dance and burlesque accommodated the style of the "olio" to standard variety acts.⁴³

The popularity of The Creole Show paved the way for a succession of successful non-blackface, all-Black musicals produced between 1890 and 1911. They include The Octoroon, Oriental America, In Dahomey, and The Red Moon to name a few. "The success of these shows," writes Langston Hughes, "led at the turn of the century to the great era of Negro musical comedy in which not only performers but black composers and writers gained a foothold in the commercial theater, and beauty become a part of the brown-skinned world of make-believe."⁴⁴ (The Creole Show et al. will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.)

Between 1890 and 1910, Daniel and Charles Frohman, managers of Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre; Steele MacKaye and The Madison Square Garden Theatre; Albert Marshall Palmer (Palmer's Theatre); Lester Wallack

and Wallack's Theatre; and Augustin Daly were among the most powerful men in American theatre.⁴⁵ During this period, the impact of economics produced major changes in the American theatre. Around 1890, a small group of business men, whose primary interest was profit, emerged to control theatres, production, and booking. During the early Nineties, Abraham L. Erlanger and Marc Klaw controlled several theatres in important cities and had two-hundred exclusive booking in one-night stands in the Southwest; Charles Frohman and Al Hayman controlled three-hundred theatres in the West. In 1896, Klaw and Erlanger and Frohman and Hayman joined Samuel F. Nixon and Frederick Zimmerman, who controlled Philadelphia and the surrounding area, to form the Theatrical Syndicate. Because of the demand for a centralized form of booking created by the combination company (a touring troupe consisting of a star and full company, complete with scenery and properties), the Syndicate, and later Sam, Lee, and J.J. Shubert, achieved a monopoly of the theatre business. The Syndicate offered a full season of star attractions on condition that local managers booked exclusively through them. Those who refused were eliminated. The Syndicate held key routes between large cities

and unless productions could play along the way, touring was financially impossible. Through control of the booking business, by 1900 American theatre was controlled by the Syndicate.⁴⁶ Since the Syndicate refused to accept plays not likely to appeal to a large audience, Black productions were especially vulnerable.

By 1907, the competition between the Syndicate and the Shuberts had resulted in having more theatres than either organization could fill. In 1913 the Syndicate, which was breaking up, and the Shuberts came to an agreement to regulate competition in Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. In some instances, they even booked through each other. Between 1900 and 1915, American theatre became a business venture and was dominated by commercial interests.⁴⁷ Because of this profit-motive development, commercial theatre became less accessible to Blacks.

Only Black stars such as Williams and Walker and Johnson and Dean played the Northern White circuit. Most Black entertainers toured the South, playing in carnivals, minstrels, and circuses.⁴⁸ In 1913, Black comedian Sherman H. Dudley began to lease and buy theatres in Washington, D.C. By 1920, he had helped to organize a Black vaudeville circuit called

T. O. B. A., the Theatre Owner's Booking Association (frequently nicknamed "Tough On Black Artists").⁴⁹ Composed of both Black and White theatre owners, T. O. B. A. was also known as "the Chitlin Circuit."⁵⁰ Although some talented performers were able to break into mainstream show business, "virtually every great black entertainer spent some time on the brutally competitive T. O. B. A. circuit where only the best survived."⁵¹

The 1890 federal census listed 1,490 Black "actors and showmen;" however, none was performing in legitimate drama.⁵² By 1894 that number had increased sharply. During that same year, 2,000 Blacks responded to an ad in the New York Clipper, (the major theatrical newspaper of the 19th century), for 40 openings in Black minstrels.⁵³ The New York Dramatic Mirror and the Indianapolis Freeman, a Black newspaper, also ran theatrical advertisements. Fletcher recalls that those of the Harrison brothers were most provocative:

WANTED: Colored performers, men and women. Men who can double in band and orchestra or band and stage. Real black men and yellow women. Good dressers on and off stage. Do not worry about your parade outfits because they are furnished by the company [c. 1890-1900].⁵⁴

As indicated in Chapter 2, at the turn of the century, conditions for Blacks began to worsen, especially in the South. As more and more Blacks migrated to

the Northern cities, anti-Black feelings escalated. This increase in Black population "disturbed and threatened Northern white men, who feared that their jobs and their women would be lost to the black 'intruders.'"⁵⁵ As Harlem changed from a White suburb to a Black ghetto, the fear of the "intermingling of the races" intensified. "Such bias," notes Toll, "which was centuries old in America, re-emerged in the North when the black population in Northern cities strikingly increased, and when Negro stars emerged; stars who seemed to represent the first evidence that black people would no longer remain content with inferior positions."⁵⁶

In 1900, a riot broke out in New York after a Black man killed a White policeman. In retaliation, White mobs, with the approval of the police, decimated the Black community. Black performers became the targets of White mobs who were seeking Black victims.⁵⁷ "At the height of these disturbances," writes Morrison, "cries were heard 'get Ernest Hogan and Williams and Walker, and Cole and Johnson.' These were names of famous Negroes in show business whom the crowds knew and regarded as symbols of the Negro community."⁵⁸ During the riot, Ernest Hogan was badly beaten and

George Walker escaped injury only by hiding in a cellar all night.⁵⁹

As racial tensions increased, Black progress in show business decreased, indicating a connection between artistic development and social and cultural restrictions.⁶⁰ A number of Black entertainers escaped and profited by touring and living abroad. They performed in Russia, Germany, England, France, Japan, China, Australia, Hungary, and Austria. These men and women epitomized the "pioneering presence of black performers who literally spread throughout the world."⁶¹ This exodus did not stop until World War I.

By 1910, the number of professional Black entertainers had risen to 3,088; most were appearing in all-Black musicals.⁶² After 1910, however, Black involvement in professional theatre in New York nearly came to a halt. By that time, George Walker, Bob Cole, and Ernest Hogan had left show business due to illness. Also in 1910, Bert Williams signed with the Ziegfeld Follies. Without these stars to assure the success of a production, White producers and theatre managers withdrew their backing from Black musical shows. Unfortunately, the loss of the leadership of these men left no producer/performer teams to develop

Black musical comedy. So, from 1911 to 1917, except for Bert Williams, Blacks did not perform on the Broadway stage.

Nonetheless, during this absence from Broadway, there developed an aggressive effort by Black artists and others to establish a theatre in the Black community. This venture produced, in 1915, Harlem's first community theatre company, The Lafayette Players. The Lafayette Players were well received, presenting Black casts performing Broadway standards such as Alexandre Dumas' The Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers; Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon; Bayard Veiller's Within the Law; as well as Goethe's Faust and Moliere's The Follies of Scapin.⁶³

Establishing an ethnic theatre during this period was very difficult for Blacks since "their entertainment was tailored to the standards of mass culture."⁶⁴ Just as theatre artists and technicians required training, an audience must also be educated to support such a theatre. Because of the pioneering efforts of the Lafayette Players, "Black audiences saw, for the first time, Black entertainers performing in a medium that differed greatly from the usual minstrel-type comedy with which audiences were familiar."⁶⁵ Unfortunately,

the progress of Black playwrights did not keep pace with that of Black performers. No serious drama by and about Blacks was ever put on at the Lafayette. (The Lafayette Theatre will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.) Like minstrelsy, however, this move from Broadway to Harlem provided another training ground for Black actors to sharpen their skills. They would soon be thrust onto the mainstream professional stage once again.

On 5 April 1917, three dramatic plays were presented by the Colored Players at the Garden Theatre in Madison Square in New York City.⁶⁶ Collectively entitled Three Plays For A Negro Theatre, these plays challenged the traditional portrayal of Blacks on the stage and their historical stereotypes. (The presentation of this landmark production will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.) Written by a White author (and produced and directed by Whites) these plays represented the "first serious attempt to depict the Negro, from his own point of view."⁶⁷ "The Negro dramatist," comments Carl Van Vechten, "has no desire to remind himself or his prospective audiences of the dark days and unpleasant traditions, which he thinks best forgotten."⁶⁸ Neither Black authors nor

Black audiences were "ready to look at their folk past as art."⁶⁹ Speaking of this period and the future of Black theatre, Van Vechten laments,

it is doubtful if Negro audiences would go in large numbers to see a characteristic Negro play, the musical play excepted. Negroes as a whole are astonishingly lacking in race pride. Many of them have succumbed to the effect of white domination: they are ashamed of their race. . . I am afraid there will never be a Negro theatre, and if there is one I am sure ⁷⁰ it will appeal more to whites than to blacks.

Some of Van Vechten's observations were valid in 1917, made prior to later significant changes in the social and cultural status of Blacks in America. At that time, conditions for Blacks were very bleak and Van Vechten could not have predicted either the feelings of ethnic pride aroused by the Marcus Garvey Movement or the cultural advancements achieved during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

A few Blacks had been writing serious plays before the 1920s. W. E. B. DuBois and others, including Van Vechten, however, began a concerted effort to develop a Black theatre. The spread of the Little Theatre Movement and the initiation of the Crisis (1925) and Opportunity (1925) literary contests, sponsored by the NAACP and the National Urban League, respectively, coupled with a shift in attitude and thought of both

Blacks and Whites, provided encouragement as well as opportunity for Black playwrights to gain experience, exposure, and training. With the new Black Drama, however, came the Black playwright's dilemma:

the Black playwright was faced with having to choose between pleasing the overwhelmingly white audience of the commercial theatre or writing for a Black audience, which wished to see its image with less distortion, but could not provide a commensurate material reward.⁷¹

With the emergence of the Black playwright also came discussion about what would constitute a Black theatre. In a 1926 Crisis article, DuBois theorizes:

. . . The plays of a Negro theatre must be: 1. About us. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continued association just what it means to be a Negro today. 3. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people.⁷²

The Black playwright's dilemma is still not reconciled today. Seventy years after Van Vechten's erroneous predictions, however, there is a Black theatre in America, with New York being the largest producing center. Moreover, as DuBois had visualized 60 years earlier the Black theatre of today is sustained by the plays of Black writers who depict a wide range

of the Black experience. Black theatre, like all theatre, is faced with the problem of obtaining adequate financing. Nevertheless, there is an aggressive effort by Black artists and Black communities, with the help of interested Whites, to sustain Black theatre across America. Black Drama has also evolved into a field of study including history, theory, and criticism.

The turn-of-the-century American theatre reflected the tastes of the people. Characterized by the attitudes of a changing society, this transitional period provided the setting for nearly three decades of productivity for Black theatre-artists, especially women. During this era, major changes occurred in the portrayal of the Black character and the development of the Black performer. The progression from minstrelsy to musicals to drama signaled a new era of Black involvement in American theatre. Moreover, those Black women who launched their careers during this time played significant roles in furthering the acceptance of the Black artist world-wide. It was also during this brief, but pivotal period, that the Black dramatic actress emerged, developed, and began to practice her craft, laying the foundation for the acceptance of the contemporary Black dramatic actress.

IV

The Black Woman Artist and the American Stage Prior to 1890

By challenging established roles, 19th century Black women created new performing opportunities for themselves. During the early 1850s, anti-aristocratic feelings ran high among the new common-man audiences. "This was a time when raucous, folk-based entertainment and black-face minstrel songs in Afro-American dialect--not opera--were the vogue in America," notes Robert Toll.¹ Yet, during this same period, when there was no demand for the serious Black singer, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield debuted on the American concert stage. Born a slave in 1809 (of an African father and an Indian/White mother) but raised in freedom, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield became "the first American Negro musician to win more than local recognition, making a success in Europe in the 1850s," write Hughes and Meltzer.²

Brought to Philadelphia at the age of one by a Quaker, Mrs. Greenfield, Elizabeth's musical talents

were encouraged at an early age. In 1844, her patron died.³ Long before Mrs. Greenfield's death, Elizabeth had acquired, in her limited circle, "celebrity status" singing at various benefits and charities. Unable to get professional training because "no money would induce a 'Professor' to include a 'Darkie' among his pupils,"⁴ Elizabeth taught herself to play the guitar. The turning point in her singing career occurred when Miss Price, a talented musician and daughter of a Philadelphia physician, heard of Elizabeth and offered to accompany her on piano. Later, Miss Price taught her to play the piano.⁵

Shortly after her mistress' death, Elizabeth, who had little money, travelled to Buffalo, New York to be with relatives and friends. While in Buffalo she received the patronage of a wealthy philanthropist, the wife of General Potter, who encouraged her to seek a professional singing career. Through the efforts of her generous patroness, Elizabeth gave several private concerts to the elite of the city.⁶ In the early part of 1852, she made her first public appearance. Such was her success that the press likened her voice to Jenny Lind and Parodi, and bestowed the sobriquet "The Black Swan" upon her.⁷ The Buffalo Express says:

She now reads the most difficult music with a readiness and precision that would do credit to a finished master, and possesses a power and cultivation of voice that surprises and confounds the listener. She sang before the Buffalo Musical Association yesterday afternoon, at Town Hall; and her performances were well received with marks of approbation from the best musical talent in the city, that established her reputation as a songstress. Give the Black Swan the cultivation and experience of the fair Swede, or Madlle. Parodi, and she will rank favorable with those popular singers who have carried the nation into captivity by their rare musical abilities.

From Buffalo, Greenfield went to Rochester, New York at the invitation of its citizens. The Rochester Paper reports:

On Monday, Parodi in all her splendor, sustained by Patti and Strakosh, sang at Corinthian Hall, to half a house. Last night, Miss Greenfield sang at the same place to a crowded house of the respectable, cultivated, and fashionable people of the city. Jenny Lind has never drawn a better house as to character, than that which listened with evident satisfaction to this unheralded and almost unknown African Nightingale. Curiosity did something for her--but not all. She has merit, very great merit, and with cultivation, (instruction,) she will rank among the very first vocalists of the age. She has a voice of great sweetness and power, with a wide range from the lowest to the highest notes that we have ever listened to; flexibility is not wanting, and her control of it is beyond example, for a new and untaught vocalist. Her performance was received with marked approbation and applause from those who know what to applaude.

Afterwards, she travelled to Canada, New England, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The Cincinnati Enquirer writes:

In compass, her voice is the most extraordinary we have ever heard, being fully satisfied that it possesses the astonishing range of 27 notes. . . . So full and mellow are the lower notes, that it is difficult to believe they proceed from a woman, they are more like the baritone of a well cultivated male voice. The chief characteristic of the voice is its natural sweetness; in this quality it will compare with that of our best singers. "Home, sweet home" was as beautifully rendered as we remember to have ever heard it. We fully agree with many others, that cultivation cannot fail to render the "Black Swan" one of the first singers.¹⁰

The Springfield, Massachusetts Post says:

Even with the memory of Jenny Lind, Catherine Hayes, and Parodi, fresh within us, we cannot but record our opinion that Miss Greenfield is a singer of extraordinary merit, who will yet win a fame scarcely second to any cantatrice in the world, and with every step she takes in public, we shall look to see fresh laurels on her ebon brow.¹¹

The Daily Morning News reports:

Her musical education is acknowledged deficient, but as it is, she excels any singer that we have ever heard, save the late Jenny Lind. "On the Banks of the Guadalquivir," was sung better by her than we have ever heard it, notwithstanding it is Mad. Bishop's favorite, and one in which she excels. The role in this piece is considered the most difficult of any song, excepting the gems from Lucrezia Borgia. Miss Greenfield's voice needs cultivation, and then she will rank far above any vocalist that ever appeared in this country.¹²

On 31 March 1853, immediately before departing for Europe, she performed in New York City at the Metropolitan Hall. This was the same theatre where Anna Bishop, Sontag, Jenny Lind, and Parodi had

appeared.¹³ The 1 April 1853 edition of the Evening Post provides this review:

Metropolitan Hall was unmistakably full last evening, with an audience drawn together by the novel character of the entertainment. Miss Greenfield's reception was very favourable, though occasionally the applause was mingled with ill-mannered laughter, from certain individuals who were more nice in matters of colour than in those of tone. Escorted on the stage by a young, white gentleman, the Swan, who is a stout, good-looking coloured woman, of about twenty-five years of age, received her bouquets and frequent encores with a propriety of demeanor that operated decidedly in her favor. About her musical achievements we cannot say much. At present, her voice, though of extraordinary compass, lacks cultivation; but we should not be surprised if her intended three years' study abroad should put her on a level with the most celebrated prima donna of a different complexion. She seems much more at home in her upper than in her lower notes. We noticed this in the drinking song from Lucrezia Borgia, where her voice made a descent, at once so deep and so sudden, that the audience laughed out with surprise and amazement.¹⁴

During the 1853-54 season in New York City, Uncle Tom's Cabin ran an unprecedented 325 consecutive performances.¹⁵ This moving, sentimental melodrama provoked increasing controversy over the emotional and moral issue of slavery. Due to intensified anti-Black feelings, there had been speculations that Greenfield's appearance might cause trouble. The 1 April 1853 edition of the New York Herald reports:

It would appear that there had been fears entertained that some unpleasant transaction might occur, which would change the character

of the concert, as a very large posse of police was in attendance in the hall, under the superintendence of the chief. However, we are pleased to find that no attempt was made to disturb the propriety of the proceedings, nor do we believe that such an intention could have existed on the part of any one.¹⁶

The following correspondence between Greenfield and some Black clergymen provides an account of how New York City Blacks attempted to circumvent some of the restrictions imposed upon them:

New York, March 30, 1853

Miss Elizabeth Greenfield,

The undersigned profoundly regret that themselves and their numerous coloured friends in the city are denied the privilege of attending your concert at the Metropolitan Hall, to-morrow evening.

That they may not be left with the present painful impression, they hereby respectfully request, if consistent with your engagement, you will be so kind as to repeat your concert on Monday evening, the 4th of April, at the Broadway Tabernacle. Should you decline further benefit for yourself, we would suggest that the proceeds, after paying expenses, be divided between the Home for Aged Coloured persons and the Coloured Orphan Asylum.

J. W. C. Pennington,
Charles B. Ray,
J. P. Campbell,
Henry M. Wilson,
Dempsey Kennedy,
Sampson White,

P. S.--We enter into this arrangement with the distinct understanding that the concert, if repeated, will be public, and that no one shall be excluded who complies with the terms.

Gentlemen--I received your kind letter inviting me to sing at a concert previous to my visit to Europe, at which the coloured people of this city might have an opportunity of hearing me sing. I regret that you have been debarred from

attending the concert to be given at the Metropolitan Hall, this evening; but it was expressly stated in the agreement for the use of the hall, that such should be the case. I will with pleasure sing for the benefit of any charity that will elevate the condition of my coloured brethren, as soon as the necessary arrangements shall be completed for the same, which must necessarily be arranged for an early day, as I shall take my departure for Europe on the 6th proximo. With sincere regret.

(Signed,) ELIZABETH T. GREENFIELD.

To Revs. J. W. C. Pennington, Chas. B. Ray, J. P. Campbell, Henry M. Wilson, Dempsey Kennedy, and Sampson White.¹⁷

Seizing the opportunity to actively participate in the continuing struggle against racism and discrimination, before departing for London on April 6th, Greenfield gave a second concert in New York City at the request of a group of citizens.¹⁸

Even though the Black Swan was admired and applauded by the elite of the City, she also felt the sting of racial prejudice. While in Buffalo, she had been befriended by Madame Alboni, who gave her much advice. When some of Greenfield's friends tried to secure a private box for the Italian Opera at Niblo's Gardens so she could hear Madame Alboni sing, they were denied.¹⁹

After touring the Northern states, aided by the citizens of Buffalo, Greenfield went to Europe to study and perform. She arrived in London on 18 April 1853. When promised arrangements left her stranded,

she was aided by Harriet Beecher Stowe who was in London. Her Uncle Tom's Cabin had been staged, widely read, and had sold 300,000 copies in England and on the Continent. Greenfield achieved immediate success. The London Times, Observer, and Morning Post gave glowing reviews of her concerts. On 10 May 1854 she gave a command performance at Buckingham Palace for Queen Victoria. In July of 1854, Greenfield returned to the United States. She went back to Philadelphia where she taught voice and gave occasional concerts. On 31 March 1876, she died suddenly of paralysis in her home.²⁰

The pioneering efforts of Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield paved the way for the acceptance of Marie Selika, Sissieretta Jones, and other Black women concert singers who received considerable recognition both here and abroad. Moreover, as we will see, she began a tradition that provided an entree to the legitimate stage for Black women.

Greenfield appeared on the stage before either of the Hyers Sisters were born. Yet, just thirteen years after Greenfield had achieved recognition, Anna Madah Hyers (b. 1855) and Emma Louise Hyers (b. 1857)²¹ launched their careers on the professional concert

stage. Such was their creative passion and genius that during 1876, the same year of Greenfield's death, they began producing and performing in Black theatricals. Because of their popularity and initiative in making the transition to the theatre, the Hyers Sisters became the first Black women to gain success on the American stage.

Their parents, Sam B. Hyers and Annie E. Hyers, migrated from New York (when Anna was a year old) to Sacramento, California in 1856. Emma was born in Sacramento the following year.²² These sisters showed their musical talents early and studied music with their parents who were amateur musicians.²³ They were considered musical prodigies and when Anna was seven and Emma nine, they were placed with the German instructor, Hugo Sank, where they studied voice, piano, and language. Later, they studied with opera singer Josephine d'Ormy. Anna, a soprano, and Emma, a contralto, debuted on 22 April 1867 before an audience of eight hundred at the Metropolitan Theatre in Sacramento. Their program included "Costa Diva," and Verdi's "Fors e' lui chi l'anima." The press commented on the purity and sweetness of Madah's voice and the fine contralto possessed by Emma.²⁴

After years of further study, insisted upon by their father, the Hyers Sisters undertook an extended tour of the country, traveling from West to East. On 12 August 1871, assisted by baritone LeCount and their father, they appeared at the Salt Lake City Theatre. The first part of the concert consisted of selections from the first and second acts of Donizetti's opera Linda di Chamounix. During the western part of the tour, the Missouri, Illinois and Ohio papers praised the singers.²⁵ "Anna's singing of E flat above the staff with the greatest of ease, and her bird-like trills, caused her to be likened to Jenny Lind, while Emma's voice was said to be one of remarkable quality and richness 'rarely heard.'"²⁶

For concerts in New England and New York, their father engaged noted baritone John Luca; rising tenor of the day, Wallace King; and accompanist A. C. Taylor. Their programs consisted mainly of operatic arias, duos, trios, and quartets.²⁷ The group gave concerts at the Young Men's Christian Association Hall in Brooklyn and at Steinway Hall in New York City. They were well received by full houses of cultured patrons, and the press was flattering.²⁸ The New York Tribune reports: "These are two young colored girls who have

received a musical training in California, and who are by no means mere 'Jubilee' singers, as the programme of last evening clearly shows."²⁹ Of their voices, the reviewer for the New York Evening Post writes: "Miss Anna Hyers possesses a flexible voice of great compass, clear and steady in the higher notes. Miss Emma, the contralto, has a voice of great power and depth; qualities which, in impassioned strains, give it a richness not often heard in chamber concerts."³⁰

After appearing in Boston, where they sang before Patrick S. Gilmore and Eben Tourgee (who became director of the New England Conservatory of Music), the ensemble won critical acclaim performing throughout the area. The Worcester Daily Press writes that "the quartette singing was unaccompanied, and was the finest that has been heard in this city for years. The voices blended beautifully, and were full of expression."³¹

The Hyers Sisters remained in Boston in order to continue their musical training. In 1872 they were invited to sing at P. S. Gilmore's World Peace Jubilee in Boston. By 1875 they had organized a small concert company and were performing primarily in New England.³² For their concerts at the Boston Theatre, where they appeared in Sunday night "sacred" concerts,

they were supported by an orchestra of forty pieces conducted by the White orchestra leader Napier Lothian. Their success at these engagements added to their growing fame. At one performance, the audience insisted upon thirteen encores.³³

As early as 1876, their father, who was also their business manager, enlarged the company in order to produce drama.³⁴ The troupe, now called "The Hyers Sisters Musical Company, Starring Sam Lucas," gave as its first production, Out Of Bondage (1876), which featured Lucas in the role of Mischievous Henry, his first big hit. It appears that Out of Bondage was the first musical show to be produced by a Black theatrical organization.³⁵ Coauthored with White writer Joseph Bradford of Boston, this four-act musical drama begins with slavery and ends with the Black man adjusting to freedom. Rounding out the piece by performing their "specialty," "the final act takes the form of a concert during which the sisters sing selections from their regular repertoire."³⁶ Out of Bondage made history: it signaled the beginning of the transition from minstrelsy to Black musical comedy.³⁷

In addition to Princess Orelia Of Madagascar

(c. 1877), which they wrote, the Hyers Sisters added Black playwright Pauline E. Hopkin's Urlina, the African Princess and The Underground Railroad to their repertory.³⁸ The Sisters first performed Urlina, the African Princess in 1879 at the Bush Theatre in San Francisco.³⁹

Called an "operatic bouffe extravaganza," . . . plot is laid in Africa, where a usurping king has banished the princess Urlina, rightful successor to the throne. But the usurper's son, prince Zurleska, sees a picture of the princess, falls in love with her, and sets out with his ally Kekolah to rescue her and her maid. However, as the young people return to the kingdom they are seized by the king's soliders, imprisoned, and left to starve to death. Kekolah escapes, disguises himself as a traveller, and with the help of friends succeeds in freeing the prisoners and overthrowing the usurper.⁴⁰

After playing in San Francisco, they moved Urlina to New Market, Oregon.⁴¹ Although it was enthusiastically received, according to the critic reviewing the production, "'the real gem of the evening was the Midnight Quartet from Martha' which was sung by the Hyers sisters, John Luca and Wallace King."⁴² By presenting Urlina, the African Princess, the Hyers Sisters became the "first black theatre company to stage a musical set in Africa, a trend that will be followed by Cole and Johnson, Williams and Walker, and other notable black

companies in later years."⁴³

The Hyers Sisters toured extensively, primarily in the West, with these plays under the sponsorship of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau.⁴⁴ Critics praised the company as "one of the best opera-bouffe troupes in America."⁴⁵ Over the years, the company included pianist-composor Jacob Sawyer, Mrs. Francis A. Powell, Billy Kersands, Dora S. King, Grace V. Overall, pianist Celestine Q. Browne, and Sam Lucas.⁴⁶

Early in 1883, the Hyers' dramatic troupe disbanded temporarily. In May of that year, they reorganized the concert company and appeared in the Callendar Consolidated Spectacular Minstrel Festival in July at the Grand Opera House in New York before touring nationwide. Gustave and Charles Frohman, the White owners of the show, planned to form a Colored Opera Troupe starring the Hyers Sisters in the Fall of 1883. The company was to feature Marie Selika and her husband, Sampson Williams, and a chorus and orchestra of forty. These plans, however, never materialized.⁴⁷

By the Fall of 1886, the Hyerses had reorganized their dramatic company and were touring with Out Of Bondage, starring Sam Lucas as during the 1870s.⁴⁸

During 1891, the Hyers Sisters were playing the East

with Out of Bondage, Colored Aristocracy, and Blackville Twins.⁴⁹ During the early 1890s, their name appeared less frequently in the press. An April 1893 press notice announced that they were leaving the stage and would appear only for special engagements. Thereafter, no press notices of the Hyerses as a duo appeared. In 1894, Emma performed with an Uncle Tom's Cabin company and in 1894 Anna joined John Isham's Octoroons, singing in the operatic finale called "Thirty Minutes Around the Operas." Some time before 1900 Emma died.⁵⁰ During the 1899-1900 season, Anna toured Australia with Curtis' Afro-American Minstrel Company, which also included Ernest Hogan and Billy McClain.⁵¹ The 12 July 1899 issue of The Referee, Sidney, reports: "Miss Madah A. Hyer, 'The Bronze Patti,' was heard to great advantage in a couple of operatic selections."⁵² After returning to the United States, Anna performed with various Isham companies until 1902 when she retired from the stage.⁵³ Later, Anna married Dr. Fletcher of Sacramento where she settled. In 1920, she was still alive, living quietly, but actively involved in music in the Church.⁵⁴ The date of Anna's death has not been established.

Debuting on the professional concert stage just

two years after the Civil War, the Hyers Sisters demonstrated "to the country at large that black artists--and by extrapolation all black people--could be the equal of whites in any field of endeavor."⁵⁵ In the face of tremendous obstacles, they made significant contributions to the development of Black musical comedy and to the acceptance of Black theatre-artists. Beginning as classically trained singers, they made the successful transition to the theatrical stage. By challenging established roles, they created new performing opportunities for themselves. Their pioneering efforts produced "black musical comedies of a scope and scale that had not previously been attempted by any other black company nor would be matched by another for at least two decades."⁵⁶

Much credit is owed to the Hyers Sisters for their courage in embarking on an uncharted and often dangerous path. By shattering the traditional stage image of Black women, they provided a new image for the entry of the Black female performer on the professional stage in America. Moreover, through their talents and innovative ideas, they provided the foundation that would eventually lead to the evolution of Black musical comedy into the form we know it as today.

The magnitude of their accomplishments cannot be overstated. As Hill puts it: "They were, in fact, the precursors of black musical theatre in America."⁵⁷

An interesting figure in the musical life of Boston was Mrs. Arianna Cooley Sparrow. The daughter of the quadroon whom Harriet Beecher Stowe depicted as one of the characters in her Uncle Tom's Cabin, she sang in the Tremont Temple Choir. Later, she was the soprano for the Berkeley Street Quartet. She was a member of the Handel and Haydn Society for a number of years. Due to excellent training under the well-known teacher H. L. Whitney, Mrs. Sparrow continued to sing at St. Augustine Episcopal Church in Boston when she was over eighty.⁵⁸

The most famous Black prima donna of the 1880s was Mme. Marie Selika (Mrs. Sampson Williams). Born in c.1849 in Natchez, Mississippi, she was taken to Cincinnati as an infant. While there, a wealthy family heard her sing and arranged for her to study professionally. About 1874 she went to San Francisco, California, where she studied with Signora G. Bianchi and debuted there in 1876. After a year of further study with Mr. Farini in Chicago, she began giving concerts in the East in 1878. At her 1878 Philadelphia

debut, the sobriquet "Queen of Staccata" was bestowed upon her when she sang the "Staccato Polka."⁵⁹

Her stage name, "Selika," was taken from the heroine of Meyerbeer's opera L'Africaine. In 1880, while under the management of Lt. William Dupree, she gave several concerts. "She created a furore by her marvelous coloratura singing."⁶⁰ In 1882, she traveled to Europe with her husband, an aspiring baritone known as "Vilaski," where she gained international fame.⁶¹ The Paris Figaro writes:

Madame Selika sang in great style. She has a very strong voice of depth and compass, rising with perfect ease from C to C₂, and she trills like a feathered songster. Her range is marvelous and her execution and style of rendition show perfect cultivation. Her "Echo Song" cannot be surpassed. It was beyond any criticism. It was an artistic triumph.⁶²

Of her performance in Berlin, the reviewer for the Tagblatt says:

The concert by Mme. Selika was given yesterday before a well filled house, and this distinguished artist gave us a genuine pleasure. Mme. Selika, with her singing roused the audience to the highest pitch of enthusiasms, and after her first aria, she was twice recalled, and could quiet the vociferous applause only by rendering a selection with orchestral accompaniment. Of this wonderful singer we can only say that she is endowed with a voice of surpassing sweetness and extraordinary compass. With her pure tones, her wonderful trills and roulades, her correct rendering of the most difficult intervals, she not only gains the admiration of amateurs⁶³ but also that of professional musicians and critics.

In October 1883 she sang at a command performance for Queen Victoria.⁶⁴

Mme. Selika returned to America in 1885. Soon afterward, she and her husband (who was also known as the Hawaiian Baritone) toured extensively across the country. Between 1887 and 1892 she made her second tour of Europe and the West Indies. Around 1893 Mme. Selika and her husband settled in Cleveland, Ohio where she headed a voice studio and they continued to tour. During this time, she managed her own career.⁶⁵ "Despite problems of management," notes Southern, "she sang all over the nation and was regarded as the leading prima donna of the race during her prime."⁶⁶

During the late 1890s, after a number of successful years on the concert stage, "critics began to compare her unfavorably to younger singers--Flora Batson and Sissieretta Jones, for example--and her career began to languish."⁶⁷ Around 1911, after her husband's death, Mme. Selika moved to New York City where she taught voice for several years at the Martin-Smith School of Music in Harlem. In 1919 she was honored at a testimonial concert given by the New York Black music establishment. Mme. Selika taught privately

until 1936. She died in 1937 at the age of eighty-seven.⁶⁸

The De Wolf Sisters, Sadie and Rosa, were singers of exceptional merit. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, they came to Boston where they sang with the "Walker Quintet" and in Sunday night concerts. During the 1880s, they were members of the Sam Lucas Concert Company of Boston.⁶⁹

Sadie, a soprano, and Rosa, a contralto, were heard on the vaudeville circuit for two years before joining Sam T. Jack's The Creole Show on 4 August 1890.⁷⁰ The original cast of Black Patti's Troubadours (1896) also included the De Wolf Sisters.⁷¹ Shortly after 1902, "The sisters retired after twelve years' stage experience in a refined type of vaudeville that would illy fit the coarse acts which gradually found a wide public."⁷² On 23 May 1917, Rosa De Wolf died in Boston.⁷³ The date of Sadie's death is not available.

A younger singer, Flora Batson, born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1870, possessed a remarkable soprano voice. As a ballad singer, she toured throughout America, in New Zealand, Australia, and Africa. In 1887, she formed a concert company, and on the 21st of March of that year, she appeared at the Music Hall

in Boston. Acclaimed for her performance, "she became popular on southern tours for her high class entertainments."⁷⁴ For three months, she sang as a soloist at a large temperance revival in New York. At the height of her career, she married a White business man, Mr. Berger, who was also her business manager. On 2 December 1906, Flora Batson died suddenly in Philadelphia.⁷⁵

Due to racism, most nineteenth-century Black artists were limited to playing stereotypical roles on the professional stage. As demonstrated by the demise of the African Company, Blacks performing in drama were not accepted by the White theatrical establishment. In an attempt to circumvent these restrictions, as with the African Theatre, late nineteenth-century Blacks formed their own companies and established their own theatres. A number of Black drama groups sprang up in urban centers throughout the country. During the last two decades of this century, Providence, Louisville, and Baltimore had two companies each. Philadelphia, San Francisco, and the District of Columbia had three; Chicago had four; and New York had at least ten. Unlike the touring Black professionals, these amateurs and semiprofessionals presented dramatic

productions as opposed to vaudeville, minstrels, and variety shows.⁷⁶

The most distinguished group performing drama during this time was the Astor Place Company of Colored Tragedians in New York. In 1878, Benjamin J. Ford, a waiter, and his wife, Hattie E. Hill, presented Richard III at the Lyric Theatre on Sixth Avenue. By 1884, they were rehearsing at the Grand Central Theatre in Astor Place, near Broadway. On 17 June 1884, they presented Othello at the Brooklyn Atheneum for an audience of three hundred.⁷⁷ Of this performance, Hill concludes that

Ford looked the part of the Moor, but his performance was disappointing; he lacked passion and his diction was faulty. Hattie Hill did not appear in this production. They must have quarreled and were still not reconciled in September of that year, at which time she denied in a press report that she was engaged to perform with Ford in John Banim's tragedy Damon and Pythias and in Richard III. The new leading lady was Alice Brooks, an octoroon who made a pretty and pleasing, if inexperienced, Desdemona.⁷⁸

Of the Blacks "performing" drama during the nineteenth century, none was more prominent than Henrietta Vinton Davis. At fifteen she graduated from a Washington school and took a teaching post in Maryland. By 1878, she was back in Washington working as secretary in

the office of the Recorder of Deeds. She became a student of the well-known elocutionist Miss Marguerita Saxton, and on 25 April she debuted as a reciter at Marini's Hall in Washington, D.C. She was introduced by the man for whom she had worked in the recorder's office, the honorable Frederick Douglass.⁷⁹

Davis was advertised as "the first lady of her race to publicly essay a debut in Shakespearean and other legitimate characters."⁸⁰ Her program included speeches of Juliet (from Romeo and Juliet) and Portia (from The Merchant of Venice).⁸¹ Local reactions to her performance were glowing. The 21 July 1883

Washington Bee reports:

She came forward and from the time she said her first line to the close of the last sentence, she wrapped the whole audience so close to her that she became a queen of the stage in their eyes. One moment all was serene and quiet, deep pathos,--the next, all was laughter. . . . She is our first American lady leader, she will in due season become our star on the stage of tragedy and the drama.⁸²

At the end of her first season, she had added speeches of Rosalind from As You Like It and Cleopatra from Antony and Cleopatra to her repertoire. Her desire to appear in a full-scale stage production for the following year did not materialize. On 7 May 1884, however, at Ford's Opera House in Washington,

D. C., she and Powhatan Beaty performed in scenes from Macbeth, Richard III, and Ingomar. Davis played Lady Anne, Lady Macbeth, and Parthenia.⁸³ Praising Davis' work, the 17 May 1884 New York Globe recognizes the event as historic.

As Lady Macbeth, Miss Davis displayed wonderful powers of conception. While we failed to discover in her acting the dull, heavy, declamatory style complained of by some critics, to me it was plainly apparent that Miss Davis has great reserve dramatic powers, which have not been drawn upon because of the influence that always somehow represses the spontaneous outflow of genius in beginners. . . . The perfect adaptation of Miss Davis to her chosen profession is undisputed. She has earned the plaudits of professional critics, and her success has opened the dramatic door to many. Thus leap by leap the colored man and woman encroach upon the ground so long held sacred by their white brother and sister.⁸⁴

For this performance, the audience was integrated. As with the African Company sixty years earlier, some White patrons found it difficult to accept Black actors in serious roles. The 8 May 1884 Washington Post describes the atmosphere:

There were many white people in the house who seemed disposed to turn to comedy the tragic efforts of the actors. In this they were not wholly successful, for the earnestness and intelligence of several of the leading performers were such as to command the respect of those most disposed to find cause for laughter in everything said or done. . . . The scene from Macbeth went creditably, all things considered, Miss Davis and Mr. Beaty showing a knowledge of the requirements of the parts which they essayed which, it is

safe to say, surprised those in the audience competent to judge.⁸⁵

Also in 1884, she appeared once with the Astor Company in Damon and Pythias.⁸⁶

Davis settled in Chicago where she taught elocution. Over the next nine years she gave recitals throughout the South, East, and West. In Chicago in 1893, she was seen in a full-scale dramatic production of William Edgar Easton's Dessalines. This romantic melodrama depicted the conflict between the freed Blacks and the mulattoes for control of Haiti. Dessalines saves Clarisse, sister of one of the mulatto leaders. In the end, the two, who are from different camps, realize they are in love. Davis, who organized the company and produced the play herself, portrayed Clarisse.⁸⁷

In 1898 Davis appeared in another drama, Our Old Kentucky Home. Coauthored by Davis and Black journalist John E. Bruce, this play shows Clothilde, a Creole slave (acted by Davis), whose courageous efforts helped to end the Civil War and unite her with her lover, a freed slave in the Union Army. The play toured throughout the East with some success. Davis continued to perform on the concert stage for five more years. In 1903 she moved back to Washington,

DC. Also in 1903, she revived Our Old Kentucky Home in Denver; in 1908 she recited at the Palm Garden in New York, and in 1909 she staged Dessalines at the Trinity Congregational Church in Pittsburgh, where she doubled as the comic Dominique and Zingarella, the flower girl. The last play in which Davis appeared was Easton's Christophe: A Tragedy. This piece, produced by Davis, depicted another Haitian leader's successful slave revolt. Christophe opened on 21 March 1912 at the Lenox Casino in New York City, with Davis doubling as Pere L'Avenge and Valerie.⁸⁸

After over thirty years on the stage, Davis gave up performing and became actively involved in politics. By 1919 she had become a director and vice-president of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its ill-fated Black Star Line, "one of the cornerstones of Garvey's program for uniting all peoples of African descent." Davis remained a UNIA officer for twelve years, the longest tenure of any member except for Garvey. She died at the age of eighty-one in Washington, D.C. in 1941.⁸⁹

Despite incredible odds, Davis' stage career survived only because she refused to quit. Although her talents held much promise, her African ancestry

prevented her from being accepted as a serious artist in America. After more than a quarter of a century of struggling to achieve an unobtainable goal, it was not surprising that Davis had evolved from an artist into an activist. As Hill concludes:

At the height of her powers as a dramatic actress and Shakespeare interpreter, Henrietta Vinton Davis turned from the stage to politics. In so doing, she hoped to gain for black Americans the equality of opportunity that had been denied her in the profession for which she was equipped. Though the Garvey movement failed in its stated objectives, it left a legacy of black self-worth that has continued to fuel demands for a just society. By her dedication to her craft, her achievement as an artist, and her commitment to the improvement of her race, ⁹⁰Miss Davis' contribution stands preeminent.

The careers of these entertainers represent the kinds of performing opportunities Black women had available to them. As indicated, the 19th century American concert stage, in singing as well as in reciting, provided opportunities for Black women to perform professionally. At a time when there was no demand for either serious Black singers or reciters, these women carved out a place for themselves on the American stage. As we have seen, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield paved the way for the acceptance of other Black women on the concert stage. We have also seen the Hyers Sisters, the DeWolf Sisters, and Henrietta Vinton

Davis continue the evolutionary process of the Black dramatic actress by making the transition from the concert stage to the theatrical stage. By so doing, they helped to lay the foundation for the Black women performers who have followed.

Historical Overview of the Shows:
Black Women Performers in Black Theatricals,
1890-1917

From 1879 until 1890, except for "specialty acts," most Black women performers were relegated to playing Topsy and "plantation" roles in Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the 1890s, however, with the development of Black musicals such as The Creole Show,¹ Black women gained respect and prominence on the American stage. The Creole Show, the first musical to successfully challenge the blackface tradition, provided a new image for the Black woman's re-entry (with the earlier entry being the Hyers Sisters in their Out of Bondage (c. 1876) to the American stage. The Harlem chronicler James Weldon Johnson states:

in the professional theatre the first successful departure made by the Negro from strict minstrelsy was in 1890. Sam T. Jack, a prominent burlesque-theatre owner and manager, conceived the idea of putting out a Negro show different from anything yet thought of,² a show that would glorify the coloured girl.

This production, The Creole Show, patterned upon

the minstrel show, featured sixteen beautiful Black women who sang and danced, up-to-date material, smart costumes, and the Cakewalk in the finale. It differed from the regular minstrel show "in that the girls were in the centre of the line, with a female interlocutor, and the men on the ends; then came an olio, and then the finale," explains Johnson.³ For the first time on the professional stage, women danced in the Cakewalk in the finale. From then on, all Black shows, including minstrels, had women in the company.⁴

The show was cast in New York, rehearsed in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and opened at the Howard Theatre in Boston before playing New York. The 20 September 1890 issue of the Indianapolis Freeman prints this description of The Creole Show:

Sam T. Jack's Creole Burlesque Company recently opened at London Theatre, New York City. The show commenced with a very pretty first part, attractive grouping of shapely femininity. In "Tropical Revelries," Florence Brisco was the first conversationalist; Florence Hines, the greatest living female song and dance artist, second and Mrs. Sam Lucas third. The olio sketches were very fine and called for numerous encores. The burlesque, "The Beauty of the Nile, or Doomed by Fire," by William R. Waits, is fine. . . .

In 1891 The Creole Show went to Chicago. Later, the cast performed for the entire Summer season during

the 1893 Chicago World's Fair at Sam T. Jack's Opera House. Then the show returned to New York, creating a sensation when it opened at the Standard Theatre in Greeley Square, where it ran continuously for five seasons.⁶

The female members of this landmark production included Florence Hines, a popular male impersonator, as the Interlocutor; Sadie and Rosa DeWolf, classical singers; and Hattie McIntosh, who performed with her husband in their act, "Mr. and Mrs. McIntosh." Stella Wiley (who later married Bob Cole and formed a team known as "Cole and Wiley"), Mattie Wilkes, and Dora Dean⁺ were three of the chorus girls.

Although the content of the show appears to have changed a great deal over the years, as late as 1897 The Creole Show was still drawing large audiences. According to the 1 January 1897 issue of the Indianapolis Freeman:

Sam T. Jack's Creole played to packed houses at Brooklyn, New York last week, and are presenting an elaborate bill. The opening piece on the program is "H. M. S. Pinafore." Then follows specialties by Grundy and Mundy, grotesque dancers; Black Carl, the Creole Mahatma; George Wilson, blackface comedian; the Golden Gate Quartette with "Washday on the Levee"; and Hypolite, West Indian musical prodigy. The show closes with a skit called "The Soiree."

During its several years' run, The Creole Show produced

a number of female stars: Belle Davis, Mattie Wilkes, Florence Hines, Mazie Brooks, Saddle Jones, and Dora Dean.⁸

Besides the actual production of The Creole Show itself, the most significant change initiated by the show was the inclusion of the Cake-Walk in the finale. For the first time, reports Tom Fletcher, women were introduced in the dance, ending the all-male minstrel show. The Cake-Walk, also known as the "walk-around" and "Chalkline-walk," developed from a "Prize-Walk" (where the prize of a huge cake was awarded the winning couple) performed by slaves at plantation get-togethers.⁹ The dance was so popular that the Cake-Walk became an international fad.¹⁰ Cake-Walk contests sprang up throughout the country. The Madison Square Garden competition in New York City, however, was the most prestigious. Fletcher recalls the event:

Before the contest there would be a big plantation scene with the cast of about 150 singers and dancers and some great vocal soloist of the period.

. . .
The inside of Madison Square Garden on such occasions was arranged like a race track. The space for the Cake Walkers ran alongside the boxes and loges. Chairs were placed on the floor to mark off the space for the contestants. When the contest music started, first would appear a drum major who would go through a routine with his baton then return to his place as leader. Then the curtain would part and 50 to 60 couples

would come from behind the stage on to the floor, prancing and dancing to the tempo of the music. It was very reminiscent of the grand entry at a circus.

The girls' dresses were of all colors. The men wore full dress, clown clothes or comedy costumes with the big checks. When all the walkers were on the floor, then the 50 or 60 couples could all be seen doing different prances and dance steps ranging from buck-and-wing to toe dancing and, in fact, practically everything known to the terpsichorean art. As couples went around the floor which extended all around the inside of the Garden from Fourth to Madison Avenues and from 26th to 27th Streets, they would be watched by the judges and as they came in front of the stage where the judges sat, a number of couples would be beckoned off the floor.

The ten best couples selected by the judges would be brought up on the stage to compete for the prizes and that is when the real big doings got underway. When the ten couples did their numbers around the stage, the audience could get a good look at them because when they were walking around the floor it was more like a big circus with three rings and two stages where something different was going on at the same time. . . . The best couple would receive a prize for their style.¹¹

In addition to providing a form of entertainment, Cake-Walk contests offered young talented Black dancers and singers the opportunity to be seen by prominent people. After such exposure, the top winners usually formed vaudeville and variety acts which were booked throughout the world.¹² The Cake-Walk became the first Black dance to be accepted by White society, paving the way for the acceptance of other Black dances.¹³ The Cake-Walk was a "great exhibition dance with such superb theatrical potentialities," comments Marian

Hannah Winter, "that it served as a Negro re-entry permit to the stage."¹⁴ As a result of the popularity of the Calk-Walk, which stressed individual style and execution, Dora Dean, Ida Forsyne, and Ada Walker became internationally famous performing the dance.

Another departure from the traditional minstrel show occurred in 1895 when John W. Isham, the Black advance agent for The Creole Show, produced The Octoroons. This production, a "musical farce," set in New York City, followed the minstrel show pattern, but it too used chorus girls in several specialty numbers in the finale, as well as featuring six of them in principals' parts.¹⁵ James Weldon Johnson says of The Octoroons:

The first part consisted of an opening chorus and a medley of songs done by the various principals, generally assisted by the girls of the chorus. The middle part was a burlesque sketch in which a number of specialties were strung on a very thin thread of a story. The show closed with a cakewalk jubilee, a military drill, and a "chorus-march finale."¹⁶

There were seventeen women in the original cast of The Octoroons. They included Madame Flowers, Belle Davis, the famous Hyers Sisters, Mattie Wilkes, Hattie McIntosh, Stella Wiley, Mazie Brooks, Grace Holliday, Mamie Emerson, and Ada Overton⁺ (who in 1899 became Mrs. George Walker). This was Overton's debut on

the professional stage. Receiving international acclaim, she went on to the play a prominent role in all of the Williams and Walker productions. By 1897, The Octoroons was so successful that three companies were playing throughout the country and one in Great Britain simultaneously.¹⁷

Then, in 1896, Isham produced Oriental America. This musical show, still based on minstrelsy, had pretty girls and did not end with the traditional "hoe-down," cakewalk, and walk-around. Instead, it ended with an operatic medley. The selections included solos and choruses from Il Trovatore, Faust, Rigoletto, Martha, and Carmen. Oriental America broke further away from the traditional norm by being the first all-Black show to be performed in a legitimate theatre, Palmer's Theatre (later known as Wallack's) rather than in a burlesque house.¹⁸

Maggie Scott and Desseria Broadley Plato, concert singers; Belle Davis; Ada Walker; Mattie Wilkes; and Inez Clough⁺ were among the women performing in the Oriental America company. As we will see, Inez Clough, who sang in the section entitled "Forty Minutes of Grand and Comic Opera," later figured in another event that made theatrical history. Dora Dean, from The

Creole Show, appeared as a member of the famous quartet which also included Mattie Wilkes, Ollie Burgoyne,⁺ and Belle Davis.¹⁹

The 9 November 1896 issue of the Morning Times, Washington, D. C., says of Oriental America:

The show is regarded, among the leading aggregation of similar character, as one of the strongest on the road. It is a company full of strong soloists, well supported by a powerful and well-balanced chorus, . . . The program, although a collection of most difficult selections for soloists and ensemble voices, is rendered in an artistic and finished manner. The several scenes in each act have been given the benefit of very attractive and elaborate scenic and electric embellishment and especially is this so in the last act, wherein are presented prominent scenes using appropriate costumes from well-known standard operas of several schools, to which fully forty minutes were devoted.

Miss Mattie Wilkes, the leading soprano of the company, has undoubted talent of high degree, and handles well her birdlike voice, whose upper register is strong and clear and pleasing in the extreme. . . .

Among the many features of the great show were a Japanese dance, cleverly rendered by Fanny Rutledge, Pearl Meredith, Alice Mackey and Carrie Meredith, who sang and danced equally well and were prominent in all the ensemble scenes of the performance. A quartet of cycling girls in bloomers and twentieth century maids, the maids of the Oriental Huzzars, led by Miss Belle Davis, as well as the hunting scenes and opening chorus form the "Bells of Cornville." All these and many more were attractive numbers of the performance. Miss Belle Davis gave a pleasing imitation of May Irwin in "I Want You, Ma Honey" and other popular songs,

and other popular songs, and Billy Eldridge brought down the house with "Hot Tamale Alley" which he sang as it has never been presented here before. A flower ballet by a bevy of pretty girls, assisted by Naby Ray, was an attractive number in the second act.²⁰

With each successful venture, new opportunities for Black women emerged. A trained concert singer, Madame M. Sissieretta Jones, better known as "Black Patti," in 1896, pioneered with her own company, "Black Patti's Troubadours." The original "Troubadours" cast included Stella Wiley and Bob Cole in the comedy sketches; May Bobee, the Creole nightingale; and thirty pretty chorus girls. Maggie Davis, Ada Overton, Lena Wise, the DeWolf Sisters, and Madame Reed were also in the company.²¹

Even though these musicals were based upon minstrelsy, they were performed on the professional stage and they served to expand on the minstrel pattern. Like the productions presented by the Hyers Sisters, these shows gave prominence to the Black woman, and they led up to the first Black production to break away completely from the minstrel pattern, furthering the movement toward musical comedy as we know it.

The year 1897 marked a turning point in the history of Black theatricals in America. It was then that Bob

Cole, an educated actor, singer, dancer, writer, and composer organized and headed the first Black stock company in New York where Black men and women could receive formal theatrical training. Composed of twelve to fifteen members, the All Star Stock Company met and performed at Worth's Museum, located at Sixth Avenue and 30th Street. Cole was both playwright and stage manager.²² The female members of this historic troupe were: Stella Wiley, Willie Farrell (who performed with her husband in their act "Billy and Willie Farrell"), Mattie Wilkes, Aline Cassell, and Mamie Flowers.²³

Several sources reveal the same scant information on this group. Nevertheless, their existence signified that Blacks were training themselves in anticipation of theatrical careers. Also, because of a later event, it appears that this company may have been a production/performance "workshop" for Cole's future project.

The year 1898 was also pivotal in the development of Black musicals. Frustrated by the conditions under which Black performers were forced to work, Bob Cole issued his "Colored Actor's Declaration of Independence" of 1898: "We are going to have our own shows. We are going to write them ourselves, we are going to have our own stage manager, our own orchestra leader

and our own manager out front to count up. No divided houses--our race must be seated from the boxes back."²⁴ Bob Cole (who had been the stage manager and a comedian with The Creole Show) wrote and staged Black Patti's first musical show. Unable to reach an agreement with her managers, Nolan and Voelckel, about money, Cole gathered his music together and left. He was arrested and a court trial followed. Cole declared before the judge: "These men have amassed a fortune from the product of my brain, and now they call me a thief; I won't give it up."²⁵

Nonetheless, Cole lost the suit, and he had to give up the music. Fortunately, this court dispute prompted him to create a show for himself, marking a further step in Black theatricals. Cole wrote A Trip to Coontown (1898), the first Black musical comedy to break completely with the minstrel pattern. This landmark play, unlike previous shows, according to Johnson, was well-written and had a continuous plot from beginning to end. In addition, this was the first show that was written, produced, directed, and performed by Blacks on the Broadway stage.²⁶ Through determination and defiance, Cole was able to organize his company utilizing the principles of his "Colored

Actor's Declaration of Independence."

After touring in several cities in Canada and in the New York area, on 4 April 1898, A Trip To Coontown opened at an out-of-the-way theatre, Jacob's Third Avenue Theatre (because Cole and any performers who worked with him had been blacklisted by Nolan and Voelckel).²⁷ A critic reviewing for the 9 April 1898 edition of the New York Dramatic Mirror gives this eyewitness account:

The company has not one poor performer among its members. The two stars, of course, carried off the honors. Bob Cole as a tramp was fully as good as any white comedian whose specialty is this style of eccentricity. Billy Johnson as the bunco steerer acted with spirit and sang well. . . . Camille Casselle, a very pretty girl, was heard to advantage in operatic selections. . . . the Freeman Sisters, and the rest of the company lent efficient aid.²⁸

Women who performed in the 1899 Coontown company included Mollie Dill, Pauline Freeman, Clara Freeman, Jennie Hillman, Wiletta Duncan Pear, LaVan, Myrtle Cousins, Alice Mackay, and Edna Alexander.²⁹ The success of Bob Cole's Coontown sparked the development of a number of Black theatricals.

As more and more Black artists began to perform on stage without blackface, the blackface makeup of minstrelsy began to give way to the non-blackface

pattern of the Black musicals. These productions, which incorporated large choruses of beautiful women, were called "Coon shows" in contrast to "Tom shows" and minstrel shows.³⁰ "Coon songs" were simply ragtime songs with lyrics about Blacks who were referred to as coons.³¹

Another landmark Black musical premiered during the 1898 season in New York. E. E. Rice had opened the summer season at the Casino Roof Garden (at 39th and Broadway) staging an entertainment (mostly vaudeville) entitled Rice's Summer Nights. On 5 July 1898, instead of the usual fare, the evening ended with an afterpiece named Clorindy, or The Origin of the Cakewalk. This musical sketch, which had a cast of forty (later reduced to thirty), was produced by George W. Lederer, and featured libretto and lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar, and music by Will Marion Cook, a classically trained composer and conductor. Clorindy was the first musical to demonstrate what could be done with syncopated ragtime music. Also, Clorindy introduced the Cakewalk to the legitimate stage, with Bert Williams and George Walker performing the dance.³² "The premiere," writes Gerald Bordman, "marked the first time an all-black effort played at a major house--albeit a roof garden--

patronized exclusively by whites. The piece itself was so wildly successful it remained on the bill most of the summer."³³

Cook recalls the performance of his cast:

My chorus sang like Russians, dancing meanwhile like Negroes, and cakewalking like angels, black angels!

Negroes were at last on Broadway, and there to stay! Gone was the uff-dah of the minstrel! Gone the Massa Linkum stuff! We were artists and we were going a long, long way. . . . Nothing could stop us, and nothing did for a decade.³⁴

Abbie Mitchell⁺ first appeared on the stage in 1898, at the age of fourteen, when she took over the lead in Clorindy during its run in Chicago.³⁵ As we will see, Mitchell became an actress in legitimate theatre.

It was in 1896 that the legendary comic team of Bert Williams and George Walker arrived in New York City singing one of the most popular tunes of the day, "Dora Dean." They had written the song as a tribute to the beauty of Dora Dean from The Creole Show. The chorus reads:

Say, have you ever seen Miss Dora Dean, She is the finest gal you've ever seen, I'm a-goin' try and make this gal my queen Next³⁶ Sunday mornin' I'm goin' to marry Miss Dora Dean

In 1900 Williams and Walker starred in Sons of Ham, becoming the highest paid Black performers, a distinction they held throughout their careers.³⁷

They had been touring with the show for two seasons before it opened on 3 March 1902 at the Grand Opera House in New York. Lottie Thompson (Williams), Hattie McIntosh and Ada Walker (who changed her name to Aida)³⁸ were in the cast.

Sons of Ham concerned the efforts of Williams and Walker to masquerade as twins in a Colorado mining town in order to inherit a fortune. The masquerade proceeds well until it is learned that the real twins had mastered "acrobatics and gun-juggling" while at school. The fake twins spend much of their time trying to avoid a display of these talents. The real twins arrive in the final act³⁹ and Williams and Walker are forced to flee.

Around 1902, when the show was playing at the Bijou Theatre in Washington, D.C., Florence Mills, the future star of Shuffle Along (1921) and Blackbirds of 1926, appeared in the production. Billed as "Baby Florence Mills, an Extra Added Attraction," she sang "Miss Hannah from Savannah." Mills, who was about eight years old, was taught the song by Ada Walker.⁴⁰

Applauded for her dancing, Ada Walker was also known for her singing. Of all the hit songs she sang, she was most associated with "Miss Hannah from Savannah," from Sons of Ham. "This number," says Sampson, "was instrumental in making her one of the important figures in the Williams and Walker Company."⁴¹ Her talents

added much to the success of this organization. Van Vetchen recalls that Ada "danced as few white women have danced."⁴² Of this performer James Weldon Johnson comments:

Ada Overton (Mrs. George Walker) was beyond comparison the brightest star among women on the Negro stage of the period; and it is a question whether or not she has since been surpassed. She was an attraction in the company not many degrees less than the two principals.

One of the most popular forms of entertainment among White theatregoers was the operetta. In yet another attempt to break away from the stereotypical images of minstrelsy, Black composers and lyricists began developing Black operettas, hoping to appeal to White audiences.⁴⁴ "Only then could black artists play the top theaters," says Helen Armstead-Johnson.⁴⁵ Black women gained prominence and stature with the development of operettas.

By 1902, Williams and Walker had produced an operetta called In Dahomey. The show, with music by Cook and lyrics by Dunbar, played at the New York Theatre in Times Square, the new center of the theatre district, making it the first Black show to open on Broadway itself.

Despite the title, the new show spent little time in Africa. The first two acts concern Williams and Walker's efforts to find a missing silver

box. In the third act, the comic team escapes to Africa a step ahead of the law. They enjoy their new life in Africa and decide to remain where "Evah Dahkey Is a King." Of course, a few changes will have to be made if they remain, as Williams and Walker explain in their hit song "On Broadway in Dahomey."⁴⁶

By the Spring of 1903, In Dahomey was in London where it played at the Shaftesbury Theatre for seven months before touring the provinces.⁴⁷ While in London, the company gave a command performance in the garden at Buckingham Palace for the birthday of the Prince of Wales.⁴⁸ Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns credit In Dahomey with making the "Cakewalk an international fad."⁴⁹ This show not only established Williams' and Walker's reputation, but it also established Black women as musical comedy stars. Hattie McIntosh, Lottie Williams (Mrs. Bert Williams), Ada Overton (Mrs. George Walker), and Abbie Mitchell (Mrs. Will Marion Cook) shared the lead with the comic duo. Inez Clough (who had remained in Europe entertaining for five years after the run of Oriental America), Ollie Burgoyne (also from Oriental America), Anita Bush,⁺ and Laura Bowman⁺ were in the chorus of In Dahomey. Bowman and Bush began their professional careers in In Dahomey, careers which were to span over forty years.

In Dahomey was a huge success, perhaps partly

due to its novelty, according to Sandra Richards:

"The mere fact that Negroes had assembled a cast of more than forty performers, written the book, composed the score, and stage managed a supposedly good musical comedy was in and of itself a novelty and worth the trip to the theatre."⁵⁰

Ollie (Olga) Burgoyne stayed in Europe after the run of In Dahomey. Around 1904, she traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, where she opened a lingerie shop and used Black models in the window. In addition to being a business woman, Burgoyne headed a company of fourteen players. When the Revolution occurred, she and her troupe were vacationing in Austria. Unable to return to Russia, Burgoyne came back to the United States with little money and few belongings.⁵¹ "Miss Burgoyne's specialty was dancing," says Sampson, "and her forte was the Brazilian dance, the Snake dance and the famous Spanish dance."⁵² Producing, choreographing, and performing in musicals throughout the 1920s, Ollie toured Europe at least fifteen times with various acts during her career, playing in Egypt, Turkey, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, France, Hungary, and Switzerland.⁵³ Burgoyne was last seen on the stage as one of the three witches in the Federal Theatre

Project's all-Black Macbeth at the Lafayette Theatre in 1936.

In 1904, Will Marion Cook's The Southerners, a musical of life on the plantation, was presented at the New York Theatre. Laura Bowman appeared in the chorus.⁵⁴ Abbie Mitchell portrayed Mandy Lou, a principal in this integrated show, and Ida Forsyne danced a solo.⁵⁵

Although a racially mixed cast in a Broadway production was not unique in 1904, it often sparked fears of trouble. The reviewer for the New York Times describes the tension of opening night:

When the chorus of real live coons walked in for the cake (walk) last night at the New York Theatre, mingling with the white members of the cast, there were those in the audience who trembled in their seats, as if expecting an . . . explosion. . . . But it presently became evident that the spirit of harmony reigned. The magician was discovered on inquiry to be the Negro composer Will Marion Cook, who all alone had succeeded in harmonizing the racial broth as skillfully as he had harmonized the accompanying score.⁵⁶

Williams' and Walkers' next hit operetta, Abyssinia, with book by Jessie Shipp and music by Cook, opened on 20 February 1906 at the Majestic Theatre, then located at Columbus Circle on the corner of 58th Street. In addition to a cast of over twenty chorus girls, several women played principal parts with the two

stars. They included Lottie Williams, Ada Overton Walker, Hattie McIntosh, Annie Ross, and Maggie Davis.⁵⁷ During the run of the show, Anita Bush appeared in the chorus.⁵⁸

In 1901, Bob Cole teamed with J. Rosamond Johnson, brother of James Weldon Johnson and a popular musician and singer who arranged many well-known Negro spirituals. Later, in 1906, Cole and the Johnson brothers composed The Shoo-Fly Regiment. This operetta, starring Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, opened on 6 August 1907 at the Bijou Theatre in New York. The featured women performers included Nettie Glenn, Elizabeth Williams, Mamie Butler, Mollie Dill, and Fannie Wise.⁵⁹ During the run of the show, Inez Clough left Shoo-Fly to join Williams and Walker in Abyssinia. She stayed with the company until it disbanded in 1910.⁶⁰

Williams and Walker appeared together for the last time in their most praised production, Bandana (or Bandanna) Land. This show, with musical numbers staged by Ada Walker and music composed by Cook and Will Vodery with lyricist Alex Rogers, opened on 3 February 1908 at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn, New York. During the run of the show, George, suffering from paresis, became too ill to perform. In February

1909, one year after the opening of Bandana Land, Walker was forced to retire from the stage. Before the show was revised due to Walker's absence, Ada imitated her husband performing his theme song, "Bon Bon Buddy."⁶¹

Cartoons of Ada appeared in the newspapers showing her in a straw hat, plaid four-button suit and spats, carrying white gloves and a cane, her bouffant long hair swept under her hat, dressed for her impersonation of the "Bon Bon Buddy."⁶²

Abbie Mitchell, one of the principals in the show, sang "Red Red Rose."⁶³

In 1909 Abbie Mitchell starred as the lead soprano, Minnehaha (singing "Cupid is an Indian Pickinny"), in Cole's and J. Rosamond Johnson's operetta The Red Moon. The show, which opened on 3 May 1909 in New York at the Majestic Theatre, toured England, where Abbie sang a command performance for Czar Nicholas II of Russia.⁶⁴ Blanche Deas, who was later to perform in a production that made theatrical history, appeared in the chorus of Red Moon.⁶⁵

The storyline of Red Moon combined the folklore of Blacks and Indians:

The red moon of the title was an omen of bad luck to the blacks in the cast and a call to war for the Indians. Needless to say, this dual meaning led to several plot complications. Minnehaha, half-Indian and half-black, lives with her mother on a Virginia farm. Her delinquent father, Chief

Lowdog, decides that he misses his long-lost daughter, so he kidnaps her to his reservation. Slim Brown (Cole) and Plunk Green (Johnson) try to rescue the chief's daughter from her father's clutches. Brown and Green disguise themselves as Indians and depart for the West. After several Indian war dances in the second act, Plunk rescues Minnehaha⁶⁶ and the chief and his wife are reconciled.

A few months after the closing of Bandana Land, Bert Williams decided to produce and star in Mr. Lode of Koal (1909). A full-length production in the Williams and Walker tradition, Mr. Lode of Koal featured many of the performers from previous Williams and Walker shows. Ada Overton Walker, however, refused to sign on. Although she had been offered a contract, "she and the management have not been able to agree on several items," reports the New York Age.⁶⁷ After Ada took over the lead in Red Moon, Williams signed Lottie Grady, a showgirl from the Pekin Theatre in Chicago, to co-star with him. Unlike other Williams and Walker efforts, this show did not receive the support of the press and the public. Mr. Lode of Koal, which opened on 1 November 1909 at the Majestic Theatre, was Williams' last performance in an all-Black show.⁶⁸ In addition to Lottie Grady, who played Mysteria, there were ten principal female parts. Inez Clough appeared in the chorus as a flower girl.⁶⁹ Like Clough

and Blanche Deas (from Red Moon), Lottie Grady also figures in a later event that made theatrical history.

On 8 May 1911, The Smart Set, a Black producing/acting company, opened with His Honor the Barber. This musical, starring S. H. Dudley and Ada Overton Walker (In Her Specialties), played at the Majestic Theatre for eight performances. "His Honor the Barber features the dreams of a barber named Raspberry Snow. Snow wishes to shave the president of the United States and elope with the beautiful Lily White. His wishes come true in Act II, but it is only a dream sequence. Snow awakes to the disappointment in Act III."⁷⁰

The reviewer for the New York Dramatic Mirror writes:

S. H. Dudley and Aida Overton Walker lead the contingent with much assurance and allow no dull moments while they hold the stage. Dudley is a quiet comedian of much resourcefulness, while Miss Walker, as is well known, is the best Negro comedienne today. Her tomboy number, her Spanish song and dance, and her impersonation of a Negro "chappie," the last of which is the real hit of the play, are minutely favorable characterizations. With such material as⁷¹ Dudley and Miss Walker have, they do wonders.

From 1911 to 1912, "Aida Walker and Her Abyssinia Girls" were vaudeville favorites. During the period 1912-1914, instead of performing, she produced and managed acts such the "Happy Girls" and the "Porto Rico Girls." The last production with which she was

associated was given on 16 August 1914 at the Manhattan Casino. A few months later, on 11 October 1914, at the age of 34, she died.⁷²

After the closing of His Honor the Barber in 1911, Black productions on the professional stage ended for six seasons. In 1910, Bert Williams signed with the Ziegfeld Follies and stayed with the annual editions of the show until 1920. Soon after Walker's death in 1911, Bob Cole's health faltered; he retired from the stage and died, also in 1911. The importance of the leadership of these men was so great that their departure left no producer/director/writer/composer/performer teams to develop Black musical comedy for Broadway. So, from 1911 to 1917, except for Bert Williams, Blacks did not perform on the Broadway stage.⁷³

During these years, however, there was an aggressive effort by Black artists and others to establish a theatre in the Black community. This venture produced, in 1915, Harlem's first community theatre company, the Lafayette Players. The Lafayette Players were well received, presenting much of what was being produced on Broadway. The company is reported to have given creditable performances of melodramas such as The Count of Monte Cristo, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Madame

X, The Servant in the House, The Thirteenth Chair, and other plays of that caliber, as well as Othello and musical comedy shows.⁷⁴

Abbie Mitchell, for a long time the company's most praised leading lady, reveals the importance of the pioneering efforts of these performers and the reason why they presented such plays:

The men and women of the Negro group who have paved the way for all Negroes in the theatres of the United States in acting came from a small group known as the Lafayette Players. Before their advent at the Lafayette Theatre . . . it wasn't possible to see a Negro acting a serious part, small or large, on Broadway. White men and women were "browed down" to play the roles. The reason for this, as expressed by the producers, was that we, the Negroes, hadn't any deep emotions. Well, the old Lafayette Players proved we not only had deep emotions, but could project them to trained and un-trained audiences. At that time, thirty-two years ago, there weren't any serious dramas written by our own, hence we were compelled to play Broadway successes. . . . "Broadwayites," producers and managers came to ridicule, but remained to applaud. From then on they began to tryout individuals downtown; the ice was broken, doors were opened. Perhaps someday some one of our poets will dig deep into the well of our folklore unashamedly and bring forth some play about⁷⁵ our men and women of whom we can be proud . . .

The success of the Lafayette Theatre prompted the founding of stock companies at the Lincoln Theatre, also in Harlem, and Black theatres in other major cities: The Lafayette Players at the Dunbar Theatre in Philadelphia and the Lafayette Players at the Howard

Theatre in Washington, D. C. ⁷⁶

Black women played an active role, both as entertainers and businesswomen, in the development of the Lafayette stock acting company. Some of the women who performed in this troupe had been a part of the Isham, Black Patti, Cole and Johnson, and Williams and Walker productions: Laura Bowman, Mattie Wilkes, Marie Young, Abbie Mitchell, Lottie Grady, Inez Clough, Elizabeth Williams, and Anita Bush. Black theatre scholars credit Bush with galvanizing these performers into action. As we will see, besides conceiving the idea of organizing the group, Bush brought the first permanent company to the Lafayette Theatre.

As has been stated, for six consecutive seasons, from 1911 to 1917, Black entertainers did not perform in mainstream professional theatre in New York. Nevertheless, during this period, vital changes took place: Black artists in New York who had for decades played to predominately white audiences were now playing to a predominately Black audience, and the freedom from the taboos and restrictions of forty years gave them an opportunity to perform in offerings running from crude burlesque to Broadway drama.⁷⁷ Of this activity in Harlem, James Weldon Johnson writes:

So, with the establishment of the Negro theatre in Harlem, coloured performers in New York experienced for the first time release from the restraining fears of what a white audience would stand for; for the first time they felt free to do on stage whatever they were able to do.⁷⁸

This move from Broadway to Harlem, like minstrelsy, provided another training period for the Black performer to sharpen his acting skills; soon, he would be thrust onto the professional stage once again.

"April 5, 1917 is the date of the most important single event in the entire history of the Negro in the American theatre," writes Johnson, "for it marks the beginning of a new era."⁷⁹ On this day, three dramatic plays were presented by the Colored Players at the Garden Theatre (formerly Wallack's) in Madison Square Garden in New York City. These plays, collectively entitled Three Plays For A Negro Theatre, were written by Ridgely Torrence, produced by Mrs. Emily Hapgood, and directed and staged by Robert Edmond Jones. The author, producer, and director/designer were White. The first play of the evening was The Rider of Dreams, a folk comedy, followed by Granny Maumee, a folk tragedy, and ending with Simon the Cyrenian, "A Passion Interlude."

Granny Maumee had an all-female cast with Marie Jackson-Stuart playing Granny Maumee, Fannie Tarkington

as Pearl, and Blanche Deas (from Red Moon) as Sapphie. This piece depicts a Black woman of royal African ancestry who despises Whites because they had wrongly accused her son of murder and burned him in a fire that blinded her when she tried to save him. When her granddaughter returns home with a mulatto child, Granny Maumee tries to place a voodoo curse upon the White father, but she has lost her powers because she has been a Christian for a long time. The Rider of Dreams presents Lucy Sparrow, a hard-working rural woman who has saved enough money from her meager earnings to buy her dream, a home. Her husband, Madison Sparrow, a dreamer who spends most of his time daydreaming, steals the money. In turn, he is robbed but manages to get the money back and continues to "ride his dreams."⁸⁰ Blanche Deas played Lucy Sparrow. Simon the Cyrenian is about the Black man, Simon, who was forced to carry Christ's cross to Mt. Calvary.⁸¹ Inez Clough (from Oriental America, Shoo-Fly Regiment, the Williams and Walker Company, and the Lafayette Players) portrayed Procula, the wife of Pilate, and Lottie Grady (from Mr. Lode of Koal and the Pekin and Lafayette Theatres) played Acte, Princess of Egypt.

The presentation of this landmark production

helped to refute the generally held belief that while Black performers were natural singers and dancers, they did not possess the ability to portray dramatic characters. Displaying a wide range of acting skills, these players received almost unanimous praise from the critics, the press, and the public. According to the critic for the Globe (1917), "These Negroes play Negro plays. They reveal the soul of the people. They are not propagandizing. They do not demand, argue, or protest. They are really artists."⁸² The reviewer for the 14 April 1917 New Republic reports, "It is, all things considered, as fine an enterprise as the American theatre has seen for years. . . . The actors had unusual power and charm."⁸³ The critic reviewing for the 14 April 1917 edition of the New York Dramatic Mirror writes:

To Mrs. Emily Hapgood, then, belongs the credit for a significant experiment--that of testing the possibilities of negro drama interpreted by colored actors before cosmopolitan audiences. . . . More completely trained white actors could not have felt nor made other feel the spirit of "The Rider of Dreams," . . . Mrs. Hapgood's negro players are one of the big events of the season and deserve every possible encouragement.⁸⁴

Zona Gale, writing for the August 1917 issue of Theatre Arts, was impressed with both the actors and Jones' costumes in Simon the Cyrenian:

And how the figures move! Procula, the wife of Pilate, the attendants, the litter-bearer, the lithe Ethiopians, the slaves. Beautiful skin, set off by costumes designed to stress that beauty and movement, costumes such as we, who do not know Ethiopians, have never seen these people wear--loose, ⁸⁵ flowing, freedom-giving, accenting every grace.

Referring to the entire ensemble, Gale concludes:

The cast was selected from colored people all over New York, a few acting in stock companies but most of them untouched by the crudities of the burlesque written for them. The players came now to be themselves. Intonations, business, interpretation, were never given to the players first--merely modified as the work progressed. ⁸⁶ The entire effect was unforgettable, prophetic.

The New York Age, a Harlem weekly, begins its review, "Negro Actors Make Debut In Drama at Garden Theatre; Given Most Cordial Welcome," written by Lester A. Walton, on the front page. According to Walton (who would eventually become the manager of the Lafayette Theatre):

For the first time in the history of the American drama Broadway playgoers attended a theatrical performance to look with a serious eye on the work of the Negro as a legitimate actor and to be swayed by his pathos as well as his humor. In the past the Negro's efforts to entertain on the stage have been confined solely to the field of comedy. Judging from the most cordial reception accorded the ambitious Thespians, who were compelled to respond to encore after encore at the end of each playlet, the launching of this bold dramatic endeavor was an unqualified success.

The most pretentious of the group of playlets was "Simon the Cyrenian," . . .

Never have colored performers appeared in a more carefully arranged production, one in which minute attention has been given to every detail

. . .

The cast of characters for "Simon the Cyrenian" could not have been selected with greater care, and it is doubtful if a superior company of Negro actors⁸⁷ could gather together to put on the piece.

. . .

Responding to the question as to whether White theatregoers will take kindly to this experiment, Walton writes:

From a Negro's standpoint the extolling of the virtues of the black man, particularly in "Granny Mawmee" and "Simon the Cyrenian," are pleasing. But will the white man relish the idea of paying to hear the Caucasian depicted as a forger and thief in the first playlet; as an immoral creature, who "just would have his way," in the second piece, and as the assailants of Christ in the last playlet. It must be admitted that the three dramatic offerings treat the white man very much as the Negro is mistreated by the daily press--magnify his faults and suppress his virtues. But maybe our pale-face brethren will not be as thin-skinned after all.⁸⁸

Walton concludes, "Nothing but good can come of the appearance of Negroes in Negro plays at the Garden Theatre, and a big movement has been started which is destined to take on momentum as times goes on. The Negro has shown that he possesses an artistic instinct, temperment, intellect and ability to act, and the public has in turn shown that 'Barkus is willin' and will accept Negroes as exponents of the drama."⁸⁹

On the other hand, all of the press was not favorable

to Three Plays. Burns Mantle claims that the acting was "bad." Writing in the 14 April 1917 edition of the New York Evening Mail, he comments: "The Negro is not racially adapted to the expression of tragedy or serious emotion, usually displaying an imitative and stilted style and a grotesque rather than a genuine sense of feeling."⁹⁰ The article concludes: "We feel it would be better for him to be away from Broadway influences."⁹¹

In an article entitled "The Colored Players," published in the 14 April 1917 edition of the New York Post, James Weldon Johnson provides some insight as to the reasons why Mantle would express such racial views:

The Negro has long had a place on the American stage; and the race has produced a long line of well known minstrels, comedians, and dancers. Bert Williams is today acknowledged as among the best comedians in the country. But the Negro's place on the American stage has always been limited and circumscribed. The idea that the colored performer could do anything else besides making an audience laugh seems rarely to have entered a manager's head. This attitude on the part of managers has been due largely to the popular national conception of the Negro as a happy-go-lucky, laughing, shuffling, banjo-picking being; a conception which ignores the other side of the truth-- that the life of every thinking Negro in the United States is part of a great tragedy.⁹²

In an article entitled "The Beginnings of the Negro Theatre," published in the June 1917 issue of

Vanity Fair, Louis Sherwin discusses the recent success of Three Plays. He documents this event as being the beginning of Black Drama:

Mrs. Hapgood made the first, gallant effort to establish a theatre to express the drama, poetry and humor of the negro as he is. . . . To my mind this was one of the most important things that has happened in the history of the American stage.

Sherwin states why he believes that Blacks had not been given the opportunity to play a larger role in developing the American theatre. He cites Cole and Johnson and Williams and Walker as being the only prominent Black theatre artists. The Stage Society, which had produced Granny Maumee in 1915, wanted to organize a group to dramatize Black life which would be written by Black authors, but they were unable to find other suitable plays to accompany the one-act piece for an evening's bill. "There was no difficulty in finding actors, but the problem was to get plays," says Sherwin.⁹⁴ Although scores of manuscripts by Blacks had been read, none was acceptable. Sherwin explains:

Your negro dramatist, never having been encouraged in the proper direction, invariably produces a lurid imitation of the worst products of the white playwright's typewriter.⁹⁵

Torrence's portrayal of his Black characters

was realistic and sympathetic. Of his understanding and treatment of Black life, Sherwin writes:

Not one of Mr. Torrence's characters dwelt "humorously" on the larceny of chicken coops. Not once was the family razor flourished as a favorite instrument of social intercourse. So naturally New York audiences did not recognize these characters as negroes nor the plays as truthful pictures of negro life. Mr. Torrence showed us that our conceptions of these points were cheap, narrow, snobbish and vulgar, and that in ignoring such a fertile source of drama and poetry for so long we had been cheating ourselves out of genuine artistic enjoyment.⁹⁶

Torrence helped to advance the development of Black Drama, the Black character, and the Black artist through his plays. He explains his reasons for writing them:

It was not only the capacity of the Negro as an actor that I wished to exploit. It was also the extraordinary dramatic richness of his daily life. The Negro has been a race apart and usually a race in subjection. . . . [The Negro race's] life under slavery with its intense but seemingly helpless longing for liberty produced in it a certain epic spirit, unconscious of course. . . . In modern life, the Negro comes face to face with many tragedies unknown to the Anglo-Saxon.⁹⁷

After playing at the Garden for eighteen performances, Three Plays for a Negro Theatre moved to the Garrick Theatre on April 16th where it ran for one week. On 6 April 1917, the day after the opening, the United States declared war against Germany. Even though Three Plays was a critical success, the increasing

tension of World War I became too much for this show, as well as for some stronger shows; on 23 April 1917 it closed.⁹⁸ In spite of their short run, "the plays were critically acclaimed for their realism, their use of Black actors, their avoidance of stereotypes, and the integration of Blacks in the audience," notes Freda Scott.⁹⁹

James Haskins, agrees with Sherwin that Black talent was available to present such works. Only John T. Butler, who portrayed Simon the Cyrenian, and Opal Cooper, who played Madison Sparrow, were new to the professional stage. Everyone else had acquired years of theatrical experience:

It would have been less surprising to some of the white critics that blacks could act well if the critics had known about the backgrounds of the performers Torrence chose. Many had been members of the Lafayette stock company, or had worked in the Cole and Johnson and Williams and Walker shows. Inez Clough had been with both Cole and Johnson and the Lafayette troupe.¹⁰⁰

For displaying a wide range of emotions, Inez Clough was chosen as one of the ten best actresses of the year by critic George Jean Nathan.¹⁰¹ Clough performed in two landmark productions that made theatrical history for both Blacks and the American Theatre. Moreover, these presentations were extremely important to the Black female performer, giving her prominence,

stature, and respect. Clough, like other Black women, made the theatre her life-long career. Her rise from chorus girl to dramatic actress was not an isolated phenomenon; rather it appears to reflect a pattern common to other Black women who also made the transition from musicals to dramas.

The pioneering efforts of Black artists during this period to break away from traditional "darky shows" were significant. Refining and capitalizing on ideas first established by the Hyers Sisters, the theatricals presented were novel in plot, dancing, and music, introducing to a wider audience African settings and themes, urbanized, upwardly mobile Blacks, and love interests. All of these innovations provided opportunities for Black performers to enlarge the "horizons of acceptable black characterizations."¹⁰² Sandra Richards writes, "Gone are the days of the happy life on the plantation with dear ole Massa; instead Negroes strut, wear modish clothes and impressive jewelry, as did Walker in sporting a breast sash of diamonds in In Dahomey."¹⁰³ And now that song lyrics were bold and sassy (like those in Sons of Ham), Ada Walker could sing

I want to be the leading lady,

I want to play the real star part, . . .
I'll make Bernhardt look like thirty cents,
. . .¹⁰⁴

These productions represented the transitional period between minstrelsy and the Black musical comedy and the "New Negro" of the 1920s.¹⁰⁵

The emergence and development of Black musicals of this era is of great importance in the history of American musical theatre. These shows were forerunners of the coming Broadway musical. In addition to the traditional types of music that audiences expected, these Black musicals moved ragtime songs and Black dancing from their accustomed place in vaudeville and made them acceptable as an integral part of the developing American musical comedy.¹⁰⁶

The talents of so many Black artists during this period helped to establish a form that was not imported from Europe or the English stage, but was indigenous to the United States.¹⁰⁷ These productions added a new dimension to American theatre entertainment, laying a foundation for public acceptance of images of Black men and women on the stage in other than "burlesque" roles. Through them, the Black artist-performer left his distinctive mark upon the development of American musical comedy. As James V. Hatch says,

without the contributions of these artists the "American musical might still be waltzing with an umpah-pah-pah to the descendants of Merry Widow and Naughty Marietta." 108

VI

The Class Acts:

Three Black Women Singers and Dancers

At the turn of the century Black entertainers were redefining their image on the American stage. According to Marshall and Jean Stearns,

The CLASS ACTS, among other things, were an expression of the Negroes' drive toward equality and respectability. Imitating and embellishing the formal elegance of the more sophisticated white acts, they ran headlong into an old stereotype: a Negro performer had always been an overdressed dandy or a shiftless plantation hand. Bit by bit they refuted the stereotype, first as individuals and then as teams, taking this characteristic here and that quality there and blending them into a dignified combination.¹

These writers point out that "the pioneering team Johnson and Dean was perhaps the first to break ground for the class acts."² By 1900 Dora Dean had gained international fame. Born in Indianapolis (but considering Minneapolis her home) Dora Dean Babbige and her husband Charles Johnson, one of the end men from The Creole Show, were cakewalkers who headlined here and abroad. They met first while playing in The Creole Show and then decided to form a team

After learning new routines, they left the show for vaudeville, and were soon successful.³ "Johnson and Dean sold themselves to audiences through their well-dressed elegance and impressive personalities," say Stearns and Stearns. "Johnson was not a tap dancer. He was a strutter in the cakewalk tradition and an eccentric dancer who employed legomania, a rhythmic twisting and turning of the legs. Neither of them could sing--they 'talked' their songs, while Johnson inserted an occasional dance and Dora 'posed.'"⁴

Sophisticated and elegant, Johnson and Dean made the cakewalk a star turn. Comedian Tom Fletcher describes one of their dance routines in 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business:

. . . they were the first to use the Flicker Kinetoscope, a spotlight with a glass built on the inside and a handle on the outside. At a given cue the stage lights would be turned off and the house lights dimmed. Charley Johnson, dressed in a black Prince Albert or full dress suit, with white gloves and spats, and Dora, with a dark dress trimmed in white, would come on and go into their dance. The Kinetoscope would be turned on while they were dancing and when the spotlight hit them, the operator would turn the handle making the glass on the inside of the machine whirl, with the result that the couple on the stage looked like a crowd of hands and feet and nothing else.⁵

Creative and innovative, their dancing established several firsts. In 1891 they introduced the cakewalk

at Hammerstein's Roof Garden in New York City.⁶ "They were 'the first to really do the professional stage cakewalk.'"⁷ They were also the first dance team in vaudeville, Black or white, in 1901, to wear evening clothes on stage, at Koster and Bial's, also in New York City. In 1897, Johnson and Dean became the first Black dance team to play on Broadway.⁸ In addition to being talented, Johnson and Dean were a handsome couple. The 8 April 1901 issue of the New York Telegraph calls them "the best dressed team in vaudeville."⁹ Dean, a fair-complexioned, beautiful woman with a stunningly plump, hourglass figure, was "the first Negro woman to wear a thousand-dollar costume on stage."¹⁰ "At the height of their success," says Sampson, "many of Dora's gowns cost more than \$1000 each and were copied by Lillian Russell, Sarah Bernhardt and other big names on Broadway."¹¹ The 5 February 1915 edition of Variety notes:

. . . "Miss Dean and Her Fantoms," the act is called. It is colored and the classiest of its kind. Miss Dean for her entrance gown chose a pink satin dress with a crystallized tunic of old blue. A large black hat with aigrettes was worn. A second change was a harem costume. The bloomers were pale blue and the dress purple chiffon. The last gown was artistic in coloring as well as model. A foundation of salmon pink satin was covered in white net, edged in white fox.¹²

Johnson and Dean were so popular and exceptional

that in 1908 they were signed by the prestigious William Morris Agency.¹³ They made the cakewalk famous playing winter gardens in Budapest, Berlin, Hungary, and Vienna.¹⁴ "On tours abroad, according to dancers in the company, she had the crowned heads of Europe literally at her feet."¹⁵ While the team was in Germany, artist Ernest von Heilmann was so inspired by her beauty that he bought Dora Dean's theatrical contract so she could pose for him. The picture was exhibited throughout America after it was unveiled at the coronation of King Edward in London in 1902.¹⁶ A cigarette company printed her picture on a card as "The Sweet Caporal Girl" and enclosed it in packs of cigarettes.¹⁷ A popular song of the day, written by Williams and Walker as a tribute to her beauty, asked "Have you met Miss Dora Dean, prettiest girl you've ever seen?"

Married in 1893, the couple separated at the start of World War I.¹⁸ "Miss Dean had a fabulous personality. . . . Whenever she encouraged us, it made us feel two feet taller," says Rufus Greenlee, a famous member of a dance team who, in 1913, performed with Johnson and Dean on their fourteen countries European tour that lasted over a year.¹⁹ According to Greenlee, "Dora and Charlie were married but they

never got along well and when the Archduke was assassinated in 1914 and business slowed down, they separated and went back home to Minneapolis."²⁰ Both Johnson and Dean formed acts of their own and continued to work. A Variety review of her show at the American Roof Garden Theatre in New York City, dated 26 June 1914 reads:

At last a "Pick act" without a white woman for the feature. With three girls and as many boys, Dora Dean and Co. make a fast going aggregation. The boys are the workers and get big results, the girls can't sing but their work shows enthusiasm. The boys' dancing at the finish leaves a fine impression. The act is dressed well, the girls making a number of changes, while the boys look very nifty in dark trousers and later in evening dress. The act should go very well on the big small time.²¹

Prompted by the popularity of her own company, Dora Dean organized several successful all-Black singing/dancing troupes who appeared in Germany, Russia, England, and France.²²

Dora Dean left show business for a while and became partners with Mattie Wilkes (from Octoroons and Oriental America) in a lingerie and hat shop in New York City. Mattie, who had been entertaining in Russia, had returned to New York when World War I erupted. Previously, she had owned a lingerie and hat shop there.²³

In 1934 Dora Dean travelled to Hollywood to do "Georgia Rose," an all-Black film. While there, she and Charles Johnson decided to revive their old act.²⁴ In 1936, although both were over fifty, they staged a "comeback" at Connie's Inn in New York, then appeared briefly in nightclubs throughout the country.²⁵ By this time, however, motion pictures were replacing vaudeville and their act was shortlived. Johnson and Dean returned to Minneapolis where Dora Dean died on 13 December 1949.²⁶ "Acclaimed as 'the originators of high-class Negro show business,' Johnson and Dean established the roles of the genteel Negro couple on the American stage--the courtly gentleman and the gracious lady."²⁷ She did not, however, become an actress in legitimate theatre.

Another very early pivotal female figure who did become an actress on the musical stage was Madame M. Sissieretta Jones, better known as "Black Patti." A trained concert singer, Madame Jones pioneered with her own company. Of the other competing Black roadshows²⁸ touring the country, hers was the most prestigious.²⁹ Born Matilida Joyner on 5 January 1869, in Portsmouth, Virginia, the daughter of Reverend Jeremiah M. and Henrietta B. Joyner (a soprano of exceptional talent),

she and her family migrated to Providence, R. I. in 1876. Sissy, as she was called as a child, began to attract local attention singing in the Pond Street Baptist Church Sunday School entertainments. At fifteen, she started studying at the Providence Academy of Music. She continued her classical training at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.³⁰

She made her professional debut in New York City in 1888 at Wallack's Theatre, "a place where no other colored singer had been privileged to shine," announces a press release.³¹ The next day, The New York Clipper dubbed her "The Black Patti" after Adelina Patti, the reigning White opera singer of the day.³² The paper says, "she sings like Patti without the slightest effort."³³ Although she appreciated the compliment, Madame Jones disliked the comparison. In an interview some years later, she said: "But I do not begin to sing like Patti can. I have been anxious to drop the name but it had been so identified with me, it is now impossible."³⁴ According to Dr. Carl R. Gross, "her voice in its early stages was a decided contralto and as it matured, still contained the velvety richness so noticeable in such singers as Scalchi and others."³⁵

On 4 September 1883 she married David Richard

Jones. Dick Jones, a one-eyed impresario who managed some of her business affairs, had definite plans for his wife's career. Because Mme. Jones "was very dark skinned, with Negroid features, he took her to London in 1890 to begin arsenic 'treatment' which was supposed to lighten her coloring and straighten her hair."³⁶

As later photographs attest, the "treatment" did not work. Mme. Jones and her husband, a handsome mulatto, had one child who died. In 1898 she divorced Jones, a race-track and gambling man, because he mis-managed her money. However, she kept the name Madame Sissieretta Jones for the stage³⁷

By 1891 she had toured the West Indies and South America with the Tennessee Jubilee Singers for six months.³⁸ Black Patti received wide recognition after she had performed with Jules Levy and his famous Band at Madison Square Garden on 26-28 April 1892 at a Jubilee Spectacle and Cakewalk. After singing before 75,000 people in a week, she remarked, "I woke up famous after singing at the Garden and didn't know it."³⁹ Two nights later, she sang for a large audience at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn. Such was her success that rumors that the managers of the Metropolitan Opera House had signed her to sing the dark roles

in Aida and L'Africaine began circulating.⁴⁰ Although racial prejudice probably prevented her from appearing there at the time, she helped lay the foundation for Marian Anderson and others who followed.

Black Patti went on to develop a large following singing on the concert stage. Earning more than \$100 a day, she sang at the World's Fair in Toronto, Canada (1892), and before 7,500 in two nights at Saratoga's Congress Spring Park (1892).⁴¹ In September 1892 she sang for President Harrison at the White House, and later, for President Cleveland.⁴² She also sang for Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William McKinley.⁴³

Sissieretta Jones was managed by the American Lecture and Musical Agency. Owned by Major Pond, the agency handled such celebrities as Mark Twain, Henry Ward Beecher, and Sir Edwin Arnold.⁴⁴ In 1893 Major Pond demanded and received \$2000 (the highest salary ever paid to a Black artist) for her one-week engagement at the Pittsburgh Exposition. On 22 February 1893, she sang before 7,000 at the Talmage Tabernacle in Brooklyn, New York. She performed before 300,000 at the Buffalo Exposition, and 12,000 in Congress Hall Park at the Chicago World's Fair.⁴⁵ Mrs. Alberta Wilson, who was also under contract to Major Pond,

accompanied Madame Jones. "At a concert in Louisville, KY, to the people who had never seen a finished colored pianist, she was a curiosity and revelation."⁴⁶

Appearing before such large audiences had its drawbacks: Because of low admission fees which encouraged attendance by the "popular" audience, Madame Jones, like the Hyers Sisters before her, (who, in order to earn a living performed in minstrel shows), performed a repertory that would appeal to public tastes. She sang "plantation pieces" like "Swanee River," and favorites like "Comin' Thro' the Rye" and "Maggie, the Cows are in the Clover."⁴⁷ The 29 September 1892

Pittsburgh Press notes:

"Black Patti" has a sweet, well modulated voice and yet it is powerful enough to be heard throughout the main building. She had considerable to contend with, too, in her afternoon performance in the noise and confusion created by over 3,500 school children, who despite the efforts of teachers and policemen could not keep still.⁴⁸

Unlike her White contemporaries Lillian Nordica and Emma Emaes, Sissieretta Jones could not aspire to a career on the legitimate American operatic stage, especially the Metropolitan Opera House.⁴⁹ She was painfully aware of the restrictions imposed upon her by color. An excerpt from an interview in the 12 February 1893 Detroit Tribune reveals: "Her [Mrs.

Jones's] favorite songs are from the opera 'L'Africaine.' She would like very much to sing in that opera, but she pathetically said: 'They tell me my color is against me.'" ⁵⁰ Whenever Madame Jones encountered racism and was asked by the press about her experiences, she would speak out. According to an undated article, when questioned by a reporter for the Commercial concerning how she felt about her performance before a segregated house in Louisville, Kentucky, she replied: "It's so strange; I never have met with anything like it before." ⁵¹ When the reporter responded, "What do you mean?" She answered:

Why, putting the colored people off in the gallery and leaving all those vacant seats downstairs. Why the house would have been crowded if "they" had allowed them to have seats downstairs. I felt very much disappointed: I have never before had such an experience, and I could not help feeling it. . . . I think people of my ^{own} race ought not to be shut out in this way. ⁵²

Morris Reno, president of the Carnegie Music Hall Association of New York, engaged Black Patti for a tour of the United States and Europe. She performed in Europe successfully for almost an entire year, premiering first in Berlin. The Berliner Zeitung reports: "no sooner had the real Patti departed than a most worthy substitute appeared in the person of the Black Patti from America." ⁵³ She sang in St.

Petersburg, Munich, Milan, Cologne, and Paris. In London she gave a command performance for King Edward and for the Prince of Wales.⁵⁴

During the Nineties, the "Star System"--the star rather than the play--dominated the stage. Touring operatic companies had become popular. Realizing that her operatic career was limited, however, Madame Jones embarked on a theatrical career.⁵⁵ Upon her return from her second European tour, her new managers (Voelckel and Nolan of New York) hired Bob Cole (who had been a comedian in The Creole Show) to write and stage an all-Black show for Mme. Jones, a show that could compete with Oriental America. In 1896, "Black Patti's Troubadours" opened at Proctor's 58th Street Theatre in New York and toured successfully.⁵⁶ Sampson credits "The Troubadours" with being the "first successful black road show to tour the East and South."⁵⁷ In pattern, this production was similar to minstrelsy. Johnson writes:

The first part was a sketchy farce interspersed with songs and choruses and ending with a buck-dance contest. Then followed the olio. The finale was termed: "The Operatic Kaleidoscope," and in it "Black Patti" appeared in songs and operatic selections with the chorus.

Although this was bold for a Black woman at the time, Mme. Jones' activity in the show was not truly a first.

As Errol Hill observes, "long before the Oriental America Company or the Black Patti Troubadours of the 1890s, the Hyers Sisters introduced the singing of operatic selections to round out a performance."⁵⁹

Black Patti's Troubadours were widely accepted. According to a review in the 12 December 1896 issue of the Indianapolis Freeman:

Vaudeville, comedy, burlesque, and opera interpreted by fifty of the best artists ever organized for this style of entertainment will be the stage offering of "Black Patti's Troubadours" on the occasion of their performance in this city. The company is practically a double one with "Black Patti" as the star of the operatic and singing forces. . . . She sustains the principal roles of "The Grand Duchess," "Carmen," "Bohemian Girl," "Trovatore," "Lucia," "Maritana," "Tartar," and "The Daughter of the Regiment." . . . The work of Black Patti and the company has received the highest marks of public approval and the forthcoming performances here will doubtless be highly appreciated.⁶⁰

The original "Troubadours" cast included Stella Wiley and Bob Cole in the comedy sketches; May Bobee, the Creole nightingale; and thirty pretty chorus girls. Maggie Davis, Ada Overton (Walker), Lena Wise, the DeWolf Sisters, and Madame Reed were in the company.⁶¹

The Troubadours played a grueling 45-week season from July to May, traveling thousands of miles yearly, appearing in every city and town with available theatre

space.⁶² "Madame Jones enjoys the distinction of appearing in more consecutive performances than any other living singer of her time."⁶³ According to the Stearns, "Black Patti herself came close to beating the white concert-singers at their own game."⁶⁴

In addition to the show written by Cole, Black Patti toured in other productions, including At Jolly Coon-ey Island (1898). A skit starring Ernest Hogan, At Jolly Coon-ey Island was "based on a minstrel format with spontaneous buffonery interspersed with song."⁶⁵ The following season, the Troubadours presented A Rag-time Frolic at Ras-bury Park. The 25 September 1899 issue of the Detroit Free Press had this to say about A Rag-time Frolic at Ras-bury Park: "Exaggerated comedy, plenty of character work, lightening dancing by both men and women, comic songs and acrobatic fun are chief ingredients of the skit."⁶⁶

Around 1900, in a step towards linking the separate parts of a "variety show" into a unified musical comedy with a beginning, middle, and end, the Troubadours added comedy sketches with a slight plot.⁶⁷ About their first one-act farce, the 11 September 1900 Evening Mail (St. John, New Brunswick) comments:

The programme [Troubadours] began with a very

funny ragtime comedy skit called "A Darktown Frolic on the Rialto." There was not great depth of plot to this jolly absurdity but the action was spirited and the specialties were of the very best and immensely pleasing.⁶⁸

Capitalizing on Williams' and Walker's In Dahomey, the Troubadours presented Dooney Dreamland in 1903. An undated article in the Augusta Chronicle describes Dooney Dreamland as an "up-to-date comedy with its operatic kaleidoscope containing a group of plantation pastimes and an 'Offenbach review.'" ⁶⁹ The new show for 1908 was The Blackville Strollers. This skit included comedians "Tutt" Whitney and Slim Henderson, Gus Hall, Sarah Green, the Troubadour Quartet (a group of female singers), and tenor George Day.⁷⁰

By 1910, as productions became more structured, Black Patti had integrated her operatic singing into the plot of the sketches.⁷¹ The 11 March 1911 Columbia Dispatch (Ohio) notes the change with the three-act A Trip to Africa (1910): "Miss Jones, in gorgeous raiment, steps forth in the jungles of Africa among the half-breeds and is acclaimed the princess."⁷² This role made Mme. Jones "part of the action and hence brought about a consolidation of the serious and the humorous into one unified form."⁷³ According

to the 18 February 1910 Indianapolis Star, "'A Trip to Africa' is a musical farce and has to do with a college professor who robs the school safe and goes to Africa to rescue a missionary who has been detained there for ransom."⁷⁴

During the Fall of 1911, the Troubadours opened with a three-act play entitled In the Jungles. The 11 September 1911 Louisville Post gives this description of the plot: "A relief party has been sent to the jungle to effect the release of Cynthia Brown, a school teacher, who has been lost in the wilds."⁷⁵

In the last act of In the Jungles Mme. Jones "assumes the part of the sister of the head of the Baptist Seminary."⁷⁶ In the same piece, "Sissieretta Jones appears in the role of Queen Le-Ku-Li-, queen of the Gumbula Tribe."⁷⁷

During the 1912 season, the Troubadours opened with Captain Jasper, a three-act piece featuring Black Patti and Harrison Stewart. The 12 October 1912 Fort Worth Star-Telegram provides the following description: "Captain Jasper, as presented by the Black Patti company is not a minstrel show. It's a musical comedy about government papers stolen by a renegade officer of Negro troops to be sold to Cheteka, queen of a Philippine

tribe, and the efforts to apprehend him." ⁷⁸

Sometime later, the name of Mme. Jones' company was changed to "Black Patti Musical Company." As her show began to resemble the musical comedy format with a storyline, she performed small speaking roles but remained the featured singer. ⁷⁹

During the 1914-1915 season, the Troubadours added Lucky Sam to their repertory. In it, "Sissieretta Jones becomes a part of the cast of the play, her musical repertory originating out of the dramatic situation," ⁸⁰ eliminating the need for the "Operatic Kaleidoscope" altogether.

Although she attempted to keep her personal life private, her public appearances were grandly staged. In 1900 she "married" Rudolph Voelckel, her Jewish manager.

They traveled together for fifteen years in what was advertised as a \$30,000 private railroad car fitted with gold plush upholstery and hand-carved pianos. Eubie Blake, the Negro showman who joined the troupe as a youngster, serving as Madame Jones' private errand boy with regular orders to run to grocery stores for a nickel's worth of her favorite ginger snaps, remembered that Voelckel insisted that a red carpet had to be laid on the sidewalk from the stage door to the hack every time she came to and from the theater. ⁸¹

As a boy, Blake had lived near Sissierette Jones in Baltimore. "I never heard anybody with a voice

like hers," recalls Blake, "and I heard the original white Patti, too--when she sang 'The Prison Song,' first in the original key and then an octave higher, it was like she had a wonderful bird in her throat. She had a range like Yma Sumac and a fine operatic voice."⁸² Some years later, Mme. Jones' exceptional talents and sophisticated manner were still beyond reproach. An unidentified, undated article remarks:

"Black Patti" still retains that charm of voice and manner which won her an international reputation as a singer years ago. If nature had been more kind to her in the matter of complexion, she would have been at this time the pet prima donna of society. As it is, she is one of the highest salaried singers on the stage and is recognized as an artist of extraordinary vocal ability.⁸³

Although Madame Jones enjoyed the status of being one of the most respected Black celebrities of the day, she still encountered racial contempt.

She was engaged to sing at the Madison Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, the gospel cafeteria of the first families. Arriving in the afternoon for a private rehearsal, her voice drifted across the street to the ears of one of the dowagers who was entertaining her club. Whose voice is that? On being told it was the Black Patti said, I'll allow her to sing for our party. She dispatched her colored cook to invite her over. Madame Jones looked at the cook, saying tell your mistress if she will contact my managers, arrange for an engagement, I will be happy to sing for her, but it will be several months. The cook returned⁸⁴ and were the faces of the blue bloods red.

The exact date of Mme. Jones' last appearance

is not established, but in 1916 she left the stage to care for her mother. There had been speculations that she would return. Instead, she retired to her nine-room home, at 7 Wheaton Street, in Providence, R.I. Soon after, she joined the Congdon Street Baptist Church and lived quietly with some of her treasures of former days.⁸⁵

Madame Jones, a woman of unusual generosity, took care of homeless children until she was penniless. Forced to sell her silver, four other houses, and her jewelry, she managed to keep three of the seventeen medals she wore across her bosom in concert.⁸⁶ The largest was a gold medal from President Hippolyte of the Haitian Republic. "From the top bar, a ribbon holding a bar inscribed Madame Jones and below the medal with Black Patti around the top with a diamond above, and the bottom, Republique-1891-Haiti with a diamond below."⁸⁷ When she finally went on relief, the City required her to sign over #7 Wheaton Street. Soon, Madame Jones was stricken with cancer. During the last two years of her illness, William P. H. Freeman, a Black realtor and past president of the Providence N. A. A. C. P., paid her estate tax, water tax, wood and coal bills, and other essentials. He also provided

the grave in Grace Church Cemetery which kept her remains out of Potter's Field.⁸⁸

Once singled out "as the greatest singer of the race before the public," she was largely forgotten after she left the stage.⁸⁹ Sissieretta Jones died penniless on 24 June 1933 in the Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, R.I.⁹⁰ The obituary in the Baltimore Afro-American reads: "This piece of history is fast passing into discard as one by one, the pioneers of the stage pass on, 'Black Patti' is at the end of her line."⁹¹

As much as her environment permitted, Sissieretta Jones achieved substantial success performing on both the professional concert and theatrical stages, establishing herself as a role model for other Black artists.

During her years on the concert stage, Mme. Jones sang before a predominately White audience--"an audience which expected to find a freak, a comical, awkward, unusually strange creature before it, but which found instead an artist who exhibited the same training known to the white singer of her time as well as a decorum which gave new dignity and finesse to the Negro image on the concert stage."⁹²

Through her association with the Troubadours, "Madame Jones created a substitute for the legitimate American operatic stage from which she was excluded. The operatic kaleidoscope was a production in which she was able to realize at least partial fulfillment of her artistic inclinations and desires."⁹³

Black Patti encountered racial discrimination. Ironically, her efforts to circumvent some of the artistic and cultural restrictions imposed upon her, resulted according to Daughtry in significant contributions to the further development of the Black artist.

The very atmosphere which restricted Sissieretta Jones and which destroyed her desire to perform on the American Metropolitan stage forced her to make a contribution to American concert and theatrical life--the creation of a musical-dramatic compound which employed both the comical and the serious and which gave the Negro a chance to learn the basics of the arts of stagecraft and performance. Without this beginning which Madame Jones' Troubadours provided, there would not have been available opportunities for the Negro actor to gain experience--opportunities which provided him with rudimentary training in performance as well as with an aesthetic attitude toward the American stage.⁹⁴

During the nineteen seasons that "Black Patti's Troubadours" toured the United States and Canada, as in minstrelsy, performers changed frequently. In addition to featuring the star, her shows gave many actors, comedians, singers, and dancers, especially

women, the opportunity to work on the professional stage, where they gained "experience in staging and performing which could later be helpful on the larger American stage."⁹⁵

In 1898 "Diminutive Ida 'Topsy' Forsyne" (who had portrayed Topsy in a production of Uncle Tom's Cabin) joined "Black Patti's Troubadours." "A girl in the show was sick, so I went down and did my number, 'My Hannah Lady,' and got the job at \$15 a week," says Ida. I was the only young girl in a company of twenty-six. For my specialty, I pushed a baby carriage across the stage and sang a lullaby, 'You're Just a Little Nigger but You're Mine All Mine,' and no one thought of objecting in those days."⁹⁶

Born in Chicago in 1883, Ida Forsyne (Forcen) Hubbard began dancing professionally in 1893 as a "pick" cakewalking with a Black boy at the Chicago World's Fair, earning 25¢ a day.⁹⁷ "We went around in a wagon with a ragtime band to drum up trade," recalls Ida.⁹⁸ She and her mother lived above a bar. "I learned my first real steps from Willie Mason, the sporting-house pianist downstairs and picked up dimes dancing at house-rent parties."⁹⁹ For several years, Ida earned considerably more money than her

mother cakewalking at cabarets on weekends.¹⁰⁰

At fourteen she ran away with a show. "It was called The Bostonians and it had a little plot, while everybody did their specialties. I sang 'My Hannah Lady' and did a Buck dance."¹⁰¹ When the show went broke in Butte, Montana, she earned her fare home by adopting a five-year old boy as a prop and passing his hat as they walked up and down the aisles of railroad cars harmonizing "On the Banks of the Wabash."¹⁰²

Ida learned to dance by watching others. She sharpened her skills while performing with the Troubadours. "I could do any step I saw and there was plenty to see," according to Ida.¹⁰³ Black Patti was the only member of the company who had been trained to sing opera. The other members of the troupe were instructed to sing loudly behind Mme. Jones in the finale. "We all stood in a row behind her and yelled our heads off, belting our own version of how each opera should go, and I used to think the sound was wonderful."¹⁰⁴ In 1902, before this edition of the show closed, Ida's salary was raised to \$25.¹⁰⁵

By 1903 Ida was dancing throughout Europe. Laura Bowman recalls seeing her perform in Vienna at Bal Tabarin, a well-known night club. Ida and Laura performed

on the same bill in Odessa, Russia. In 1904, when the "Cossacks were riding and cutting heads as they rode," Ida, Laura, and Ida's cousin Ollie Bourgoyne (from In Dahomey) were in Moscow. For their safety, they were escorted to a train leaving the country by the American Consul. Ida, Laura, and Ollie returned to the United States together.¹⁰⁶ Shortly afterwards, Ida was on Broadway at the New York Theatre where she danced a solo in Will Marion Cook's musical, The Southerners, which opened on 23 May 1904.¹⁰⁷ Laura Bowman appeared in the chorus.¹⁰⁸ Abbie Mitchell portrayed Mandy Lou, a principal in this integrated show.¹⁰⁹

Forsythe reached prominence in 1906 at the Palace Theatre in London. She had returned to Europe in 1905 with "Abbie Mitchell and Her Coloured Students." Composed mostly of string musicians and singers, the group was also known as the "Tennessee Students" and the "Memphis Students." The show was a hit writes Fletcher. "Ida was a novelty. Her dancing as described by drama critics and show folks was a riot."¹¹⁰ According to Stearns and Stearns,

Ida Forsythe, judging by a handbill printed at the time, was the star. Her photograph appears on the cover--full face wearing a bandanna, with an infectious grin-over the caption: "Topsy,

the Famous Negro Dancer." On the back the reader is warned, "Look out for 'Topsy' the most fascination negro dancer ever seen--the little lady who 'was not born but just grew.'" The same picture appeared on magazine covers and in London buses.¹¹¹

After the run of the show, she accepted a long-term contract with the Marinelli Agency (one of the largest theatrical agencies in Europe). She headlined at all the top houses.¹¹² Ida sang and danced at the Moulin Rouge in Paris that entire first year. Around 1906 she went to London where she introduced her Sack dance at the Alhambra Theatre.

"A stage hand brought me out in a big potato sack, and first I'd throw out one leg, then an arm, and so on until he dumped me in the middle of the stage.' The line of ballet dancers backing her up was paid extra to appear in blackface.

"I wear a sack, too, with straw stuck to it, and I run around dancing like a wild woman, while the music roars, and then a shot rings out, and I fall and roll over and over dead--that was the act."¹¹³

Ida performed solo throughout Europe for nine years. Although she was married to Usher Watts, a singer, she and her husband performed separately in different countries. Because Ida was able to imitate what she saw and heard, she sang and spoke in French, German, Russian, and Norwegian. According to Ida, since Black entertainers usually stayed in Europe longer than a year, they learned and brought back some of each country's art and culture. Ida settled

in Russia around 1906, where she was the toast of St. Petersburg and Moscow, performing the cakewalk which had been popularized by Williams and Walker. Later, she traveled all over Russia performing native Russian dances.¹¹⁴

In 1914, after living and entertaining in Russia for almost ten years, Ida returned to the United States an expert in Russian dancing.¹¹⁵ In 1915, she appeared in Darkydom at the Lafayette Theatre in New York. In 1919 Ida performed in Over the Top at the Grand Theatre in Chicago. Having difficulty finding steady work, Ida danced in a number of musical shows during the 1920s. From 1920 to 1922, she worked for Sophie Tucker earning \$50 a week as a maid on and off stage. Sophie sang and Ida danced at the end of the act. In 1924 she was one of six chorus girls with Mamie Smith's act, and in 1926 toured the South with a later Smart Set Company, a Black producing/acting group.¹¹⁶ Upon her return to New York, Ida tried to get work at the major nightclubs such as the Cotton Club, Small's Paradise, and Connie's Inn, "but she was refused because they featured light-skinned chorus girls."¹¹⁷ Ida recalls that although she got jobs, they were not as good as those in Europe. She believes that she

did not make it to the top here because she did not get the opportunity to show what she could do. According to Ida, who was dark-complexioned, she did not get that chance because "there's something about my skin that gives me away."¹¹⁸ By this time, Ida had come to realize that the years she had spent performing in Europe were the pinnacle of her artistic success. Contrasting the response to her talents here with that in Europe, she remarks, "They treated me like a princess."¹¹⁹

In 1927, Ida traveled with Bessie Smith's show earning \$35 weekly performing a Russian solo and dancing in the chorus. During 1930 she played a bit part in Lily White; in 1932 she appeared as Mrs. Noah in Green Pastures and in The Emperor Jones with Rex Ingram; and in 1935 she was seen in Oscar Micheaux's film "The Underworld."¹²⁰ In 1938 Forsythe was a member of the congregation of Conjur, featuring Laura Bowman.¹²¹ As late as 1951, she assisted Jerome Robbins in choreographing "The Calkwalk" for the New York City Ballet.¹²² Ida worked at whatever was available. Writing in the March 1944 issue of American News, an American Hotels Corporation publication, a correspondent from Schenectady announces: "We have in our midst a movie

actress--Ida Forsyne Hubbard, our new elevator operator."¹²³ An article in the 23 October 1982 issue of the New York Amsterdam News reports

Ida Hubbard Forsyne, the 121-year old [my sources indicate she would be 97] dancer who was able to lift her legs above her head at the age of 80-plus, is in Concord Baptist Nursing Home in Brooklyn. The amazing Ida, who moved out [of] her 121st St. home was a specialist in the cake walk dance. Ida and the late Dewey Wineglass danced all over the world. She was in Russia during the time of the Czar when, according to Ida, the Czar had a Black girl friend who came from Hell's Kitchen. She remembers the bloody end of the reign of the Czar and how they left a bloody trail. In fact, she recalls her own flight to China and back to the U.S. Wineglass confirmed her statements. The little dancer, who was under five feet, could do the split when she was in her 70s. Ida is always smiling, although she has lost her sight and has been disabled during the past decade.¹²⁴

In spite of the restrictions imposed on a (dark-skinned) Black female entertainer in America at the turn of the century, she remained in love with show business. "I was born to be a performer," says Ida.¹²⁵ Reflecting upon her many experiences in a long and eventful life, Ida remarks humorously, "I'm the happiest uneducated woman you've ever seen".¹²⁶ Despite repeated requests to the Concord Baptist Nursing Home, a reply to whether Ida Forsyne is still alive has not been forthcoming. Ida Forsyne did become an actress in legitimate theatre. She played only minor roles, however.

Dora Dean provided an elegant and sophisticated stage image of a Black woman. She and her husband established several firsts on the professional stage, paving the way for others. Through her show, she gave many singers and dancers the opportunity to work, both here and abroad. Possessing training and talent comparable to her White contemporaries, Sissieretta Jones brought a new dignity to the stage image of Black Americans. "'Negroes were proud of Black Patti,' says Professor Willis Laurence James of Spelman College, who grew up in Jacksonville and remembers the excitement caused by the arrival of the Troubadours. 'In a sense, she was a kind of "racial" heroine because she was so outstanding as a singer, even by white standards, and white people came to hear her, too.'"¹²⁷ Ida "Topsy" Forsythe headlined at the top theatres in Europe. Through talent, creativity, style, and charm, she provided Europeans with a positive image of Black performers, establishing herself as a role model for others. Although they were admired and accepted throughout the world, especially in Europe, these entertainers were never completely accepted in America.

VII

The Black Dramatic Actress, 1890-1917

Not all of the biographical data on Black women performers of this period (i.e., dates and places of birth, marriage, death, and education), can be established from available materials. Some details of roles, places, and dates of performance are not to be found. We can, however, using bits and pieces from numerous sources, piece together the lives and careers of several of these entertainers. One major consideration in choosing these women in particular is the availability of material. The actresses, singers, and dancers in this chapter achieved recognition in their own right, and are representative of those performers whose careers are most fully documented.¹

Mainly, Black women first entered the professional theatre as performers in musical shows only later appearing in dramatic roles. The lives of five professional Black actresses, whose stage careers span the 1890s to the 1940s, illustrate this evolutionary cycle. These women's activities are typical of what

some others tried to do and to some extent accomplished, and the latter will be listed in the Appendix. Although the major concern of the study is the period from the turn of the century to the second decade of the 20th century, in order to do justice to these pioneers, I thought it would be wise to document their careers from beginning to end (instead of stopping at 1917), and have it located in one place, this dissertation.

The five women in this chapter made a successful transition from performing in musicals to performing in dramas. In fact, Inez Clough appeared in the first recorded dramatic production on the professional legitimate stage in America in which Black actresses were seen. She was born in Worcester, Massachusetts (c. 1860s-70s) and educated in Worcester and Boston. Following the path traveled by Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield, the Hyers Sisters, and Sissieretta Jones, Clough was a trained concert singer and pianist. From 1897 to 1906 Clough lived in Europe. During her stay abroad, she was coached in voice in Austria and London.² She began receiving attention during the 1880s when she started singing in local concerts in Worcester. Clough began her professional career performing on the stage in Oriental America (1896).

She sang in the section entitled "Forty Minutes of Grand and Comic Opera." In 1903, while In Dahomey was in London, Clough (who had remained in Europe entertaining after the run of Oriental America), joined the chorus.³ During her nearly ten years abroad, Clough performed as a single in the major music halls of the British Isles.⁴ While living in London, she played in the English Pantomines. Two of her roles were as fairy queens and three as a "principal boy" in the musicals Robinson Crusoe, Red Riding Hood, and Dick Whittington. In 1907, after Clough had returned to the United States, she joined Cole's and Johnson's Shoo-Fly Regiment. During the run of Shoo-Fly, she left the show to join Williams and Walker in Abyssinia (1907) and then in Bandana Land (1908). Clough also appeared as a Flower Girl in the chorus of Mr. Lode Of Koal (1909), Bert Williams' last all-Black show.⁵

When opportunities in musical theatre became scarce, Clough appeared on the concert stage as a soloist, singing in New York, Washington, and other major cities throughout the East.⁶ She toured in vaudeville until she joined the Lafayette Players in 1916.⁷ A charter member, she performed in numerous productions at the Lafayette.

During 1916 Clough appeared as Teresa Rand in Clyde Fitch's The City. "Anita Bush and Inez Clough divided honors as the two sisters," says the New York Age.⁸ Clough also played Mrs. Conway in Harold McGrath's and Grace Livingston's The Man on the Box; Mrs. Edward Ramsay in Channing Pollock's In the Bishop's Carriage; Mrs. Sholto in Sherlock Holmes in Sign of the Four, an adaptation of Conan Doyle's novel; and Madame Catherine Lockwood in George Scarborough's The Lure.⁹ "Inez Clough rises to unsuspected heights as Mme. Catherine Lockwood, conducting the fashionable demi monde resort which is the white slaver's headquarters," writes the New York Age.¹⁰

In 1917 Clough portrayed Procula, the wife of Pilate, in Ridgley Torrences' Simon the Cyrenian, one of Three Plays For A Negro Theatre. Louis Sherwin, reviewing for the 6 April 1917 New York Globe, writes:

Rarely have I heard such spontaneous enthusiasm in an American theatre. Ordinarily the applause that rewards the actors on first night comes from their personal friends or clique. But there was no such thing last night. The enjoyment of the boxes and the parterre was, for once, as genuine and unrestrained as that of the gallery. . . . The acting, for the most part, was quite inspiring. . . .

"Simon the Cyrenian" was excellently staged. Herein Robert Edmond Jones's skill in scenic design had wider scope. And never have I heard such thrilling, gruesome shouting from a mob. The effect of the procession was achieved with

wonderful economy of detail. The acting of Inez Clough, Andrew Bishop, and John T. Butler, which really deserves full comment, was especially impressive.¹¹

In an article entitled "Negro Players Display Talent At the Garden," Charles Darnto reports: "In 'The Rider of Dreams' and 'Granny Maumee' there was a display of talent that justified Mrs. Hapgood's strange venture." He adds, "'Simon the Cyrenian,' . . . disclosed little more than the limitations of the actors. Only Inez Clough, as Procula, gave it dramatic life."¹² According to the New York Age, "Inez Clough made a stately and sympathetic Procula; . . ."¹³

By the time she was cast in the leading female role in Simon the Cyrenian, Clough had already garnered twenty years of theatrical experience. This role was a personal triumph for her. George Jean Nathan, a prominent critic, named Clough seventh on his "Ten Best Actresses of the Year" list for 1917.¹⁴

After Three Plays closed, Clough returned to the Lafayette Players where she appeared as Mascha in the comic opera The Chocolate Soldier; Lady Henrietta Verdayne in Elinor Glynn's Three Weeks; Mme. Dupont in Eugene Brieux's Damaged Goods; Sallie Graice in Willie Collier's comedy The Man from Mexico; and Dolly

Belmar in Branded. Other productions in which Clough was seen include the comedies Are You a Mason? and Charlie's Aunt, Hubert Henry Davies' drama The Outcast, Bayard Veiller's The Fight, Robert McLaughlin's The Eternal Magdalene, Eugene Walter's Just a Woman, Cleve Kinkead's Common Clay, and the musicals Song of Songs, A Pair of Queens, and The Little Millionaire.¹⁵

In 1921, Clough debuted on the screen in "The Simp." Also in 1921, she was seen in the film "Ties of Blood." Both films were produced by REOL Productions.¹⁶ In 1922, Clough performed in Dumb Luck, a musical. The show, starring Arthur G. Moss and Edward Frye, a successful comedy team, (and featuring Alberta Hunter) opened on the road on September 11th in Stamford, Connecticut. Failing to attract the attention of the press and the public, it closed on September 23rd in Worcester, Massachusetts, leaving the cast of 90 stranded. At the time, Shuffle Along was playing in Boston. When Messrs. Blake, Miller, Lyles, and Sissle (stars and producers of the show), heard of the financial problems, they offered financial assistance to Moss (who was also co-producer). Moss, however, refused the offer. When arrangements had not been made by the following Saturday, William C. Elkins,

director of the chorus, called Noble Sissle and told him of the situation. Despite Moss's previous refusal, the producers of Shuffle Along sent Mrs. Sissle to Worcester with \$400 which enabled 50 members of the Dumb Luck company to return to New York City. Soon afterwards, an additional \$300 was sent and the remainder of the cast was able to return to New York.¹⁷ In 1924, Clough played the part of Mrs. Hez Brown, the wife, in Chocolate Dandies at the Colonial Theatre in New York. This musical, which featured Josephine Baker, was created jointly by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, coauthors of Shuffle Along (1921).¹⁸

Returning to drama, Clough played the lead, Deborah, in Em Jo Basshe's Earth, first produced on 9 February 1927 by the "militant theatre group," The New Playwrights Theatre in their theatre on Fifty-second street.¹⁹ The show ran there for 26 performances.²⁰ Then, on 21 March 1927, Earth moved to the Grove Street Theatre where it played until 2 April 1927.²¹ Earth depicts the conflict between Christianity and Voodoo among rural Blacks during the 1880s. Gordon M. Leland, in the 19 March 1927 Cincinnati Billboard, writes: "Inez Clough, as a rebellious worshiper who cannot see the results of twenty years' allegiance to the

Bible, is majestically impressive but at the same time most natural. She holds her scenes with a sure hand."²² Percy Hammond of the Herald-Tribune says, "Miss Inez Clough exerts noticeable talents for emotional acting as Deborah."²³ The 10 March 1927 New York Graphic writes: "Inez Clough, the grief-stricken and blasphemous Deborah in the play, gave an uncommonly fine performance, . . ."²⁴ Brooks Atkinson, reviewing for The New York Times, writes: ". . . the rich voices of Mr. Hayes and Miss Clough in the leading parts soothe the ear quite apart from what they say."²⁵ An article in the 16 March 1927 issue of the New York Amsterdam News, entitled "Inez Clough Scores Remarkable Hit at Playwrights' Theatre," reports: "The chief feature of the evening was the stirring acting of Inez Clough as Deborah. She revealed herself to be an emotional actress of splendid ability. . . Her performance last Thursday night was deeply moving."²⁶

On 2 July 1928 Clough opened in Don Mullally's comedy Wanted at Wallack Theatre in New York for 16 performances.²⁷ Staged by Mullally, Wanted is about a White girl from a good family who comes to New York from Baton Rouge. When her money runs out, she is

invited to stay temporarily in the Park Avenue apartment of a couple who are in Europe. Although she did not know the couple, she knows the two Black maids from Baton Rouge. Before she leaves, the couple returns and a robbery occurs. The couple's nephew falls in love with the girl; the thief is caught and all ends well.²⁸ "Teresa Brooks and Inez Clough, both colored, who act the maids, handle important roles flawlessly," notes Bide Dudley, writing for the 5 July 1928 Evening World.²⁹

On 20 February 1929, Clough opened in Jourdon Rapp's and Wallace Thurman's Harlem, "An Episode of Life in New York's Black Belt" at the Apollo Theatre in New York for 94 performances.³⁰ A melodrama, Harlem tells the story of Cordelia Williams, a girl from a small southern town, who goes wrong north of 125th Street. In the cast of 74 Blacks and 1 White, Clough played Ma Williams. The reviewer for the 21 February 1929 The New York Times writes, "Inez Clough, as the mother of a scrabbling family, has gentleness and dignity in her acting."³¹ In an undated review from the Herald-Tribune entitled "'Harlem' Negro Melodrama of Racketeer Sort," Arthur Ruhl says, "Inez Clough was sincere and moving as the uprooted and bewildered

mother."³²

Also in 1929, Clough was one of the stars of Jeroline Hemsely's first play, Wade in de Water at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City. Presented by the New Negro Art Theatre, Wade in de Water is set on a plantation in Georgia in 1885. It violently depicts the White man's antipathy towards Blacks.³³

"Inez Clough and Hemsely Winfield are to be considered apart from the rest of the cast by virtue of professional experience. 'Wade in de Water' derives its title from the spiritual which holds out hope for divine intervention," notes the 14 September 1929 issue of The New York Times.³⁴

The 28 May 1930 The New York Times, provides a review of a once performed piece called De Promis' Lan'. This two-act, twelve-scene pageant, with dialogue by Jeroline Hemsley and score by Russell Wooding, was presented by the National Negro Pageant Association of Chicago at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Inez Clough played one of the principal parts in this epic.³⁵ Of the show, the reviewer writes:

In failing to be impressive at the same time that it was serious, "De Promis' Lan'" only followed in the path of most similar attempts, which are content to drowse until it is time to sing and dance. . . . A few spirituals were harshly and insufficiently rendered, and the voices of de

promis' lan', in chorus and quartet numbers,
proved to be less divine than in need of rehearsal.³⁶

Beginning in November of 1930, NBC radio presented a weekly play of "life among colored folk" on Sundays at 2:15 PM. F. Carlton Moss was the author and one of the featured actors. The show ran for over a year. During this period, Inez Clough appeared in the cast of players.³⁷

On 31 December 1931, Harry Hamilton's and Norman Foster's Savage Rhythm opened at the John Golden Theatre for 12 performances.³⁸ A drama of Black sorcery, Savage Rhythm takes place down South in the village of "Tuckaloo" where superstitions, magic, and self-hypnosis are accepted as part of the Chrisitan religion. During a lively barbecue, one of the "Conjur-Woman's" granddaughters (a singer visiting from Harlem played by Vivian Baber) is fatally stabbed by the wife of the adulterous "Sweetback," with whom she has been partying. Inez Clough portrayed the "Sweetback's Wife," her last recorded role on the stage.³⁹ In the 1 January 1932 World-Telegraph, Robert Garland writes, "The Sweetback's Wife fares better in the hands of Miss Inez Clough. Restraint and comprehension are in Miss Clough's interpretation."⁴⁰ Burns Mantle, reviewing for the 1 January 1932 Daily News says,

"The acting is as simple and effective as the play itself. There are excellent performances . . . especially by Inez Clough, the unhappy wife who stabs a cheating husband as a service to the Lord."⁴¹ "Credits also to Vivian Baber as the star, Venezuela Jones as the sister, Inez Clough, Juano Hernandez and Mamie Cartier," says the 1 January 1932 The Chicago Defender.⁴²

Brooks Atkinson, writing for the 1 January 1932 The New York Times, gave Savage Rhythm an unfavorable review.

. . . the story is rather too languid for three acts on a restless New Year's Eve. And the acting of the Negro cast is shapeless and uneven. Excepting for an occasional episode when the Negro blood pounds hard and the tomtom beats that unearthly measure of incantation, "Savage Rhythm" has only its intelligence and temperance to recommend it as a page of savage folklore.⁴³

Clough was last seen on the screen in "The Crimson Fog" (1932) produced by Charles Allman White.⁴⁴ By performing in musicals, dramas, and film, (whenever opportunity permitted) Clough was able to piece together a career that lasted more than a quarter of century. On 24 November 1933, after a long illness, Clough died in Cook County Hospital in Chicago. The obituary in the 29 November 1933 New York Amsterdam News reads: "Inez Clough is no more. The voice which William Faversham, the celebrated actor, said was one of the

best he ever heard, is silent."⁴⁵ Clough was survived by her estranged husband, Harry P. Hogan.⁴⁶

Inez Clough performed in two landmark productions that made theatrical history: Oriental America (1896) and Three Plays For A Negro Theatre (1917). Further, these presentations were extremely important for the Black female performer; they gave her prominence and stature. Clough made the theatre her life-long career. Her rise from chorus girl to dramatic actress was not a kind of isolated phenomenon, rather it appears to reflect the pattern of development common to other Black women who also made the successful transition from musicals to dramas.

On 18 June 1904, Robert Motts, a Black restaurant owner, opened the Pekin Theatre, located on 27th and State Streets in Chicago, Illinois. Originally, the Pekin served as a vaudeville theatre and music hall. Due to a fire in 1905, Motts renovated the theatre; he enlarged the stage and added a balcony.⁴⁷ In an attempt to make the Pekin a popular family theatre, in 1906 Motts began presenting musical comedy, establishing the "first legitimate Black theatre in the United States."⁴⁸ Advertised as "the only first-class and properly equipped theatre in the United States

owned, managed and controlled by colored promoters,"⁴⁹ the Pekin featured Black artists exclusively. Producing original musical shows required a large cast. The Pekin Stock Company evolved out of the need created by changing the bill every two weeks. During the early part of 1911, the Pekin Stock Company disbanded. Soon after, the theatre became a vaudeville house. In July 1911, Bob Motts died.⁵⁰ Like the Lafayette Players several years later, the Pekin Players provided valuable training and experience for a number of actresses who went on to perform professionally in both musicals and dramas on the New York stage. Among these were Abbie Mitchell and Lottie Grady.

Before sharing the lead with Bert Williams in Mr. Lode of Koal (1909) on Broadway, Lottie Grady (a singer and dancer) had been a member of the Pekin Players. In 1907 she appeared in a musical comedy, The Husband. Written by Flournoy E. Miller and Aubrey Lyles, the future co-stars and co-creators of Shuffle Along (1921), The Husband featured music by Joe Jordon. Also in 1907, Grady played the Filipino Girl in Captain Rufus, a military musical. In August of that same year, the Pekin Players presented Captain Rufus and The Husband at Hurtig and Seamon's Music Hall Theatre

in New York for two weeks. Grady played the Wife in the 1909 edition of The Husband presented at the Pekin. She was Phonia in the musical Merry Widower (1908) and Lucy Johnson in Simple Mollie (1908), both at the Pekin. In Simple Mollie Grady sang "Taffy Finally."⁵¹

On 1 November 1909, Mr. Lode of Koal, starring Bert Williams, opened at the Majestic Theatre in New York City where it ran for 40 performances.⁵² A three-act musical by J. A. Shipp and Alexander Rogers, with music by J. Rosamond Johnson, Mr. Lode of Koal takes place on the mythical island of Koal. Big Smoak, the ruler, is kidnapped, and Chester A. Lode is forced to take his place. In the end, the king returns, and he condemns Chester to being one of his servants. Lottie Grady played Mysteria.⁵³ Despite calling the plot a "jumble of nonsense and music," the 2 November 1909 The New York Times prints a favorable review:

Bert Williams is fully as amusing by himself as he was as a part of the partnership of Williams and Walker. . . . The chorus has the vocal vigor and quality to be expected of negro singers, and its members seem to enjoy their work. The soloists, too, are proficient in voice and expression. . . .⁵⁴

In 1911 Grady was seen in Dr. Herb's Prescription, or It Happened in a Dream at the Pekin. An adaptation

of Mr. Lode of Koal, Dr. Herb's Prescription, a farce with music, was also written by J.A. Shipp. Grady, who played Mysteria the Soothsayer (the same role she had created in Mr. Lode of Koal), sang "Mums the Word Mr. Moon."⁵⁵ Also in 1911, Grady appeared in another musical, The Lime Kiln Club, also at the Pekin. In 1913 she was seen there in Flournoy Miller's and Aubrey Lyles' musical, The Cabaret.⁵⁶ Grady also performed at the Pekin in Physco Gasarino. According to an undated handbill, she played Miss Dollie Dot and sang "Kiss Me."⁵⁷ In 1915 Grady was in Irvin C. Millers' (brother of Flournoy) first hit show, Broadway Rastus. Featuring music by W.C. Handy, Broadway Rastus opened at the Apollo Theatre in Atlantic City, NJ.⁵⁸

In 1917 Grady joined the Lafayette Players.⁵⁹ According to Anita Bush, "Lottie played ladies' parts."⁶⁰ (No information regarding roles found.) Before joining the Lafayette Players, Grady had been anticipating making the transition from musicals to dramas. She had been a member of the dramatic class of the Pekin Stock Company where she played Stella Darbisher in C. Haddon Chambers' four-act drama Captain Swift. Captain Swift was the "first dramatic effort of the

Dramatic School of acting under the tutorship of Mr. [J. ED.] Green," annouces an undated handbill.⁶¹

Two weeks prior to the opening of Three Plays, the role of Acte, Princess of Egypt in Simon the Cyrenian had not been cast. Numerous actresses auditioned for the part, but none was acceptable. According to Lester Walton, in an article entitled "In Quest of Egyptian Princess":

In order to be the Egyptian princess for the passion play two requisites are necessary--pulchritude and histrionic ability. Some of our belles who would win a prize in a beauty contest have failed to land the coveted role because of inability to read lines like a real actress. Others have sparkled as elocutionists but fallen short of what an Egyptian princess is expected to possess in the way of personal charm; then there have been instances where the applicant could act and was pronounced "a thing of beauty" but was told her color was not in keeping with the part. So with opening night only a few weeks off the search for the Egyptian princess goes merrily on.

P. S.--The "Egyptian Princess" has been found in the person of Miss Lottie Grady, rated as one of the race's most talented performers. Miss Grady received her education in the dramatic art as a member of the famous Pekin Stock Company. She has played leading parts with our largest colored musical productions.⁶²

On 5 April 1917, Grady portrayed Acte, Princess of Egypt in Simon the Cyrenian, one of the Three Plays on Broadway. Rennold Wolf, reviewing for the New York Telegraph, writes:

To be sure, the spectacle of stage boxes filled

with negroes in evening dress, is not usual at New York first night performances, nor was the sprinkling of blacks in the lobby and the first rows of the balcony. Yet everyone present accepted the endeavor in good faith, and followed the proceedings attentively and respectfully. . . . The most pretentious production of the bill is "Simon the Cyrenian," . . . An extremely simple but none the less effective setting shows the garden of Pilate's house. Otherwise there is little impressive about the play, save that it is acted earnestly and after the fashion of classic, stilted drama. John T. Butler looks an imposing Simon, but plays the role indifferently. Lottie Grady acts the Princess of Egypt with some distinction.⁶³

The New York American says of Simon the Cyrenian: "The chief honors went to John T. Butler, as Simon; Lottie Grady, as the Princess of Egypt; and Inez Clough, as the wife of Pilate."⁶⁴ According to an unidentified review: "Mrs. Hapgood, . . . is to be complimented both on the success of her undertaking and the philanthropic impulse that inspired it. It both satisfied the curiosity of those who saw it and must have aroused their admiration as well. . . . Of the individual performers, . . . Inez Clough, John T. Butler and Lottie Grady in 'Simon the Cyrenian' were splendidly capable."⁶⁵ The New York Age says, "Lottie Grady was admirably cast for the emotional role of Acte, Princess of Egypt."⁶⁶ The date of Grady's death has not been established.

"In 1915, Anita Bush introduced Negro drama in

New York City," according to Sampson, "by organizing the Colored Dramatic Stock Company which she later renamed the Anita Bush Stock Company."⁶⁷ Sister Francesca Thompson credits Bush with bringing the first permanent stock company to the Lafayette Theatre. Bush, the daughter of a tailor whose clientel was mostly show people, was born in Washington, D.C. (c. 1887) but grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Bush, who had been a singer/dancer with Williams and Walker, touring with them throughout England during 1903, performed her first role on the professional stage. As children, she and her sister played "extra serving maids" in Anthony and Cleopatra presented by a group of White professionals at the Park Theatre in New York. She recalls appearing in every scene possible and learning all of the other actors' lines. After their "debut," she and her sister played every part given to them whenever they could manage to beg or wheedle the leading actors, manager, or director to hire them.⁶⁸ "We felt certain," says Bush, "that Broadway didn't know what talents it was missing."⁶⁹

In 1903, when Bush was sixteen, Bert Williams persuaded her father to permit her to join the chorus of In Dahomey. When her father questioned Williams

about his reasons for hiring Bush (who was supposedly untalented), Williams tactfully replied, "Oh, she'll make a pretty picture on stage."⁷⁰ Bush remained with Williams and Walker for six years, until 1909, when the company disbanded.⁷¹ During that time, Bush was one of Ada Walker's "special dancers."⁷²

Out of work, Bush selected four or five of the most talented chorus girls from the company and formed her own dancing troupe. They performed on the music hall circuit until 1913 when Bush injured her back in a serious accident backstage. While recuperating, Bush decided to form a dramatic stock company. After attending a Saturday matinee of a silent film at the newly renovated Lincoln Theatre in Harlem (with only five or six patrons present), Bush approached Eugene "Frenchy" Elmore, the manager, with her concept. Due to a slump in business, Frenchy agreed, hoping to increase the box office receipts. A finished performance was to be presented in two weeks. Bush signed a contract formalizing the Anita Bush Stock Company.⁷³

On 15 November 1915, Bush and her troupe, including Carlotta Freeman and Charles Gilpin, opened at the Lincoln with Billie Burke's farcical comedy The Girl at the Fort. Burke, a White actress and author, also

directed the piece. Bush, who had recently recovered from pneumonia, recalls opening night.⁷⁴

I was the happiest, sick ingenue in the whole world. All of the best people, some of whom had never crossed the sill of the Lincoln Theatre before, were there to welcome us. The house was packed and so were the sidewalks outside. Everything went off like clock-work. Everyone knew his lines and not a single mistake was made. I shall never forget or cease to be grateful for the reception given us by the people of Harlem, our own people. I laugh whenever I hear myself called "The Little Mother of [Negro] Drama." No one will ever know what labor pains were borne by the "Little Mother" that week before the show opened, plus the job of learning my lines for my part as the Girl at the Fort. But on opening night,⁷⁵ I knew it was worth every agony I had suffered.

The press was very favorable to these neophyte actors. Of Bush's performance, an unidentified clipping from her scrapbook reports:

Anita Bush, our charmingly petite "Lady of the Dances," demonstrated her versatility and ability to jump from one extreme to the other. Popular as she has been in her dances, she lost none of that popularity by entering the ranks of the drama, but is even more popular, if possible, for her delightful delineation of Claricce, the girl at the fort.⁷⁶

The response of the community to the performance was so overwhelming that Mrs. Marie C. Downs, the proprietor of the Lincoln, prompted by the prospect of capitalizing on a good business venture, demanded that Bush change the name of the group to the Lincoln Players. Bush refused, gave two weeks notice, and

moved her company of five to the rival Lafayette Theatre, taking the newly acquired audience with her. On 27 December 1915, the group premiered there with Across the Footlights, starring Bush.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the name was soon changed to the Lafayette Players.

"Apparently, Anita Bush was no longer adamant about her name being used," notes Sister Thompson, "because in spite of the changed name, Miss Bush remained with the Players until 1920."⁷⁸

During the first three months of 1916, the Lafayette Players presented the following plays, and Anita Bush appeared in most of them: The Gambler's Sweetheart, "borrowed" from David Belasco's The Girl of the Golden West; The Octoroon; New York After Dark; Wanted-- A Family; When the Wife's Away; Roanoke; Southern Life; For His Daughter's Honor; The World Against Him; Within the Law, and Paid in Full.⁷⁹

The patrons supported these new players. During a three-week period, Bush and her troupe of five were paid over \$1,300 in salary. Although they enjoyed the productions offered, this Harlem audience began to complain that the material was too "White." In response to their demands, Bush initiated a contest for the best 60-minute sketch dealing with Black life.⁸⁰

Since no Black plays were presented, it appears that the playwriting contest did not produce suitable works.

The fame of the Lafayette Player spread throughout the country. In April of 1916, Bush received an offer to form a stock company in Chicago. This was not to be a rival company, but an extension of the New York company. Bush premiered with The Girl at the Fort under the direction of Edgar Forrest at the Grand Theatre in Chicago.⁸¹ The Indianapolis Freeman says: "If we are to judge from the verdict given to the first opening . . . it was a good omen . . . the audience was entirely in its favor."⁸² Although Chicago had Black theatricals, they had not been of the type presented by the Lafayette Players. As with the Lincoln (where she debuted) and Lafayette theatres in New York, Bush had brought a new sophistication to the Grand Theatre.

By July of 1916, besides the Lafayette Players in New York and Chicago, there were companies playing in Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, plus one in rehearsal for touring. Bush usually played with the touring company, but she performed in New York occasionally.⁸³ In August of 1916, Bush starred in The Bishop's Carriage at the Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C. Although this production did not

receive the support of the press and the public, Bush's performance was commended:

Miss Anita Bush, the originator of the present dramatic renaissance in the arena of colored theatricals, appeared to advantage as Nance Olden, giving the role a piquant attractiveness and convincing pathos that won the sympathy of her audience from her beginning as the confirmed thief to the final curtain when she had learned how to "get diamonds honestly" and had been redeemed by the sacrificial love of a good man. Miss Bush is not an actress of the heavy emotional type, but is an ingenue of strong dramatic promise and one who will make good in parts that call for a dainty touch of the human element spiced with a bit of rollicking comedy. She has proper appraisement of her range of abilities. She has made an excellent impression so far, and is sure of a warm welcome at the hands of our exacting theatregoers.⁸⁴

In October of 1916, the Lafayette Players presented The Lure in New York. Bush's name appears in the review printed by the Indianapolis Freeman: "The acting of Miss Inez Clough, Mr. Andrew Bishop, Will Cooke and the rest of the cast is well done. As for Miss Bush, we do not see how there could be very much improvement in her way of playing 'the girl.'"⁸⁵

In a very short time, Bush, a forerunner of Black repertory theatre, achieved one of her life-time goals. "It had long been a dormant dream of hers," says Sister Francesca Thompson, "to form a legitimate stock company of Black actors to prove to whites and Blacks alike that Black performers could be successful in some

type of theater work other than the 'stereotype-comic-song-and-dance' routines to which theater-goers of the early 1900's were accustomed."⁸⁶

Bush remained with the Lafayette Players until 1920, when she took advantage of other opportunities. In 1921 Bush starred with Bill Pickett in the first all-Black western film, "The Crimson Skull" produced by the Norman Brothers.⁸⁷ During the same period she starred in two other westerns, "Girl of the Golden West" and "The Bulldogger."⁸⁸ The "Bull Dogger" (1923), produced by Normal Film Manufacturing Company, features "trick riding by black cowboys and cowgirls."⁸⁹

During the 1920s and 1930s Bush traveled throughout the country with her own company, performing drama, music, and comedy. Her troupes numbered between ten and twenty performers who were paid \$50 weekly.⁹⁰

On 22 July 1937, Bush appeared in the WPA's production of Swing It at the Adelphi Theatre in New York for 60 performances.⁹¹ A musical, written by Cecil Mack, Milton Reddie, and Eubie Blake, Swing It is "about a showboat troupe in the South which wants to go to fabulous Harlem."⁹² Anita Bush played Amy. The reviewer for the 23 July 1937 The New York Times reports:

"Swing It is a pot-pourri of minstrelsy, singing, dancing, mugging, clowning, spirituals, jazz, swing, tapping and the carrying of Harlem's throaty torch. Dozens of Negro players are taking part, in specialty numbers, in clogging, in buck and wing. Harlem is right⁹³ down town, having fun in an infectious manner.

Rosetta LeNoire⁺ began her professional career during the late 1920s as a teenager touring during the Summers with her godfather and dance instructor Bill "Bojangles" Robinson as one of his "Time Steppers," a chorus of twelve dancing girls. Her mentor and voice teacher was Eubie Blake. LeNoire went on to perform in several successful musicals and dramas. A pioneer in non-traditional casting, she is founder and artistic director of AMAS Repertory Theatre. AMAS produces musicals featuring multi-ethnic casts exclusively. Celebrating her fiftieth year as a member of Actors Equity Association this year (1989), she is currently seen on television on Saturday nights as Rollie's Wife, in NBC's "Amen," starring Sherman Hemsley.⁹⁴

According to LeNoire (who also performed in WPA productions), during the 1930s and 40s, Bush was teaching acting at the Harlem "Y". "Anita, I felt, was an overlooked person. She was a brilliant actress and she was a hell of a good teacher! When I entered

the theatre," she recalls, acting in dramatic roles was more respected than singing and dancing."⁹⁵ At the time, LeNoire (who was associated with singing and dancing), was not an official member of the class. She would, however, slip in quietly, sit at the back of the room, and observe Bush. "I would write down everything I saw and heard," she reveals. "In case I got a character to play, I could go back and look up my notes."⁹⁶

In order to supplement her income, for several years--as a young woman and a middle-aged woman--Bush endorsed Kashmir Preparation, a skin whitener and cleanser. Bush, who retired from the stage in 1943, headed her last traveling company in 1941. For several years she was Executive Secretary of the Negro Actors Guild.⁹⁷ On 19 February 1974, Bush died at the age of 91 in her Bronx apartment in New York City. She is buried in the Mt. Hope Cemetery in Hastings, New York.⁹⁸

Bush, a pivotal figure in the evolution of the Black theatre-artist (she is also known as "Little Mother of Negro Drama"), is credited with initiating the careers of more than fifty Black performers.⁹⁹ Inez Clough, Lottie Grady, Laura Bowman, Abbie Mitchell,

and Bush all gained recognition and valuable experience while acting with the Lafayette Players. Bush's accomplishments have assured her a unique place in the history of American Theatre. Sister Thompson, the daughter of two former stars of the Lafayette Players, Evelyn Preer and Edward Thompson, sums up why this Black Theatre "legend" should be remembered:

Anita Bush's contributions to the success of the Lafayette Players should not be minimized. Without her, there would not have been a company; without her, the company would not have continued to thrive and to grow during the first difficult years of establishment. The company was her idea, her dream, her ambition brought to life. Credit must be given to one who, through her determination,, kept the dream alive. Anita Bush's inspiration encouraged others to follow in her footsteps along a previously untraveled path. It was a path that was to lead ultimately to an unparalleled position for black performers in the theatrical world.¹⁰⁰

Dido Johnson writes, "No history of the Negro in the twentieth century theatre can be complete without the name of Laura Bowman," in an article entitled "The Truly Startling Story of Laura Bowman."¹⁰¹ Like Anita Bush, Bowman began her professional career in In Dahomey (1902). Born of mixed parents (a mulatto father and a Dutch mother) on 3 October 1881 in Quincy, Illinois, but raised in Cincinnati, Laura Bradford started singing as a youngster in church choirs. In 1898, at sixteen, she married Henry Ward Bowman, a railroad porter.

She realized that she wanted to sing professionally in 1900 while performing in an Easter program in church. Her memoir, Achievement: The Life of Laura Bowman, gives valuable information about her life and career. However, Bowman mentions few dates. She recalls auditioning in 1902 for Williams and Walker at Heuchs Opera House in Cincinnati. Although she did not get hired, because they had enough contract players, they encouraged her. The next week, however, when the show was returning from Louisiana on its way to Chicago, the advance man hired her for In Dahomey. The show played two nights in Des Moines and three nights in Omaha before arriving in Chicago. While there, Laura stayed with Paul Laurence Dunbar and his mother.¹⁰²

In the overture of In Dahomey she wore dark grease paint. ("I have always had to use dark makeup, so, of course, I had to learn to perfect it," reveals Laura.¹⁰³) She also wore an "ugly-nappy, bushy African wig" and a colorful costume.¹⁰⁴ "We girls had to hide behind big rocks. The floor was covered with grass mats. . . . All we had to do was play hide and seek behind the rocks while Bert Williams, our star, played with us. Our biggest job," remembers Bowman,

"was to place ourselves so that we could see Will Marion Cook, our musical director."¹⁰⁵ Hatti McIntosh (who also performed) and Mrs. Reed, Ada Walker's mother, were wardrobe mistresses.¹⁰⁶

According to Bowman, they traveled by train--an entire car for the company. And there was a banner the length of the car which read "Williams and Walker Company." In 1903 the cast of eighty-one, booked second class on the Cunard Line, sailed from New York for England. They rehearsed all day and performed at night. On the way over, "the ghost walked." This was an expression used by Black performers to mean that they were getting paid. Laura received her salary of \$18 for two weeks, which was \$1 over her original contract.¹⁰⁷

Pete Hampton, one of the executives and stars of the show who had fallen in love with Laura, taught her to play the banjo. They wrote a couple of songs, formed a vaudeville act, "Hampton and Bowman," and entertained on board. Laura, who says that she was never a good dancer, sang "Swanee River"; together they sang "Lindy," and "Brownskin Baby Mine." They were well received, and she was a hit. After using "Lindy," one of their songs, in the act for several

years, Pete and Laura sold it to Johnson and Dean before it was published by a Hungarian music company in Budapest.¹⁰⁸

The ship landed in Liverpool where the cast took the train to London. In Dahomey was one of six shows presenting a command performance for the Prince of Wales' ninth birthday.¹⁰⁹ The acts did not go to the front gate at Buckingham Palace; they had to go to the side gate, then walk about ten blocks. Bowman did not know whether it was because of race.¹¹⁰ "The sensational part of our show to the English public," says Laura, "was the high cakewalk which gained a tremendous amount of publicity and popularity."¹¹¹

The first company of In Dahomey broke up in London in 1903. A new company was formed with Avery and Hart (a comic duo) replacing Williams and Walker. Laura and Pete, however, decided not to join the second company of In Dahomey. Instead, they formed a quartet, the Darktown Entertainer, featuring William Garland, tenor, Fred Douglas, bass, Pete Hampton, baritone, and Laura, soprano. They sang everything from grand opera to lullabies. Laura was the official representative for the group. They were booked in Leipzig, Germany at the Crystal Palace by the Shereck and Braff agency,

who remained with Hampton and Bowman for twelve years. The Darktown Entertainers performed in Hungary, Austria, France, Russia, Switzerland, and the Balkan countries. Garland sang "Flower Song." While he held a note for three minutes, they passed out roses to the women in the audience. Pete played three numbers on the banjo and harmonica. Then, Pete and Laura performed a character sketch. Laura had six character changes; two were supposed to be overdressed. The act closed with the Sextette from "Lucia."¹¹² "The repertorie of Darktown Entertainers was something unique in theatrical circles," notes Sampson. "They sang, danced and Miss Bowman highlighted the evening with varied characterizations in costume. One of her favorites was 'Salome' from the opera of the same name."¹¹³

In Budapest, they were met by two open carriages and a brass band that rode through town with a banner which read "Darktown Entertainers." During their 15-day engagement there, they played in an open air theatre with canvas on the sides. Laura sang "Swanee River" and dressed like an old lady. The group played three weeks in Germany and thirty days in Vienna. While in Vienna, they met Ida Forsyne; she was dancing at Bal Tabarin, a high-class night club.¹¹⁴ Ida "was

a very small person of dark brown complexion. Her very short hair was not too good of quality," says Bowman. "But Ida was not the type to let a little thing like that stop her. She had wigs made out of chestnut curls. When she was made up for her act she looked like a little brown doll."¹¹⁵ Both the Darktown Entertainers and Ida were going to Russia; Ida had already been there. They promised to meet. According to Laura, Black acts in Europe remained in contact.¹¹⁶ Their first night in Russia, the Darktown Entertainers performed on a bill with eleven other acts, including Hungarian, German, Russian, and French women's choruses. They did not go on until 10:00 PM. While in Russia, they met Tolstoi. Although they were not aware of it, the group was expected to entertain at private parties. While at one of the parties, Tolstoi offered them 100 rubles to sing "Simple Simon," but no one could remember the melody. After thirty minutes of singing other songs, Laura had an idea.¹¹⁷ "I had a little comedy number I did alone. It interested him enough to make him at least listen to us, not because the number was so wonderful, but simply because I was a woman."¹¹⁸ The group sang for a half hour longer without a break and earned

the 100 rubles. However, they felt very cheap and letdown.¹¹⁹

Pete and Laura also performed as a duo while they were members of the Darktown Entertainers. In Odessa, Laura and Pete were booked on the same bill with Ida Forsyne. Ida's cousin Ollie Borgoyne (who had remained in Europe after the run of In Dahomey) also accompanied them to Odessa, but only to vacation. As the political climate escalated, the American Consul told all Americans to leave Russia. The Darktown Entertainers and Ida and Ollie (who spoke fluent Russian) left Russia for London. They were escorted to the train by the Consul and a guard of soldiers.¹²⁰ "In those days, to be an American meant something," says Bowman.¹²¹

After leaving Russia, the Darktown Entertainers broke up. Ida, Pete, and Laura booked passage on the Lusitania to the United States. The trip home was only for a visit. The couple had their return tickets to London and two years advance bookings awaiting them.¹²² On 23 May 1904, Will Marion Cook's musical The Southerners opened at the New York Theatre for 36 performances.¹²³ Ida, Pete, and Laura were in the company. According to Bowman, "it was strictly

an ofay [White] show although it had a colored chorus."¹²⁴

After the close of The Southerners, Bowman returned to London as a principal in the second company of In Dahomey, featuring Avery and Hart. She played Mrs. Lightfoot, Pete's wife. Laura received an \$8 raise for doing two parts, singing and talking. Now that she was a principal, and no longer a chorus girl, her stature with the show changed; she received better accommodations and dressing room. This was not a real acting part for Laura.¹²⁵ "I already knew the part better than the woman who had been doing it for the past seven months," says Bowman.¹²⁶ After the run of In Dahomey II, Laura and Pete performed as a duo throughout Europe. They worked in Berlin, Moscow, Prague, Budapest, Rome, Naples, Switzerland, and twenty-six weeks in England. By October 1907 (on her birthday), the couple was back performing in Vienna.¹²⁷

By 1910, Pete and Laura had bought a house in England, and both her parents were living with them. On 20 July 1912 Laura's mother died. Sometime afterwards, the English government ordered all foreigners home. The couple returned to New York. They toured the east coast performing as a duo. On a return trip from Boston, Pete became seriously ill. By this time,

Ida Forsythe had returned to the United States. She stayed with Pete and Laura at their 136th street apartment in Harlem where she helped Laura take care of Pete. Shortly afterwards, he died.¹²⁸

In March of 1916 Bowman joined the Lafayette Players. At her first rehearsal for Eugene Walker's The Wolf, she met Sidney Kirkpatrick. Laura played the part of a Canadian backwoods girl and Sidney was an American engineer in love with the girl. Only a few days after Pete's death, Laura fell in love with Sidney. Pete Hampton had been several years older than Laura, more of a father and teacher. Sidney and Laura, however, were lovers.¹²⁹

Soon, the Lafayette Players numbered about forty. Laura was classified as a "character woman" with the group. Her audiences seemed to enjoy her in tender mother parts.¹³⁰ That first season Bowman portrayed Martha Washington Johnson in Robert Baker's and John Emerson's detective story The Conspiracy, Mrs. Dole in George Broadhurst's The Price, and Mrs. Blount in Daniel Carter's The Master Mind.¹³¹ "Miss Bowman as Mrs. Blount, alias Milwaukee Sadie, the shoplifter, gave a good characterization," says Lucien White.¹³² Bowman played Rose in Madame X. "Miss Laura Bowman

as Rose maintained her most excellent reputation as an interpreter of character parts," says White.¹³³ She was also seen in Bayard Veiller's Within the Law, Deep Purple, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Today, and A. Alston's Tennessee's Pardner¹³⁴.

The musicals presented during that same season include Fifty Miles from Boston, Prince of Pilsen, Hit the Deck, Madam Sherry, Three Twins, A Pair of Sixes, Here Comes the Bride, Chocolate Soldier, Faust, and Forty-five Minutes from Broadway, starring Abbie Mitchell.¹³⁵ Reviewing Bowman's performance in Forty-five Minutes from Broadway, White says, "Miss Bowman's voice was heard to good advantage in 'Dreaming,' but the song was hardly suited to the character which she is interpreting."¹³⁶

Other productions in which Bowman was seen include Joseph E. Howard's The Time, The Place and The Girl, C. T. Dazey's and Alatheia Layson's In Old Kentucky, the Wife in A Fool There Was, Mrs. Jordan in The Great Divide, Mrs. Kate Desmond in Owen Davis's A Man's Game, Mrs. Fielding in The Yankee Prince, and doubled as Mrs. Meyer and Mrs. Smalley in Jack Lait's Help Wanted.¹³⁷

Eventually, Laura and Sidney left the Lafayette

Players to get married. The management did not want either married couples or sweethearts because "we would lose our value to him unless we remained single," says Bowman.¹³⁸ They formed an act and played in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Indianapolis. Laura used their popularity with the stock company as publicity. Sidney did not possess either the contacts or business savvy Laura had acquired from Pete. Now, the roles were reversed; she took the lead. In their first program they sang three solos each and four duets, plus excerpts from various operas. The show was well received. The couple married in Baltimore and moved to Indianapolis.¹³⁹

According to Bowman,

Indianapolis was rather a prejudiced town with disadvantages for colored performers. Although it was Sidney's home and everyone knew his family, we billed ourselves as a modern Hawaiian Duet and got by with it. We often played in theatres that did not allow colored patrons or performers.¹⁴⁰

Some theatres in the area relegated Blacks to seats in the balcony. The English Opera House, however, was one of those theatres that did not permit Blacks even in the balcony.¹⁴¹

In 1923 Bowman and Kirkpatrick returned to New York City as members of the Ethiopian Art Players. Originally The Colored Folk Theatre, this Chicago-based

group was organized in 1923 by Mrs. Sherwood Anderson and Raymond O'Neil.¹⁴² The company's objective was to produce plays which dealt with Black life; but because of a lack of suitable material, they presented mostly non-racial works.¹⁴³ Of the three plays presented, only one, The Chip Woman's Fortune by Willis Richardson, was written by a Black playwright. In addition to Chip Woman, they performed Oscar Wilde's Salome and a jazz version of Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors. The Ethiopian Art Players, directed by O'Neil, first performed their three-play repertoire at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem. However, when the community was unkind to the troupe, the producers moved them to Broadway in May 1923.¹⁴⁴

On 7 May 1923 the company opened with The Chip Woman's Fortune, followed by Salome, at the Frazee Theatre in New York for eight performances. On 15 May 1923, the curtain raiser was Chip Woman, followed by The Comedy of Errors for seven performances, also at the Frazee.¹⁴⁵

In Salome, Kirkpatrick played Herod opposite Bowman's Herodias. According to a review in the 8 May 1923 issue of The New York Times, Salome "is not particularly good and it is not particularly bad and

it has its moments when it is art and other moments when it is theatre and still other moments when it is neither. Rather strangely for an Ethiopian Art Theatre, it seemed to one observer last night, it had no moments at all when it was Ethiopian."¹⁴⁶

Chip Woman tells the story of an elderly Black woman, Aunt Nancy, who earns a living by picking up and selling chips of coal found in the streets. By living a very meager existence, she manages to save a large sum of money (which she hides in the backyard) for her son when he is released from prison. Bowman played Aunt Nancy. Although Chip Woman is a drama, the reviewer calls it "trifling and at times amusing." Even though it is never cited in the review, this landmark production was the first drama by a Black author to reach Broadway. The Times ends its review by saying, "perhaps in the plays announced for production later these negro players will show that they differ in any way from from the average Broadway company. As it is, however, last night's performance tended to indicate an addition of another so-so company to the American stage already burdened with an overproduction of that kind of thing."¹⁴⁷ The reporter from The Times did not mention Bowman; however, Percy Hammond,

reviewing for the Herald-Tribune, writes: "Miss Laura Bowman, as the cross Herodias, showed a gift of impersonation as an ancient negress in the curtain-raiser [Chip Woman] which preceded 'Salome.'"148

Bowman played Aemili in The Comedy of Errors. According to John Corbin, reviewing for the 16 May 1923 issue of The New York Times, The Comedy of Errors lacks the smoothness and precision of Chip Woman and Salome. He goes on to say:

Unlikely as it may appear, the director of the Ethiopian Art Theatre had an idea in the back of his head when he set out to jazz 'The Comedy of Errors.' . . . Raymond O'Neill pitches a circus tent, with a platform in the centre, in the manner of Jacques Copeau. Rude set pieces indicating the various scenes are fox-trotted in and shimmied out, to ragtime tunes, by black-face pierrots. Minor characters mime extravagantly to enliven the scene. . . . In brief the idea is to stage this Greco-Roman-Shakespearean farce in a gale of high spirits. . . . Instead of heightening the illusion, the attempted grotesquerie creaked at the hinges. It is quite possible that there is already a sufficient melange, what with Menander, Plautus and Shakespeare, without adding complexions of the various shades of cafe du lait and dissonances suggestive of the African jungle.149

Bowman and Kirkpatrick returned to Indianapolis where they worked in the surrounding area. Sometime later, when a new cast of the Lafayette Players opened at the Avenue Theatre in Chicago, Mr. Levy, the boss from New York, asked Laura and Sidney to join. It

appears that either the management had changed its policy regarding married couples or Bowman and Kirkpatrick were so popular they were exempted. The couple signed a one-year contract with the Lafayette Players and returned to New York from where they were sent throughout the country.¹⁵⁰

On 6 February 1928 Meek Moses opened at the Princess Theatre in New York for thirty-two performances.¹⁵¹ Written by actor Frank Wilson (who had played the title role in Porgy), the play is set in Mexia, Texas where a colony of Blacks has been evicted by greedy Whites. They find refuge in swamp country. Mose, the pacifist minister, believes in the expression "Blessed are the meek." After numerous sorrows, he triumphs in the end.¹⁵² Bowman played Josephine, Mose's wife. Sidney was also in the cast.¹⁵³

Produced by Lester Walton, the Black entrepreneur and newspaper man from the Lafayette, Meek Mose is the initial attempt at establishing the Princess Theatre in New York City as a Negro repertory theatre. In hopes of helping this idea to flourish, Mayor Walker, Otto H. Kahn, Max Reinhardt and other prominent political and theatre people attended the opening night performance.¹⁵⁴ The 7 February 1928 issue of The New

York Times provides the following review:

it is difficult to record "Meek Mose" as anything better than a childishly naive endeavor, full of sepia tint John Golden and depicting life only in slightly shop-worn terms of the theatre. . . . the majority of the characters do not seem to be real people, . . .

On the other hand, the point may well be brought up that "Meek Mose" is not supposed to be a realistic portrayal of negroes or of contemporary negro problems, but simply a theatrical entertainment. In this case the opinion that such a theatre should locate in Harlem, where it would be of most service, might be in order.¹⁵⁵

According to an article in the 18 February 1928 issue of the Afro-American, Meek Mose "ran the gamut of criticism which ranged from the 'feeble and faltering attempt' to a 'fruitful study of a man who took the Bible literally and tried to live by it's creed.'"¹⁵⁶ The reporter cites examples from various critics.

He quotes Alexander Woolcott of the New York World:

"'Mr. Wilson's play seemed to me an awkward and artless contraption and except for the excellent work of Laura Bowman as the mother, the company was not a promising one. . . . The redeeming feature of the production was the fact that when in doubt, "Meek Mose" burst into the singing of spirituals, the players taking to them with the alacrity born of their knowledge that here was something they could do better than any one else.'"¹⁵⁷

The Afro-American writes, "Romeo Dougherty, of the Amsterdam News credited Laura Bowman, Ruth Ellis, and J. Lawrence Griner with portraying their roles faithfully."¹⁵⁸ Despite praising the acting, Dougherty had this to say about the play: "'The story, however, lacks sufficient depth we think to bring us to the theatre for the second time. We hope that it will have a liberal run, but we doubt it. It is, however, a very important step in the right direction.'"¹⁵⁹ The Brooklyn Eagle says: "'Wilson must be given credit for combining many elements of popular appeal in his first drama, including mob scenes and double wedding. One of the best parts is that of Laura Bowman, Mose's unbelieving wife.'"¹⁶⁰

In 1928 Bowman organized a group of aspiring actors and began teaching dramatics. Known as the National Art School, located at 119th street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem, Bowman's troupe performed at churches, schools, and social functions. Their repertorie included The Unlighted Cross, The Passing of the Third Door Back, and Oscar Wilde's Salome. Pauline Meyers (Myers)⁺, Helen Mair, and Estelle Hemsley⁺ were among the members. From this time to the 1940s, Bowman had some kind of dramatic school.¹⁶¹

The fame of the Lafayette Players had spread to the West Coast years earlier. Prompted by repeated requests by the patrons for dramatic shows, the management of the Lincoln Theatre in Los Angeles invited the celebrated company to perform there. Located at Central Avenue and twenty-third street, the Lincoln became the home of the Lafayette Players for forty-two weeks. The group promised to present a varied program with a new type of dramatic performance each week. During this time, the company presented both old and new favorites.¹⁶²

On 24 August 1928 the Lafayette Players premiered at the Lincoln Theatre in Rain. Lavishly produced, Rain was well received. Bowman and Kirkpatrick were in the company. According to Romeo Dougherty, writing for the Pittsburgh Courier this time: "'The opening performance found the house sold out and many of the motion picture celebrities were on hand; in fact, Hollywood turned out in full and went away awed and surprised at the wonderful work of the colored artists.'"¹⁶³

Rain, a favorite with New York audiences, gave Black theatregoers on the West Coast a "chance to view that which they had heard so much about," notes

Thompson. "White critics were given a first-time opportunity to see black performers in serious drama."¹⁶⁴ The Los Angeles American, a White newspaper, was quoted by the 5 September 1928 New York Amsterdam News:

Painting in with broad strokes of comedy only hinted at in the Caucasian productions of the melodrama, this interesting group of Players presented an exciting mounting of the story which gave Sadie Thompson a place in the bright annals of American drama. Evelyn Preer, playing the vivid femme . . . does commendatory thespianism . . . A standing room only audience, which included Charles Chaplin, and other Hollywood personalities cheered the offering. The Lincoln production . . . I regard as one of the most interesting stage items of the current calendar.¹⁶⁵

In that same article, "Los Angeles Gives Lafayette Players Remarkable Welcome at the Lincoln," the New York Amsterdam News quotes another White newspaper, The Los Angeles Illustrated Daily:

With Jeanne Eagles appearing . . . at the Orpheum this week, it is a nice gesture on the part of the Lafayette Players to present Rain as the opening attraction at the Lincoln Theatre. Four types of actresses have played the dynamic and colorful role of Sadie Thompson in the last two years. . . . Each has had a distinct version . . . so no odious comparison can be made. However, Evelyn Preer, beautiful Negress, owes no apology to anyone for her interpretation. . . . This group of Players, at the midnight show Saturday simply¹⁶⁶ packed . . . the beautiful Lincoln Theatre. . . .

After Rain, the company presented Willard Mack's drama Kick In, followed by In Old Kentucky. During October they presented Madame X as a "special attraction"

for the Lincoln Theatre's first year anniversary. A few of the productions performed by the Lafayette Players during the Fall of 1928 were: Bayard Veiller's Within The Law, Anna Christie by Eugene O'Neill, Is Zat So? by James Gleason, On Trial by Elmer Rice, The Thirteenth Chair, also by Veiller, Willard Mack's The Noose, Common Clay by Cleve Kinkadee, Bought and Paid For by George Broadhurst, and Max Marcin's Cheating Cheaters. In December the Lafayette Players presented their first musical, Laurence Schwab's and B. G. de Sylva's Queen High. The show was a "triumphant success." The Players ended 1928 as the "undisputed hit of the season."¹⁶⁷

The Lafayette Players opened 1929 with Ralph Spence's mystery play The Gorilla. Why Women Cheat, The Man Who Came Back by Jules Eckert Goodman, and Harlan Thompson's musical comedy Little Jesse James were mounted during the remaining weeks of January.¹⁶⁸

The popular Rain was repeated during the first week of February, followed by Salome. Other shows produced during February and March were: John Emerson's and Anita Loos' The Whole Town's Talking, The Unborn by Beulah Poytner, James Montgomery's musical comedy Irene, The Fallen Sister and Michael Morton's play

about the persecution of Jews, The Yellow Ticket. Outcast by Hubert Henry Davies ended the month of March. Divorce, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and (in honor of "Shriners' Week") Are You A Mason? were among the plays presented during April and May. During the last week of May, before the close of the season, the Lafayette Players revived The Unborn.¹⁶⁹

During her vacation, Bowman returned to New York. On 20 and 21 June 1929, she appeared in Jeroline Hemsley's Wade in de Water at the Abyssinia Baptist Church in Harlem. Under the patronage of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Wade in de Water was the debut production of the newly formed Negro Art Theatre.¹⁷⁰ (The price of tickets was 50¢). Bowman was in the cast, presumably in the role Inez Clough would create at the Cherry Lane Theatre in September of 1929. Pauline Meyers (Myers), one of Bowman's drama students, was also in the company. As with the Cherry Lane production, Hemsely Winfield played a featured part.¹⁷¹

While Bowman was in New York, Evelyn Preer, after two weeks vacation, returned to the Lafayette Players to star in Octavius Ray Cohen's Come Seven. The production was presented at the Orange Grove Theatre on Grand near Seventh Avenue in Los Angeles. Come

Seven played for five consecutive weeks, closing during the latter part of August. Near the end of the run, attendance declined. During this time, Levy announced that the Players would be leaving Los Angeles for a limited engagement in San Francisco. On 15 September 1929 the Lafayette Players opened in the highly praised Rain at the Capitol Theatre in San Francisco. Rain was well received.¹⁷²

Perhaps in hopes of drumming up business, at the end of Summer, before going to San Francisco, Levy announced that the "New Lafayette Players" would be arriving in Los Angeles from New York to open the Fall season at the Lincoln Theatre. On 23 September 1929, the group opened with George V. Hobart's Experience. Abbie Mitchell, one of the "new" performers from New York, starred in the show. Also, Laura Bowman returned to the Lincoln for the Fall season. In October they presented the musical comedy Hit the Deck, an adaptation of Herbert Field's Shore Leave. They continued to present weekly productions throughout December. For Christmas week they staged Robert H. McLaughlin's The Eternal Magdalene. By this time, attendance had dropped so badly that the group's demise was inevitable. During January of 1930, the Players gave their farewell

performance, Why Wives Go Wrong, by an unknown playwright. The Lincoln Theatre closed; it would be reopened, however, as a movie theatre. Sometime later it was learned that Levy, the owner of the Lafayette Players, at the end, owed the company two weeks salary which they never received.¹⁷³ After the Lafayette Players disbanded, Bowman and Kirkpatrick remained in Los Angeles. They became members of the Hall Singers, obtained a contract from R. K. O., and sang in several films including "Dixie Anna" with Bebe Daniels, "Check and Double Check" with Amos and Andy, and "Half Shot at Sunrise."¹⁷⁴

Bowman returned to the East Coast where on 25 December 1931 she appeared in Lula Vollmer's Sentinels at the Biltmore Theatre in New York for eleven performances.¹⁷⁵ Set in the South, Sentinels tells the story of the Hathaways, a wealthy White family, whose son kills a local scoundrel. When Mallie, the Black mammy who has raised the Hathaway boys as her own, discovers that George has committed the murder, in order to save the family name, she forces her own son, Thunder, to take the blame. At the end of the play, however, as Thunder is being taken away by the law, George confesses. Laura Bowman portrayed Mallie,

the family servant; Wayland Rudd was Thunder.¹⁷⁶

Virtually all of the critics pan the play but cite Bowman as giving an excellent performance. Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times says: "'Sentinels' is an awkward and labored piece of writing for the stage, elaborately motivated in the early scenes to assure the heroics of the concluding act. In spite of two or three isolated examples of good acting, the performance as a whole is quite ambiguous. . . . Laura Bowman makes something warm of the monotonously written part of the Negro servant."¹⁷⁷ Richard Lockridge in the New York Sun writes, "It is always overburdened with incidental characters, well enough conceived and better acted, but not in themselves sturdy enough--or novel enough--to make 'Sentinels' a play. . . . Particularly good are Miss Bowman and Mr. Rudd, both Negroes."¹⁷⁸

Burns Mantle, reviewing for the New York News, credits Bowman and Rudd with saving the play:

Laura Bowman, late leading woman of the Harlem stock company, and Wayland Rudd, hailing from the same training school, arose in the third act and played a big scene so earnestly that they momentarily brought reality to a slightly synthetic theatre piece and helped the evening tremendously. . . .

Playing it fervently and yet simply, Miss Bowman and Mr. Rudd were able to win an applauseful tribute from their audience. . . . the evening, histri-

onically, belongs to the Harlem players . . .¹⁷⁹

Four months later Bowman was back on Broadway. On 12 April 1932 Richard Mailbaum's The Tree opened at the Park Lane Theatre (formerly Daly's Sixty-Third Street Theatre) for seven performances.¹⁸⁰ The Tree takes place in a rural district North of the Mason-Dixon Line. David, a friendly Black youth, is caught dancing for a White girl under a tree. Later, she is found raped and murdered. The Black youth is erroneously accused and hanged. After the real killer (who happens to be White) is discovered, in order to make amends, one of the White lynchers allows himself to be hanged with the same rope under the same tree. Laura Bowman played Miriam, the mother of the slain Black youth.¹⁸¹

This drama of lynching in the North did not fare well with the critics. Bowman's performance, however, was praised. The 20 April 1932 issue of the New York Amsterdam News calls The Tree a "Morbid Drama." It goes on to say: "The most heart-throbbing and emotional performance of the evening was given by Laura Bowman as David's mother."¹⁸² The 23 April 1932 The Chicago Defender reports: "The scene in which Laura Bowman, as Miriam, David's mother, rocks the dead body of her son to sleep and sings to her Jesus has genuine,

throat-chocking tears of compassion."¹⁸³ John Mason Brown, reviewing for 13 April 1932 issue of The Post, says: "Laura Bowman had a chance as the slain Negro's mammy to croon woeful songs once again over a colored son to whom the whites had done a wrong. Good as some of Mr. Rossen's [the director] actors were, however, Mr. Mailbaum's solemn drama was far from being good enough. It was, to tell the truth, rather sad in more ways than one."¹⁸⁴

Brooks Atkinson did not mention Bowman by name, He did, however, note her performance: "Although the acting is clumsy and faltering, the mob scenes have a genuine clamor, and the scene in which the Negro's mother wearily rocks his dead body to sleep and sings to her Jesus has an honest sense of compassion."¹⁸⁵ He adds, "the author and most of the actors still have a good deal to learn about the theatre."¹⁸⁶

After years of performing in musicals, vaudeville, and with the Lafayette Players, Bowman had begun establishing herself as a dramatic actress on the professional legitimate stage. Although the shows were short-lived and Bowman's roles were stereotyped, she had had two Broadway openings within six months: Sentinels

and The Tree. "That, at that time, was considered quite an achievement," says Bowman.¹⁸⁷

For sometime, Levy and a group of former Lafayette Players (including Bowman) had been attempting to reestablish the troupe at the Lincoln Theatre. It was announced that the Players would reopen in June and that Jules Wolf, the new manager of the Lincoln, had sent for Laura Bowman to come to Los Angeles from Boston to join the company. During the week of 25 June 1932 the Lafayette Players opened at the Lincoln (no production information found). During the week of July 4th they presented O'Neill's Desire Under the Elm. The group's revival, however, was short-lived. On Sunday, 17 July 1932, the Lafayette Players gave their last performance at the Lincoln Theatre, before disbanding permanently. Ironically, the title of the feature film which opened at the Lincoln the following Sunday was the "all-colored" "Harlem Is Heaven."¹⁸⁸ "For so many fruitful and productive years," observes Thompson, "Harlem had been almost that for the Lafayette Players."¹⁸⁹

Bowman remained in Los Angeles for several months after the close of the Lafayette Players. During this time, she debuted on the screen in "Ten Minutes

to Live" (1932) produced by Oscar Micheaux. In 1933 she made the film "Drums O Voodoo" produced by Robert Mintz and Louis Weiss.¹⁹⁰ Soon afterwards, the couple bought a car and Sidney drove back to the East Coast. Shortly after their return, they performed their duo at the Alhambra Theatre on Seventh Avenue and Twelfth Street in New York City. A few days later, Sidney died in Harlem Hospital of a heart attack.¹⁹¹

Once again, Bowman was left a widow. Nonetheless, she continued to earn a living as a serious actress. A few weeks later, on 20 February 1933, J. Augustus Smith's Louisiana opened at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn, NY for one week of performances. Set in the Louisiana swamps, this three-act drama with a prologue depicts the conflict between voodoo and Christianity. J. Augustus Smith played Amos Berry, the preacher; Bowman was Aunt Hagar, the voodoo priestess.¹⁹²

According to the reviewer for the 21 February 1933 Brooklyn Daily Eagle: "In a way it is a more truthful picture of colored religious life than 'Green Pastures.' It cannot be as popular with a white audience as the latter play, for 'Green Pastures' flattered the vanity of whites by allowing them to laugh at what they thought was a colored man's idea of God

and the Bible."¹⁹³ Despite reporting that the play "is poorly written" and "sadly in need of a good director," he goes on to say: "But the last act, with its darkened stage, its drums continually beating, its voodoo witch--if witch is the right name for old Aunt Hagar--its blind villain and its weird singing and dancing is the most unusual and dramatic scene of the play."¹⁹⁴ Of the individual performances, he says: "Laura Bowman, who plays Aunt Hagar, is the domineering figure. Here is a role that plays itself but Miss Bowman adds a good deal to it."¹⁹⁵

One week later, on 27 February 1933, Louisiana moved uptown to the Forty-eight Street Theatre for eight performances.¹⁹⁶ For the most part, the reviews were unfavorable. Brooks Atkinson had this to say:

If the voodoo gods looked after the welfare of Negro actors on Broadway such an artless drama as "Louisiana," . . . would be spared the humiliation of a professional review.

If you saw "Louisiana" in Harlem you would be willing to overlook its defects out of respect for its sincerity. Its virtues and villainies are thoroughly guileless. When it describes a revival service at the Flat Rock Washfoot Baptist Church it has considerable picturesque vitality.

In producing "Louisiana" downtown the Negro Theatre Guild had defied the pitiless gods of the white man, who value skill beyond anything else.¹⁹⁷

Arthur Ruhl, writing for the 28 February 1933 issue of the Herald-Tribune, provides the following

review:

The piece offered as the first work of a new organization known as the Negro Theatre Guild was ingenuously put together and directed. Entrances were announced, generally, by the very obvious sound of approaching feet, and the villagers were broadly and farcically treated, more in the manner of Negro musical comedy without the music. Mr. Smith himself has a fine countenance and he acted with no little dignity and sincerity, but most of the others were pretty theatrical. The voodoo business itself was decidedly more in the Broadway style than after the manner of the real thing. And the interpolated songs, although sung with characteristic spirit, added little to the strength of the melodrama.¹⁹⁸

Louisiana "has all the defects, and few of the virtues, of its genus and it is acted, for the most part, in a fashion to drive one slowly mad," according to Richard Lockridge in the 28 February 1933 New York Sun.¹⁹⁹ "Although it may be true that the colored folks do carry on that way in the dusky settlements near Bayou-la-Fauche, Louisiana, their carryings-on never ring quite true when reproduced by the citizens of Harlem, who, mentally and physically, are far removed from Bayou-la-Frauche, Louisiana, even as you and I," says Robert Garland of the World-Telegram. "In the cast, Laura Bowman plays the Voodoo Priestess impressively enough to get her name in the program twice [Bowman appeared in the Prologue]," he adds.²⁰⁰

Burns Mantle, the critic for the New York Daily

News, wrote the most favorable review:

The play is an unpretentious exhibit of primitive drama punctuated by the occasional singing of spirituals. In one or two scenes, notably a church scene in which the honest pastor is forced by his enemy to confess a murder done thirty years before, it rises sharply to climaxes of emotional power.

An outstanding performance in the all-colored cast is that of Laura Bowman as Aunt Hagar. An ominous, brooding exultant figure of vengeance, she dominated all her scenes. . . .²⁰¹

Shortly after Sidney Kirkpartick's death, Laura began to drink at home alone (after work) in order to sleep. Soon, she was drinking heavily at a local bar in Harlem that theatre-folk frequented. While there, she met her fourth husband-to-be, LeRoi Antoine. Antoine, a Haitian who had aspirations of becoming an opera singer, was twenty-three years her junior. She called him "my boy," and many of her friends called her a "cradle snatcher." With the exception of Anita Bush, the old-timers objected to the relationship. In spite of this, she became Antoine's benefactor.²⁰² "I planned all sorts of things for his entertainment or amusement," recalls Bowman. "I never invited people unless they were musical or celebrities. I kept him in touch with the best people at all times."²⁰³ Bowman had become accustomed to being loved by the men with whom she was involved. Antoine, however, did not

care for her as a lover; "I never think of you as a sweetheart, but sometimes, I wish, oh, how I wish that you were my mother," he revealed to her.²⁰⁴

A short time after meeting, Bowman and Antoine were married. For seven years, she taught him everything she knew about music and singing. Then, she paid for voice lessons from Prof. Franz Erdody, a prominent teacher at the time. When Antoine was ready, she gave him a recital at the Steinway Recital Hall at Fifty-seventh Street in New York City. Bowman's protege received creditable reviews from The New York Times and The Mirror.²⁰⁵

By the end of 1933 Bowman was back on Broadway in Owen Davis' Jezebel. On 19 December 1933 Jezebel opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre for thirty-two performances.²⁰⁶ This three-act play with songs and spirituals takes place in the antebellum South. A Southern belle returns three years after qualleling with her lover to find him married. She instigates a duel in which her ex-lover's brother kills the opponent. She is branded a Jezebel by her aunt and is blamed for the murder. When her ex-lover is stricken with yellow fever, she goes to nurse him on the plague-ridden island from where neither of them returns.²⁰⁷

The title role, Jezebel, performed by film star Miriam Hopkins, was originally written for Tallulah Bankhead. Due to illness, however, she was unable to play the part. Laura Bowman played Mammy Winnie. In an article entitled "The Truly Startling Story of Laura Bowman," Dido Johnson, reviewing for the 30 December 1933 Daily Citizen (no city), writes: "In 'Jezebel' Miss Bowman gives one of her finest characterizations, that of the Negro woman whose love for the hellion who was her mistress (Miriam Hopkins) passed all understanding."²⁰⁸ Bushnell Dimond, of the 31 December 1933 Columbus Journal Dispatch, says: "I liked immensely . . . all the Negroes, especially Laura Bowman as a pacific mammy, . . ."²⁰⁹

Brooks Atkinson sums up the general feelings of the critics:

Reed Brown Jr. is excellent as the lover. As the aunt Cora Witherspoon is in top form. Frederic Worlock as the general has the convictions of a Southern gentleman and the breeding of a good actor. There are good performances also by Owen Davis Jr., Helen Claire, Frances Creel of the California Greels and Laura Bowman. But Mr. Davis's romantic play of the Southland is only a Bowery trollop at heart.²¹⁰

By January of 1934 "Drums of Voodoo" was being shown in the movie theatres. "Drums of Voodoo" was the film version of Augustus Smith's play Louisiana.

The original stage players recreated the roles they had performed on Broadway. Bowman was Aunt Hagar. According to Garland Mackey of the 1 February 1934 The Washington Tribune, "Drums of Voodoo" is "the most powerful drama of jungle superstition ever to be brought to the screen."²¹¹ Of Bowman he says, "You will love Aunt Hagar, despite the fact that she practices voodooism. Underneath her exterior of witchcraft there is a heart of love for humanity."²¹²

On 5 October 1934, Henry Rosendahl's Yesterday's Orchids opened at the Fulton Theatre (in Brooklyn, New York) for three performances.²¹³ The play is about a girl who manages to get a lot of money from several men while remaining a good girl.²¹⁴ Bowman was Caroline. That Yesterday's Orchid closed after only three performances is indicative of the reactions of the press. Kauf, from Variety, reports: "Nothing in the playwriting, the acting or the production to commend it."²¹⁵ According to Richard Lockridge of the New York Sun, "The acting of Carleton Young and Miss Whitney is not quite so bad as that of Royal Stout, Laura Bowman, Kay Linaker, William Balfour, Grant Erwin, Charles Dingle and Richard Reeves."²¹⁶ George Ross of the New York World-Telegram writes,

"The acting is terrible."²¹⁷

According to L.N., the reviewer for the 6 October 1934 The New York Times:

The present witches' holiday at the Fulton is a shambles of bad craftsmanship and bad catering, which plows its bitter way through the same old situations to the same old ending. The girl hadn't given herself until she met the young artist she loved and expected to marry.²¹⁸

Like Inez Clough, Bowman was heard on NBC's Sunday afternoon radio program of plays of "life among colored folk." Bowman appeared in F. Carlton Moss' Careless Love. She was paid \$55 per broadcast. During the Thirties, radio became quite profitable for Bowman. She played eighteen weeks with Helen Hayes on the "New Penny Show." Bowman earned \$125 for one night a week, plus \$100 for rebroadcasting on the weekends. She was performing on four or five radio programs, as well as soap operas, for Proctor and Gamble. Bowman's radio credits include "Stella Dallas," "John's Other Wife," "Pepper Young's Family," "The O'Neils," and "Pretty Kitty Kelly." "Personal Column on the Air" was another radio show on which Bowman was heard. On Sunday mornings Bowman was heard on the "Southernaires"; on Sunday evenings she was heard on "Pores and Drums."²¹⁹ "In fact, there was not a single day that I did not broadcast on some program,"

says Bowman.²²⁰ In 1935 she was seen in Oscar Micheaux's "Lem Hawkin's Confession."²²¹

On 26 October 1936 Sophie Treadwell's Plumes in the Dust previewed out of town at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C. This three-act sketch of the life of Edgar Allan Poe was produced and staged by Arthur Hopkins, with Henry Hull as Poe. Laura Bowman was Miranda, presumably the maid/housekeeper. Pauline Myers, Bowman's acting student, played Lou. In an unidentified review from a Washington newspaper, dated 27 October 1936, Craig writes:

'Plumes in the Dust' is too aptly titled. It grasps one of the greatest, most-poignant, most-discussed tragedies of modern times--and it lets it slip through its fingers as sensational melodrama. . . . Its characters, other than Poe, are unconvincing; its lines, except for those borrowed from Poe, are flat.

Henry Hull delivers a performance that is little short of heroic--. . . Rest of the cast--with the exception of Mary Morris as the aunt and Charles Kennedy as the foster-father--is seldom more than adequate and frequently less.²²²

A few days later, on 6 November 1936, Plumes in the Dust opened at the 46th Street Theatre in New York for eleven performances.²²³ The New York press was more supportive than the Washington critics. "Mr. Hopkins has assembled one of his most carefully chosen casts, . . ." reports Brooks Atkinson of the 7 November 1936 The New York Times. "Externally Poe

must have been something like the battered Hamlet Miss Treadwell and Mr. Hull have created. But the externals are not fair tokens of the resolute and rueful spirit that lived within them. The poet becomes the poetaster on the stage."²²⁴ Burns Mantle says, "A regrettable but, an inevitable failure." He concludes:

'Plumes in the Dust' had no more than a story of defeat and frustration to commend it to playgoers who insist upon their inalienable right to a search for happiness. Or at least, the illusion of happiness. Both in the theatre and out, but particularly in the theatre. . . . No plays that Hopkins has ever produced and none that Miss Treadwell has ever written has been undeserving of the support of an intelligent minority, at least. But it unhappily takes more than that to turn a profit on Broadway.²²⁵

In 1937 Bowman and Antoine went to Haiti to visit his family for several months. While they were there, Antoine collected Haitian music and folklore. When they returned to New York, the Negro Unit of WPA's Federal Theatre was presenting William DuBois' Haiti.²²⁶ Haiti opened on 2 March 1938 at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem for 168 performance.²²⁷ It tells the story of the uprising, led by Henri Christophe and Toussaint L'Ouverture, against the French.²²⁸

After the opening of the play, it was discovered that there was no background music. When it was learned that Antoine had brought back some music from Haiti,

he and Bowman were asked to help with the music. They were both placed on salary so Haiti could use their songs. After witnessing the christening of the authentic, Haitian, virgin drums played in the performance, Walter Damrosch asked Antoine to appear on an international hookup to broadcast these songs. According to Bowman, "this was the actual introduction of Haitian folklore and music to the American public and the world."²²⁹

On 31 October 1938, Waller Freeman's Conjur opened at the St. Felix Playhouse in Brooklyn. Conjur is the story of a young Black girl who is in love with a son of a Conjur woman. When a minister comes into her life, she is forced to deal with the struggle to banish conjur superstitions in favor of religion.²³⁰ Bowman played Parthenia, the Conjur woman. Ida Forsyne was a member of the congregation. According to the 1 November 1938 New York Post, "If there were prizes to be given one would go to Laura Bowman who plays Parthenia, the Conjur woman, . . ."²³¹ "Although the cast boasts of some fine Negro performers, notably Morris McKenney, Laura Bowman, Pearl Gaines, and Al Stokes," writes the 9 November 1938 issue of Variety, "they fail to offer in 'Conjur' anything but a feeble

portrait of primitive Negro existence in the south-land." ²³²

It appears that the presentation of Conjur represented a landmark production. As Brooks Atkinson points out: "According to a mimeographed bulletin handed out to the visiting drama soothsayers, 'the very thought of the Brattleboro Theatre presenting a new play with an all-Negro cast was in itself somewhat revolutionary in Brooklyn circles.'" ²³³ Except for Atkinson, most of the critics agreed that the play was well cast and well acted. Atkinson had this to say:

Although parts of it are well written with some literary skill, it is virtually undramatic in story, acting and staging. The Juanita Hall Choir sings the customary spirituals during the familiar church meeting scene . . . The Brattleboro Theatre might arouse warmer interest in its future if it worked through a nucleus of ambitious actors. Without an acting company it is only a producing unit; that puts it in competition with Broadway, which is already much more skillful in the business of producing than a small organization can hope to be. ²³⁴

Also in 1938, Bowman was seen on the screen in Oscar Micheaux's "God's Stepchildren." ²³⁵

On 16 March 1939, Mary McCarthy's Please Mrs. Garibaldi opened at the Belmont Theatre in New York for four performances. ²³⁶ A variation of My Darling Daughter, this "America comedy" deals with an Italian

American family living in San Francisco.²³⁷ A daughter has made one mistake. In the end, however, with the help of her loving parents, the girl happily marries the young man.²³⁸ Laura Bowman played Endora, presumably the maid. (Black women servants were rarely given last names.) Perhaps, the fact that the show only ran for four performances is indicative of the critics' reactions. In an article entitled "Hold Your Hats Folks, They're Doing Shows As They Did in '28," Robert Sylvester, reviewing for the 17 March 1939 New York Daily News says: "What happened on the stage of the Belmont theatre last night was nothing less than a Turkey."²³⁹ The 22 March 1939 Variety writes: "Play has no sparkle, few laughs and not enough acting."²⁴⁰

Although the play was not well received, its subject matter provided some sentiment. Richard Lockridge, of the New York Sun, reports: "It is folksy and human in its way and it is also almost unbearably dull. It is dull. . . ."²⁴¹ Brooks Atkinson says, "As dramaturgy the play is weak, to be perfectly candid, and the acting is substandard merchandise. Kind of touching though, you know--the way it works out. Love is such a beautiful thing."²⁴² Robert Coleman claims, "There was very little they could do for 'Please,

Mrs. Garibaldi.' But at least they valiantly went through the motions of performing a play," concedes Coleman.²⁴³

Because of his success with Haiti, Antoine became recognized as the leading authority on Haitian folklore and music. Warner Brothers produced a film in New York, "Voodoo Fire," starring Floyd Gibbons; Antoine co-starred. When he decided to pursue a film career, he and Bowman moved to Los Angeles.²⁴⁴ "What we didn't know was that Hollywood was and still is the most disappointing prospect in show business. I found that all my previous experience was wasted and did not count," says Bowman.²⁴⁵

Fortunately, Bowman still had a film contract. In 1940 she appeared as Dr. Helen Jackson, the leading role, in "Son of Ingagi," produced by R. Kahn, an independent studio.²⁴⁶ Written by Spencer Williams, "Son of Ingagi" is significant as the first all-Black horror film.²⁴⁷ Also in 1940, Bowman was seen in "The Notorious Elinor Lee." Produced by Hubert Julian and Oscar Micheaux, "Robert Earl Jones [James Earl Jones' father] plays a fighter on the rise and Edna Mae Harris,⁺ the woman who tried to stop him by using her wiles and getting him to 'throw' the fight."²⁴⁸

The studio was able to get Bowman accepted into the Screen Actors Guild. Antoine, however, could not get into the union, and without a Guild card, he could not get a job. Although he was not pleased with the role, he was eventually cast as a primitive drummer in "Rhapsody in Blue." In addition to roles in "Sundown" and "Belle of Yukon," Antoine was hired as technical director for "Lydia Bailey," a film about Haiti produced by Twentieth-Century Fox.²⁴⁹

The couple remained in California where Bowman organized an amateur theatre group. "I soon discovered that people were not too theatre-minded," says Bowman.²⁵⁰ Eventually, she met a woman who was directing a radio program for the Gold Furniture Company. She invited Bowman and her troupe to present a Monday night dramatic program. Lacking money for original radio scripts, they performed excerpts from old stock plays and Bible stories. The program became so popular that Bowman was asked by Rev. Clayton Russell of the Independent Church to perform regularly schedule programs in the church auditorium. They produced plays such as The Rosary, The Passing of the Third Door Back, and The Eternal Magdalene. Soon, Bowman and her group were

being invited to other churches to perform. These opportunities provided valuable experience for Bowman's students.²⁵¹ "This was not very remunerative to me, but it kept me active," says Bowman.²⁵²

Bowman heard of a small theatre-group, headed by Paul Bernard at the Vanguard Theatre located at Hollywood Boulevard and La Brea, that was presenting Decision. Decision had been produced on Broadway in 1944. One of the roles required a "Negro dialect;" Bowman played the part. During the run of the show, Bowman was seen by many directors, producers, and writers. This led to Robert Ardrey writing a part for her in his play Jeb, starring Ossie Davis. Bowman signed a contract for \$250 a week and transportation to New York where she began rehearsals for Jeb.²⁵³

Jeb, a postwar drama, tells the story of a World War II Black veteran who returns to the South. Although he has won a Silver Star and a Purple Heart, he is denied a "White" job running the adding machine as a clerk in a mill. A conflict occurs, and Jeb flees to the North.²⁵⁴ Before entering the War, Davis had performed in On Striver's Row and Joy Exceeding Glory with the semi-professional Rose McClendon⁺ Players.²⁵⁵ With his appearance as Jeb, however, Davis debuted

on the professional stage. Laura Bowman played Amanda Turner, Jeb's mother, and Ruby Dee portrayed his girlfriend. While Jeb was rehearsing at the Amsterdam Roof Theatre, Bowman roomed in the Bronx with Susie Sutton⁺.²⁵⁶

On 7 February 1946, Jeb previewed at the Locust Street Theatre in Philadelphia for ten days. Waters, writing for the 13 February 1946 issue of Variety questions why Jeb, produced and staged by Herman Shumlin, is being produced so soon after the smash hit with a parallel theme, Deep Are the Roots. He provides the following review:

Shumlin's answer, in effect, has been that he believed he had a better play. Certainly it was acclaimed as one of the season's dramatic highlights here, with the fact still remaining, however, that despite its many obvious merits, it will have to overcome the handicap of coming along after "Roots." . . . The one vulnerable part, if any, seems to be the final climactic scene.

The final scene finds him in a cheap bar-cabaret in a northern city (presumably New York's Harlem), where he is originally seen in the play's first scene. The irony comes from the fact that poor Jeb gets as shoddy treatment from his own race there as he did down home in the south. In the end he decides to return to Hyacinth [LA], where it is likely he will suffer further indignities and even death. . . . Ossie Davis, a practical unknown, himself just out of the service after four years in uniform with the Army Medical Corps, does a crackerjack job as Jeb. . . . Laura Bowman is outstanding as his mother, and Ruby Dee as his sweetheart does exceptionally well with one of the play's most difficult roles. . . .²⁵⁷

Ossie Davis' and Ruby Dee's stage romance blossomed into a real-life romance and eventually, they were married.

On 21 February 1946, three weeks after previewing in Philadelphia, Jeb opened on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre and ran for nine performances.²⁵⁸ Lewis Nichols, reviewing for the 22 February 1946 The New York Times, cites Ossie Davis as giving the best performance. Despite commending the directing, acting, and setting, Nichols finds Jeb lacking as drama. "For it Mr. Ardrey has written several moving and stirring scenes, which Mr. Shumlin has directed and the actors perform with the highest artistry of the theatre. But, on strictly dramatic terms, 'Jeb' is not all of a piece. . . . The suggestion for a great and stirring play is there, but it is not realized," Nichols concludes.²⁵⁹

In an unidentified article, "Goodbye to a Good Play," Irene Kittle Kamp disagrees with Nichols on most points:

Jeb was a better, more honest, less complicated treatment of the Negro's problem than Deep Are the Roosts. If it has its faults they are not big enough to rob it of its enormous drama. . . .

The production and the acting (except for Ossie Davis in the title role and Santos Ortega as a white liberal) seemed terribly stylized and

Mielziner's sets an unhappy attempt to symbolize rather than represent. . . .

For me, the play ended with a terrible scene behind the white church into which Jeb has gone believing that the good people of the town, if faced with the truth, will be . . . good. With that scene Mr. Ardrey handed me and, I'm sure, most sensitive white people, a very hot potato. I did not find it possible to throw the potato in the aisle when the curtain fell. I think this makes Jeb a good play.²⁶⁰

"The show 'Jeb' was an interesting one to play, but the short run was none too pleasant," recalls Bowman. "No sooner had we recovered from the excitement of opening night than everybody began to discuss the closing."²⁶¹

Immediately following the opening of Jeb, Bowman, Ossie Davis, and Ruby Dee were contacted by John Wildberg, the producer, to perform in one of the touring companies of Anna Lucasta (1944).²⁶² Originally performed in 1944 by the American Negro Theatre at the 135th Street Library in Harlem, Abram Hill's adaptation of Philip Yordan's play about a Polish family, became a Broadway hit.²⁶³ Anna Lucasta was so successful that it played at the Mansfield Theatre for 957 performances.²⁶⁴ Bowman, who played Theresa, the role created by Georgia Burke⁺ on Broadway, did not go to Europe with the Broadway cast; she performed on the subway circuit. This tour included the Bronx, Brooklyn, Atlantic City,

and other outlying areas. "The company transferred our baggage from one theatre to the other, and most of the time we could get to the theatres by subway," says Bowman.²⁶⁵

A few months later, the circuit was divided. Bowman played two weeks each in Detroit, Providence, and Massachusetts. "Each trip was greater in success, and, when we got close to New York, I also played with the New York cast, taking advantage of the contract I had," says Bowman.²⁶⁶ Georgette Harvey⁺ and Alberta Perkins⁺ had already played the part. Despite opening on Broadway again for the second time in one season, Bowman was not entirely satisfied. "Anybody would have been pleased to work on Broadway, but not on the road salary," reveals Bowman.²⁶⁷ She went back on the road with the show. After four years of touring, Anna Lucasta finally closed in Canada. Bowman returned to Los Angeles.²⁶⁸

By this time, Bowman weighed over two-hundred pounds. Around 1951, soon after she returned home, she suffered a paralyzing stroke that confined her to a wheelchair. Although he desired to become a classical singer, in order to support himself and Bowman, Antoine embarked on a night club singing career.

For six years, Antoine cared for Bowman single-handedly. Unable to either walk or move her body without help, Bowman relied on Antoine completely. She was painfully aware of the stress her illness had placed upon him.²⁶⁹ "Poor Le Roi. What would I do without him? Life has not been easy for this young man I married," laments Bowman.²⁷⁰ Although the Negro Actors Guild, of which Bowman was a charter member, and some of her church and theatre friends remembered her from time to time, Bowman credits Antoine with sustaining her:

As I look back through the years, I remember how many friends condemned this marriage because of the difference in our ages. They said I would be sorry. The wisest thing I ever did was to marry Le Roi Antoine. I know now that he will never leave me, and, as long as he is able, I will be cared for. These friends have long forgotten me.²⁷¹

Confined to her bed during the the twilight years of her life, Bowman would reminisce. "I owe all I ever learned about show business to Pete Hampton," she says.²⁷² Concerning show business, Bowman advises that "no one without education and special training make an attempt to start because there are too many heartaches when you don't succeed."²⁷³ She credits choral director Bill Elkins and Madam DeHart, one of the original Fisk Jubilee singers from Fisk University, with providing her musical training.²⁷⁴ "In dramatics

I am thankful to Billy King, Hattie MacIntosh, and the Lafayette Players," says Bowman. "The best training possible is in a stock company. It gives you a chance to become versatile."²⁷⁵

During her many years of performing, Bowman earned a considerable amount of money. Yet, she was broke. "In my early training I was not taught the value of money," she says. "Therefore, I have suffered from what others call extravagance, although it did not seem so at the time. . . . I am afraid that I have spent most of my money on myself, but I did buy many things for others."²⁷⁶

Bowman spent her entire adult life in show business. Her experiences, however, left her with bittersweet feelings:

I must say that my fifty years in the theatre have been most colorful. But I cannot encourage any of the young aspirants to try it because it is hard work and there is nothing sure. There are lots of disappointments. I am very grateful to my co-workers for their help and encouragement, but, nevertheless, I have paid a price for my fifty years.²⁷⁷

On 29 March 1957, at the age of 76, Bowman died in Los Angeles. She was survived by her husband Le Roi Antoine. According to the obituary, "Laura Bowman is Dead," in the 31 March 1957 The New York Times: "It was said of Miss Bowman that she had played in

about every country that had a theatre."²⁷⁸ Like her contemporaries Inez Clough, Lottie Grady, and Anita Bush, Bowman made a successful transition from musical theatre to become a respected character actress. During her more than half a century in show business, she performed in theatres, music halls, film, and or radio.

Although the majority of her stage roles were as servants and she had to "blacken up" to play the parts, Bowman was more often than not singled out as having given an excellent performance. Through her association with the Lafayette Players, community theatre companies, and her own amateur acting groups, Bowman helped to foster the development of Black Theatre. That Laura Bowman not only survived but succeeded in an institution as unpredictable as show business is a testimony to her talent and determination.

As has been stated, on 5 July 1898 Will Marion Cook's and Paul Laurence Dunbar's landmark musical Clorindy, The Origin of the Cakewalk opened at the Casino Roof Garden in New York City. Clorindy was the first all-Black production to play in a major theatre patronized exclusively by Whites.²⁷⁹ Abbie Mitchell first appeared on the professional stage

in 1898, at the age of fourteen, when she took over the lead in Clorindy during its run in Chicago.²⁸⁰

Born of musical parents (an African-American mother and a German-Jewish father) in New York on 25 September 1884, Mitchell was educated in a convent in Baltimore.²⁸¹ After her mother's death, Mitchell was offered the option of living with her father's family where she would pass for White. Instead, she chose to stay with Mama Alice, the Black woman who had been raising her and live as a Black.²⁸² Mitchell began singing at local church affairs as a child. Early in her career, she was coached by Cook, whom she married the year after appearing in Clorindy, and she studied in New York with Harry T. Burleigh.²⁸³

She performed songs of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems taught to her by her husband in a series of Sunday-evening concerts on Broadway. She also sang at parties hosted by the Vanderbilts, Astors and Morgans. In December of 1898, Abbie Mitchell joined "Black Patti's Troubadours" and toured with the troupe off and on for several seasons. Throughout her life she admired Mme. Jones and spoke of her often. The summer following Clorindy, Mitchell was a principal in Cook's musical Jes Lak White Folks (1899) at the New York

Winter Garden.²⁸⁴

By 1903 she was in London with Williams' and Walker's In Dahomey. A principal, she was a hit playing Pansy and singing "Brownskin Baby Mine."²⁸⁵ Mitchell's popularity had been underestimated by both her husband and Williams and Walker. "For some reason the producers left Mitchell in the hotel, thinking she would not be missed. Noting her absence, the king, who had seen the show, asked: '"Where's "She ain't no violet"?' " (That was the nickname Londoners had given her: the first line in the song by Will Marion Cook, "Brownskin Baby Mine," Mitchell's featured number.) The king sent his royal coach to fetch her before permitting the performance to go on."²⁸⁶

According to Mitchell's granddaughter, Maranantha Quick, a.k.a. Marion Douglas Quick, Mitchell told this anecdote often. Even as a teenager, Mitchell was strong-willed, determined, and precocious. When she discovered that the royal coach had come to fetch her, she purposefully took her time dressing, keeping King Edward VII waiting. When she arrived at the palace, to her surprise, she found the king and Cook on their knees shooting craps.²⁸⁷

According to Louise Hill, Mitchell's niece by

marriage to Cook, Mitchell was a "stickler for perfection."²⁸⁸ Mitchell's acceptance by the London audience had inspired her to develop her talent and become a serious singer. Her plans were to reach the top of her profession. When she returned to the United States, without her husband's knowledge, she pawned all of her jewelry (for which she received \$2000) and went to the nationally known Madam Emilia Seranno whom she begged to teach her until the money ran out. Even though Mitchell's actions were met by the dismay and disapproval of Cook, determined to get the training she felt she needed, she refused to redeem her jewelry.²⁸⁹

In 1904, Mitchell portrayed Mandy Lou, a principal in Cook's musical The Southerners. Ida Forsyne danced a solo and Laura Bowman was in the chorus.

While the New York Dramatic Mirror despised the musical of life on the old plantation, it raved about Mitchell: "Miss Mitchell won her laurels by singing a quaint, wistful Negro song called 'Mandy Lou' in so sincere a fashion that for the moment the artificialty of the rest of the performance was forgotten and the audience was surprised into genuine feeling. The song was demanded again and again. The singer had actually touched the hearts of Broadway playgoers."²⁹⁰

In 1905 she was a member of the original Nashville Students, the first all-Black concert group. Composed of twenty entertainers who sang and played music written

in the "Negro" style, they debuted in the spring of 1905 at the Proctor 23rd Street Theatre in New York. Mitchell was the featured soprano and Ida Forsyne, the featured dancer. They were so successful that they played at the Hammerstein Victoria Theatre on Broadway during the day and at the Casino Roof Garden at night. Later they toured Europe for eight months as the Memphis Students, playing at the Palace Theatre in London, the Olypmia in Paris, and the Schumann Circus in Berlin.²⁹¹ Mitchell starred again in the second edition of the Memphis Students in 1908.²⁹² During this time, she studied voice with Jean de Reszke in Paris.²⁹³

Mitchell did not receive the support of her friends and colleagues when she decided to become a classical singer. They felt that she should have been satisfied singing popular music. When she gave her first concert in New York (no date found), Mitchell felt the hostility from certain members of the audience. According to her granddaughter, Mitchell was a fighter and she produced her best work when she was challenged. Her performance for the concert was highly praised. Mitchell, who was very dramatic in speech and behavior, ends the story by telling her granddaughter, "they came

to laugh; they stayed to cheer."²⁹⁴

Also in 1908, Mitchell, one of the principals in Williams' and Walker's last production, Bandana Land, sang "Red Red Rose." In addition to praising the two stars, a critic reviewing for the Brooklyn Eagle writes: "There are half a dozen other good actors and singers in the company, including that wonderfully sympathetic soprano, Abbie Mitchell Cook."²⁹⁵ She starred as the lead soprano Minnehaha (singing "Cupid is an Indian Pickin'") in Cole's and Johnson's The Red Moon and in 1908 she toured Europe in the role where she sang a command performance for Czar Nicholas II of Russia.²⁹⁶ Mitchell starred in Marion A. Brooks', Charles A. Hunter's, James T. Brynm's, and H. Lawrence Freeman's musical Panama in 1908 at the Pekin Stock Company in Chicago. The story deals with the problems encountered by the residents of Brandyville, Kentucky when they are duped into investing in a mythical piece of property in Panama. The acts shift between the canal region of Panama and Kentucky.²⁹⁷

"The artistic success of Abbie Mitchell," according to Maude Cuney-Hare, "is the more marked in that she overcame a sense of nervous breakdown which was the result of many years' strain of vaudeville and musical

comedy singing. Practically losing her singing voice, she turned to the dramatic stage."²⁹⁸ According to what Mitchell told her granddaughter, her son Mercer had been stricken with scarlet fever, and she lost her voice as a result of nursing him back to health. Since Mitchell considered herself a singer not an actress, the transition to drama was difficult for her.²⁹⁹ During this time, however, she studied harmony and musical theory under Metville Charlton.³⁰⁰ In 1916, when she first joined the Lafayette Players, the Indianapolis Freeman headlined: "Miss Abbie Mitchell, America's Acknowledged Greatest Singer, Now Appearing in Drama."³⁰¹ Mitchell performed with the Lafayette Players at intervals up to 1929.³⁰²

In the spring of 1916 Mitchell was seen in Paid in Full and Under Cover. As one of the "new stars," she earned \$90 a week. During the week of 18 September 1916 she appeared in her first leading role with the Lafayette Players in Alexander Brisson's Madame X. This was a role she would repeat many times.³⁰³ According to the New York Amsterdam News, "she had minor parts for several months, learned overnight the part consisting of long speeches in 104 pages so successfully that she was handed the lead."³⁰⁴

The play ran for nearly three and a half hours, ending just before midnight. The packed house demanded numerous curtain calls and the critics were very supportive.³⁰⁵ Lucien H. White of the New York Age felt that "the 'high-water' mark of their efforts had been attained in their presentation of Madame X . . . His highest acclaim was for the star of the production, Miss Mitchell, whom he lavishly compared to Sarah Bernhardt who at the zenith of her own career also portrayed Madame X."³⁰⁶

In October, Madame X was presented in Baltimore and Washington. The play was so successful in Washington that it broke attendance records at the Howard Theatre.³⁰⁷ Washington critic R. W. Thompson, reviewing for the 14 October 1916 Indianapolis Freeman, agreed with the critic from The New York Age:

Abbie Mitchell Caps Climax in Madame X. Miss Abbie Mitchell placed the cap-sheaf upon her brilliant career. She was a marvel and sustained the trying role with a force and finish that has not been surpassed by Sarah Bernhardt, Dorothy Donnelly, Eugenie Blair or any of the great stars who have preceded her in this part.³⁰⁸

Mitchell went on to star in John Roberts' The Conspiracy and Goethe's Faust at the Howard Theatre. Directed by A. C. Winn, this presentation of Faust introduced six songs from the operatic version of the play, including

"The Flower Song" and "The Jewel Song." Mitchell played the tragic Marguerite opposite Sidney Kirkpatrick's (Laura Bowman's husband-to-be) Mephisto.³⁰⁹

After nine months of offering an assortment of dramas, melodramas, and comedies, the Lafayette Players presented their first full-length musical, George M. Cohan's popular Forty-five Minutes From Broadway, directed by A. C. Winn. For this show, a chorus of female dancers was added. The company now included thirty members, the largest cast for a single production. Having regained her singing voice, Abbie Mitchell played the leading role of Mary, the maid.³¹⁰ According to White: "Abbie Mitchell as Mary Jane Jenkins, the housemaid, is clever and capable, and her one song, 'Mary is a Grand Old Name,' is sung as only Miss Mitchell can sing."³¹¹

According to Thompson, The Indianapolis Freeman reports that "Cohan's play with music was filled with as much dramatic blending as could possibly have been put into a strictly musical comedy production."³¹² One of the main attractions at the theatre was the Lafayette Ladies' Orchestra under the direction of Marie Lucas⁺, Sam Lucas' daughter. They played before performances, during intermissions and after last

curtain calls. For Forty-five Minutes From Broadway, they "played 'as though inspired'" by the house-maid costumes they wore. As a special feature for this show, their costumes matched the one worn by Mitchell.³¹³

The audience response to the musical was so enthusiastic that it was held over for another week. "The second week of performances paralleled in enthusiasm the success of the first week, and the Company was greeted each night with crowded houses. So great was the response that a special midnight show was arranged and performed on election night, November 7, 1916."³¹⁴

Other musicals and comedies in which Mitchell appeared include Song of Songs, Otto Harbach's, A Seymour Brown's, and Harry Lewis' A Pair of Queens, Kate Armitage in Charles Dickson's Three Twins, George M. Cohan's Fifty Miles from Boston and The Little Millionaire, Joseph E. Howard's The Time, The Place and the Girl, Nadina Popoff in The Chocolate Soldier, Yvonne Sherry in Hugo Felix's and M. Ordonneau's adaptation of Madame Sherry, Charlie's Aunt, Willie Collier's The Man from Mexico and Are You A Mason?³¹⁵

Mitchell also portrayed Ethel Toscani in George Broadhurst's The Price, Miriam in Hubert Henry Davies'

The Outcast, The Woman in Porter Emerson Browne's A Fool There Was, Ruth Jordan in The Great Divide, The Girl in Eugene Brieux' Damaged Goods, Gertrude Meyer in Jack Lait's Help Wanted, Nance Mayo in Owen Davis' A Man's Game, Ruth Belmar in Branded, Margaret Holt in Robert Baker's and John Emerson's detective story The Conspiracy, doubled as Queen Sardalia and the Lady in Elinor Glynn's love drama Three Weeks, Cleve Kinkead's Common Clay, Bayard Veiller's The Fight, Robert McLaughlin's The Eternal Magdalene, Eugene Walter's Just A Woman, and Betty Amseley, the heroine, in Harold McGrath's and Grace Livingston's The Man on the Box.³¹⁶ Reviewing her performance in The Man on the Box, White says, "The work of Abbie Mitchell as the heroine is of a character with her usual excellence."³¹⁷

Mitchell was first seen on the screen in "The Scapegoat" (1917) co-starring Sidney Kirkpatrick. Produced by the Frederick Douglass Film Company of Jersey City, the film was written by Paul Laurence Dunbar. According to the New York Age, "there is more sustained dramatic interest in 'The Scapegoat' than any other Negro photo play that has yet been produced, and it easily takes rank as the best to

date."³¹⁸ Mitchell was also seen in "Eyes of Youth" (1920) produced by the Quality Amusement Corporation.³¹⁹ In 1919 the Black owners of the Quality Amusement Corporation purchased the Lafayette Players and the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, four companies of Lafayette Players, and several Black theatres on the East coast. By 1922, however, the Quality Amusement Corporation had lost most of its assets³²⁰

In 1920, when "Jean de Reszke declared that she had a perfect mezzosoprano voice, she became more and more famous as a recitalist in every major city of America and Europe."³²¹ In 1921 she toured with Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra (a.k.a. the New York Syncopated Orchestra) here and abroad. When Cook returned to the United States in 1921, she stayed in Europe touring with her act, "Abbie Mitchell and Her Full Harmonic Quartet." During her stay she again studied voice in Paris with Reszke and with Szbrilla, teacher of Reszke; she returned for more study in 1931.³²² According to Mitchell: "All my work as an actress has been done with my singing in mind. I learned that a singer must know dramatics, but I could not stop for a long course."³²³

By the early 1920s, Mitchell and Cook had separated

and soon afterwards divorced. They respected each other's talent, however, and remained friends. During this time, Mitchell began teaching voice. Hilda Simms⁺ and Maxine Sullivan⁺ attempted to study with Mitchell, but they were unable to get along with her. Adelaide Hall⁺ and Etta Moten⁺ did study with Mitchell, however.³²⁴

During the early 1920s, Mitchell studied acting with the well-known Jasper Deeter.³²⁵ A producer, director, actor, and teacher, Deeter founded the Hedgerow Theatre in Moylan, Pennsylvania in 1923.³²⁶ Mitchell studied with Deeter during the same period as Ann Harding. Mitchell was never accepted by the other students at the Hedgerow. Some of them, including Harding, never spoke to her.³²⁷ According to Sampson, "Miss Mitchell also spent several summers at the Hodgeman [Hedgerow] Theatre in Philadelphia under the direction of Jasper Deeter."³²⁸ As we will see, Mitchell and Deeter would eventually work together in a landmark production on Broadway.

In 1924, Mitchell starred in Negro Nuances, produced by Will Marion Cook. This musical, with book by Abbie Mitchell and the performing/producing team of Flournoy E. Miller and Aubrey Lyles (who, along with Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, had co-created Shuffle Along

in 1921), features music and lyrics by Cook. Although there was no information available to document place of performance or even musical numbers, "the play traces the musical history of blacks starting in Africa, moving with the slave ships, the lamentations of pre-civil war days to the reconstruction period as typified by the early minstrels of Jim Bland's day."³²⁹

In 1925 Mitchell was a principal in Harlem Rounders. This two-act musical was produced by Frank Montgomery with J. Rosamond Johnson as the musical director. Act one includes a scene in Dixie, a scene in Italy (in which Mitchell sang an Italian number, "Rose of Montmartre"), and a scene in Mexico. The second act includes an Apache scene, a Charleston scene, an Old Broadway scene, a Monte Carlo scene, and a Russian scene. The Russian scene featured Mitchell, supported by the chorus, singing "Song of Songs."³³⁰

By 1926 Mitchell had married her second husband. He was a delicate, handsome young man years her junior. By 1927 they had separated. Although it was not directly related to their breakup, he committed suicide. (No information regarding his name or the date of their marriage.)³³¹

On 30 December 1926 Paul Green's In Abraham's

Bosom opened at the Provincetown Theatre on Macdougall Street in New York. Set in the Turpentine district of North Carolina in 1885, Green's biographical tragedy depicts the struggles and defeat of Abraham McCraine. Abraham, the son of a Black mother and a White planter, Colonel McCraine, realizes that education is the most effective way of truly emancipating Blacks. Despite the apathy of his own people and the other planters, his father helps him establish a school. When the Colonel dies, Abraham, his wife, son, and aunt are thrown off the land. After eighteen years of wandering the Carolinas, Abraham returns to his hometown in hopes that his half-brother will help him start another school. When Lonnie McCraine not only refuses to help him but instead, robs him of the land his father had willed him, Abraham kills his half-brother and is in turn shot by the Ku Klux Klan. Abbie Mitchell played Muh Mack, Abraham's aunt.³³²

Except for reporting that the play was too long and too realistic in certain scenes, especially the whipping scene, the critics all agreed that In Abraham's Bosom was an artistic success. "A sincere and powerful tragedy written with courage, understanding, logic and humor, was played last night by actors whose sincerity

matched that of the author," writes the reviewer for the 31 December 1926 The New York Times.³³³ He goes on to say:

. . . the range runs all the way from the boisterous and infectious gayety of the race to the religious estascy and the madness of the mixed blood who is the central tragic figure. . . .

Julius Bledsoe played the part of that black man-- . . . He was especially impressive in the scene of religious exaltation when he prayed over the infant whom he dedicated to the saving of his people and in the mad scene after the murder his perfect solemnity in the situations of comedy contributed enormously to the effects produced by the others, especially Abbie Mitchell as an old woman . . .³³⁴

Wilfred J. Riley writes "Abbie Mitchell gives a flawless performance as the nagging but well-intentioned aunt and crystallizes the promise she showed in Deep River. He concludes, "Jasper Deeter's excellent direction is well in evidence and Cleon Throckmorton's settings in harmony with the piece--all in all, a generally well-written, well-acted and well-staged drama."³³⁵

According to George Goldsmith of the Herald-Tribune, "The representation by a company almost entirely Negro was, I thought, excellent. Julius Bledsoe, late of 'Deep River,' gave powerful and moving utterance to Abraham's Mosaic obsession. Rose McClendon, who also appeared in 'Deep River,' brought poignance and classic restraint to the role of his wife and you

never saw anything more realistic in your life than Abbie Mitchell's portrayal of the old aunt."³³⁶

The reviewer for the 31 December 1926 Telegram says, "The Goldie McAllister of Rose McClendon, who will be remembered as a hit in 'Deep River'; the Muh Mack of Abbie Mitchell, and the Douglas McCraine of R. J. Huey are other outstanding impersonations of a performance which is capital from beginning to end."³³⁷ The 31 December 1926 Evening Post reports, "As the cackling and derisive aunt of Abraham, Abbie Mitchell is vivid and intelligent."³³⁸

J. A. Rogers, reviewing for the 5 January 1927 Amsterdam News has this to say:

At the Provincetown Theatre is again being demonstrated the fact that tragedy--real, searing tragedy--as poignant and gripping as anything ever written by Shakespeare or Eschylus [Aeschylus?], is to be found in Negro life in America.

The play is a triumph not only for its author, but its interpreters, . . . Abbie Mitchell acted the part of Muh Mack to perfection, . . .

Despite the fact that in its last analysis the play smacks of white man's interpretation, it reveals great understanding of what the aspiring Negro really faces in the South, and is in its effect a powerful plea for justice.³³⁹

According to the 31 December 1926 Evening World, "Rose McClendon played the part of Goldie, wife of Abraham, and she gave a splendid performance, as did Abbie Mitchell, who is popular in Harlem stock repertoire. Miss Mitchell, as Abraham's aunt, was such a 'Mammy'

as the stage seldom sees. She has no sympathy with her nephew in his unceasing struggle against poverty and oppression and lightens the most sordid parts of the drama with her comedy."³⁴⁰

The 31 December 1926 New York American documents a pivotal transition:

The principal burden of the play is splendidly carried by Julius Bledsoe and Rose McClendon, featured in the late-lamented "Deep River," and Abbie Mitchell, who has been starring for the last five years in Harlem stock. This, by the way, is Miss Mitchell's first appearance in a straight colored role.

The difficult task of staging was accomplished well by Jasper Deeter, who, it will be remembered, brought out Charles Gilpin in "The Emperor Jones."³⁴¹

The 13 February 1927 The New York Times ran a sketch of Mitchell as Muh Mack. The caption reads: "Abbie Mitchell in 'In Abraham' Bosom' Which Will Move From Macdougall Street to the Garrick Theatre Tomorrow Night."³⁴² The 19 February 1927 Evening World writes, "'In Abraham's Bosom' is drama that stirs and stabs. For theatre-goers who can appreciate intelligent glooms of the stage the journey to the Garrick is well worth while. The piece receives authentic interpretation by players nearly all of whom are of Abraham's race."³⁴³

Brooks Atkinson, writing for the 20 February 1927 The New York Times provides the following review:

On last Tuesday evening the opportunity for which every muted understudy prays earnestly every day came to Frank Wilson in the cast of "In Abraham's Bosom." Julius Bledsoe, the leading player in that uncommonly adroit cast, did not appear at the usual hour and did not communicate with the management. Actors and audience both waited patiently for about thirty minutes. Then Mr. Wilson, who had been playing a minor part in the first scene, walked on as Abraham McCranie, and gave a performance not only almost letter perfect, but also swift, direct and extraordinarily moving. . . .

No less remarkable is the acting by a cast chiefly made up of negroes. Miss McClendon as the preternaturally faithful wife, Miss Mitchell as a purely natural aunt, Mr. Mosely [Mosley] and Mr. Dunmore as irresponsible farm hands, Mr. Huey as a son who is content with the foibles of day-to-day living--are all well cast and forceful. . . . The performance has been ably directed for its contrasts in mood; from the dark undercurrent of tragedy it leaps into high spirits, comedy and minstrel singing, with no break in dramatic continuity.³⁴⁴

On 5 March 1927, after 72 performances, In Abraham's Bosom closed.³⁴⁵

On 21 April 1927, Leigh Hutton's The House of Shadows opened at the Longacre Theatre in New York for twenty-nine performances.³⁴⁶ The play is about a Harvard psychologist, bent on exposing American ghosts, who rents an old mansion up on the Hudson because of a legend that no one ever entering the house came out alive. He, along with a young lady, discovers a pirate's treasure and escapes the house (which is filled with secret passageways and mysterious

panels) after many horrifying adventures. Abbie Mitchell played Darkey's Wife and Tom Mosley, who was also seen in In Abraham's Bosom, played Darkey.³⁴⁷

Despite saying that the cast was generally good and that the audience enjoyed the stage devices, the reviews were generally unfavorable. According to the critic for the 22 April 1927 The New York Times:

It has some good gooseflesh moments, the traditional blackface hysteria by way of comedy, and an eventual solution that seemed even a little flatter than the solutions of mystery plays customarily are. . . . For a mystery play it is a trifle slow-paced--there is a feeling that the author had only a definite amount of action to spread over the evening, and accordingly the movement is sometimes wilfully retarded lest the denouement be upon one too soon. The result is a play that is a bit thinnish.

Last night's audience, however, indulged in a good deal of miscellaneous screaming and seemed properly agitated when chairs collapsed without visible agency and pictures toppled unassisted from the wall. The producers have done everything possible for the play, including a generally good cast and some first-rate Livingston Platt scenery, to say nothing of a highly realistic storm . . .

"The House of Shadows" is marked apart from the recent run of mystery plays by³⁴⁸ the fact that it is the work of a woman. . . .

Burns Mantle writes, "The story is roughly hewn and more improbable than most."³⁴⁹ Stephen Rathbun reports, "The only person who seemed real to us was Miss Abbie Mitchell as the Professor's faithful, intrepid colored servant. She established a convincing charac-

terization, but the other players were hardly more than shadows."³⁵⁰ According to Gordon M. Leland (in an otherwise unidentified article) "James S. Barrett is as villanous in the role of a crook as the play calls for, and Abbie Mitchell and Tom Moseley supply the usual comedy relief of a couple of hysterical colored servants."³⁵¹

Percy Hammond is negative: "'The House of Shadows' is an excerise in nursery nightmares, being an enfant account of a haunted bungalow infested by pixies and hobgoblins. 'Rastus, a Negro servant, trembled in a familiar fashion and the ingenue removed the stockings from her graceful limbs with no excuse whatever. Despite those advertisements my advise to Herald-Tribune playgoers is to beware of 'The House of Shadows.' It is not so good."³⁵²

On Sunday evening, 8 May 1927, In Abraham's Bosom reopened at the Provincetown Theatre for a second engagement, with Anyce Francis replacing Mitchell as Muh Mack. During mid-May, after The House of Shadows closed, Mitchell took over the role of Muh Mack from Francis. On 19 June 1927, after fifty-one performances, In Abraham's Bosom closed again.³⁵³

In Abraham's Bosom became a huge personal success

for its author, winning him the Putlizer Prize in 1926. Despite its popularity, Lofton Mitchell feels that the play was overrated:

For all of Mr. Green's sincerity and dramatic skill, In Abraham's Bosom is not a great play. It seems to have little relationship to the plight of the American Negro at that point in the nation's history. He presented to us a man named Abraham who attempted to "elevate" his people through education. In the midst of all of this, Abraham has trouble with black people and white people and, ³⁵⁴ of course, he ends up by killing a white man.

The often mentioned Deep River in the In Abraham's Bosom reviews refers to Laurence Stallings and Frank Harling's native opera. Produced and staged by Arthur Hopkins, Deep River opened on 4 October 1926 at the Imperial Theatre in New York for 32 performances.³⁵⁵ Set in New Orleans in 1835, the piece depicts a conflict among a Creole aristocrat, a quadroon girl, and her Kentucky lover during the annual ball.³⁵⁶

Rose McClendon is cited as having given an excellent performance as a proud, but aging, madam in a house of quadroon women.³⁵⁷ Julius Bledsoe was also a member of the integrated cast.³⁵⁸ Contrary to the 15 January 1927 review in Billboard by Wilfred J. Riley reporting that "Abbie Mitchell gives a flawless performance as the nagging but well-intentioned aunt and crystalalizes the promise she showed in Deep River,"³⁵⁹ neither

the program nor any other reviews mention Mitchell. It is possible that she did not appear in the show.

Like Laura Bowman, Mitchell had two Broadway openings in one season: In Abraham's Bosom and The House of Shadows. Also like Bowman, Mitchell, a fair-skinned woman, "blackened-up" to play the parts. Further, in shows that featured White actors (except On Whitman Avenue), like Bowman, Mitchell played a servant. As we will see, this was the role she would perform in all of the White productions in which she would appear.

On 8 November 1927, George Abbott's and Ann Preston Bridgers' Coquette opened at the Maxine Elliott's Theatre in New York and stayed on for 366 performances.³⁶⁰ Coquette depicts the story of Norma Besant, a Carolina southern belle, who falls in love with an outsider. When she becomes pregnant, her father avenges her honor by killing her lover. When her father is placed on trial for murder, in order to win him favor with the jury, Norma kills herself.³⁶¹ Helen Hayes was Norma Besant, and Charles Waldron was her father. Elliot Cabot played the outcast lover, and Abbie Mitchell portrayed Julia.

Coquette, staged by Abbott, was a hit. Helen

Hayes, the star, received glowing reviews. According to Brooks Atkinson, writing for the 13 November 1927

The New York Times:

. . . nothing so complete and touching as "Coquette" has crossed the boards for many seasons. . . . Casting, acting, directing give it the magic of life. . . .

After witnessing the performance one cannot dissociate the parts from the actors. . . .

Of Miss Hayes as the coquettish Southern maiden it is sufficient to say that she has never added so much emotional strength to her personal charm. In the most poignant moments she gives so much of herself that one feels ashamed to receive it; she beggars the most generous-minded people in her audience. For once the stale vocabulary of dramatic criticism is positively revolting.³⁶²

All of the critics were very impressed with

Coquette's realism in writing, acting, and staging.

E. W. Osborn, writing for the 12 November 1927 Evening World, had this to say:

Percy Hammond wept unblushingly, Brooks Atkinson wept, John Anderson forgot he was a critic and clapped his august hands, Walter Winchell acted like a gallery god performing a sacrifice, Gilbert Gabriel tried hard and failed to preserve an air of condescending acceptance of an occasion. And there were others.

It is of note worth mentioning that rarely has the critical corps found itself so perfectly and becomingly in line for the truly good and true in art. The explanation being that it had to be.³⁶³

Out of twenty available reviews, only two mention Abbie Mitchell. "Andrew Lawlor, jr., Albert Smith and Abbie Mitchell were helpful," says Burns Mantle.³⁶⁴

According to the 12 November 1927 Evening Post:

. . . it is not the atmosphere that is so impressive in inept native drama, but its bromidity and Mr. Abbott can let an old mammy, played admirably by Abbie Mitchell, lumber up stairs humming a spiritual to herself--can hold the whole stage, in fact, while she does it--and leave you thinking it a glorious accident, when you know perfectly well that the adroit Mr. Abbott has underscored it ³⁶⁵stunningly by refusing to underscore it at all.

In 1927, Mitchell was forty-three years old.

As documented by her portrayals in In Abraham's Bosom and The House of Shadows, she had already begun playing old mammy/servant roles. Influenced by her many experiences and years of professional training, according to her granddaughter, Mitchell had developed into a very critical perfectionist. She neither associated with the other cast members socially nor considered them to be friends. Mitchell possessed a sharp tongue which she welded like a weapon. It is reported that she intimidated her co-workers, both Black and White.³⁶⁶

Of all of the actresses with whom Mitchell worked, she admired Helen Hayes most. One night during Coquette's New York run, Ethel Barrymore came backstage to see Hayes. When Barrymore asked Hayes, "Who's that marvelous nigger back there (referring to Mitchell)?" Hayes, who both respected and feared Mitchell, responded frantically, "Please, Please, Oh God! Please don't

let her hear you say that."³⁶⁷

After its New York run, Coquette, starring Helen Hayes, went on the road. Abbie Mitchell toured with the company. They opened on 19 November 1928 at the Shubert Wilbur Theatre in Boston. On 27 January 1929 they began their sixth week at the Selwyn Theatre in Chicago. On 11 March 1929 they opened at the Shubert Alvin Theatre in Pittsburgh. By 19 March 1929 they were performing at the Cass Theatre in Detroit. On 22 April 1929 Coquette opened at Poli's Theatre in Washington, D.C. The last available program to list either Helen Hayes or Abbie Mitchell was the production that opened on 10 June 1929 at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco.³⁶⁸

As has been stated, the "New Lafayette Players" would be arriving in Los Angeles from New York to open the 1929 Fall season at the Lincoln Theatre. On 23 September 1929, the group opened with George V. Hobart's Experience. Abbie Mitchell, one of the "new" stars from New York, starred in the show.³⁶⁹

According to Sister Thompson:

Helen Ware, the Broadway actress who had played the role taken by Abbie Mitchell in the New York production of th play, attended the opening night performance. Miss Ware had nothing but praise for Abbie Mitchell and said in an interview that she considered Miss Mitchell a great actress.

It was the first time that Miss Ware had witnessed the play from "out front" after having played her role for an entire year on Broadway, and she was happy to have been able to see Abbie Mitchell's performance.³⁷⁰

From 1931 to 1934, Abbie Mitchell was head of the vocal department at Tuskegee Institute,³⁷¹ the historic Black college in Alabama. Although she had no college degree, she possessed unquestionable talent, training, and professional experience. Nevertheless, she regretted not having completed her formal education, particularly because Cook's family was educated. His mother had been among the first Black women to graduate from Oberlin College in Ohio. According to her granddaughter (a retired New York City Public School French teacher), Mitchell instilled in her the desire to get an education.³⁷²

While on the faculty at Tuskegee, Mitchell continued to perform on the concert stage in various cities. In Chicago, while on tour, during the early part of 1931, Mitchell received a radio contract that had her singing nationwide. In that concert she sang a group of spirituals by Hall Johnson, William L. Dawson, and Will Marion Cook; translations of poems by Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes; American and English songs by La Forge, Nevin, and Bantock; French

songs by Debussy, Hahn, Foudrain, Duparc, and Faure; and German songs by Pahlen (no program available).³⁷³

On 22 November 1931 she gave an all-Negro recital at Town Hall in St. Louis. The announcement reads: "The Greatest Singer of the Present Day will appear in an all-Negro Song Recital."³⁷⁴ Of her appearance, the 27 November 1931 St. Louis Argus says: "Abbie Mitchell, who has given convincing evidence in the past as a singer of German lieder, chose to devote her gifts Friday afternoon at the Town Hall to a program of songs by and of Negroes. Miss Mitchell was no less the artist in this type of music. She understands it as few other singers even of her race do."³⁷⁵

In a review of a concert in Pittsburgh, the 23 September 1933 edition of the Pittsburgh Courier raves: "Abbie Mitchell is the greatest singer of songs that the Negro has."³⁷⁶ Of her performance in Washington, the 26 October 1933 issue of The Washington Tribune reports:

Prolonged applause greeted her rendition of Schubert's Erlkoenig, Lied der Mignon (Schubert) was well received, as was Chausson's Apaisement. But the enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds when she gave the impressively beautiful interpretation³⁷⁹ of the Aria Ritorna Vincitor from Aida (Verdi).

About an earlier recital, Charles D. Isaacson

of the New York Morning Telegraph (no date) writes:

Her diction and handling of the German group of songs was a feat: Die Lorelei of Liszt was memorable. Her diction was a model of her white rivals. Followed the Ritorno Vincitor from Aida. What an Aida this woman would make!³⁷⁸

In 1933, after years of studying voice and opera, Mitchell remarks about herself: "I have come from the dinge of smoke and heat, tired and worn from singing, and lit the oil lamp. In quietude while my loved ones slept, I dug down to the roots of French, German, Italian, theory, harmony and counterpoint.---I have always studied and I still am studying."³⁷⁹

In a 1934 interview printed in the Pittsburgh Courier, Mitchell asserts that there is a goal not yet attained: "a 'Negro opera,' produced by a 'race man. . . . But I'm so afraid it will eventually be a white person. The Metropolitan Opera House is a goal. The gates of that place must be crashed yet by a Negro.'"³⁸⁰ As we will see, Mitchell's dream for the creation of a "Negro opera" would soon come true, and it would not be written by a "race" man.

According to her granddaughter, the Metropolitan Opera House hired Mitchell to sing the off-stage role of the child in Debussy's "Pelleas et Melisande." She was not to be seen on stage, however. During

rehearsals, Mitchell "invited the 'darkest skinned' Black men she knew to her dressing room." When the management at the Met told her to stop, she left the company (no date available).³⁸¹ Although she did not sing at the Met, Mitchell did perform in opera. In July 1934 she sang Cavalleria Rusticana at the Mecca Temple in New York, and again in August with the Aeolian Opera Company.³⁸²

Abbie Mitchell returned to the legitimate theatre in 1934 in the role of Bennie in Paul Peters' and George Sklar's Stevedore. A drama of race and labor problems, Stevedore opened at the Civic Repertory Theatre in New York on 18 April 1934 where it ran for 110 performances.³⁸³ Set along the docks of a southern seaport, the play centers around a Black dock worker who is framed. He is accused of raping a White woman only because he is helping to organize a longshoremen's union. With the help of some White friends, he escapes from the police. In retaliation, other Whites riot against all the Blacks who live in the alley.³⁸⁴

Produced by the militant Theatre Union, a labor group, Stevedore, according to the program notes, 'is based on incidents which occurred during the attacks

on Negroes in East St. Louis in 1919, the Chicago attacks in 1919, the Dr. Sweet case in Detroit, the Bogalusa lumber strike, the New Orleans dock strikes, the Colorado bathing beach fight, the attack on the Camp Hill, Ala., share croppers and the similar attack at Tuscaloosa, Ala.'³⁸⁵ Brooks Atkinson, writing for the 19 April 1934 The New York Times, provides the following review:

. . . "Stevedore" is remarkable chiefly for the lithographic color of its scenes and the broadness and keenness of its characterization. Scenes do not come much finer than the lazy noontime view of the Negroes singing, quarreling and laughing with animal enthusiasm on the dock, with the sun streaming down on bales of cotton outside. No one could invent a scene like that. Nor is that all, for "Stevedore" describes in easy strokes the Negroes lounging about Bennie's neighborhood lunchroom or cringing there while the rioting whites hurl bricks through the windows. It shows them singing over the body of the old man who was killed, and it concludes with a stirring scene of resistance when the Negroes beat down a murderous invasion of their alley.

The white actors are good, . . . But the Negroes give their scenes a robustiousness and an earthiness that are wholly exhilarating. . . . it is acting with a tang and bite and raciness, and the director has been wise enough not to discipline the nature out of it.

Many Negroes were in the audience last night, both downstairs and up. Their responses to the lines and the incidents gave the play an entirely fresh meaning. If the drama seemed lively to the white audience it was a holiday for the galleries. Up there the roars of laughter and the jeers sounded like an Elks convention. For "Stevedore" comes to the theatre busting with vitality. Although it has progaganda implications, it does not hamstring its characters with classroom

ideas. The characters are as real and rich as the earth.³⁸⁶

In an review entitled "Labor Color-Line," (from an unidentified source) Joseph T. Shipley also makes note of the social and political implications of the play:

"Stevedore" is a gripping picture of how laborers down South are beginning to realize that the color-line is less fundamental a dividing mark than that between worker and capitalist; and how the cry of "rape," even falsely raised, is an easy screen for breaking up any effort of the Negroes to better their condition. The temporary victory of the Negro group, with which the play ends--though at the cost of leaders' lives--gives the audience no doubt as to the white triumph; and emphasizes the fact that force, begetting force, leads to no near solution. In the movement toward a true theatre for the people, the Theatre Union is taking long strides in the right direction; and in "Stevedore" it has again produced a play no one should miss.³⁸⁷

After 110 performances, Stevedore closed for the summer. On 1 October 1934, Stevedore reopened at the Civic Repertory Theatre for a second engagement with Abbie Mitchell replacing Georgette Harvey as Bennie. The 2 October 1934 New York World-Telegram says, "Last night's audience, as was the first night audience on 'Stevedore's' original opening night, was vociferous in it's sympathies with the negro laborers."³⁸⁸

According to J. K. H., reviewing for the 2 October

1934 The New York Times:

For a month, and perhaps longer, those who missed last April's liveliest theatrical bomb may make up for their negligence. For those who did see it then, its stormy and tearing rhythms are here again to be recaptured. . . . Excellently staged by Michael Blankfort, it still runs at a nervous pace more enthralling than propaganda, and the final scene on the barricade, in which that struggle is visualized in gunfire, gathering mobs and flying bricks, remains a climactic triumph.

Among a number of cast changes for this re-appearance and the road tour which will follow it are Abbie Mitchell for Georgette Harvey, Canada Lee for Rex Ingram, Thomas Coffin Cooke for Dodson Mitchell, and Martin Wolfson for Neill O'Malley.
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. . . .

In a review entitled "'Stevedore' Begins a Return Engagement in 14th Street," R. M., writing for the 2 October 1934 New York Evening Post, reports:

It is still a good show--violent, honest and stirring--and it accomplishes what it set out to do: it makes its audience reflective and more than a little uncomfortable. Like the hero of the piece, Lonnie Thompson, "Stevedore" has what is indelicately called "guts." . . . Authenticity can so easily be a bore, and honesty has rarely aroused great enthusiasm. It is a tribute to the skillful presentation that "Stevedore" achieves any power at all. When the colored preacher in the last act calls upon the dock workers to avoid violence and behave like Christians, "Blacksnake" tells him to put the Bible on the shelf. "We're fighting for our necks!" he cries. It is a story of people who can't sit on the fence--timely stirring and important.

Jack Carter is superb in the leading role, . . . Leigh Whipper, Abbie Mitchell, Edna Thomas and Al Watts were also excellent in their characterizations. . . . Last night's audience seemed to know the play well, and liked it. It was an extremely interesting audience, serious and attentive. It should be, for "Stevedore" is

serious--and effective³⁹⁰

Stevedore opened on a Monday evening. It played throughout the week, plus Saturday and Sunday matinees. Prices for tickets at the Civic Repertory Theatre, located at 105 West 14th Street, were 30¢, 45¢, 60¢, 75¢, \$1.00, and \$1.50 respectively.³⁹¹ The actual production of Stevedore and the scale of prices for tickets reflect the aims of the Theatre Union:

Ninety per cent of the people are barred from the theatre, we believe, by high admission prices, and also, though perhaps they are unconscious of it, by the remoteness of the average run of plays from their lives and their fundamental problems.

The Theatre Union is building a theatre of the ninety per cent. A theatre which will try to reflect with honesty and vitality the economic, emotional and cultural conflicts in the experience of our audience. A theatre which will try to contribute to those struggles that interpretation and excitement which seem to us the purpose of the theatre.

The Theatre Union will produce plays that have meaning for and bearing on the struggles and conflicts of our times. It does not expect that these plays will fall into the accepted social patterns. Its point of view is that there is but one constructive guide in the prevailing situation; the interests of the great masses of the people,³⁹² the working people, the workers as a class.

As we have seen, throughout her career, Mitchell performed in productions that made theatrical history for Blacks and for the American stage. According to the biography in "Who's Who in the Cast" in the

1 October 1934 The Playbill, "Abbie Mitchell created the role of Muh Mack in 'Abraham's Bosom.' Her chosen profession is not acting but concert singing and she has sung all over Europe as far east as Russia. She sings in five languages and converses in three, besides English. Miss Mitchell trained at the Hedgerow Theatre under Jasper Deeter and returns every year to do a part there."³⁹³

On 24 November 1934, after 64 performances,³⁹⁴ Stevedore closed again and went on the road. On 10 December 1934 Stevedore opened at the Garrick Theatre in Philadelphia. The last available program is for the production that opened on Christmas eve at the Selwyn Theatre in Chicago.³⁹⁵ According to Lloyd Lewis' review, "Rough and Thrilling," printed in the 27 December 1934 Daily News:

Although two equally excitable and minor sects, the advocates of communism and the disciplines of 1880 "laissez faire," saw red when it was announced that "Stevedore" was to open at the Selwyn, I found at the premiere, that the crimson bogey of Moscow was more in the lobby than on the stage. . . .

Led by three authoritative players--Jack Carter as the hero, Canada Lee as his courageous friend and Abbie Mitchell as a grim black fury--the Negroes show you a convincingly human picture of levee laborers and their women. They hold up for your gaze the subservient Negro, the gentle Negro, the philosophic Negro, the rebellious Negro and the self-respecting Negro. All these come vividly to dramatic life as the racial quarters

Lonnie Thompson. . . .

So keen is the suspense of the pursuit and the sympathy for this courageous underdog that the play rides triumphant, as a play, over some egregiously juvenile and tedious overemphasis of profanity and a few mawkishly sententious lines.

The authors footnote their program with citations about Scottsboro case, Bogalusa lumber strikes and the Colorado bathing beach fight, as if that proved anything about their play. What is true in drama is what is true on the stage and nowhere else, and "Stevedore" is a stirring melodrama simply because it is good theater.³⁹⁶

The nineteen-thirties, the period of the Great Depression, brought social protest and excitement to the American theatre. As Loftin Mitchell observes:

With Roosevelt's election the country gave up nostalgic dreams and decided to make a complete change. Roosevelt, with his big smile, with his spirit of hope, with his "All we have to fear is fear itself," brought a surge of hope to all Americans. This bold hope made its way into the theatre. The American stage became a battleground of ideas where old ways were challenged and new dreams daringly dreamt. The so-called propaganda play forged the dreams of black people for freedom³⁹⁷ and the dreams of white men for a decent living.

Stevedore, a realistic, protest drama, mirrored the conflicts of the time. As Mitchell puts it: "Negroes were shouting and screaming then, in theatre and out, demanding an end to injustices, demanding fair employment and fair housing. They recognized, in and out of the theatre, the need for white support."³⁹⁸

As has been stated, Abbie Mitchell had been hoping for a "Negro" opera created by a Black man. She was

aware of the lyrical and dramatic potential of Black life for the stage. On 10 October 1935, the "American folk opera" Porgy and Bess opened at the Alvin Theatre in New York where it played for 124 performances.³⁹⁹

Produced by the Theatre Guild, Porgy and Bess, an adaptation of DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's drama Porgy (1927), was composed by George Gershwin, libretto by DuBose Heyward, and lyrics by Ira Gershwin and Heyward.

Set in Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, Porgy and Bess depicts the tragic romance of Porgy, a crippled Black beggar, and Bess, a beautiful woman who also loves the bully Crown. In the end, Porgy murders Crown and Bess, who thinks Porgy has been arrested, leaves Catfish Row for the North. Porgy, a double amputee, pursues her in his goat drawn packing-box chariot.⁴⁰⁰ Abbie Mitchell, who introduced the song "Summer Time," played Clara, an inhabitant of Catfish Row.

"'Porgy and Bess', the Gershwins' and Heyward's 'American folk opera' version of DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's 'Porgy,' besides being a highly significant contribution to the American theatre, is also box office," proclaims the 16 October 1935 issue of

Variety.⁴⁰¹ The critic goes on to say:

. . . It reverberates even into the corridors of the sacrosanct Metropolitan opera, into the length and breadth of that nebulous alley known as Tin Pan, and emerges in the field of the theatre as undeniable stage fare. It's entertainment. It's good theatre. . . .

All the average auditors must perforce basically concede is that Gershwin's spirited, oftentimes spiritual music, and the articulateness of the cast in interpreting the lyrics, has resulted in a compelling saga of Negro existence on the half shell. . . .

Performances par all the other components throughout. . . .

Abbie Mitchell is a fine Clara with her introductory lullaby, "Summer Time," one of the finer things. . . .

Mamoulian's staging is inspired.⁴⁰² It's exceedingly fine in its group motivations.

Leonard Liebling, reviewing for the 11 October 1935 New York American documents Porgy and Bess as being the first American opera:

. . . The personages of the play are mostly colored, with a few officials white. The latter express themselves in speech, while the colored participants sing their lines. The cast of solo vocalists and chorus consists exclusively of Negroes.

Gershwin has fashioned an appropriate score and an important one of its kind. Its kind is altogether welcome, for it represents the first intelligent attempt to tonalize a comedy-drama--call it folk opera, if you like--about Americans, for Americans, and by Americans sympathetically and completely understood. . . .

The orchestration is resourceful, arresting, full of local meaning, and used in the main with shrewd economy, so as not to oversound the text and the remarkably clear diction of the Negro singers. . . .

Gershwin has caught the spirit of the play remarkably with its successions of festiveness and fear, its madness, supersition, passion,

sordidness, pathos and pity. . . .

The dance numbers are irresistible in their jollity and tang. . . .

The cast was excellent, . . . There was astonishing ensemble, and absolute correctness in pitch and rhythm revealed themselves anew as the musical birthright of the gifted colored race.

Enthusiastic acceptance from a large and highly representative audience denoted that George Gershwin reached his goal triumphantly. He has indeed given us the first authentic American opera, and has done it with imagination, feeling and a technic all his own. 403

Lawrence Gilman, of the 11 October 1935 Herald-Tribune, writes:

The production of the opera, with its difficult problems of histrionics and musical adjustments, was astonishing and superb, and an authentic triumph for Mr. Mamoulian, Mr. Smallens--who conducted like a house-a-fire--and all the artists concerned. . . .

The team-work is so perfect, indeed, that in the scene of Porgy's delectable ditty, "Oh, I Got Plenty of Nuttin'," even the chairs "got rhythm," and a couple of empty rockers began to rock of their own accord in sympathetic unison with the swing of the tune. 404

All of the reviews discuss the production in both musical and dramatic terms. The 11 October 1935 The New York Times provides two reviews. Olin Downes, the music critic reports:

The performance had much that was uncommonly interesting, particularly to a reviewer accustomed to the methods of the opera stage. . . . If the Metropolitan chorus could ever put one half the action into the riot scene in the second act of "Meistersinger" that the Negro cast put into the fight that followed the crap game it would be not merely refreshing but miraculous. . . .

The cast provided some excellent singing. None

of the vocalists fell short of musicianship and expressiveness. . . . Musically this was a very eloquent interpretation by soloists and chorus. . . .

Brooks Atkinson says:

For the current folk opera Sergel Soudeikine has prepared Catfish Row settings that follow the general design of the originals, but have more grace and color. In the world of sound that Mr. Gershwin has created tattered children of a Charleston byway are still racy and congenial. Promoting "Porgy" to opera involves considerable incidental drudgery for theatregoers who agree with Mark Twain that "classical music is not so bad as it sounds." But Mr. Gershwin has found a personal voice that was inarticulate in the original play. The fear and the pain go deeper in "Porgy and Bess" than they did in penny plain "Porgy."⁴⁰⁶

Burns Mantle exclaims, "The Gershwin-Heyward opera 'Porgy and Bess,' which is pretty certain to prove one of the sensations of this theatre seasons, is so shot with climaxes, musical and dramatic, that it wore an applauding audience at the Alvin Theatre last night a bit ragged before the evening was over."⁴⁰⁷ He continues:

It wore the audience a little ragged, as I say, but not so ragged it did not have sufficient enthusiasm left to give the colored players an additional six or eight calls at the final curtain, which brought Mr. Gershwin and Alexander Smallens, the conductor, to the stage and there was a good deal of happy jollifying. . . .

Next to the score, and a magnificent reproduction of the original setting by Sergei Soudeikine, the acting of the players and the direction of Rouben Mamoulian, which is still effective if less novel than it used to be, the glories of

this performance are gathered by the players.

These are particularly fine, fine in their enthusiasm, fine in their quality. . . .

Not a part is slighted. Mr. Bubbles divorces himself temporarily from a repressed Mr. Buck to dance and sing a defiant Sportin' Life. Abbie Mitchell is large and motherly as the maternal Clara. Georgette Harvey a reminiscent joy as the boardinghouse lady, Maria, she played in the original "Porgy."⁴⁰⁸

John Anderson, critic for the New York Evening Journal, provides the least favorable review from the White press:

. . . Mr. Gershwin has written quite a lot of music, some very happy and pleasant, some self-consciously operatic and some which went in one ear and out the other. If a critic can be shot for one paragraph, let it be for this. I found two-thirds of it mighty dull.

Heaven and the Guild's paymaster must know that nothing has been spared to make this the event it ought to be, and the production itself is nothing short of brilliant. . . .

If the large Negro cast that has been assembled lacks the qualities of the play's cast, and so loses much personal appeal, it sings generally well and so, I suppose, fulfills the obligations of opera. . . Porgy's song "I Got Plenty of Nuttin'" and also his duet with Bess find Mr. Gershwin in his best mood and style, flooding his music racks with stuff that is rich and satisfying. "A Woman is a Sometime Thing" and the Crap Game music are both out of the Gershwin top drawer, and Serena's lament, "My Man's Gone Now," holds a unique and compelling magic.

You may then ask, "How now, Anderson, if you like all that music, can 'Porgy and Bess' be less than a masterpiece?" You may search me and find the suspicion that when Mr. Gershwin is merely tying the narrative together, he gets in the way of the movement of the whole show, but when he is decorating it with isolated compositions he enriches it marvelously.

For much of it is desperately laggard and

repetitious, overworked, tedious and irrelevant. Possibly if Mr. Gershwin had merely written music for a play, and not turned the play into an opera, "Porgy" would have stood up on its own feet and found further splendor in its songs. . . . I repeat that Soudekine's [sic] settings are superbly done, and that Mr. Mamouliau's direction is brilliantly illuminating. But the parts remain stubbornly greater than the whole.⁴⁰⁹

Loften Mitchell saw the original production when he was a teenager. "I found its characters stereotypes and its music imitative and not nearly as moving as its source," he recalls.⁴¹⁰ According to Mitchell, Porgy and Bess is a "work generally hailed by whites and disliked by many Negroes."⁴¹¹

The last performances of Porgy and Bess at the Alvin Theatre occurred during the week of 20 January 1936. The company began their second week at the Forrest Theatre in Philadelphia on 3 February 1936. The last available program of Porgy and Bess to list Mitchell as "Clara" was the 16 March 1936 production at the National Theatre in Washington, D. C.⁴¹²

On 15 February 1939, Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes opened at the National Theatre in New York for 410 performances.⁴¹³ The title of the play is taken from the Song of Songs in the Bible: "'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for the vines have tender grapes.'"⁴¹⁴ Set in the South

in 1900, The Little Foxes, a play of social and industrial tyranny, depicts how the Hubbard clan (Regina, Ben, Oscar, and Oscar's son Leo) schemes to bring a cotton factory to their town. The factory would be a very good investment because the Blacks and Whites would work cheaply, and they could be forced to work for even less money by pitting them against each other. Regina ends up owning most of the mill, but she loses her daughter who decides to stay with Addie when her mother moves North.⁴¹⁵ Abbie Mitchell played Addie, the female servant.

Despite its incredible success, the play received mixed reviews. The critics agreed, however, that the acting was good. Richard Watts Jr, writing for the 16 February 1939 Herald-Tribune says:

Playing the central character of the drama, the ruthless Regina, Miss Tallulah Bankhead offers the finest performance of her local career, a portrayal that is honest, merciless and completely understanding. . . . Lesser roles are well managed by . . . Miss Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott as the family servants. The settings, direction and costumes are excellent. "The Little Foxes" is an important and distinguished play, properly acted, and it is convincing proof of Miss Hellman's standing as a dramatist.⁴¹⁶

"This is one of the best roles of Miss Bankhead's career and she is releasing all the stops in portraying it," writes George Ross of the 16 February 1939 World-

Telegram "She is in superb company. . . . The two Negro players in the play, Abbie Mitchell and John Marriot, are 'way above just being good. Miss Hellman's new play about clashing wills and passions has all the excitement of an absorbing drama."⁴¹⁷

Robert Coleman of the 16 February 1939 Daily Mirror reports:

We suspect that Miss Hellman started out to pen a play of social significance, to belabor the Southern aristocrats, but she ended by typing a flamboyant melodrama, a melodrama which might have New England as well as Dixie for its locale.

Miss Hellman's characters often fall into stereotypes in the writing, but emerge, in performance, with a goodly measure of verity and vitality, thanks to Mr. Shumlin's direction and to the cast's fine acting.

Miss Bankhead is superb as the greedy and willful Regina. . . . Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott are helpful in other roles.

"The Little Foxes," in sum, has its electric moments, but they flash too seldom to illuminate a grim and bitter script that's on the thin side dramatically. We doubt that it will have a popular appeal.⁴¹⁸

According to Brooks Atkinson, reviewing for the 16 February 1939 The New York Times:

. . . "The Little Foxes" is so cleverly contrived that it lacks spontaneity. It is easier to accept as an adroitly designed theatre piece than as a document in the study of humanity.

One practical advantage of a theatre piece is the opportunities it supplies to the actors. In a perfectly cast performance, none of them fumbles his part. Sometimes our Tallulah walks buoyantly through a part without much feeling for the whole design. But as the malevolent lady of "The Little Foxes" she plays with superb command

of the entire character--sparing of the showy side, constantly aware of the poisonous spirit within. . . . There are also vivid characterizations in the other parts by Charles Dingle, Abbie Mitchell, Carl Benton Reid, Dan Duryea, Lee Baker and John Marriott.⁴¹⁹

Ibee in Variety writes: "It certainly is a drama away from the usual but the question is whether the appeal is strong enough for the average playgoer, for the drama is seeped with trouble and the undertone is decadence. . . . Interest is maintained, however, which is among the play's winning points. Regina, as played by Miss Bankhead, is a splendid portrayal . . . Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott, as servants, are in the sterling cast."⁴²⁰

John Cambridge, writing for the Daily Worker, says: "Tallulah Bankhead gave perhaps the best performance of her career as Regina Giddens, a greedy, unscrupulous and heartless woman. . . . Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott interpreted two Negro servants, as they were written, with sympathy, dignity and humor."⁴²¹

According to Arthur Pollock of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle: "Addie, the colored woman who works for the Hubbards in the Southern home that is setting for "The Little Foxes," has the words for Miss Hellman's meaning. There are people in this world, she says, who eat the earth and the people upon it while others,

who do not approve, stand about and do nothing to prevent them."⁴²² Pollock also states: "Gossip says Tallulah Bankhead, the play's star, refused to speak certain of the play's lines. There ought to be a law against actors electing themselves censors. Actors should know their place."⁴²³

When Mitchell auditioned for the role of Addie, Hellman told her that she had done great, but she wanted a "dull Black" woman to play the part. Mitchell responded nastily, "I will never be 'dull Black.'"
For three weeks she heard nothing from Hellman. After auditioning every Black actress who wanted the part, noone measured up to her. Mitchell was called back to show how she could look with burnt cork make-up. She played all of the performances in blackface. On the opening night of previews, Mitchell received numerous curtain calls. The next morning at rehearsals, Bankhead approached Mitchell. She told her, "I don't care who you are. This has got to be my show." As a result, many of Mitchell's lines were cut.⁴²⁴

Mitchell remained alone throughout the run of the show. She didnot like anyone in the cast; she could barely tolerate Bankhead.⁴²⁵ On 3 February 1940 The Little Foxes closed on Broadway and went

on tour.⁴²⁶ Mitchell left The Little Foxes in Chicago in 1940 to assist as technical advisor and to play the part of Abbie Mitchell, herself, in the American Negro Exposition's "Cavalcade of the Negro Theatre," written by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes.⁴²⁷

During this time, Mitchell was living on Seventh Avenue between 116th and 117th Streets in New York with her boyfriend, her daughter, and granddaughter. By this time, her son was a professor at Howard University; she married her third husband (another man many years her junior) because her living arrangements lacked professional propriety. (No other information found regarding her husband.)⁴²⁸

During the 1940s, Mitchell organized the Abbie Mitchell Players and began teaching drama in church basements and the "Y" in Harlem. The company, which included her granddaughter, was still in existence in the 1950s.⁴²⁹ According to LeNoire, who studied acting with Mitchell, "Abbie was the quiet 'Grand Dame of Drama,' and everybody went to her for acting lessons."⁴³⁰ According to LeNoire, during the 1930s and 40s, Ethel Waters was the Black star most accepted by White audiences. Whenever she performed, big name

White stars would attend. LeNoire reveals that when Black actors, including Ethel Waters, were cast in dramatic roles, "as soon as they received their scripts, they would run to Abbie Mitchell for coaching."⁴³¹

On 8 May 1946, Maxine Wood's On Whitman Avenue opened at the Cort Theatre in New York for 150 performances.⁴³² Set in a pleasant White Northern suburb, On Whitman Avenue tells the story of a White storekeeper whose liberal daughter rents an apartment in the family home to a Black veteran and his family. The storekeeper, who bows to the pressures of his neighbors (who fear their property values will decrease) and the real estate company evicts his Black tenants. Will Geer played the storekeeper, Canada Lee (who was also co-producer) was the veteran, and Abbie Mitchell, his mother.⁴³³

Because of its theme, the play aroused much controversy. Before the New York opening, On Whitman Avenue had played successfully in Detroit and Buffalo. According to a press release, the play had been "endorsed" by Eleanor Roosevelt and other prominent people.⁴³⁴ Many of the critics, however, did not like the play.

Lewis Nichols of The New York Times says:

Maxine Wood is writing about the Negro and the white, and how an antagonistic relationship can

and does affect both. She is not a practiced playwright, and the final treatment of a difficult theme has eluded her. . . .

Caught in the rather overpowering toils of the script, the players have difficulty in making their contributions seem real. . . . The play's aspirations are honest and sincere,⁴³⁵ but the effect grows increasingly disappointing.

Ward Morehouse of the Sun writes: "Quite the weakest of the racial problems plays that have come along this season."⁴³⁶ Howard Barnes of the Tribune reports: "While it rates a high mark for sincerity, it is lean on theatrical effectiveness."⁴³⁷ Robert Garland says: "If last night's play proves anything new--and I'm not so sure it does!--it proves that Canada Lee is more than ever to be reckoned with as a fine American actor."⁴³⁸

Other critics were favorably impressed. "Here it is, folks! That play on the Negro question for which we have all been waiting. What Miss Wood had done . . . is to bring her problem out in the open and to discuss it boldly and candidly and intelligently," proclaims Vernon Rice of the Post.⁴³⁹ According to William Hawkins of the Telegram: "Comes to tighter grips with the post war racial problem than any play so far presented here . . . Maxine Wood had the firm painstaking touch of a Hellman."⁴⁴⁰

The 22 May 1945 issue of Variety devotes a column

to the critical reactions to On Whitman Avenue. It cites the editorial and column printed in the 18 May 1946 The People's Voice, a Harlem weekly:

In lead editorial headed "Lynching on Broadway," paper said "another excellent play of Negro life is in process of being lynched by the 'kept' dramatic critics on Broadway." Calling the play "a magnificent and stirring dramatic interpretation of the housing problem faced by returning Negro GI vets," sheet said it could understand why "critics of the big business-dominated daily press" didn't like "Avenue." Their "anti-Negro prejudices" had already been challenged by other Negro plays this season, it said, and the critics "simply could not stand up under 'Avenue's' indictment." Paper is inviting readers to a public forum May 31 to discuss the play's merits.

Fredi Washington [+], a Negro actress now running column as the sheet's theatrical editor, was still stronger in taking the critics to task by name. Saying "the boys have become cynical, lazy, tired of going to the theatre, or what is worse, in the best fascist tradition, have agreed on an unwritten plot to kill plays dramatizing people's problems, especially Negroes," Miss Washington admitted she's hopping mad at them. She singled out John Chapman (News) for sloughing off the play, and Ward Morehouse (Sun) especially for his "phoney liberalism." "You, like most of your colleagues," she told Morehouse, "went around robin's red barn to try to cover up the fact that you, like Mrs. Tilden in the play, would probably be horrified at the thought that you might have to live in the same house or neighborhood with Negroes."

Excepting Vernon Rice (Post), Arthur Pollock (Brooklyn Eagle), William Hawkins (World-Telegram) and Samuel Sillen (Daily Worker), Miss Washington ended: "You've made us mad boys."⁴⁴¹

According to Rice, "Canada Lee, . . . played David Bennett, the Negro veteran with ease and touching naturalness. Abbie Mitchell and Augustus Smith, who

played his mother and grandfather, Cora and Gramp Bennett, respectively, have restraint, yet smothered intensity that is exciting to watch."⁴⁴² In Variety, Ibee states: "Hilda Vaughn as the friendly neighbor delivers whatever comedy there is. Others white and colored who count are Vivienne Baber, Robert Simon, Philip Clarke, Abbie Mitchell, Augustus Smith, Richard Williams, Kenneth Terry and Martin Miller, latter three being kids."⁴⁴³

Robert Garland reports: "To make her point convincing, Maxine Wood paints her blacks all white, her whites all black and stacks her cards exactly as she wants them. Apart from Will Geer, Abbie Mitchell and the flawless Mr. Lee, her players are equally contrived and unbelievable."⁴⁴⁴ George Freedley, reviewing for the Morning Telegraph, writes: "Abbie Mitchell as the mother of the colored family, Richard Williams as her [grand] son, and Augustus Smith . . . are outstanding."⁴⁴⁵

Mitchell was last seen on the stage in 1947 in The Skull Boat, starring Fay Bainter. (No other information available.) Poor eyesight prevented her from considering the role of Lena Younger (Mama) in Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun.⁴⁴⁶ From reading

the reviews of On Whitman Avenue, it appears that Raisin resembles the former play considerably.

The mother of a daughter, Marion, and a son, Mercer, Mitchell travelled a great deal during the years her children were growing up. Although she was conflicted regarding her role as mother, Mitchell considered herself to have been a good parent. Most of the time, however, she did live in one place, while Mama Alice, the woman who had raised Mitchell, housed the children in another place. Even during those times when Mitchell lived in the same house with her children, Mama Alice was in charge of the household and of Marion and Mercer.⁴⁴⁷

Despite having earned a great deal of money during her career, Mitchell lived a "feast or famine" existence.⁴⁴⁸ When she retired from the stage, she taught voice and acting in her studio on 125th Street in Harlem until around 1955 when her eyesight began to fail.⁴⁴⁹ On 16 March 1960, after a long illness, Abbie Mitchell died in Harlem Hospital in New York City.⁴⁵⁰ According to "Abbie Mitchell Goes to Perpetual 'Summertime,'" the obituary in the Amsterdam News,: "They sang the songs Abbie Mitchell made famous during her career in the theatre and on the concert stage

at a memorial service held Sunday afternoon."⁴⁵¹

Former Executive Secretary of the Negro Actors Guild of America, Mitchell is buried in St. Raymond's Cemetery in the Bronx, and she is survived by three grandchildren.⁴⁵²

Abbie Mitchell, the quintessential Black actress, had a career that last nearly fifty years. Like so many of her contemporaries, she first sang on the professional stage in musicals before going on to act in dramatic roles. Through her association with the Lafayette Players and her own amateur acting groups, Mitchell help to foster the development of Black Theatre. Further, throughout her career, she performed in landmark productions that made theatrical history for Blacks and for the American stage. As demonstrated by her success as both a serious singer and actress, Mitchell possessed unquestionable talent and determination. "Her life epitomized the paradox that beset Negro artists who knew the glamour of the early 1900s and were idolized by European audiences, sovereigns, and Harlem theatre-goers, but denied total American acceptance."⁴⁵³

VIII

Conclusion

Show business provided a major opportunity for Blacks to enter into mainstream American society. The Black performer and American show business, however, have endured a symbiotic, but bittersweet, relationship. Over the years, despite their many contributions, Black entertainers have often been restricted to performing within a prescribed framework that permits only limited opportunity.

The concert stage provided an early opportunity for Black women to perform professionally. In the 1850s, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield was the first African-American to receive public recognition both here and in England as a classical singer.¹ In 1869, Emma and Anna Hyers debuted as singers on the concert stage. They toured the country giving concerts. After the demise of slavery, minstrelsy offered a generation of Black performers the opportunity to learn and work. The Hyers performed their "specialty" (classical singing) in the olio or variety show part of the minstrel pattern.

In 1876, the year of Taylor-Greenfield's death, the Hyers enlarged their company in order to produce drama. They presented Out of Bondage, a four-act musical drama which begins with slavery and ends with the Black man adjusting to freedom. During the final act, in the concert scene, the Sisters performed their "specialty," selections from their regular repertoire.² By including classical singing in drama, the Hyers Sisters had made the leap from the concert stage to the legitimate stage. In so doing, they began the odyssey of the evolving performing pattern of many a Black dramatic actress.

The efforts of an Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield paved the way for the Hyers Sisters, Marie Selika, Sissieretta Jones, Inez Clough, Abbie Mitchell and other Black women concert singers who received considerable recognition both here and abroad. Perhaps of more importance, she was the first Black woman to embark on a path that led to the legitimate stage for Black women.

In the face of tremendous obstacles, the Hyers made significant contributions to the development of Black musical comedy and the evolution of Black theatre-artists. They produced Black musical comedies

that were more sophisticated than those that had been seen before. They introduced musicals set in Africa, later, a trend in turn-of-the-century Black musicals. By shattering the then stage image of Black women, they provided a new contemporary image for the Black female performer on the professional stage in America. As Hill puts it: "They were, in fact, the precursors of black musical theatre in America."³

Henrietta Vinton Davis debuted on the concert stage in 1878 as a reciter before appearing on the theatrical stage. Despite incredible odds, Davis' stage career of more than thirty years survived only because she refused to quit. Although her talents held much promise, her ethnicity served to prevent her from being accepted as a serious artist in America. By making the transition from the concert stage to the theatrical stage, the Hyers Sisters, the DeWolf Sisters, and Henrietta Vinton Davis furthered the evolutionary process of the Black dramatic actress.

By 1890, many Black parents had been able to educate their children. There were Black poets, songwriters, musicians, and singers, among other skilled and talented artists and professionals. Some played a significant role in developing show business into

the large industry it has become today. Edith Isaacs calls the years 1890-1917 "The Middle Distance." Not only did Blacks receive more acceptance as "subject matter" on the legitimate stage, but they also had received limited access to the theatre, both as audience and artist. According to Isaacs, "everything that Negro theatre artists and musicians are doing today had its beginnings in the Middle Distance and much of what our theatres and concert halls and radio, and most of what our night clubs are doing had its source or its flood-tide here."⁴

Except for "specialty acts" like the Hyers Sisters, most Black women until 1890 were relegated to performing in minstrelsy or Topsy and "plantation" roles in Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the 1890s, however, with the development of Black musicals such as The Creole Show (1890), Black women truly gained prominence. The Creole Show, the first musical to successfully challenge the blackface tradition, provided a new image for the Black woman on the American stage: "It glorified the coloured girl."

For the first time on the professional stage, women danced in the Cakewalk. From then on, Black shows, including minstrel shows, had women in their casts. The popularity of The Creole Show was followed

by many successful non-blackface, all-Black musicals produced between 1890 and 1911. They include The Octoroons, Oriental America, In Dahomey, and Red Moon. Building and revising on the innovations initiated by the Hyers Sisters, these productions played a major role in the evolution of Black musical comedy.

The pioneering efforts of Black artists during this period to break away from traditional "darky shows" were significant. The theatricals presented were novel in plot, dancing, and music, introducing to a wider audience African settings and themes, urbanized, upwardly mobile Blacks, and love themes. All of these innovations provided opportunities for Black performers to enlarge the "horizons of acceptable black characterizations."⁵

The emergence and development of Black musicals of this era are of great importance in the history of American musical theatre. These shows were forerunners of the coming Broadway musical. In addition to the traditional types of music that audiences expected, these Black musicals moved ragtime songs and Black dancing from their accustomed place in vaudeville and made them acceptable as an integral part of the developing American musical comedy.⁶

The talents of so many Black artists during this period helped to establish a form that was not imported from Europe or the English stage, but was indigenous to the United States.⁷ These productions added a new dimension to American theatre entertainment, laying a foundation for public acceptance of images of Black men and women on the stage in other than "burlesque" roles. In addition, through these shows, the Black artist was beginning to leave his distinctive mark upon mainstream American Musical Theatre. As Hatch says, without the contributions of these artists the "American musical might still be waltzing with an umpah-pah-pah to the descendants of Merry Widow and Naughty Marietta."⁸

According to Nathan Huggins:

Black performers accommodated themselves to the tradition, while at the same time they tried to innovate and find more room for their talents within the convention [minstrelsy]; they moved toward the musical review. Sam T. Jack's The Creole Show . . . featured girls for the first time in a major minstrel. They were lightskinned [italics mine] dancers whose dance and burlesque accommodated the style of the "olio" to standard variety acts.

This format became so successful that minstrels and other Black musical shows developed for White audiences began to feature choruses of lightskinned Black women. Pioneer entertainer Tom Fletcher recalls

that between 1890-1900 theatrical "help wanted" advertisements were specific about the appearances of both male and female performers:

WANTED: Colored performers, men and women. Men who can double in band and orchestra or band and stage. Real black men and yellow women [italics mine]. Good dressers on and off stage. Do not worry about your parade outfits because they are furnished by the company.¹⁰

Despite its contributions, The Creole Show may have performed a disservice to Black women performers. It helped to foster and preserve the "lightskinned woman" image over the years, which tends to exclude "darkskinned" Black women from performing certain roles.

Although The Creole Show (1890) predates the first Ziegfeld Follies (1907) by seventeen years, Derek Parker and Julia Parker credit Ziegfeld with introducing the chorus girl to the American stage. "It was in the new century, and predictably in New York, that the all-American chorus girl was born: less a chorus girl in the classic sense, than a show girl; but in any case the product of the imagination and vision of one man: Florenz Ziegfeld."¹¹ According to Ziegfeld, chorus girls "must attract men. You cannot define the quality. In one word, I would say it was a promise: a promise of romance and excitement--all

the things a man dreams about when he thinks of the word girl.'"¹² By introducing a chorus of sixteen beautiful Black women, Sam Lucas "attracted" both a White producer and a White audience.

Yet another popular form of entertainment during the period was the musical revue, which incorporates large choruses of beautiful women. These shows also provided opportunities for Black women performers. At the time, some Black men had received recognition as singers, dancers, and comedians in minstrelsy and in "specialty acts." Several of these men married, teaming with their wives and creating vaudeville acts. Sam Lucas and his wife Carrie, known as "Mr. and Mrs. Sam Lucas," were a featured act in The Creole Show. Laura Bowman credits Pete Hampton with teaching her everything she knew about show business. They formed "Hampton and Bowman" and performed throughout the world. "Johnson and Dean" was still another husband/wife team. Lottie Williams and Ada Walker, the wives of Bert Williams and George Walker, respectively, performed principal roles in the landmark Williams and Walker productions. Will Marion Cook wrote several very popular songs for his wife Abbie Mitchell. These turn-of-the-century Black men entertainers were both

teachers and promoters of Black women entertainers, providing them with performing opportunities.

At the turn of the century Black entertainers continued to redefine their image on the American stage. Singer/dancer Dora Dean, of "Johnson and Dean," mentioned earlier, provided an elegant and sophisticated image of a Black woman. She gave many singers and dancers the opportunity to work in her shows, both here and abroad. She did not, however, aspire to become an actress in legitimate theatre.

Another very early pivotal female figure who did become an actress on the musical stage was Madame M. Sissieretta Jones, better known as "Black Patti." Jones achieved substantial success on both the professional concert and legitimate stages, establishing herself as a role model for other Black artists. Possessing training and talent comparable to her White contemporaries, she brought a new dignity to the Black stage image. In addition, "Black Patti's Troubadours," like "Johnson and Dean," also provided many actors, comedians, singers, and dancers (especially women) with the opportunity to perform on the professional stage, where they gained "experience in staging and performing which could later be helpful on the larger

American stage."¹³

Ironically, her efforts to circumvent some of the artistic and cultural restrictions imposed upon her resulted according to Daughtry in significant contributions to the further development of the Black artist.

The very atmosphere which restricted Sissieretta Jones and which destroyed her desire to perform on the American Metropolitan stage forced her to make a contribution to American concert and theatrical life--the creation of a musical-dramatic compound which employed both the comical and the serious and which gave the Negro a chance to learn the basics of the arts of stagecraft and performance. Without this beginning which Madame Jones' Troubadours provided, there would not have been available opportunities for the Negro actor to gain experience--opportunities which provided him with rudimentary training in performance as well as with an aesthetic attitude toward the American stage.¹⁴

At the age of sixteen, Ida "Topsy" Forsyne joined "Black Patti's Troubadours" as a singer/dancer. She went on to become a headliner at top theatres in Europe, still another role model for others. After living in Russia for ten years, Forsyne returned to the United States where she played only minor roles in a few musicals and dramas. She believes that she did not make it to the top here because she did not get the opportunity to show what she could do. According to Ida, who was dark-complexioned, she did not get

that chance because "there's something about my skin that gives me away."¹⁵

Inez Clough, Lottie Grady, Anita Bush, Abbie Mitchell, and Laura Bowman were all fair-skinned. At the time they entered the theatre, a light complexion was preferred. Nearly thirty years later, however, the predominant stage role of Black women in legitimate theatre was the servant. When the image changed from "glorified coloured girl" to maid, so did the complexion. As we have seen, both Mitchell and Bowman had to blacken-up to play certain roles, their skin color working for or against them, at different times.

After 1910, Black involvement in mainstream professional theatre in New York nearly came to a halt. By that time, George Walker, Bob Cole, and Ernest Hogan had left show business due to illness, and Bert Williams had signed with the Ziegfeld Follies. The loss of these men left no producer/performer teams to develop Black musical comedy.

In Harlem, however, Black performers were attempting to change their stage image again. Anita Bush, one of the singers/dancers from Williams' and Walker's In Dahomey (1902), organized The Anita Bush Stock Company in 1915 and began performing drama. The group

later became known as the Lafayette Players. They performed drama at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem and at Black theatres throughout the country. In addition to providing a training ground for Black actors to sharpen their skills, "Black audiences saw, for the first time, Black entertainers performing in a medium that differed greatly from the usual minstrel type comedies with which audiences were familiar."¹⁶

Anita Bush made a special contribution to the evolution of the Black theatre-artist. Known as "Little Mother of Negro Drama," she is credited with initiating the careers of more than fifty Black performers. Inez Clough, Lottie Grady, Laura Bowman, Abbie Mitchell, and Bush, herself, all gained recognition and valuable experience while acting with the Lafayette Players. Sister Thompson, the daughter of two former stars of the Lafayette Players, Evelyn Preer and Edward Thompson, sums up why this Black Theatre "legend" should be remembered:

Anita Bush's contributions to the success of the Lafayette Players should not be minimized. Without her, there would not have been a company; without her, the company would not have continued to thrive and to grow during the first difficult years of establishment. The company was her idea, her dream, her ambition brought to life. Credit must be given to one who, through her determination, kept the dream alive. Anita Bush's inspiration encouraged others to follow in her footsteps

along a previously untraveled path. It was a path that was to lead ultimately to an unparalleled position for black performers in the theatrical world.¹⁷

Anita Bush, along with Lottie Grady, Laura Bowman, Abbie Mitchell, and Inez Clough had all begun their careers performing in turn-of-the-century musical shows. This is not to say that all Black women acting in drama by 1916 began their careers in musicals, but when given the opportunity to perform in other than stereotypical roles, those theatre-professionals who had begun in musicals possessed many years of experience and training. They, like the Hyers Sisters before them, stepped easily from musicals to dramas. Inez Clough and Lottie Grady played principal parts in Three Plays For A Negro Theatre (1917), the first recorded dramatic production on the Broadway stage in which Black actresses appeared. Clough and Grady, along with Abbie Mitchell, Laura Bowman, and Anita Bush were prominent among the first group of Black women to break into legitimate theatre.

Despite the odds, Grady, Clough, Bush, Bowman, and Mitchell sustained careers that lasted up to nearly fifty years. They all performed in landmark productions that made performance history. They, too, established themselves as role models for contemporary Black dramatic

actresses. In addition to organizing their own acting troupes, Bowman, Mitchell, and Bush trained and coached some of the top Black actresses of the 1930s and 40s, establishing a link between the past and the present. By helping to provide trained talent, these women made a significant contribution to mainstream American theatre. Racism denied them the opportunity to realize their full potential. Admired, especially in Europe, they were never fully accepted at home.

By the turn of the century, some Blacks were beginning to integrate into mainstream American society. Thus, the emergence of the Black dramatic actress coincides with the attitudes of a changing society and parallels the breakthroughs in other areas. The emergence of Black women performers during this period gave birth to a new generation of theatre-artists. The inclusion of women in Black theatricals marked a turning point in Black participation in American theatre. With sophistication and style, they helped to change the stereotypical image. They served as role models and opened up for women numerous possibilities on the professional stage. These Black women pioneers added a new dimension to the American theatre scene. Through beauty, talent, spirit, and determination,

they led the way to the acceptance of Black performers, particularly women, around the world. Through their careers, we can trace the beginnings of the re-entry (with minstrelsy being the first entry) of Blacks on the professional stage in musical shows, and later, in legitimate drama. The evolution of the Black dramatic actress illustrates "the change in the American theatre in the possibilities for black theatrical companies and for the individual black performer," notes Yvonne Shafer.¹⁸ Stemming from Minstrelsy, the next form of theatre accessible to Black performers was the musical stage. When they had the opportunity to do other than musicals, they moved onto drama. It was this gradual change (from musicals to drama) that made possible the comparatively recent "star status and acclaim for serious acting ability which is demonstrated by the careers of such"¹⁹ Black actresses as Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, Diahann Carroll, Cicely Tyson, Mary Alice, Gloria Foster, Rosaline Cash, Abbey Lincoln, and Debbie Allen.

This study, necessarily limited, should awaken scholars--both Black and White--to the need to provide more detailed analyses of Black women's contributions. Additional research needs to be done on all of the

Black women performers in America and abroad and their contributions spelled out. This study, I hope, is the start of a continuing project which, ultimately, should be brought up to the present, and which might also include other Black women of the theatre, such as playwrights and directors.

NOTES

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

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Chapter 2. THE BLACK WOMAN IN AMERICA, 1890-1917

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4. August Meier, Negro Thought in America 1880-1915 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 19.

5. Ibid., 19-20.

6. Ibid., 20.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 20-21.

9. Ibid., 21.

10. Ibid., 21-24.

11. Ibid., 25.

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27. Ibid., 77-78.
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39. Ibid., 23.
40. Ibid., 24.
41. Ibid., 29.
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43. Ibid., 30.
44. Ibid., 90.
45. Ibid., 90-91.
46. Ibid., 92.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 92-94.
49. Lerner, Black Women/White America, 440.
50. Giddings, When and Where, 95, 135.
51. Ibid., 95-96.
52. Ibid., 100.
53. Ibid., 135-37.
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Chapter 3. OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLACK THEATRE

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15. Ibid.

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17. Marshall and Stock, Ira Aldridge, 36.
18. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, 3: 71.
19. Ibid., 3: 594.
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Chapter 4. THE BLACK WOMAN ARTIST AND THE AMERICAN STAGE
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Chapter 5. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SHOWS

1. According to Henry T. Sampson, this production originated from an idea conceived by Sam Lucas, the dean of Black theatrical artists at the turn of the century. In 1873 Sam became a member of the original Georgia Minstrels as a ballad singer. After leaving the Hyers Sisters, he performed as a comedian/singer/dancer in vaudeville. Until 1879, he played the part of Uncle Tom in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Lucas, the first Black man to do so, also played the same role in the film version of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1915). During the

1880s, while still performing as a single, he met and married his second wife, Carrie Melvin. She, a concert musician and contralto soloist, and Lucas formed the musical act "Mr. and Mrs. Sam Lucas" and played all the major variety halls. It was during this time that Sam envisioned producing a Creole show. Unable to interest Black investors, Lucas approached Sam T. Jack, a White man, who agreed to organize and finance the show, headed by Lucas and his wife Carrie. Blacks in Blackface, 6, 393-94.

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35. Southern, Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians, 275.

36. Charters, Nobody, 35.

37. Sandra L. Richards, "Bert Williams: The Man and The Mask," Mime Mask & Marionette 1 (Spring 1978): 13.

38. Sampson, Blacks in Blackface, 402, 438. I am using Ada because that is the name by which she was most commonly known, although she herself used Aida at one time.

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42. Van Vechten, "The Negro Theatre," 23.

43. Johnson, Black Manhattan, 107.

44. Helen Armstead-Johnson, "Shuffle Along: Keynote of the Harlem Renaissance," in The Theater of Black Americans, vol. 1, edited by Errol Hill (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 128.

45. Ibid.

46. Woll, The Dictionary of the Black Theatre, 86.

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62. Quoted in *ibid.*
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Chapter 6. THE CLASS ACTS

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Chapter 8. CONCLUSION

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8. Hatch, "A Guide to 200 Years of Drama," 18.
9. Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, 274-75.
10. Fletcher, 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business, 42.
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APPENDI X

DIRECTORY OF BLACK WOMEN PERFORMERS, 1821-1946

I believe that "Directory of Black Women Performers, 1821-1946" is the only extant reference source compiled solely on Black women performing artists during the period. It documents the significant contributions of more than 400 actresses, singers, dancers, and musicians who appeared on the mainstream professional stage and on the professional Black stage in New York, but it also includes women who performed both nationally and internationally. Although listings are primarily theatrical/stage (including classical concert, opera, ballet, and night-clubs), a number of these women worked in film and television whenever opportunity permitted.

Each biographical entry contains personal information, i.e., birth and death dates where available, geography, education, and notes of interests; professional credits, e.g., theatrical presentations with opening dates and number of performances when available, film

appearances with dates if available, playwriting, directing, producing, and choreographing experience; and published material by and about individuals.

One asterisk (*) indicates performer began career between 1890 and 1917. Two asterisks (**) indicate performer joined Lafayette Players by 1917; three asterisks (***) indicate performer began career between 1890 and 1917 and joined Lafayette Players by 1917. An explanatory "List of Acronyms and Abbreviations" precedes the "Directory."

This is neither the definitive compilation on the topic nor the complete listings under any individual. However, the "Directory" permanently records the often unheralded accomplishments of those trailblazers who helped to pave the way for the acceptance of Black artists, especially women, on the American stage and throughout the world.

The entries in this section appeared in playbills, reviews, articles, and books. Also, individual performers' names cropped up in sources of information not directly related to show business. The following, however, is a list of the main sources from which this directory was compiled:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	American Negro Theatre
ANTA	American National Theatre Academy
ASFT	American Shakespeare Festival Theatre
BAM	Brooklyn Academy of Music
BTA	Black Theatre Alliance
Bway	Broadway
ELT	Equity Library Theatre
LCR	Lincoln Center Repertory
MET	Metropolitan Opera House
NAT	Negro Art Theatre
NBT	National Black Theater
NEC	Negro Ensemble Company
NFT	Negro Folk Theatre
NRT	National Repertory Theatre
NYPL	New York Public Library
NYSF	New York Shakespeare Festival
Q	Opening date
Q. B.	Off-Broadway
P	Play version
pre-Bway	pre-Broadway

DIRECTORY OF BLACK WOMEN PERFORMERS,

1821 - 1946

Includes actresses, singers, dancers, and musicians

*(Began career between 1890-1917)

**(Joined Lafayette Players by 1917)

*** (Began career between 1890-1917 and joined Lafayette Players by 1917)

*ALLEN, REBECCA (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC Q. 5/3/09.

ALLISON, BESSIE (b. d.) SHUFFLE ALONG (1921); CHOCOLATE DANDIES (1924) - Chorus. Joined Lafayette Players in 1923.

*ANDERSON, MAMIE (b. d.) Straight dramatic actress who performed sketches on vaudeville stage with her husband, Al Anderson.

**ANDERSON, MRS. CHARLES, H. (IDA) (b. d.) Wife of popular Harlem dance master. Joined Bush's company in 1915 in BARBARA FRIETCHE, Lincoln Theatre, NYC; THE OCTOROON - Dora Sunshine, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/10/16.

*ANDERSON, ELLA (b. d.) THE OYSTER MAN - Princess Itto, Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/23/07, 8 performances; HIS HONOR THE BARBER - Caroline Brown, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/8/11, 8 performances.

ANDERSON, MARIAN (b. 2/17/1902) (Concert Singer/opera singer). Narrated Aaron Copland's Lincoln Portrait - Boston Pops; Numerous tours beginning in 1924; Lewisohn Stadium (debut) (1926); Town Hall (1935); Carnegie Hall (1936); Lincoln Memorial Concert (1939); UN BALLO IN MASCHERA - Ulrica, MET (debut, 1955); Farewell concert Philadelphia Orchestra (1965). Autobiography: MY LORD, WHAT A MORNING - Viking Press, 1956.

ANDERSON, MYRTLE (b. d.) GREEN PASTURES (1935). Films: "GREEN PASTURES" (1936); "THE LADY IS WILLING"; "TALES OF MANHATTAN" (1942); "I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE"; "CABIN IN THE SKY" (1943); "OH, YOU BEAUTIFUL DOLL" (1949); "WHITE POOL" (1950); "WHITE WITCH DOCTOR" (1953).

ANDREWS, REGINA (b. d.) President, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC; THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE - Mother, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931); SUNNY MORNING - Old Lady, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC

ARCHER, OSCEOLA (b. 6/13/1890 d. 11/20/83) (Actress/Director) Education: BA - Howard University (1913); MA - New York University, 1936 (Drama). THE CAT SCREAMS; RIDERS TO THE SEA (ANTA); HIPPOLYTUS (ANTA); SKIN OF OUR TEETH (Olney Theatre); STRANGE HOUSE (Putney, VT); BETWEEN TWO WORLDS (1934); PANIC (1934); EMPEROR JONES (Tour, 1935); ROMEO AND JULIET (New York Shakespearean Festival, 1961); RING ROUND MOON (NRT, 1963-64); THE CRUCIBLE - Tituba, (NRT, 1963-64); THE SEA GULL (NRT, 1963-64); BLOOD WEDDING (Penn State University Theatre, 1966); THE THREE SISTERS (Hartford, 1966-67); THE GUIDE (1968); THE SCREENS (Q.B., 1971); Directed the SILVER FOX

*ARLINGTON, BLANCHE (b. d.) THE OYSTER MAN - Bala, Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q 11/23/07, 8 performances.

ARNETT, RUTH (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

ATTAWAY, RUTH (b. c.1912 d. 1987) YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU - Reba the Housemaid, Music Box Theatre, NYC, Q 12/14/36, 837 performances; THE LITTLE FOXES (Stock); DECISION (Q.B.); THE COUNTRY WIFE (LCR); DANTON'S DEATH (LCR); THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE (LCR); THE GRASS HARP (Q.B., 1953); MRS. PATTERSON - Mother (1954); MISTER JOHNSON (1956); THE EGGHEAD (1957); NAT TURNER (Q.B., 1960s); A RAISIN IN THE SUN (Stand-by for Claudia McNeil, 1961); TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT (Stand-by for Claudia McNeil, 1962); AFTER THE FALL (LCR, 1964); YERMA (LCR, 1966).

BAILEY, OLA (b. d.) (Blues Singer - Pearl Bailey's sister).

BAILEY, RUBY (b. d.) THE LITTLE STONE HOUSE - Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

BAKER, JOSEPHINE (b. 1906 d. 1976) SHUFFLE ALONG (1921) - Chorus Girl; CHOCOLATE DANDIES - That Comedy Chorus Girl, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24; LA REVUE NEGRE (Paris, 1925); "Dramatis Personae: Josephine

Baker et al." Crisis 34 (May 1927): 85-86.

BAKER, JUANITA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN
- Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

BALL, OLIVE (b. d.) PORGY & BESS - Annie, Alvin
Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/10/35.

*BANKS, ADA (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Mandy Lou,
Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/3/08, 89 performances;
MR LODE OF KOAL - Saylor, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q.
11/1/09, 40 performances.

*BANKS, BESSIE (b. d.)

BANNISTER, MADAME CHRISTIANA (b. d.) INDIAN S
VISIT - Wakinko. Performed by the Histrionic Club,
Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on 3/2/1858.

BANNISTER, MRS. RUTH (b. d.) FOUR SISTERS -
Susan. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall,
Boston, MA on 3/2/1858.

BARNES, MAE (EDITH MAE STITH) (b. 1/23/07 d.)
(Singer/Actress) RUNNIN' WILD (debut, 1923); LUCKY
SAMBO (1925); SHUFFLE ALONG (Tour, 1926); RANG TANG
(1927); THE RAINBOW (1928); HOT RHYTHM (1930); EBONY
SCANDALS (Vaudeville tour, 1932-33); BY THE BEAUTIFUL
SEA (1954); ZIEGFELD FOLLIES (pre-Bway tour, 1956).
Films: "ODDS AGAINST TOMORROW" (1959). Television:
Steve Allen Show; Garry Moore Show; Today Show; Merv
Griffin Show; Dupont Show of the Month; Kitty Foyle
Series; America Be Seated (Ed Sullivan Show).

BARNES, MARY (b. d.) HAITI - Mother, Lafayette
Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/2/38.

BARR, EDNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1929.

BATES, AIMEE (AMY) (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN
- Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36; CONJUR
MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC,
Q. 3/11/36; THE LONG VOYAGE HOME - Kate, Lafayette
Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/29/37.

*BATSON, FLORA (b. 1870 d. 1906) (Ballad Singer/Concert
Singer 1880s-90s). A contemporary of Sissieretta Jones.

Married a White businessman. Performed in Africa, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and throughout the U.S.

BEANE, EDNA (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

BEASLEY, JOYCE (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/11/39.

*BEAUMONT, SADIE (b. d.) DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/13/1897.

BEGG, JEANNIE (b. d.) THE EMPEROR JONES - Spectator, Provincetown Players, NYC, Q. 11/3/20.

BELL, HILDA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

BENNETTE, GERTRUDE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1920.

BLAKE, ATTA (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939, Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/11/39.

BLANDS, BIRLEANNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

BLUFORD, THERESA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

BONDHILL, GERTRUDE (b. d.) MULATTO - Grace Richards, Vanderbilt Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/24/35.

BOONE, DAZEY (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

**BOQUET, ORMA CROSBY (b. d.)

BOUCREE, GLADYS (b. d.) THE SWING MIKADO - Yum-yum, New Yorker Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/1/39 (WPA).

***BOWMAN, LAURA (b. 10/3/1881 d. 1957) IN DAHOMEY - Chorus Girl, New York Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/18/02; THE SOUTHERNERS - New York Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/23/04, 36 performances; THE CHIP WOMAN'S FORTUNE - Aunt Nancy, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 6/4/23 (1st drama by a Black to reach Broadway); SALOME - Herodias, Lafayette

Players, NYC, Q. 6/4/23; IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM (1926);
MEEK MOSES - Princess Theatre, NYC (1928); WADE IN
THE WATER - (NAT, 1929); HARLEM 1929 (P) - The Apollo
Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/20/29, 94 performances; HARLEM
- Eltinge Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/21/29, 16 performances;
SENTINELS (P) - Baltimore Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/25/31,
11 performances; JEZEBEL (P) - Ethel Barrymore Theatre,
NYC, Q. 12/19/33; LOUISIANA (1933); PLUMES IN THE
DUST - 46th Street Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/6/36, 11 per-
formances; CONJUN (Brooklyn, 1938); PLEASE MRS. GARI BALDI
- Belmont Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/16/39, 4 performances;
JEB (1946) - Martin Beck Theatre, NYC

BOYD, KATHRYN (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1926.

*BRADY, BESSIE (b. 1882 d. 1912) MR. LODGE OF KOAL
- Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/1/09, 40 performances.

BRANAN, INEZ (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church
Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

BRANCH, WILLIE (b. d.) GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN
- Parabelle, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

BRANTLEY, MARION (b. d.) SWING IT - Ethel, Adelphia
Theatre, NYC, Q. 7/22/37.

BRI CE, CAROL (CAROL LOVETTE HAWKINS) (b. 4/16/20 d.
) (Concert Singer/Actress) THE HOT MIKADO - New York
World's Fair (1939); Town Hall (debut, 1945); OUANGA
- Voodoo Princess, Met (1956); SARATOGA - Kakou (1959);
FINIAN'S RAINBOW - City Center (1960); SHOW BOAT -
Queenie, City Center (1961); PORGY AND BESS - Marie,
City Center (1961); GENTLEMEN BE SEATED - Harriet
Tubman (1963); Carnegie Hall (1975).

BROCK, FRANCES (b. d.) THE HOT MIKADO - Pitti-Sing,
Broadhurst Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/23/39.

*BRODIE, ALVERTA (b. d.) Moscow, 1911. "She was
one of a large and sophisticated group of Black American
entertainers who were popular under the Czarist regime.
Many entertained Tolstoy." (Armstead-Johnson, Black
America on Stage, 12.)

*BROOKS, MAZIE (b. d.)

BROOKS, THERESA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

BROWN, ANNE WIGGINS (b. d.) PORGY AND BESS - Bess (Gershwin's), Alvin Theatre, NYC, Q 10/10/35; LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS (London); LABOR STAGE (1938); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Gardenia, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39; PINS & NEEDLES (Revue, 1939); RAVEL'S L' HEURE ESPAGNOLE (1939); OFFENBACH'S HELEN (Black Version, 1941); PORGY AND BESS - Bess (Revival, 1942); Concert - BAM (1942); ROBIN HOOD - Dell (1942); VIRGINIA - Miranda, St. Louis Opera Co.; Concert - Town Hall (1945); MENOTTI'S THE MEDIUM AND THE TELEPHONE (Norway, 1950).

**BROWN, BEULAH WHITE (b. d.)

*BROWN, DAISY (b. d.) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Park Theatre, NYC, Q 1/13/06; THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

BROWN, ETHEL (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

BROWN, GENA MAY (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36.

BROWN, IDA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

**BROWN, KITTY (b. d.)

**BROWN, MARGARET HUBBARD (b. d.)

*BROWN, MINNIE (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Angelina Diggs, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08, 89 performances.

BROWN, ROSA (b. d.) THE HOT MIKADO - Katisha, Broadhurst Theatre, NYC, Q 3/23/39.

*BURGOYNE, OLGA (b. 1885 d.) IN DAHOMEY (NY, 1902/ London, 1903). After IN DAHOMEY, she lived in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she was an entertainer and a business woman until the Revolution. She had a lingerie shop in St. Petersburg with Black models in window. She and her company of 14 members were vacationing in Austria when the Revolution occurred. She returned to the United States with only pocket money. MACBETH

- One of the Three Witches, Lafayette Theatre, NYC (WPA, 1936).

BURKE, GEORGIA (GRACE MAEDEL BURKE) (b. 2/27/06 d. 11/28/85) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS; OLD MAN SATAN; FIVE STAR FINAL; SAVAGE RHYTHM; SUN FIELDS; IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM (1926); THEY SHALL NOT DIE (1936); COQUETTE - New Hope, PA (1934); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Eva, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39; NO TIME FOR COMEDY (1939); CABIN IN THE SKY (1940); DECISION - Virgie (1944); ANNA LUCASTA (1944); THE WISTERIA TREES (1952); THE GRASS HARP (1952); PORGY AND BESS - Maria (1953); TAMBOURINES TO GLORY (Stock, 1958); INTERLOCK (ANTA, 1958); THE KILLER (1960); MANDI GO (1961); BOHI KEE (1966).

**BURKE, LEONORA (b. d.)

***BUSH, ANITA (b. 1883 d. 2/19/74) IN DAHOMEY (1903); ABYSSINA (1906); MR. LODGE OF KOAL - Ho, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/1/09. Formed the "Anita Bush Stock Company" which performed at the Lincoln Theatre in NYC in 1915; troupe moved to Lafayette Theatre in NYC in 1915. Co-starred in the first all-Black western film "The Crimson Skull" (1921); co-starred in SWING IT - Amy, Adelphia Theatre, NYC, Q. 7/22/37. Biography - Moorland/Spingarn Collection, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

*BUTLER, BLANCHE (b. d.) RACHEL - Mrs. Lane, Myrtilla Miner Normal School, Washington, D.C., Q. 3/3/16. Angelina Grimke's RACHEL was the first "successful" drama written by a Black.

*BUTLER, MAYME (MAMIE) (b. d.) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Truscolina, Park Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/06; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q. 8/6/07, 15 performances; THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

*BYRD, A. D. (b. d.) RUFUS RASTUS - Angelica Newcomb, American Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/29/06.

CADOZA, DOROTHY (b. d.) HOW COME, LAWD? - Babes, 49th Street Theatre, NYC, Q. 9/30/37.

CAMPBELL, ANNE (b. d.) PERFECTION - Susan. Performed by Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA, Q. 3/2/1858.

CANTY, MARIETTA (b. d.) RUN LITTLE CHILLUN (Debut, 1933); CO-RESPONDENT UNKNOWN (1936); KISS THE BOYS GOODBYE (1939); NO TIME FOR COMEDY (1939); HORSE FEVER (1940); ON STRIVER'S ROW (1940).

*CARR, ELLA (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q. 5/23/c.1900.

**CARTER, HELEN (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

CARTER, MABEL (b. d.) THE SWING MI KADO - Peep-bo, New York Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/1/39.

CARTER, MARIE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1925.

CARTER, VIOLA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1922.

*CASSEL, ALINE (b. d.) ABYSSINIA - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/20/06.

CASSELLE, CAMILE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/4/1898, 8 performances; A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC Q. 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

CATO, MINTO (b. 1900 d. 11/2/79) (Singer/Actress) BLACKBIRDS OF 1930, introduced song "Memories of You."

CHALMERS, WILNETTE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1926.

CHAMPION, DORIS (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

CHAMPION, REBECCA (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

**CHERRY, RUTH (b. d.)

CHILTON, THELMA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

CHURCHILL, SAVANNAH (b. d.) (Actress/Singer) Vocalist with the Benny Carter Band during 1940s;

appeared at the Apollo Theatre, NYC

CLARK, QUEEN (b. d.) Member of "Famous Colored Lady Sextette" (c. late 1800s).

**CLEO, ETHEL (b. d.)

**CLEO, RUTH (b. d.)

***CLOUGH, INEZ (b. c. 1860s-70s d. 11/24/33) ORIENTAL AMERICA (1896) - Show Girl (the first Black musical performed in a legitimate theatre in NYC, Palmer's Theatre); IN DAHMOEY (1902); THE LURE, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, 1916; CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Mrs. Hez Brown, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/13/24.

*CLOUGH, ESTELLE PINCKNEY (b. c. 1860s-70s d.) (Concert Singer/Dramatic Soprano) Maintained a successful voice studio in Worcester, MA. She was heard in the leading roles in operas fostered by Theodore Drury in Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, and NYC. "Carmen" at Lexington Avenue Opera House in 1900. May 1901 NY papers gave space to the production of IL GUARANY by Black composer Gomez; AIDA in NYC, Q. 5/11/03.

COHEE, REGINA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1925.

*COLEMAN, LULU (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

COLLINS, JANET (b. d.) (Dancer/Choreographer) First Black Prima Ballerina (MET, 1951-54); Principal Dancer - Musical Productions (LA, 1940); Concert - Las Palmas Theatre (LA, 1948); Principal Dancer in OUT OF THIS WORLD (1950-51).

*COOK, ANNA (PANKEY) (b. d.) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Park Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/13/06; RUFUS RASTUS - Sophronia, American Theatre, Q. 1/29/06; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Martha Jones, Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q. 8/6/07.

COOKE, MILLIE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1921.

COOPER, ETTA (b. 1873 d. 1966) Performed an act with her husband John W. Cooper.

CRAWFORD, EVA (b. d.) Member of "Famous Colored Lady Sextette" (c.late 1800s).

CRAWFORD, ROSETTA (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39.

**CROSBY, OMA (b. d.)

CURTIS, LOUISE (b. d.) Member of "Famous Lady Sextette" (c.late 1800s).

CUTLER, GENEVA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1921.

DANDRIDGE, ETTA (b. d.) SWINGIN' THE DREAM - Third Pixie, Center Theatre, NYC, Q 11/29/39.

DANDRIDGE, VIVIAN (b. d.) SWINGIN' THE DREAM - First Pixie, Center Theatre, NYC, Q 11/29/39.

DANDRIDGE, DOROTHY (b. 11/1923 d. 9/8/65) SWINGIN' THE DREAM - Second Pixie, Center Theatre, NYC, Q 11/29/39; JUMP FOR JOY (LA, 1941); SHOW BOAT - Julie (Burlingame, CA, 1964). Autobiography: Dorothy Dandridge & Earl Conrad, EVERYTHING AND NOTHING: THE DOROTHY DANDRIDGE TRAGEDY - Abelard-Schuman Ltd, 1970; Biography: Earl Mills, DOROTHY DANDRIDGE: A PORTRAIT IN BLACK - Hollywood House, 1970; Agan Patrick, THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE LOVE GODDESS (DOROTHY DANDRIDGE) - Pinnacle Books, 1979.

DANDRIDGE, RUBY (b. 3/3/04 d.) (Mother of Dorothy Dandridge) SHOW BOAT; HIT THE DECK; THE ROSARY; NOT A MAN IN THE HOUSE.

DARRELL, EMILY (b. d.) LATE FOR REHEARSAL - Keith's, Toledo, OH, Q 3/16/20.

DAVIS, MISS (b. d.) TOM & JERRY - Kate, The African Co., NYC (c.1821).

*DAVIS, BELLE (b. d.) ORIENTAL AMERICA (1896); THE ORIGIN OF THE CAKE WALK, or CLORINDY - The Casino Roof Garden, NYC, Q 1898.

DAVIS, CLARA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

DAVIS, ELLABELLE (b. 3/17/07 d.) (Concert Singer)
Town Hall, NYC - Debut (1942); TEATRO GRAN REX - Buenos
Aires (1946); Carnegie Hall, NYC (1948).

DAVIS, EVELYN (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN -
Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

DAVIS, MAGGIE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Florinda,
Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898; ABYSSINIA
- Serina, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/20/06; BANDANA
LAND - Julia Smothers, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08;
MR. LODE OF KOAL - Diano, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q
11/1/09, 40 performances.

**DAY, ANITA (b. d.)

*DAY, CORITA (b. d.) RUFUS RASTUS - Selina Giltedge,
American Theatre, Q 1/29/06; THE OYSTERMAN - Angelea
Gailiard, Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q 11/23/07.

*DAY, IDA (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Babe Brown,
Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08, 89 performances;
MR. LODE OF KOAL - Discretia, Majestic Theatre, NYC,
Q 11/1/09, 40 performances.

**DAY, JENNY (b. d.)

*DEAN, DORA (b. d. 12/13/49) THE CREOLE SHOW - Show
Girl (1890). Song "Dora Dean" (1896) written and popu-
larized by Bert Williams and George Walker as a tribute
to her beauty. Teamed with husband Charles Johnson.
They were cakewalkers who headlined here and abroad.

DEAN, VIOLA (b. d.) BRAIN SWEAT - Lucy, Longacre
Theatre, Q 4/5/34; MACBETH - First Page Boy, Lafayette
Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36.

*DEAS, BLANCHE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic
Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09; THE RIDER OF DREAMS - Lucy
Sparrow, Garden Theatre, NYC, Q 4/5/17 (Earliest
serious play presented on the legitimate stage in
which Black actresses appeared); GRANNY MAUMEE - Sapphire,
Garden Theatre, NYC, Q 4/5/17.

*DEAS, ELLA (b. d.) THE OYSTERMAN - Belle Cown,
Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q 11/23/07, 8 performances.

*DELK, REBECCA (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Lilly White,

Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09, 32 performances.

**DESMOND, CLEO (b. d.) ROANOKE - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/2/16; AT BAY - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 9/1916. She became a leading actress with the Lafayette Players and remained with the company for 15 years.

*DE WOLF SISTERS, SADIE (b. d.) & ROSA (b. d. 5/23/17) (Concert Singers, soprano & contralto, 1880s) Born in Charlotte, NC. They moved to Boston where they were heard in Sunday night concerts and as members of "Walker's Quintet." They performed on the vaudeville circuit for 2 years before joining THE CREOLE SHOW in 1890.

DICK, OCTAVIA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

DICKSON, ALMA (b. d.) MACBETH - The Duchess, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/9/36.

*DILL, MOLLIE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Mrs. Fannie Brown, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/4/1898, 8 performances; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Park Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/13/06; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Dilsey Lumpkins, Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q. 8/6/07; THE RED MOON - Amanda Gibson, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

DIXON, ALICE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

DIXON, ELIZABETH (b. d.) NOAH - Aida.

DOWDY, HELEN (b. d.) (Singer/Actress) SCARLET SISTER MAY - Debut (1930); RHAPSODY IN BLACK (1931); PORGY & BESS - Lily, Strawberry Woman, Alvin Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/10/35; MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Willie May, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39; CABIN IN THE SKY (1940); PORGY & BESS - Strawberry Woman (1942, 1953); RUN LITTLE CHILLUN (1943); TROPICAL REVUE (1943-44); MEMPHIS BOUND (1945); TOBACCO ROAD (Black cast); SHOW BOAT - Queenie (1946); FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS (1952); BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA (1954); MRS. PATTERSON (1954); KISS ME, KATE; SHOW BOAT - Jones Beach Marine Theatre (1956, 1957).

*DOWSON, ELLA (b. d.) DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third

Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 12/13/1897.

DRAYTON, ETHEL (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36.

DUNCAN, INA (b. d.) BLACK RHYTHM - Wardrobe Sal, The Comedy Theatre, NYC, Q 12/19/36; HOT CHOCOLATES - Dancer.

DUNHAM, KATHERINE (b. d.) (Dancer/Choreographer) PINS & NEEDLES (1939); CABIN IN THE SKY - Georgia Brown (1940); TROPICS & LE JAZZ HOT (1940); TROPICAL REVUE (1943-44); Appeared at Hollywood Bowl (1943-44); CARIB SONG (1945); Choreographed WINDY CITY (1946); BAL NEGRE (1946); NEW TROPICAL REVUE (London/Paris, 1948); BAMBODIE (1962); Choreographed AIDA - MET, NYC (1963); CABIN IN THE SKY - Scarlet Woman. Published Works: JOURNEY TO ACCOMPONG (1949); DANCES OF HAITI (1949, 1959); TOUCH OF INNOCENCE (1959, 1960); contributed stories and articles to ESQUIRE; MADEMOISELLE; SHOW; ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE; ANTHROPOLOGY OF AMERICAN NEGRO.

DYSON, ZITA (b. d.) RACHEL - Mrs. Mary Loving, Myrtilla Miner Normal School, Washington, D.C., Q 3/3/16. Later produced at the Neighborhood Playhouse in NYC and in Cambridge, MA.

ELL, CHRISTINE (b. d.) THE EMPEROR JONES - Native Woman, Provincetown Players, NYC, Q 11/3/20.

ELLINGTON, IRENE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

ELLIS, EVELYN (b. 1894 d. 1958) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918; OTHELLO - Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1919); ROSEANNE (1923); GOAT ALLEY (1927); PORGY - Bess (1927); MEEK MOSES - Princess Theatre, NYC (1928); SENTINELS (1931); NATIVE SON (1941); DEEP ARE THE ROOTS (1945); BLUE HOLIDAY (1945); TOBACCO ROAD (Black cast, 1950); THE ROYAL FAMILY - City Center, NYC (1951); TOUCHSTONE (1953); SUPPER FOR THE DEAD (Q.B., 1954).

*ELLIS, JESSIE (b. d.) MR. LODGE OF KOAL - Oser, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 11/1/09, 40 performances.

ELMORE, IRENE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

ELZY, RUBY (b. d.) PORGY AND BESS - Serena, Alvin Theatre, NYC, Q 10/10/35.

EMANUEL, ELLA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

*EMERSON, MAMIE (b. d.) RUFUS RASTUS - Mandy Jones, America Theatre, NYC, Q 1/29/06.

ENGLISH, GENORA (b. d.) SWING IT - Mame, Adelphi Theatre, NYC, Q 7/22/37.

FAMBRO, FRANKIE (b. d.) THE SWING MIKADO - Pitti-Sing, New York Theatre, NYC, Q 3/1/39.

FLOWERS, MADAME (b. d.) "'The Bronze Melba,' whose voice, when she sang in Madison Square Garden, prompted newspaper critics to report that they never heard a voice so strong and yet so sweet. One of them even wrote that he believed her voice could be heard on Tenth Avenue." (Fletcher, 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business, 67.) J.W. Gorman's ALABAMA TROUBADOURS - the largest Summer park show, featuring Sam Lucas and a cast of 40 (1901).

*FLOWERS, MAMIE (b. d.) Cake walk dancer - Member of Bob Cole's "All Star Stock Co."

FOOT, MISS (b. d.) The African Company. TOM & JERRY - Sue, NYC, Q 6/7/c.1823

*FORSYNE, "DIMINUTIVE IDA 'TOPSY' HUBBARD" (b. 1883 d.) Had been in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN and the name stuck. Member of Black Patti's Troubadours (1902); member of Abbie Mitchell's MEMPHIS STUDENTS (1905); a successful dancer, she starred at the Olympia in Paris, the Palace in England, and Schumann Circus in Berlin. Lived in Russia for 10 years.

*FORSTER, JEANETTE (b. d.) "Chocolate Drop Venus." One of the chorus girls in Williams and Walker Co. Had legendary affair with George Walker.

FRANCESCO, ISABELLE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1921.

*FREEMAN, ALICE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/14/1898; A TRIP TO

COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

FREEMAN, BEE (b. d.) ("The Sepia Mae West") SHUFFLE ALONG (1921); LIZA (1922); RUNNIN' WILD (1923); MALINDA (1929); OL' MAN SATAN (1932); ANNA LUCASTA (1944).

*FREEMAN, CARLOTTA (b. d.) Appeared in the first production of Anita Bush's company, THE GIRL AT THE FORT - Lincoln Theatre, NYC, Q 11/15/15; NEW YORK AFTER DARK - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 1/20/16; THE OCTOROON - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 1/10/16.

*FREEMAN, CLARA (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Flotinda, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/14/1898, 8 performances.

**FREEMAN, ELIZABETH (b. d.)

*FREEMAN, PAULINE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Fannie Brown, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/14/1898; A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

FRENCH, HILDA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36; MACBETH - Second Page Boy, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36.

FRIERSON, ESSIE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

*FULLER, EVA (b. d.)

*GASTON, LAVINIA (b. d.) Featured with Richard Covers in the cake walk in IN DAHOMEY (1903).

*GEE, LOTTIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09; Featured Singer 1920s; SHUFFLE ALONG - Starring role (1921); CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Angelina Brown, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24. She performed in China as part of a vaudeville trio during the 1930s.

GENTRY, MINNIE (. 12/2/15 d.) Member of Karamu Players, Cleveland, OH (1931-60); THE BLACKS (Q.B., 1961); PURLIE VICTORIOUS - Pennsylvania (1962); A RAISIN IN THE SUN - Ohio State Univ. (1963); THE BLACKS - Washington, D.C. (1964); THE AMEN CORNER - European Tour (1965); WEDDING BAND - Ann Arbor, MI (1966);

JUNE BUG GRADUATES TONIGHT (Q.B., 1967); BLACK QUARTET (Q.B., 1969-70); WHO'S GOT HIS OWN - Center Stage, Baltimore, MD (1970); BLACK GIRL (Q.B., 1971); AIN'T SUPPOSED TO DIE... (1971); SUNSHINE BOYS (1972); GOD'S FAVORITE - Mady, Summer Stock (1975); ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS (1975); LIVIN' FAT (NEC, 1976); THE MAN IN THE FAMILY - Albany, NY (1977).

GILBERT, EMMA (b. d.) GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN - Deborah, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

GILBERT, MERCEDES (b. d.) (Actress/Playwright) HOW COME, LAWD? - Mom, 49th Street Theatre, NYC, Q 9/30/37.

**GILLIAM, LILLIAN (b. d.)

*GILLIAN, BESSIE (b. d.) Black Patti's DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown (5/23/c.1900).

**GILLIS, CLAIRE (b. d.)

GIRVIN, VIRGINIA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36; CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36; MACBETH - The Nurse, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36; OUT OF MY HOUSE (1942); A LONG WAY FROM HOME (1948).

GIVENS, RUTH (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

*GLENN, NETTIE (b. d.) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Virginia, Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q 8/6/07, 15 performances.

GODFREY, PAULINE (b. d.) THE CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Sammy, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24.

**GOINS, IDA (b. d.)

*GOMEZ, GEORGIA (b. d.) MR. LODGE OF KOAL - Kinklets, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 11/1/09.

GONZOLAS, RONNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

GOODNER, LILLIAN (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1920.

GOODWIN, MARY (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36; CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

**GORGAS, ALICE (b. d.)

***GRADY, LOTTIE (b. d.) A member of the Pekin Theatre in Chicago; Co-starred with Bert Williams in MR. LODGE OF KOAL - Hysteria, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/1/09; SIMON THE CYRENIAN - Acte, Madison Square Garden Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/5/17.

GRANERT, CHARLOTTE (b. d.) THE EMPEROR JONES - Spectator, Provincetown Players, NYC, Q. 11/3/20.

GRANT, ANITA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

GRAY, ANNE (b. d.) HONEYMOON - Zamora. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Boston, MA, Chapman Hall on 3/2/1858.

*GRAY, LILLIAN (b. d.) DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/13/1897. Feature: steamboat race on the Mississippi.

GRAY, LOUISA NELL (b. d.) HUNCHBACK - Julia. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Boston, MA, Chapman Hall on 3/2/1858.

GREELEY, AURORA (b. d.) Broomfield and Greeley dance team. They performed in Shanghai in 1933.

*GREEN, CORA (b. d.) (Blues Singer) GREAT DAY (1929).

*GREEN, SARAH (b. d.) Black Patti's DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown (5/23/c.1900).

GREENFIELD, ELIZABETH TAYLOR (b. 1809 d. 1876) (1850s Concert Singer) First Black American singer to win more than local recognition. Sang at a command performance for Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace in 1853.

*GUIGESSE, ADA (b. d.) ABYSSINIA - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/20/06.

GUY, RACHEL (b. d.) RACHEL - Rachel, Myrtilla Miner Normal School, Washington, D.C., Q 3/3/16.

*HACKNEY, PAULINE (b. d.) RUFUS RASTUS - Balmoral, American Theatre, NYC, Q 1/29/06; THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/31/09.

HALL, ADELAIDE (b. 10/20/10 d.) (Actress/Singer) Featured singer during the 1920s; SHUFFLE ALONG (1921); RUNNIN' WILD (1923); CHOCOLATE DANDIES (1924); BLACKBIRDS OF 1928; Co-starred with Bill Robinson in BROWN BUDDIES (1930); THE SUN NEVER SETS - Fiteima, London (1938); KISS ME, KATE - Hattie, London (1951); LOVE FROM JUDY - London (1952); SOMEONE TO TALK TO - London (1956); GRANDMA OBEAH IN JAMAICA (1957); JANIE JACKSON - London (1968); PAUL ROBESON ANNIVERSARY CONCERT - Royal Festive Hall, London (1968).

**HALL, IRIS (b. d.)

HALL, JOSEPHINE (b. d.) Featured Singer during the 1920s.

HALL, JUANITA (b. 11/6/02 d. 1968) (Actress/Singer) SHOWBOAT (1928); THE GREEN PASTURES (1930); THE PIRATE - Mango Seller (1942); SING OUT SWEET LAND (1944); DEEP ARE THE ROOTS (1945); THE SECRET ROOM (1945); ST. LOUIS WOMAN - Leah (1946); MR. PEEBLES AND MR. HOOKER (1946); STREET SCENE (1947); SS GLENCAIRN - City Center (1948); MOON OF THE CARIBBEES - City Center (1948); SOUTH PACIFIC - Bloody Mary (1949); SINGING THE BLUES - Apollo (1953); HOUSE OF FLOWERS - Madame Tango (1954); THE PONDER HEART (1956); THE FLOWER DRUM SONG - Madame Liang (1958, Tour - 1960); MARDI GRAS - Jones Beach.

HALL, KATE (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39.

HALL, MAMIE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1922.

HALSEY, LANA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36; HAITI - Aimee, Lafayette Players, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

**HANSBROCK, ADA (b. d.)

**HARPER, LUCILLE (b. d.)

HARRIS, EDNA MAE (b. 1914 d.) GREEN PASUTRES - Zebra (1930, Revival, 1935); A LONG WAY FROM HOME (1938); Appeared at Apollo (1939); GOOD NEIGHBOR (1941); RUN LITTLE CHILLUN (1943).

*HARRIS, ESTELLA (STELLA) (b. d. 1933) Featured contralto in a vaudeville act with songwriter/pianist W. Benton Overstreet (1916). "She was regarded by some as 'the greatest natural rag-song shouter on the American Stage.'" Overstreet's "Jazzdance," sung by Harris, reputed to have been used by more vaudeville acts than any other song ever published. (Southern, Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians, 296.)

**HARRIS, LOTTIE (b. d.)

*HARRIS, MATTIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

HARRISON, MARION (b. d.) BLACKBIRDS OF 1930. Father, Richard B. Harrison, played Lord in GREEN PASTURES. She resigned from show because her father thought the dance too spicy.

*HART, ELIZABETH, (b. d.) HIS HONOR THE BARBER - Lily White, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/8/11, 8 performances.

*HARVEY, GEORGETTE (b. 1833 d. 2/17/52) PORGY - Maria (1927); STEVEDORE - Bennie (1934); PORGY AND BESS - Maria, Alvin Theatre, NYC, 10/10/35; MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Mamba, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39; OL' MAN SATAN - Mammy, Forrest Theatre (1930s).

HEATHMAN, JOSEPHINE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southern, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36; CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron/Singer, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

HEGAMIN, LUCILLE (b. d.) Blues Shouter, 1920s.

HEMMINGWAY, LEONA (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron/Singer, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

HEMSLEY, ESTELLE (b. 5/5/1887 d.) DARKTOWN FOLLIES;

TOBACCO ROAD; FRIMBO; TWO BLIND MICE; CONJUR MAN DIES - Aramintha Snead, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36; MACBETH - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/9/36; TURPENTINE; HAITI - Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1938); HARVEY (1944-45); DETECTIVE STORY (1949); TAKE A GIANT STEP - Grandmother (1953); MRS. PATTERSON (1954); TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE (1956).

*HENRY, ORA (b. d.) THE OYSTER MAN - Zamazi, Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/23/07, 8 performances.

HICKS, MISS (b. d.) KING SHOTAWAY - Queen Margaretta, The African Co., NYC, Q. 6/20/1823; OBI: OR, THREE FINGER' D JACK - Planter's Wife, The African Co., NYC, Q. 6/7/c.1823.

HILL, BERTHA "CHIPPIE" (b. d.) (Singer) Known for "Trouble in Mind" recording.

HILL, RUBY (b. d.) (Actress/Singer) Born in Danville, VA. Appeared at State Theatre (1939); ST. LOUIS WOMAN (Debut-Bway, 1946); ANNA LUCASTA (1946).

*HILLMAN, JENNIE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Dudinda, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/4/1898, 8 performances.

*HINES, FLORENCE (b. d.) Popular male impersonator know as the "American Vesta Tilley." THE CREOLE SHOW - Interlocutor (1890); DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/13/1897; RABBIT FOOT - with Tom Fletcher, Al Reeves Theatre, Brooklyn, NY (c.1900).

HITE, MATTIE (b. d.) (Blues Shouter, 1920s).

HODGES, LENORE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1925.

*HOLIDAY, GRACE (b. d.)

HOLMES, MARY (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

HOLMES, MOZELLE (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Girl, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

*HOPKINS, HATTIE (b. d.) ABYSSINIA - Majestic

Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/20/06; MR. LOBE OF KOAL - Hoola, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 11/1/09, 40 performances.

HORNE, LENA (b. 6/30/17) (Actress/Singer) DANCE WITH YOUR GODS (Debut, 1934); LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/11/39; JAMAICA; LENA HORNE: THE LADY AND HER MUSIC - One Woman Show, Netherlander Theatre, NYC (1981). Films: "CABIN IN THE SKY; "STORMY WEATHER"; "THE WIZ" - Glinda (1978).

HOWARD, HALLIE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

HOWARD, LOUISA (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/11/39.

**HUBBARD, IVY (b. d.)

HUGHES, REVELLA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1925.

*HUNSTER, GLADYS (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/4/1898; A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q. 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

HUNT, NANCY (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

HUNTER, ALBERTA (b. 1895 d. 10/17/84) Successful song writer of the Blues era. CHANGE YOUR LUCK (1930); THE CHERRY LAND FOLLIES (1930); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Dolly, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39. Sang at the Cookery in NYC at the age of 83.

*HUNTER, ZENNIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

*HYERS SISTERS, ANNA MADAH (b. 1855 d.) & EMMA LOUISE (b. 1857 d.) Classically trained concert singers from California who had their own company, "The Hyers Sisters Musical Company, Starring Sam Lucas." Wrote PRINCESS ORELIA OF MADAGASCAR (1877) and OUT OF BONDAGE with Joseph Bradford (scripts located at Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

JACKSON, ISABELLA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

JACKSON, ZAI DEE W. (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1925; RANG TANG (1927).

JARBORO, CATERINA (b. d.) (Opera Singer) SHUFFLE ALONG - Chorus ("Diva-to-be," 1921); RUNNIN' WILD (1923); PUCCINI (Milan, 1930); Hippodrome (1933, 1934); BAM (NYC, 1939); Town Hall (NYC, 1942); Carnegie Hall (NYC, 1944).

JEANETTE, GERTRUDE (b. 11/28/18) (Actress/Playwright, Director, Producer) LOST IN THE STARS (Bway, 1949); 417 (Q.B.); THE LONG DREAM (Bway, 1960); DEEP ARE THE ROOTS (Q.B. 1960); MOON ON A RAINBOW SHAWL (Q.B., 1962); NOBODY LOVES AN ALBATROSS (Bway, 1963); THE AMEN CORNER (Bway, 1965; LA, London); TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK (Q.B., 1969); THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH (Bway, 1975); VIEUX CARRIE (1977). Wrote: THIS WAY FORWARD (Q.B., 1951); A BOLT FROM THE BLUE (1952); LIGHT IN THE CELLAR (Q.B., 1975). Directed YELLOW PILLOW - Harlem Performance Center, NYC (1976). Founder/Artistic Director/Drama Instructor -- H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players (NYC, 1976).

JESSYE, EVA (b. 1/20/1895 d.) (Conductor/Composer) PORGY AND BESS (Choral Director for all productions from 1935 to 1958); MEMPHIS BOUND (1945); PARADISE LOST AND REGAINED; LOST IN THE STARS; FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS (1952).

JOHNSON, MISS (b. d.) TOM AND JERRY - Jane, The African Co., NYC, Q. 6/7/c.1823.

****JOHNSON, ADELE** (b. d.)

***JOHNSON, JUBE** (b. d.) (Classical Singer) ORIENTAL AMERICA (1896).

JOHNSON, ORA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1928.

JOHNSON, TRI XIE (b. d.) Member of "Famous Colored Lady Sextette," (c. late 1800s).

***JONES, HAZEL** (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

***JONES, KATIE** (b. d.) ABYSSINIA - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/20/06; BANDANA LAND - Becky White, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/3/08, 89 performances; MR. LODGE

OF KOAL - Giddina, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 11/1/09.

JONES, MAUDE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1920.

*JONES, SISSIRETTA (b. 1869 d. 1933) (Classical Singer) From 1896 to 1915 she headed "Black Patti's Troubadours," the first important Black musical organization to tour both the North and the South successfully.

JONES, VENZUELA (b. d.) SAVAGE RHYTHM (1932).

JORDAN, IDA (MRS. LOUIE JORDON) (b. 1902 d.) (Blues Singer) FLORIDA BLOSSOM MINSTRELS (1917); Performed with Al Gains Variety Show (1920s); Founding member of the Negro Actors Guild (1932); Toured the North and South with own band during the 1940s; Performed in Medicine Shows during the 1940s; Singing waitress in Philadelphia with Ola Bailly (Pearl Bailly's sister); Contemporary of Anita Bush and Alberta Hunter; Sang with Cab Calloway's band.

KARAM, ELENA (b. d.) HAITI - Odetta, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

**KEMP, MAE (b. d.)

*KERSANDS, LOUISE (b. d.) Wife of minstrel "Big Mouth" Billy. He and wife put together a sketch for vaudeville, singing, dancing, and recitations.

KING, LULU (b. d.) HAITI - Third Woman, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

KING, MARIAN (b. d.) BURNING OF THE MORTGAGE - One of the sisters, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

KING, ROSALIE (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39; PORGY AND BESS (1935, 1942); JERICHO-JIM CROW (1964).

KING, ZOLA (b. d.) MACBETH - Third Witch, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36; THE CASE OF PHILIP LAWRENCE (1937); HAITI - Daughter, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

LA REDD, CORA (b. d.) Danced with Avon Long at

the Cotton Club in Harlem, NYC.

LANE, ANNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

*LANGE, MAY (b. d.)

LANSING, MISS (b. d.) Sang in "Opera" following African Co. benefit for Mr. Brown, NYC. Performed on 20-21 June 1823.

LASHLEY, ELLA MAE (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

LAVATT, MISS (b. d.) KING SHOTAWAY - Queen Caroline, The African Co., NYC, Q. 6/20/1823.

LAWRENCE, CATHERINE (b. d.) HAITI - Pauline, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/2/38.

LE GON, JENI (b. d.) BLACK RHYTHM - Jenny, The Comedy Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/19/36; EARLY TO BED (1943).

LE NOIRE, ROSETTA (b. 8/8/11) MACBETH - Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1936); BOSSA MONNA (1936); BLUEBIRD (1937); THE HOT MIKADO - Peep Bo, Broadhurst Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/23/39; HEAD OF THE FAMILY - Westport Summer Theatre (1941); YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU (USO Tour, 1943); JANIE (Tour, 1943-44); DECISION & THREE'S A FAMILY - Subway Circuit (1944); ANNA LUCASTA - Stella (1944); Scenes from THE EASIEST WAY - Annie, ANTA (1949); KISS ME, KATE - Dallas Summer Theatre (1950); FOUR TWELVES ARE 48 (1951); O DISTANT LAND - ELT (1952); CARMEN JONES - Westport Summer Theatre (1952); SUPPER FOR THE DEAD (Q.B., 1954); FINIAN'S RAINBOW - City Center (1955); THE WHITE DEVIL (Q.B., 1955); MISTER JOHNSON (1956); CEREMONIES OF INNOCENCE - ANTA (1956); TAKE A GIANT STEP - Christine (Q.B., 1956); LOST IN THE STARS - City Center (1958); DESTROY RIDES AGAIN (1959); THE BIBLE SALEMAN & THE OLDEST TRICK IN THE WORLD (Q.B., 1961); SOUTH PACIFIC - Bloody Mary - City Center (1961); CLANDESTINE ON THE MORNING LINE (Q.B., 1961); SOPHIE (1963); TAMBOURINES TO GLORY (Q.B., 1963); CABIN IN THE SKY - Petunia Jackson (Q.B., 1964); BLUES FOR MR. CHARLIE (1964); GREAT INDOORS; SHOW BOAT - Queenie, LCR (1966); MARCHING - Johnny; THE NAME OF THE GAME - Florida (1967); LOST IN THE STARS - Mrs. Kumalo (1972); LADY DAY - Mrs. Holiday

(O. B., 1972); STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE - LCR (1973); THE SUNSHINE BOYS - Nurse (1973); GOD'S FAVORITE (1974); Founder/Artist Director - AMAS Repertory Co., NYC; Produced BUBBLING BROWN SUGAR - AMAS (1975); THE ROYAL FAMILY (1976). Films: "MOSCOW ON THE HUDSON"; "LILLY IN LOVE"; "BREWSTER'S MILLIONS". Television: Nell Carter's mother on "GIMME A BREAK;" Leola Forbes on "Amen." Awards: Mary McCleod Bethune Award from the National Council of Negro Women; first annual Rosetta LeNoire Award, established by Actor's Equity Association to award individuals or organizations who encourage the concept of non-traditional casting.

LENOX, SYBIL (b. d.) HONEYMOON - Julian. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on 3/2/1858.

*LEWIS, NETTIE (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - Buck Dancer/A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q. 5/23/c.1900.

***LUCAS, MARIE (b. c.1880s d. 4/26?/47) (Society-orchestra leader/Arranger/Musician) The daughter of Carrie and Sam Lucas, she received musical training from her parents, the Boston Conservatory, and schools in Nottingham, England. She began her professional career in The Red Moon (1909), which featured her father. She began to attract wide attention in 1915 as the leader of the Ladies Orchestra at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem. A pianist and trombone player, Lucas led a male dance band which played at the Howard Theatre in Washington, D. C. During the 1930s, she toured with another all-male group, the Merry Makers.

*LUCAS, MRS. SAM (CARRIE) (b. d.) THE CREOLE SHOW (1890); DARKEST AMERICA - The People's Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/13/1897.

LYNCH, ASELEAN (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

*MACINTOSH, HATTIE (MCINTOSH) (b. d. 12/17/19) THE CREOLE SHOW (1894-95); BLACK PATTI'S TROUBADOURS (1896); THE OCTOROCN (1896); KING RASTUS; Toured in THE KING OF BIVARID (1900); SONS OF HAM - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q. 3/3/02, 8 performances; IN DAHOMEY - Cecilia Lightfoot, New York Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/18/03; ABYSSINIA - Callie Parker, Majestic Theatre, NYC, 2/20/06, 31

performances; BANDANA LAND - Sophie Simmons, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/08, 89 performances; MR. LODE OF KOAL (1909).

*MCCLAIN, CORDELIA (b. d.) Performed in a vaudeville act with her husband Billy.

MCCLENDON, ROSE (b. 1885 d. 1936) JUSTICE (1916); ROSEANNE (1924); DEEP RIVER (1926); "Dramatis Personae: Rose McClendon," CRISIS 34 (Apr 1927): 55, 66-67; IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM - Goldie Mister, Provincetown Playhouse, NYC, Q. 12/30/26; EARTH (1927); PORGY - Serena (1927); THE HOUSE OF CONNELLY (1931); BLACK SOULS (1932); BRAIN SWEAT - Carrie, Longacre Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/5/34; MULATTO (1935); PANIC (1935); NEVER NO MORE - Mother (1930s); ROLL, SWEET CHARIOT; Wrote TAXI FARE.

MCDANIEL, HATTIE (b. 6/10/1895 d. 10/25/52) ("The Colored Sophie Tucker," "The Female Bert Williams") Member of Prof. George Morrison's Colored Orchestra - Pantages Circuit (1924-25); Numerous films from 1930-49; First Black to receive an Oscar - Best Performance supporting role in "GONE WITH THE WIND" (1940).

MCDONELL, EFFIE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36.

MC GEE, MARIE (b. d.) Member of "Famous Colored Lady Sextette" (c. late 1800s).

MC GINTRY AND FREEMAN (b. d.) Female comedy act.

MCKINNEY, NINA MAE (b. 1913 d. 5/3/67) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1928; BALLYHOO OF 1932; GOOD NEIGHBOR (1941); RAIN - Sadie Thompson, Brooklyn, NY (1951). Film: Star of "HALLELUJAH."

MCQUEEN, BUTTERFLY (b. 1/8/11) BROTHER RAT (1937); BROWN SUGAR (1937); WHAT A LIFE (1938); SWINGIN' THE DREAM - Puck, City Center, NYC, Q. 11/29/39; HARVEY (Black cast tour, 1946); ONE WOMAN SHOW - Carnegie Hall, NYC (1951); THE WORLD'S MY OYSTER (Q.B., 1956); SCHOOL FOR WIVES (1957); ATHENIAN TOUCH (Q.B., 1964); CURLEY MCDIMPLE (Q.B., 1968); BUTTERFLY & FRIENDS (Q.B., 1969); THREE MEN ON A HORSE (1969); Concert - Alice Tully Hall, NYC (1973); THE WIZ (Pre-Bway, 1975); PRISSY IN PERSON - Harlem, NYC (1975); TOWN

HALL, NYC (5:45 Interlude Series, 1976). Films: "GONE WITH THE WIND" (1940); "AMAZING GRACE" (1974).

MABLEY, JACKIE "MOMS" (b. 3/19/1897 d. 5/23/75) (Comedienne/Concert & Recording Artist) FAST AND FURIOUS (1931); BLACKBERRIES OF 1932; SWINGIN' THE DREAM - Prologue & Quincy, City Center, NYC, Q. 11/29/39. Films: Star - "AMAZING GRACE" (1974).

*MACKEY, ALICE (b. d.) RUFUS RASTUS - Frederica, American Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/29/06.

MACY, WANDA (b. d.) MACBETH - Daughter of Macduff, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/9/36.

MALZE, TESSIE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

MALONE, ETHEL (b. d.) Member of "Famous Colored Lady Sextette" (c. late 1800s).

MARSHALL, ASSOTTA (b. d.) PORGY AND BESS (1935, 1942); SWEET RIVER (1936); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39; SHOW BOAT (1946, 1948).

MARSHALL, FREDYE (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

*MARSHALL, LEONA (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

MARTIN, HELEN (DOROTHY) (b. 7/28/? d.) STEVEDORE - ELT; HITS, BITS AND SKITS (1940); NATIVE SON (Bway debut, 1941); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Subway Circuit (1941); THREE'S A FAMILY - ANT (1943); CHICKEN EVERY SUNDAY (Stock, 1944); DEEP ARE THE ROOTS - Honey Turner (1945, London, 1947); ON STRIVER'S ROW - ANT (1946); THE LITTLE FOXES (Stock); THE ROYAL FAMILY (Stock, 1951); THE PETRIFIED FOREST (Stock, 1951); TAKE A GIANT STEP - Poppy (1953); MAJOR BARBARA (Q.B., 1954); YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU - Reba (Tour, 1954-55); JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK (Q.B., 1955); ANNIVERSARY WALTZ (Stock, 1955); KING OF HEARTS (Stock, 1956); A LAND BEYOND THE RIVER (1957); FEVER OF LIFE (1957); THE BALLAD OF JAZZ (Q.B., 1959); THE LONG DREAM (1960); PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT (1960); THE BLACKS - Felicity (Q.B., 1961); PURLIE VICTORIOUS - Missy (1961); CRITICS CHOICE

(Stock, 1962); MY MOTHER, MY FATHER AND ME (1963); THE BLACKS - Bobo (Q.B., 1963); THE AMEN CORNER (1964); THE CAT AND THE CANARY (Q.B.); PURLIE (1970); RAISIN (1973).

MARTIN, JACQUELINE (GHANT) (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Landlady, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36; MOON OF THE CARIBBEES - Bella, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 10/29/37; THE LONG VOYAGE HOME - Mag, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 10/29/37; HAITI - First Woman, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

MATHEWS, RUTH FOSTER (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

*MEREDITH SISTERS (b. d.)

MERRITT, THERESA (b. d.) CARMEN JONES - Frankie (Tour, 1943-45); OUR LAM (1947); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS (1953); Town Hall (Concert debut, 1961); SOUTH PACIFIC - City Center (1961); SHOW BOAT - City Center (1961); TAMBOURINES TO GLORY (Q.B., 1963); TRUMPETS OF THE LORD (Q.B. & European tour, 1965); F. JASMINE ADDAMS (Q.B.); FUNNY GIRL (1964); THE AMEN CORNER (European tour, 1965); HALLELUJAH BABY (1965); GOLDEN BOY (1968); FIVE ON THE BLACK HAND SIDE (1970); DON'T PLAY US CHEAP (1972); THE CRUCIBLE - City Center; GONE WITH THE WIND - Mammy (Musical - LA, 1974); THE WIZ (1976). Television: Star - "THAT'S MY MAMA".

MILLER, ESTELLA (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Singer, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36.

MILLER, JOYCE (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTER - Lissa (as a child), Empire Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39.

MILLER, NORMA (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39; COTTON CLUB REVUE OF 1957.

*MILLS, FLORENCE (b. 1/25/1895 d. 1927) Began career as "Baby Florence Mills," a cakewalk champion at the age of 6. SONS OF HAM (1900); Member of Mills Trio (her sisters, c.1910); Member of the Tennessee Ten, a six-year vaudeville act; Member of Panama Four; SHUFFLE ALONG - Starring role (1921); PLANTATION REVUE - Lead (1922); FROM DOVER STREET TO DIXIE (1923); DIXIE TO BROADWAY (1924-25); BLACKBIRDS OF 1926 -

Starring role (NYC & London, 1926); Associated with song "I'm a Little Blackbird Looking for a Bluebird"; "Dramatis Personae: Florence Mills," CRISIS 34 (Sept 1927): 229, 248; "You're So Lovely...(Florence Mills)," CRISIS 74 (Oct 1967): 411.

MILNER, ETHEL (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

***MITCHELL, ABBIE (b. 9/25/1884 d. 3/16/60) Wife of composer/musician Will Marion Cook. THE ORIGIN OF THE CAKEWALK - Clorindy (1898); SONS OF HAM (1900); IN DAHOMEY - Pansy, New York Theatre, NYC, Q 2/13/03; THE SOUTHERNERS - New York Theatre, NYC, Q 5/23/04, 36 performances; MEMPHIS STUDENTS - Proctor's Theatre, NYC (1905) before touring Paris (Olympia Theatre), London (Palace Theatre), Schumann Circus in Berlin; BANDANA LAND - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08; THE RED MOON - Minnehaha, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09; CARMEN - Lead, Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1916); HELP WANTED - Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1916); TRAVIATA - Lead, Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1916); PAID IN FULL - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/1916; MADAM X - Leading role, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 9/18/16; FORTY-FIVE MINUTES FROM BROADWAY - Mary, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 10/1916; ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS - Mrs. Harris (1924); IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM - Muh Mack, Provincetown Playhouse, NYC, Q 12/30/26, 200 performances; COQUETTE (1927); HOUSE OF SHADOWS (1927); STEVEDORE - Bennie, Civic Repertory Theatre, NYC, Q 4/18/34; PORGY AND BESS - Clara (introduced "Summertime"), Alvin Theatre, NYC, Q 10/10/35; THE LITTLE FOXES - Addie (1939); ON WHITMAN AVENUE (1946).

MITCHELL, NELLIE BROWN (b. d.) (Concert Singer, 1870s)

MITCHELL, RENA (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Martha, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39.

*MONET, ALBERTA (b. d.) DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 12/13/1897.

MORRIS, FAY (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

*MORTON, EDNA (b. d.) DARKTOWN FOLLIES - Lafayette Theatre, NYC (1913-14); THE COMEDY OF ERRORS (1923).

MOSES, ETHEL (b. d.) ("The Negro Harlow") Leading lady in silent and sound Black films. DIXIE TO BROADWAY (1924-25); BLACKBIRDS (1926); SHOW BOAT (1927); KEEP SHUFFLIN' (1928).

MOTEN, ETTA (MRS. C. A. BARNETT) (b. d.) (Texan Contralto) FAST AND FURIOUS (1931); SUGAR HILL (1931); ZOMBIE (1932); Dubbed singing for Barbara Stanwyck in "LADIES OF THE BIG HOUSE" (1932); Rose to popularity in films "GOLD DIGGER OF 1933," "FLYING DOWN TO RIO," Dubbed singing for Ginger Rogers in "20 MILLION SWEET-HEARTS" (1934); PORGY AND BESS - Replaced Anne Brown as Bess (1944); LYSISTRATA - Leading role (1946).

*MURPHY, JEANETTA (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q. 5/23/c. 1900.

**MUSE, OPHELIA (b. d.)

MYERS, PAULINE (MEYERS) (b. d.) TRIAL BY FIRE (Blackfriars Guild); GROWING PAINS (Bway debut, 1933); KYKUNKOR (1934); PLUMES IN THE DUST (1936); THE WILLOW AND I (1942); THE NAKED GENIUS (1943); DEAR RUTH (1944); SISTER OAKS (1949); THE SON (1950); YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU (1951); TAKE A GIANT STEP (1953); ANNIVERSARY WALTZ (1954); THE WORLD OF MY AMERICA - One-woman show (Q. B., 1966).

*NORMAN, DORA COLE (b. d.) (Dancer) Directed the Colored Players Guild of NY in original plays (1921).

OFFLEY, HILDA (b. d.) OL' MAN SATAN (1932); WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Martha Ray Browne, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/2/36; THE LONG VOYAGE HOME - Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/29/37; ANDROCLES AND THE LION (1938); BIG WHITE FOG (1940).

**OLDEN, MAY (b. d.)

*OLIVER, BESSIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

OLIVER, LOUISA C. (b. d.) HONEY MOON - Volante. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on 3/2/1858; PERFECTION - Kate O'Brian. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on

3/2/1858.

*ORMES, ALBERTA (b. d.) HIS HONOR THE BARBER
- Ella Wheeler Wilson, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/8/11,
8 performances.

PARKS, CORA (b. d.) MALINDA (1929); SWING IT
- "Mom," Adelphi Theatre, NYC, Q 7/22/37.

PAUL, DOROTHY (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Empire
Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39.

*PERCAUD, HENRIETTA (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS
DAY - A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours,
Q 5/23/c.1900.

PERKINS, ALBERTA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN
- Tiny, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36; TURPENTINE
- Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 6/26/36; SWINGIN' THE
DREAM - Peaceful Pearl, Center Theatre, NYC, Q 11/29/39;
ANNA LUCASTA, 1944.

PERRY, MARGUERITE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN
- Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

PETERSON, OLGA (b. d.) THE PRODIGAL SON - Harlem
Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

PETERSON, MISS (b. d.) TOM & JERRY - Miss Tartar,
The African Theatre Co., NYC, Q 6/7/c.1823.

*PHILLIPS, MATTIE (b. d.)

PLATO BROADLEY, DESSERIA (b. d. 1/28/07) (Leading
Concert Singer during the 1890s.) First attracted
attention in 1891 as a prima donna mezzo soprano in
Signor A. Farini's Grande Creole and Colored Opera
and Concert Co. when she sang the role of Azucena
in Verdi's Il Trovatore at Union Square Theatre in
NYC. On 25 August 1893 she gain wide recognition when
she replaced Black Patti at a concert on Colored American
Day at the Chicago World's Fair. Joined operatic troupe
in ORIENTAL AMERICA (1896). (Southern, Biographical
Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians,
390.)

POINDEXTER, ROSE (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Carbarat
Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36; MOON OF

THE CARIBBEES - Pearl, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 10/29/37.

POPE, ETHEL (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1921.

PORTER, THELMA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

POSE, MILLY (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1922.

*POTTER, MARION (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 5/3/09.

PREER, EVELYN (b. 7/26/1896 d. 9/18/32) Appeared in the first Black silent film ("THE HOMESTEADER," 1917) directed and produced by Oscar Micheaux; Other films: (Leading Lady) "THE BRUTE"; "WITHIN OUR GATES"; "THE GUN SAULUS MYSTERY"; "BIRTHRIGHT"; "THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE"; "THE CONJURE WOMAN"; "DECEIT"; "THE SPIDER'S WEB"; "RAIN" (with Gloria Swanson); Joined Lafayette Players in 1920; SALOME - Lead, Lafayette Theatre (NFT), NYC, Q. 6/24/23; THE CHIP WOMAN'S FORTUNE - NFT (1923); THE COMEDY OF ERRORS (1923); THE WARNING (1924); LULU BELLE - Ruby Lee, Belasco Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/9/26; RANG TANG - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 6/11/27; PORGY; SCANDALS.

PRIMUS, PEARL (b. 11/29/19 d.) (Choreographer/Dancer) ("Queen of Black Dance") Appeared at YMHA (1943); A Dance Festival - Carnegie Hall (1943); Belasco Theatre - Bway Debut (1944); Roxy Theatre 1944); SHOW BOAT (1946); EMPEROR JONES (1946); CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL (1947); Assistant to director, MISTER JOHNSON (1956).

*PUGSLEY SISTERS (b. d.)

PURNELLO, ETHEL (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Maum Vina, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39.

RAHN, MURIEL (b. 1911 d. 8/8/61) (Singer/Actress) FINIAN'S RAINBOW; CARMEN JONES - Title role (alternating with Muriel Smith) (1943-44); THE BARRIER (1951); COME OF AGE - City Center (1952); THE IVORY BRANCH (Q.B., 1956); Musical Director - THE BELLS ARE RINGING - State Theatre of Frankfurt (1960).

RAINEY, MA (b. 4/26/1886 d. 12/22/39) (Blues Singer)
Featured in SMART SET "a colored tent show" (c.early
1900s).

*RAMSEY, ALICE (b. d.) DARKTOWN FOLLIES - Featured
singer who introduced "Rock Me in the Cradle of Love"
(1913-14).

RANDOLPH, AMANDA (b. 1902 d. 8/24/67) IN THE ALLEY;
JOY CRUISE; CHILI PEPPERS; DUSTY LANE; FALL FROLICS;
RADIO WAVES; THE CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Mandy Green,
Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24; THE MALE ANIMAL
(1940); HARLEM CALVALCADE (1942); THE WILLOW AND I
(1942).

*REX, ADA (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Majestic Theatre,
NYC, Q 2/3/08.

REYDE, GWENDOLYN (b. d.) THE HOT MI KADO - Yum-yum,
Broadhurst Theatre, NYC, Q 3/23/39.

*RHODES, MARGUERITE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN
- Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898; A TRIP TO
COONTOWN - Marinda, Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898,
8 performances.

RICHARDS, MARIE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1929.

RI CKS, SADIE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN -
Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

*RI NGGOLD, MURIEL (b. d.) THE OYSTER MAN - Matilda,
Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q 11/23/07, 8 performances;
BANDANA LAND - Cynthia, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q
2/3/08, 89 performances; RUFUS RASTUS - Snowflake,
American Theatre, NYC, Q 1/29/06.

ROAN, JUVIA (b. d.) (Opera Singer) A TRIP TO COONTOWN
- Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898, 8 performances.

ROBINSON, MARGUERITA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette
Players in 1929.

*ROBINSON, SADA (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN -
Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898; A TRIP TO
COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898, 8
performances.

ROGERS, HILDA (b. d.) MY MAGNOLIA (1926); HOW COME, LAWD? - Clorinda, 49th Street Theatre, NYC, Q 9/30/37.

*ROGERS, LAVINIA (b. d.) ABYSSINIA - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/20/06; BANDANA LAND - Sadie Thompkins, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08, 89 performances; MR. LOBE OF KOAL - Rubeena, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 11/1/09, 40 performances.

ROLEY, IDA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Southerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

ROSE, RACHEL MRS. (b. d.) FOUR SISTERS - Caroline. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on 3/2/1858.

*ROSS, EDITH (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39.

ROSS, PEARL (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

**RUFFIN, RUTH (b. d.)

RUSSELL, MAUDE (b. d.) (Featured Singer 1920s) BLACK RHYTHM - Laura, The Comedy Theatre, NYC, Q 12/19/36; MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Jane, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39.

*SALISBURY, LOUISE (b. d.) THE OYSTERMAN - Lala, Yorkville Theatre, NYC, Q 11/23/07, 8 performances.

SANFORD, ISABELL (b.) ON STRIVER'S ROW (ANT, 1946); PURLIE VICTORIOUS (1959); DARK OF THE MOON (ELT, 1960); THE BLACKS (Q.B., 1961); NOBODY LOVES AN ALBATROSS (1963); THE AMEN CORNER (1965); FUNNY GIRL (Tour, 1966); Television: Louise Jefferson on "THE JEFFERSONS."

SAUNDERS, GERTRUDE (b. d.) (Featured Singer, 1920s) SHUFFLE ALONG - Lead (taken over by Florence Mills in 1921); LIZA - Lead (1922); BLACKBERRIES OF 1932; RUN LITTLE CHILLUN (1943).

*SCOTT, MAGGIE (b. d.) (Singer) ORIENTAL AMERICA (1896).

SCOTTRAN, EDNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players

in 1920.

*SELIKA, MADAME MARIE (MRS. SAMPSON WILLIAMS) (b. c. 1849 d. 5/19/37) (Concert Singer, 1880s) Contemporary of Sissieretta Jones. Toured successfully throughout Europe. She taught at a music school in Harlem until 1935.

**SETTLE, CHARLOTTE (b. d.)

SHELTON, MAXINE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

*SHIPPER, JENNIE (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Clotinda, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898, 8 performances.

SHIPLEY, KATE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1920.

*SIMMS, BESSIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

SIMMS, HILDA (b. 4/15/18) THREE'S A FAMILY (ANT, 1943); ANNA LUCASTA - Title Role (Bway debut, 1944), Chicago (1945), London (1947); DESIRE CAUGHT BY THE TAIL - Bway/London (1950); THE GENTLE PEOPLE - Stella Goodman (1950); PERVANEH - Hassan, Cambridge (1951); THE COOL WORLD (1960); THE CAPTAIN'S PARADISE & BLACK MONDAY - Summer Stock (1961); LOVE LETTERS OF FAMOUS COURTESAN; One Woman Show (Tour, 1961); THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT (1970); TAMBOURINES TO GLORY - Laura Wright Reed (Q.B., 1970); TELL PHARAOH (1972); MONTAGE FOR FREEDOM - Carnegie Hall (1975).

SIMMS, MYRTLE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Northerner, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36.

*SIPP, MARJORIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09; Joined Lafayette Players in 1918.

**SMALL, MILDRED (b. d.)

*SMART, MARIAN (b. d.) Wife of Walter Smart. Member of S. H. Dudley's "SMART SET."

SMITH, EDITH (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

SMITH, ELIZABETH C. (b. d.) INDIAN'S VISIT - Miss Morton. Performed by the Histrionic Club, Chapman Hall, Boston, MA on 3/2/1858.

SMITH, FRANCES (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Mrs. Stallings, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36;
CONJUR MAN DIES - Entertainer/Singer, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36.

SMITH, MILDRED JOANNE (b. 5/16/23 d.) BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY; MEN TO THE SEA; S. S. GLENCAIRN - City Center Revival; THE INSECT COMEDY; FORWARD THE HEART; COCKLES AND CHAMPAGNE (London); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS (1939); BLUE HOLIDAY (1945); LYSISTRATA (1946); ST. LOUIS BLUES (1946); SET MY PEOPLE FREE (1948).

SMITH, MURIEL (b. 2/23/23 d. (Actress/Singer) CARMEN JONES - Title Role (Debut/alternating with Muriel Rahn, 1943); OUR LAM (1947); THE CRADLE WILL ROCK (1947); HIPPOLYTUS - Phaedra (Q.B., 1948); SOJOURNER TRUTH - Bella - YMHA (1948); CARMEN - Title Role, Triborough Stadium (1948); SAUCE TARTAR (London, 1948); SAUCE PIQUANTE (Cambridge, 1950); SOUTH PACIFIC - Bloody Mary (London, 1950); THE KING & I - Lady Thiang (London, 1953); CARMEN JONES - Title Role, City Center, NYC (1956); CARMEN JONES - Title Role, Covent Garden (London, 1956); MORAL REARMAMENT PRODUCTION (1958).

*SMITH, TILLIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

SNOW, VALADA (VALAIDA) (b. 1903 d. 1957) (Featured Singer, 1920s/Musician) SHUFFLE ALONG (1921); THE CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Manda, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24; RHAPSODY IN BLACK; BLACKBIRDS OF 1929; Apollo (1936, 1943); Palace Theatre (Last appearance, 1956). Snow was trapped in Europe during WWII and ended up in a Nazi concentration camp. HOT SNOW by James Mirrione and adapted and directed by Imani Douglas depicts the story of Snow's life (Cirle Repertory Theatre, NYC, Q 12/13/87).

*SPARROW, MRS. ARIANNA COOLEY (b. d.) (Concert Singer in Boston, MA) Daughter of the quadroon whom Harriet Beecher Stow depicted as one of her characters in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.

SPENCER, EDITH (b. d.) RUNNIN' WILD (1923); BETTER OR WORSE (1927); Joined Lafayette Players in

1929.

STAFFORD, MARY (b. d.) Blues Shouter, 1920s.

STEWART, JOSEPHINE (b. d.) BURNING OF THE MORTGAGE - Sister Spencer, Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

*STUART, MARIE JACKSON (b. d.) GRANNY MAUMEE - Granny. One of THREE PLAYS . . ., Madison Square Garden, NYC, Q 4/5/17.

SULLIVAN, MAXINE (b. 5/13/11 d. 4/87?) ("The Loch Lomond Lark") SWINGING THE DREAM - Titania, City Center, NYC, Q 11/29/39; TAKE A GIANT STEP (1953); Appeared at Carnegie (Newport Jazz Festival, 1974); South Street Seaport Pier with Marshall Brown Septet (1975).

***SUTTON, SUSIE (MRS. TOM BROWN) (b. d.) (Widow of famed actor Tom Brown) MEEK MOSE - Princess Theatre, NYC (1928); THE GREEN PASTURES - Noah's Wife (1930, 1935); STEVEDORE (1934); HAITI - Second Woman, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/2/38.

*TARKINGTON, FANNY (b. d.) GRANNY MAUMEE - Pearl. One of THREE PLAYS . . ., Madison Square Theatre, NYC, Q 5/4/17.

TAYLOR, CLARICE (b. 9/20/?) ON STRIVER'S ROW (Debut - Q B., 1943); HOME IS THE HUNTER - ANT (1945); MAJOR BARBARA (Q B.); RAIN (1948); A MEDAL FOR WILLIE (Q B., 1951-52); GOLD THROUGH THE TREES (Q B., 1952); IN SPLENDID ERROR (Q B., 1954-55); Directed TROUBLE IN MIND (Q B., 1956); THE TWISTING ROAD (1957); THE EGG AND I (Q B., 1958); SIMPLE SPEAKS HIS MIND (Q B.); NAT TURNER (Q B., 1960); WEDDING BAND (Q B., 1966); GOD IS A (GUESS WHAT ?) - NEC (1968); SONG OF THE LUSITANIAN BOGEY - NEC (1968); SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL - NEC (1968); KONGI'S HARVEST - NEC (1968); DADDY GOODNESS - NEC (1968); AN EVENING OF ONE ACTS - NEC (1969); CONTRIBUTION (1969); MAN BETTER MAN - NEC (1969); DUPLEX (Q B., 1969); STRING (1969); BROTHERHOOD - NEC (1970); AKO KAWA - NEC (1970); DAY OF ABSENCE (1970); STY OF THE BLOOD PIG (Q B., 1970); FIVE ON THE BLACK HAND SIDE (Q B., 1970); ROSALEE PRITCHETT - NEC (1972); THE WIZ - Addaperle (1975); MOMS (JACKIE "MOMS" MABLEY) - Title Role, Astor Place, NYC (1987).
Television: Bill Cosby's Mother on "The Cosby Show."

*TAYLOR, LIZZIE (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY
- A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q
5/23/1900.

TAYLOR MARION (b. d.) THE CHIP WOMAN'S FORTUNE
- Emma (NFT), Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 6/4/23; SALOME
- Slave of Herodias, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 6/4/23;
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS (1923).

TAYLOR, OLA MAY (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1919.

*TAYLOR, PEARL (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic
Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

THOMAS, EDNA LEWIS (b. 1886 d. 7/22/74) Joined Lafayette
Players in 1920; OL' MAN SATAN (1932); LULU BELLE
- Ruby Lee (Replaced Evelyn Preer), Balasco Theatre,
NYC (1926); STEVEDORE - Ruby Oxley, Civic Repertory
Theatre, NYC, Q 4/18/34, 111 performances; RUN LITTLE
CHILLUN - Lyric Theatre, NYC (1933); MACBETH - Lady
Macbeth, Lafayette Theatre, NYC (WPA); STRANGE FRUIT
- Mamie McIntosh; PORGY AND BESS - Serena (Touring
Co); HARRIET - Henry Miller Theatre, NYC, 3/1943;
A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE - Vendor (Both movie and
Bway, 1947); Vaudeville, Palace.

*THOMPSON, EMMA (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY
- A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q
5/23/1900.

**THOMPSON, HILDA OFFLEY (b. d.)

THORNTON, IRENE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1919.

TOLSON, ANNA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1920.

**TOUDY, MAGGIE (b. d.)

**TOWNSEND, ADELE (b. d.)

TOWNSEND, BEBE (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN
- Bessie Holden, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36;
THE CASE OF PHILIP LAWRENCE (1937).

**TOWNSEND, GERTIE (b. d.)

TRAVARES, ALBERTA (b. d.)

*TRIBLE, BESSIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

TURNER, DOROTHY (b. d.) SWING IT - Su San, Adelphi Theatre, NYC, Q 7/22/37.

TURNER, LAVINA (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Singer, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 3/11/36; TURPENTINE (1936).

*TURNER, MABLE (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q 5/23/1900.

*TURNER, SADIE (b. d.) (And her female quartet) ALABAMA TROUBADOURS (1901).

TYLER, ROSA LEE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

*VAUGHAN, BESSIE (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Sue Higgins, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08.

*VER VALIN, TERESA (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 9/12/1898; A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

*WALKER, ADA (AIDA) OVERTON (b. 2/14/1880 d. 10/11/1914) (Married George Walker in 1889) BLACK PATTI'S TROUBADOURS - Chorus; ORIENTAL AMERICA - Chorus; THE POLICY PLAYERS - Koster & Bial's, NYC, Q 4/3/1900, 8 performances; SONS OF HAM - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 3/3/02, 8 performances; IN DAHOMEY - Rosetta Lightfoot, New York Theatre, NYC, Q 2/18/03; Introduced song "Miss Elegant" (1904); ABYSSINIA - Miram, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/20/06; BANDANA LAND - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08, 89 performance. Walker, who staged musical numbers for BANDANA LAND, impersonated her husband when he became too ill to perform. THE RED MOON - Phoebe Brown, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09, 32 performances; THE RED MOON - Indian Maiden, Parsons Theatre, Hartford, CT, Q 4/7/10; HIS HONOR THE BARBER - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/8/11.

WALKER, MABLE (b. d.) THE SWING MIKADO - Katisha, New York Theatre, NYC, Q 3/1/39.

WALLACE, ROYCE (b. c. 1923 d.) CARMEN JONES (Debut); ST. LOUIS WOMAN (1946); BEGGAR'S HOLIDAY (1946); LYSISTRATA (1946); INSIDE U.S.A. (1948); ARMS AND THE GIRL (1950); HAPPY AS LARRY (1950); DARK OF THE MOON - ELT (1950); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS (1953); TAKE A GIANT STEP (Q.B., 1956); JAMAICA (1957); ON THE TOWN (Q.B., 1959); THE PRETENDER (Q.B., 1960); MY MOTHER, MY FATHER & ME (1963); FUNNY GIRL (1964).

**WALTS, ETHEL (b. d.)

WARD, AIDA (b. 2/11/03 d.) DIXIE TO BROADWAY (1924), after Florence Mill's death, she co-starred with Adelaide Hall. LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS ON BROADWAY; BLACKBIRDS OF 1929 - Star.

*WARD, MARGUERITE (b. d.) BANDANA LAND - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q. 2/3/08.

WARD, MAUD (b. d.) CONJUR MAN DIES - Cabaret Patron, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q. 3/11/36.

*WARE, ESTELLA (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Aminda, Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q. 4/4/1898.

WASHINGTON, FLORA (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1928.

WASHINGTON, FREDI (b. 12/23/03) SHUFFLE ALONG (Tour, 1922-26); BLACK BOY (1926); GREAT DAY (1929); HOT CHOCOLATES (1929); SWEET CHARIOT (1930); SINGIN' THE BLUES (1931); RUN LITTLE CHILLUN (1933); MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Lissa, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q. 1/3/39; Casting consultant for CARMEN JONES & PORGY AND BESS (1943); LYSISTRATA (1946); A LONG WAY FROM HOME (1948); HOW LONG TILL SUMMER (1949). Sister of Isabell Washington; First wife of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell; Papers located at Schomburg/NYPL.

WASHINGTON, GENEVA (b. d.) BLACK RHYTHM - Eva, The Comedy Theatre, NYC, Q. 12/19/36.

WASHINGTON, ISABELL (b. d.) HARLEM - Cordelia, Apollo Theatre, NYC (1929); BOMBOOLA (1929); SINGIN' THE BLUES (1931); Sister to Fredi Washington.

WASHINGTON, MILDRED (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1929.

*WASHINGTON, MINNIE (b. d.) She and husband Dan were a featured couple in the Cakewalk dance in IN DAHOMEY (1903); Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

WATERS, EDNA (b. d.) MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Church Member, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39.

WATERS, ETHEL (b. 10/31/1896 d. 1977) (Actress/Blues Singer a.k.a. Sweet Mama Stringbean) Lincoln Theatre, Baltimore (Debut, 1917); SWEET MAMA STRINGBEAN & HILL SISTERS TRIO (1917-27); PLANTATION REVUE - Replaced Florence Mills; AFRICANA - Lead (1929); LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS (1930); RHAPSODY IN BLACK (1931); AS THOUSANDS CHEER (1933); AT HOME ABROAD (1935); ANDROCLES AND THE LION; MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS - Hagar, Empire Theatre, NYC, Q 1/3/39; CABIN IN THE SKY - Petunia Jackson (1940); LAUGH TIME (1943); BLUE HOLIDAY (1945); THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING - Bernice (1950); THE VOICE OF STRANGERS (Stock); AT HOME WITH ETHEL WATERS (1953); HAPPY JOURNEY (Berlin, 1957). Autobiography: HIS EYE'S ON THE SPARROW; Bio: Twila Knaack, ETHEL WATERS: I TOUCHED A SPARROW - World Wide Publications, 1978.

*WAVE, ADA (b. d.) DARKEST AMERICA - People's Theatre, NYC, Q 12/21/1896; DARKEST AMERICA - Third Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 12/13/1897.

WAYNE-ROBINSON, BEATRICE (b. d.) FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS - St. Theresa, 44th Street Theatre, NYC, Q 2/20/34.

WEBB, ALYE ELIZABETH (b. 6/1/35 d.) STREET SCENE - Bway Debut (1946).

**WEBB, ELYDA (b. 1895 d.)

WEBB, DR. MARGO (b. d.) Norton and Margo dance team (1930s); "Adagio" (Ballroom) dancers who performed difficult balancing and lifting (1937); Instructor, Tisch School, NY Univ. (1980s).

WELSH, ELIZABETH (b. 1908 d.) RUNNIN' WILD (1923); THE CHOCOLATE DANDIES - Jessie Johnson, Colonial Theatre, NYC, Q 10/13/24.

WELSCH, MISS J. (b. d.) RICHARD III - Elizabeth, The African Co, NYC, Q 10/1/1821.

WELSCH, MISS S. (b. d.) RICHARD III - Prince of Wales/Lady Anne, The African Co, NYC, Q 10/21/1821; ASAMA - Asana, The African Co, NYC, Q 10/21/1821.

WHITE, JANE (b. 10/30/22 d.) STRANGE FRUIT - Nonnie (Debut, 1945); OF MICE AND MEN - Curley's Wife (Q.B., 1946); PEER GYNT - ELT (1947); TRUMPETS OF THE LORD (Paris); THE CUBAN THING; LOVE'S LABOUR LOST - French Princess (NYSF); CORIOLANUS - Volumnia (NYSF); IPHIGENIA IN AULIS - Clytemnestra.

WIDDY, LULU (b. d.)

*WILEY, STELLA (b. d.) (Dancer) Wife of Bob Cole. They met when he joined THE CREOLE SHOW in Chicago. CREOLE SHOW (1890); THE POLICY PLAYER (1900).

***WILKES, MATTIE (b. d. 7/1927) Member of Bob Cole's "All Star Stock Company" (1898) located at Worth's Museum, 6th Avenue & 30th Street, NYC. THE CREOLE SHOW (1890); THE OCTOROON (1895); ORIENTAL AMERICA - Leading Soprano (1896); THE POLICY PLAYERS - Koster & Bial's, NYC, Q 4/3/1900, 8 performances; TWENTY MILES FROM HOME - Leading Role, Grand Theatre, Chicago, Q 11/6/14; RUNNIN' WILD (1923); LULU BELL (1926).

WILLIAMS, CHRISTOLA H. (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - Hermantine, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, 2/2/36.

***WILLIAMS, ELIZABETH (b. d.) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Park Theatre, NYC, Q 1/13/06; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Aunt Phebe Jackson, Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q 8/6/07, 15 performances; THE RED MOON - Lucretia Martin, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09, 32 performances.

WILLIAMS, ELIZABETH (b. d.) LULU BELLE (1926); GOAT ALLEY (1927).

WILLIAMS, HAPPY (b. d.) SHUFFLE ALONG - Original Showgirl (1921); STRUT MISS LIZZIE - Star (1920s).

WILLIAMS, JOSEPHINE (b. d.) MACBETH - Second Witch, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36.

WILLIAMS, LAVINIA (b. d.) LEW LESLIE'S BLACKBIRDS OF 1939 - Hudson Theatre, NYC, Q 2/11/39.

*WILLIAMS, LOTTIE (THOMPSON) (b. d.) (Wife of Bert Williams) THE POLICY PLAYERS - Koster & Bial's,

NYC, Q 4/3/1900, 8 performances; SONS OF HAM - Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 3/3/02, 8 performances; IN DAHOMEY - Mrs. Stringer, New York Theatre, NYC, Q 2/18/03; IN ABYSSINIA - Miss Primly, Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/20/06; BANDANA LAND - Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 2/3/08.

WILLIAMS, MARY LOU (b. 5/8/10 d. 5/28/81) (Musician/Composer) BLUE HOLIDAY (1945); Apollo (NYC); Radio City (NYC); Avery Fisher Hall (NYC); Palais de Chaillot (Paris), Olympia (Paris); City Center (NYC); Town Hall (NYC); Carnegie Hall (NYC).

WILLIAMS, OLENA (b. d.) SWING IT - Gladys, Adelphi Theatre, NYC, Q 7/22/37.

*WILLIAMS, OLIVETTE (b. d.) DARKTOWN'S CIRCUS DAY - A Bell of Darktown, Black Patti's Troubadours, Q 5/23/1900.

WILLIAMS, WILHELMINA (b. d.) WALK TOGETHER CHILLUN - BliBBie's Wife, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 2/2/36; MACBETH - First Witch, Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/19/36; THE NATIVITY PLAY (1937).

WILSON, EDITH (b. 1897 d. 1981) Featured Singer, 1920s; BLACKBIRDS OF 1926 - Principal.

WILSON, ELEANOR (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1923.

WILSON, HELEN (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1919.

WILSON, INEZ RICHARDSON (b. d.) Graduate of Oberlin College. THE GREEN PASTURES (1930); THE PRODIGAL SON - Harlem Experimental Theatre, NYC (1931).

WILSON, IRENE (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players in 1928.

*WINFRED, FANNIE (b. d.)

*WISE, FANNY (b. d.) (Operatic Soprano) THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Rose Maxwell, Park Theatre, NYC, Q 1/13/06; THE SHOOFLY REGIMENT - Bijou Theatre, NYC, Q 8/6/07, 15 performances; THE RED MOON - Truscalina White,

Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09.

*WISE, LENA (b. d.)

WOOD, FRANCES (b. d.) Joined Lafayette Players
in 1923.

**WOOD, LILLIAN V. (b. d.)

WRIGHT, PEARL (b. d.) BRAIN SWEAT - Angie, Longacre
Theatre, NYC, Q 4/5/34.

*WYNDER, MAY (b. d.) A TRIP TO COONTOWN - Third
Avenue Theatre, NYC, Q 4/4/1898; A TRIP TO COONTOWN
- Grand Opera House, NYC, Q 9/12/1898, 8 performances.

YOUNG, BLANCHE (b. d.) SWING IT - Miranda, Adelphi
Theatre, NYC, Q 7/22/37.

***YOUNG, MARIE (b. d.) THE RED MOON - Waneta,
Majestic Theatre, NYC, Q 5/3/09; MACBETH - Lady Macduff,
Lafayette Theatre, NYC, Q 4/9/36.

**YOUNGER, ETHEL (b. d.)

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