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Marita Bonner. A teacher and playwright, Marita Bonner (1899-1971) was born and grew up in Boston. She attended Brookline High School where she excelled in music and German. In 1918, she was admitted to Radcliffe College where she had the opportunity to study creative writing extensively. Upon graduation from Radcliffe (A.B. 1922), Bonner taught in West Virginia and Washington, D.C. While in Washington, she became a member of the Krigwa Players. During this period (1922-1942), Bonner began experimenting regularly with essays, reviews, short stories, serial fictional narratives, and, later, plays, which were initially published in the National Urban League's *Opportunity* magazine and the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine. She won several first and second place literary prizes in competitions held by *Opportunity* and *Crisis* magazines. Encouraged by her friend, poet and playwright Georgia Douglas Johnson, Bonner began serious playwriting. While Bonner's period as a playwright was short, her three known plays--*The Pot Maker* (1927), *The Purple Flower* (1928), and *Exit: An Illusion* (1929)--are significant because they challenged and departed from the realistic mode that early Black dramatists were expected to adhere to. Indeed the expressionistic, fantasy play *The Purple Flower* is the first play by an African-American to employ surrealism. There is no evidence that Bonner's plays were ever produced in her lifetime, even though *The Purple Flower* won the *Crisis* award for best play in 1927. However, they were read and treasured during the Harlem Renaissance by some of its most prominent artists.

References:

Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, ed., *Wines in the Wilderness* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990);
Kathy A. Perkins, ed., *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

- P.U.E.

Alice Childress (Mrs. Nathan Woodard). An actress, director, playwright, author, and prolific lecturer, Alice Childress (1920-) was born in Charleston, South Carolina. Strongly influenced by her grandmother from the age of five, she received her early education in public schools in Harlem, New York, and went on to be the recipient of a Harvard appointment to the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study as a scholar-writer from 1966 to 68. She received a graduate medal for work completed during her tenure. Married to film director and musician, Nathan Woodard, Childress gained an early ten-year theatrical training when she helped to found and join the American Negro Theatre (ANT), Harlem, where she acted, directed and served on the Board of Directors. Prior to her professional debut in 1944 in the ANT's Broadway production of *Anna Lucasta*, Childress had appeared in the ANT's productions of *On Strivers Row* (1940) and *Natural Man* (1941). She has since acted in several stage and television plays; and written, directed, and acted in a number of Off-Broadway productions. Aside from her acting and directing career, Childress, a self-educated creative writer, has written over a dozen plays, including *Trouble in Mind* (1956), *Wedding Band* (1966), *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), and *Mojo and String: Two Plays* (1971). She has also written numerous essays; a column for the Baltimore *Afro-American* newspaper; a book; four novels, of which *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* (1973) was adapted for film production; and she has put together a collection, *Black Scenes: Collection of Scenes from Plays Written by Black People About Black Experience* (1971). In 1971, Childress became editor of *Black Scenes* magazine. A member of the Author's League of the Dramatists' Guild, NCAC, AEA, New Dramatists, and the Harlem Writers Guild, she is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. These include an Obie Award for *Trouble in Mind*, 1956; a grant from the John Golden Fund for Playwrights, 1957; a Notable Book Award for *A Hero*, 1973; a Jane Addams Honor Award, 1974; a Black Filmmakers First Paul Robeson Medal of Distinction, 1977; and the AUDELCO Pioneer Award, 1985. In 1990, she also received the City College Langston Hughes Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts and Letters. Childress's first two plays *Just a Little Simple* (1950) and *Gold Through the Trees* (1952), were the first plays by a Black woman to be performed by unionized actors. Alice Childress is the only African-American female playwright whose plays have been written, produced, and published over a period of four decades.

References:

Doris E. Abramson, *Negro Playwrights in the American Theatre, 1925-1959* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, ed., *Wines in the Wilderness* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990);

Arthur P. Davis et al, eds., *The New Cavalcade, vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992).

- P.U.E.

Bob Cole. A librettist, lyricist, and vaudeville actor, Bob Cole (1868-1911) was one of America's most renowned musical performers of the early 1900s. Born in Athens, Georgia, Cole attended Atlanta University and, after graduation, moved to New York where he began his musical career. He teamed up with J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson's younger brother, and wrote, produced, and directed several successful Broadway shows, many of which he performed in. Some of the team's most celebrated shows are *The Wedding of the Chinese and the Coon* (1897); *A Trip to Coontown* (1898); *Chicken* (1899); *Louisiana Lize* (1899); *The Shoofly Regiment* (1907), the first true all-Black operetta; and *The Red Moon* (1909). Some of Cole's most popular songs include "Under the Bamboo Tree," "The Maiden with the Dreamy Eyes," "Oh, Didn't He Ramble," and "Lazy Moon."

References:

Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970* (Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1972);

James Haskins, *Black Theater in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1982);

Loften Mitchell, *Black Drama* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967);

Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865-1910* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988);

Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

- P.U.E.

Ossie Davis. A playwright, film director, and veteran actor, Ossie Davis (1917-) was born in Cogsdell, Georgia, and grew up in Waycross, Georgia. Beginning in 1938, he studied for three years at Howard University, leaving the college in his junior year to pursue a theatrical career in New York on the advice of Alain Locke. From 1941 to 1942, he studied acting with the Rose McClendon Players, Harlem. He left the company after his induction into the U.S. Army where he spent thirty two months. While in the Army, especially when stationed in Liberia, Davis wrote a number of musical shows. After his discharge in 1945, he tried out for and won the leading role in *Jeb* in 1946, the Broadway play that boosted his acting career. Ruby Dee, Davis's future wife and acting partner, was also in the production. Davis and Dee have costarred in numerous plays, films, television shows, spoken recordings, and performances on college campuses. Some of Davis's stage acting credits, many of which were on Broadway, include *Stevedore* (1949), *The Green Pastures* (1951), *Jamaica* (1957), *The Emperor Jones* (1955), *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), and *A Ballad for Bimshire* (1963). His television credits include "Kraft Theatre" (1965), several episodes of "The Defenders" (1961, 63, 65), "The Fugitive" (1966), "N.Y.P.D." (1968), "Bonanza" (1969), "Name of the Game" (1969), and "Night Gallery" (1969). Davis also coproduced and cohosted "The Ruby Dee/Ossie Davis Story Hour" (1974) on the National Black Network, a tradition carried on in the current Black Entertainment Television network; and "The American Revolution" (1984), a two-part segment of "A Walk Through the 20th Century with Bill Moyers," produced on PBS. Some of the films directed by Davis are *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1969), which he coscripted; *Kongi's Harvest* (1970); *Black Girl* (1972); *Gordon's War* (1973); and *Countdown at Kusini* (1976), a screenplay which he coauthored. Although Davis has written several dramatic works and television and film scripts, he is best known for his play *Purlie Victorious* (1961) which was adapted into the highly acclaimed musical *Purlie* (1961), both of which were produced on Broadway. Davis and Dee starred in the 1961 Broadway production of *Purlie Victorious*. Two years later they repeated their roles in the movie version *Gone Are the Days*. Davis has also appeared in other movies, some of which include *The Cardinal* (1963), *Shock Treatment* (1964), *The Hill* (1965), *A Man Called Adam* (1966), and *Harry and Son* (1984). A persistent Civil Rights advocate, he has participated in struggles against racial discrimination in show business. In 1975, he represented African-Americans at meetings of the World Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture (Festac), in preparation for its celebration in Nigeria in 1977. Davis's memberships

include the Masons, NAACP, Grace Baptist Church, AEA, DGA Advisory Board, CORE, Urban League, SNCC, SCLC, NAG, SAG, and AFTRA. He is the recipient of an Emmy Award for his role in "Teacher, Teacher"(1969); a Frederick Douglass Award by the Urban League of New York, 1970; an AEA Paul Robeson citation, 1975; induction into the Black filmmakers Hall of Fame, 1974; and honorary doctorates from Howard University, the University of Massachusetts, Wilberforce University, and Virginia State University.

References:

Donald Bogle, *Blacks in American Film and Television: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988); James Haskins, *Black Theater in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1982); Loften Mitchell, *Black Drama* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967); Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Contemporary Black American Playwrights and Their Plays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

- P.U.E.

Ruby Dee. A playwright, screenwriter, and veteran actress of stage, screen, and television, Ruby Dee (1924-) was born Ruby Ann Wallace in Cleveland, Ohio. She grew up and was educated in New York. Her interest in the theatre began when she was in high school and grew when she attended Hunter College from where she earned an A.B. in 1945. While studying languages at Hunter, she joined the American Negro Theatre (ANT) from 1941 to 1944, where she trained and did various odd jobs while awaiting the opportunity to appear in an ANT production. She later studied with Morris Carnovsky from 1958 to 1960, and with the Actors Workshop. After playing several small roles on Broadway, her first professional break came in 1942 when she played a minor part in the ANT version of *South Pacific*. Her next role was in *Jeb*, 1946, where she met her future husband, Ossie Davis. Also in 1946, Dee played the title role in the Broadway revival of *Anna Lucasta*. During the years that followed *Jeb*, Dee and Davis worked together and individually to make their mark in the American theatre, costarring in numerous plays, films, television shows, spoken recordings, and college performances. Dee's other stage credits, many of which were on Broadway, include

appearances in *Walk Hard* (1944); *On Striver's Row* (1946); *Tell Pharoah* (1972); *Wedding Band* (1973); *Edge of the City* (1957); *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959); and *Purlie Victorious* (1961). Her movie credits include *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950); *Go Man Go* (1954); *St. Louis Blues* (1958); *Take a Giant step* (1960); *No Way Out* (1950); *Raisin in the Sun* (1961); *The Balcony* (1963); the movie version of *Purlie Victorious*, *Gone Are the Days* (1963); *Black Girl* (1973); *Countdown at Kusini* (1976); and *Cat People* (1982). She has also appeared often on network television shows, some of which are "The Nurses," "The Fugitive," "East Side, West Side," and "The Great Adventure," all in 1963; "Peyton Place" (1968-69); "Tenafly" (1973); "Wedding Band, (1974); "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (1979); "Roots the Next Generations" (1979); and the "Atlanta Child Murders (1985). Joining the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, in 1965, she became the first Black actress to star in the Festival's productions. In addition to acting, Dee has written dramatic pieces like *Uptight* (screenplay, 1968), *Twin Bit Gardens* (1974), *Tomorrow Is Ours* (television script, 1970s), and *Take It from the Top* (musical, 1979). The Ruby Dee Scholarship in Dramatic Art was established to help talented young Black women realize a career in theatre. Dee is the recipient of the Frederick Douglass Award, 1970; an Obie Award for *Boesman and Lena*, 1971; and Actors Equity Association (AEA) Paul Robeson Citation, 1975. She was elected to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1975.

References:

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- P.U.E.

Stepin Fetchit. The first Black actor to receive feature billing, Stepin Fetchit (1902-1985) was born Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry in Key West, Florida. He left home around 1914 to pursue a show business career, joining the Royal American Shows plantation revues. His career as actor, comedian, and vaudeville performer made him America's first Black movie star, and one of

Black America's earliest performers to receive broad recognition. Fetchit claimed to have taken his stage name from a Baltimore racehorse that had inspired him to write a routine for himself and his stage partner of the time, Ed Lee. They billed themselves as "Step 'n' Fetchit: Two Dancing Fools from Dixie." After he broke up with his partner, Fetchit kept the name for himself, using it on the vaudeville circuit where he spent long, strenuous years. He arrived Hollywood by 1927, creating an almost immediate impact. He appeared in many 1920s and 30s movies, including *Salute* (1929); the pioneer all-Black film, *Hearts in Dixie* (1929); *Swing High* (1930); *The Prodigal* (1931); *Carolina* (1934); *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934); *Helldorado* (1935); and *Zenobia* (1939). Fetchit was always typecast as a bald, slow, shuffling, laconic, imbecilic, grinning, Negro servant who rolled his eyes in fright at the complexities of a world that he never seemed to fit into. Despite this demeaning darky stereotype of a naive, mindless Black man, Fetchit broke down many prejudicial barriers in show business, and opened new doors for Black entertainers and performers. Criticized by Civil Rights groups and perhaps undone by his own recklessness, Fetchit's star-trip came to an end by the late 1930s. Afterward he drifted into obscurity, working sporadically in shows between the 1940s and mid-70s, but mostly appearing drained of his creative resources. In the late 1960s, Fetchit briefly regained popularity as a member of the Muhammad Ali entourage, and litigant in a lawsuit against CBS for what he felt, ironically, was a demeaning portrayal of himself in the television documentary "Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed" (1968).

References:

Donald Bogle, *Blacks in American Film and Television: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988); Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the African-American in the Performing Arts* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967);
The Negro Almanac, 1971 ed.

- P.U.E.

Charles H. Fuller, Jr. A playwright, screenwriter, and television scriptwriter; and former theatre director, teacher, and journalist; Charles H. Fuller, Jr. (1939-) was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is best known for his play *A Soldier's Play* (1981). Fuller attended the University of

Villanova from 1956 to 1958, after which he served in the U.S. Army from 1959 to 1962. Upon completing his service, he attended LaSalle College from where he earned a B.A. in 1967. Fuller began writing short stories, poetry, and essays at night while working on a number of different jobs in Philadelphia in the 1960s. To date he has written several major and short plays, television scripts, and screenplays. He was one of the founders of Kuntu, an organization of Black writers and artists; and cofounder and codirector of the Afro-American Arts Theatre in Philadelphia from 1967 to 1971. From 1970 to 1971, he taught and lectured on Black American literature in a number of universities. Some of his television scripts have been produced on local Philadelphia television channels. Fuller is the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, 1975; CAPS Playwriting Fellowship, 1975; Obie Award for playwriting, 1980, for *Zooman and the Sign* (1980), which was also selected by the Burns Mantle Theatre Yearbook Best Plays series as a "Best Play" of 1980-81; and the following awards for his famous play *A Soldier's Play* (1981): the Pulitzer Prize; the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as the Best American Play; the Outer Critics' Circle Award as the Best Off-Broadway Play; the Theatre Club Award as the Best Play; and the "Best Play of 1981-82" by the Burns Mantle Theatre Yearbook Best Plays series.

References:

Samuel A. Hay, *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994);
Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Contemporary Black American Playwrights and Their Plays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

- P.U.E.

Charles Sidney Gilpin. A top-ranking actor, Charles Gilpin (1878-1930) was born in Richmond, Virginia, the son of a White mother and Black father. After attending school briefly, he began work as a printer's devil. In 1890, he began traveling with vaudeville troupes and stock companies, an exercise he continued for two decades, working an assortment of jobs, including prizefighting, during long intervals of theatrical unemployment. His initial acting experience began with the Pekin Theatre, Chicago, where he performed comedy roles in blackface in the early 1900s. From 1911 to

1914, Gilpin toured with a troupe--the Pan-American Octette--and, in 1914, played a minor role in *Old Ann's Boy*. A year later he organized the Gilpin Players, a stock company, in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1916, he organized and managed the Lafayette Theatre Company, one of the earliest Black stock companies in New York. After playwright Eugene O'Neill saw Gilpin perform in *Abraham Lincoln* in 1919, he chose him to play the lead in his *Emperor Jones*, the role in which Gilpin starred from 1920 to 1924 and for which he was highly acclaimed. In 1921, Gilpin received the NAACP Spingarn Award for his performance of this role, the highest achievement by an African-American during the year. That same year the Drama League voted him one of the ten people that season who had done most for the theatre. Gilpin lost his voice in 1926, and was forced to earn his living as an elevator operator, a job he had done years earlier. In spite of this setback, he remained active in the Black theatre, even helping to start a company in Cleveland, until his death.

References:

Frederick W. Bond, *The Negro and the Drama* (Washington, D.C.: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969);

James Haskins, *Black Theater in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1982);

Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the African-American in the Performing Arts* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967);

Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865-1910* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988).

- P.U.E.

Charles Gordone. A playwright, actor, and director, Charles Gordone (1925-) was born in Cleveland, Ohio, but grew up in Elkhart, Indiana. He received his B.A. in 1952 from Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences (now California State University, Los Angeles). He also attended the University of California at Los Angeles. As an actor Gordone appeared in a number of plays, some of which are *Of Mice and Men* (1953), *Faust* (1952), *The Blacks* (1961-1965), and *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1967). He has directed at least twenty-five plays, including *Rebels and Bugs* (1958), *Peer Gynt* (1959), *Tobacco Road* (1960), *Detective Story* (1960), *No Place to be Somebody* (1976),

Cures (1978), and *Under the Boardwalk* (1979). Gordone is also author of as many plays as he has acted in. His plays include *Little More Light around the Place* (written with Sidney Easton, 1964), *No Place to be Somebody: A Black-Black Comedy* (1967), *Willy Bignigga* (1970), *Gordone Is a Muthah* (his own theatrical tour de force) (1970), *Baba-Chops* (1975), and *The Last Chord* (1977), among others. He has also authored a number of screenplays: *The W.A.S.P.* (adopted from the novel by Julius Horwitz, 1983), *From These Ashes* (pre-1983), *Under the Boardwalk* (1976), and *Liliom* (pre-1983). His film credits also include production manager for the U.S. Information Agency documentary *The Negro in America* (1963), and associate producer and casting director for *Nothing but a Man* (1963). Along with Susan Kouyomjian, Gordone cofounded the American Stage in Berkeley, California, where he has directed numerous productions. He also cofounded, with Godfrey Cambridge, and chaired the Committee for the Employment of Negro Actors. In 1967, he was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to the research team of the Commission on Civil Disorders. Gordone is a member of the Ensemble Studio Theatre and Actors Studio. His honors and awards include an Obie Award for best actor in *Mice and Men*, 1953; a Pulitzer Prize, 1970, for *No Place to Be Somebody* (Gordone was the first Black playwright to receive this Prize); the Los Angeles Critics Circle and Drama Desk Awards, 1970, and a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, 1971--all for *No Place to Be Somebody*.

References:

Arthur P. Davis et al, eds., *The New Cavalcade, vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992);

James Haskins, *Black Theater in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1982);

Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Contemporary Black American Playwrights and Their Plays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

- P.U.E.

Angelina Weld Grimké. A playwright, teacher, poet, short-story writer, and essayist, Angelina Grimké (1880-1958) was born to the biracial Grimké family and educated in Boston. She spent most of her life writing poetry and teaching English in Washington, D.C. She was named after her history-

making, anti-slavery, great-aunt, Angelina Emily Grimké Weld, on the White side of the family tree. Archibald, Grimké's father, practiced law in Boston. He was also an editor, writer, and consul to Santo Domingo. In 1919, he received the coveted Spingarn medal for "service to his race." Sarah E. Stanley, Grimké's mother, was a writer and member of a prominent Boston family who defied society by marrying Archibald in 1879. Grimké enjoyed advantages and an education few Black or White girls were privileged to have in the 19th century. She was educated at the Carleton Academy in Northfield, Minnesota; the Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Massachusetts; the Girl's Latin School in Boston; and the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics. After her education, she taught English in Washington, D.C. She began writing during the four years that her father served as consul to San Domingo (1894-98), partly due to the loneliness and depression that her father's absence caused. Her mother would die in 1898, intensifying Grimké's feelings of isolation. The writings of her father; her uncle Francis Grimké; and her uncle's wife, Charlotte Forten Grimké, diarist and poet; offered Grimké literary models to tap from. Grimké's poems appear in several magazines and anthologies of the Harlem Renaissance. Sixteen of them appear in Countee Cullen's classic *Caroling Dusk*. They are also featured in the pages of the *Crisis* and *Opportunity* magazines. Grimké is credited with writing the first drama of record by a Black, excluding musicals, to be performed by Blacks this century, and the first in book form by an African-American woman. The play, *Rachel* (1916), was produced by The NAACP's Drama Committee the same year it was published, and billed as a "race play in three acts." Grimké also wrote another play, *Maria*, a partially revised four act drama still in manuscript. Grimké died in New York (June 19) where she had moved to continue writing after the devastating effects of her father's death in 1930.

References:

Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Kathy A. Perkins, ed., *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); Ann Allen Shockley, ed., *Afro-American Women Writers, 1746-1933: An Anthology and Critical Guide* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988).

Lorraine Hansberry. A playwright, journalist, editor, and political activist, Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) was born in Chicago, Illinois. Born into relative affluence, she enjoyed luxuries that eluded most Blacks at the time. Influenced by her politically-active parents and uncle William Leo, however, Hansberry's upper middle-class status did not obscure her awareness of racial intolerance or prevent her from participating in Civil Rights struggles. In 1938, her father Carl and NAACP lawyers contested Chicago's real estate "restrictive covenants," compelling the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1940, to rule in favor of the Hansberrys' right to occupancy in any neighborhood. The Hansberry home welcomed noted Black celebrities, scholars, and leaders who prevailed upon Hansberry's political consciousness and cultivated the awareness that eventually featured in her drama.

Hansberry's dramatic career began at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, which she attended in 1948. An art, literature, drama, and stage design student, she worked backstage on student productions, and was attracted to plays by Henrik Ibsen and Sean O'Casey. Dissatisfied with the educational prospects offered by the University, she left the campus in her sophomore year (1949-1950), hoping to gain improved educational insights elsewhere. From 1949 to 1950, her quest took her to the University of Guadalajara extension, Mexico; Roosevelt University, Chicago; and the New School for Social Research, New York. She went on to settle in New York where, between 1950 and 1963, Harlem offered a huge intellectual and cultural attraction. In 1950, she joined the staff of *Freedom*, a monthly political newspaper owned by Paul Robeson. The job motivated her political consciousness and interest in African politics, histories, and traditions. Aside from writing plays, Hansberry wrote poems and authored the text for *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality* (1964), completed while she was in failing health. She also wrote the autobiographical *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969) (adapted by her ex-husband Robert Nemiroff who later adapted the work for stage and television), and contributed to *American Playwrights on Drama* (1965).

Several of her finished and unfinished posthumous works, like *The Collected Last Plays: Les Blancs, The Drinking Gourd, What Use Are Flowers?* (1972), were selected and edited by her ex-husband. Her writings are also represented in *Theatre Arts, Village Voice, Freedomways, and Negro Digest*. Hansberry's memberships include DG, Institute for Advanced Study in the Theatre Arts, and Ira Aldridge Society. She was the first Black dramatist and youngest American to receive the New York

Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1959, for *A Raisin*. The play was the first by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway and had the longest run of any play by a Black author up to that time. Presented as a play in 1968-69, *To Be Young* also became the longest running play of the off-Broadway season. Other honors granted Hansberry include a Tony Award, 1973, for the revival of *A Raisin* as a musical; a Cannes Film Award, 1961; and posthumous election to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, 1975. Hansberry wrote five major plays before she died of cancer in 1965.

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- P.U.E.

Paul Carter Harrison A playwright, director, critic, author, editor, and teacher, Paul Carter Harrison (1936-) was born and raised in New York City. He was educated at Indiana University (B.A., 1957); New School for Social Research (M.A., 1962); and Ohio University (graduate study as National Science Foundation Fellow, summer 1959/1960). Harrison is associated with the Playwrights Unit of the Actors Studio. He has traveled extensively and speaks Dutch and Spanish. From 1962 to 1968, he lived and worked in Amsterdam, Holland, where he developed and directed stage productions, published plays and essays on the theatre, wrote and produced films for television, was freelance journalist in art and politics, and was dramaturgical consultant for the Mickery Theatre, Loenesloot, the Netherlands. He has also traveled to the Caribbean, Brazil, and

Africa. His early works (1962-65) were mostly one-act plays, including *Tophat* (1962) which was the first of his plays produced by the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC) in 1971. The NEC subsequently produced his play *The Great Macdaddy* (1974), an adaptation of *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1952) a novel by Nigeria's Amos Tutuola; and *Abercrombie Apocalypse* (1982). His other significant works include his multi-media drama *The Death of Boogie Woogie* (1976), the musico-epic *Tabernacle* (1969), a photodocumentary *Chuck Stewart's Jazz File* (1965), and *Ameri/Cain Gothic* (1977). His blues operetta, *Anchorman* (1982), was produced in the 1987-88 season by the American Folk Theatre. Among his many directorial credits include the original production of *Ain't Supposed To Die A Natural Death* (1970), which he conceptualized; *Lady Day: A Musical Tragedy* (1972); *The Owl Answers* (1980), which he conceptualized; *My Sister, My Sister* (1981); the NEC posthumous production of *In An Upstate Motel* (1981); and *No Place to Be Somebody* (1983). Harrison's major motion picture credits are the original screenplays of *Lord Shango* and *Youngblood*. He has also written collections of dramatic essays, *Dialogue from the Opposition* (1965) and *The Drama of Nommo* (1972); edited collections of plays, *Kuntu Drama* (1974) and *Totem Voices* (1989); and edited a collection of theatrical essays, *The Modern Drama Footnote* (1965). From the late 1960s to date, Harrison has occupied significant theatre-related positions in several U.S. universities. He is the recipient of an Obie Award for *The Great Macdaddy*, 1974; an AUDELCO Award, as Best Musical Creator, for *Tabernacle*, 1981; the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship for American Playwriting, 1985-86; and the Illinois Arts Council Grant for Playwriting, 1984. Harrison has been Contributing and Advisory Editor for *Callaloo Magazine*. He has served as Literary Advisor, Lincoln Center Repertory Company, New York, 1972-73; consultant, Theatre Panel, Theatre Communications Group, New York, 1972-74; consultant on New England Regional Committee for Pan African Cultural Festival in Lagos, Nigeria, 1973-74; theatre panelist, Illinois Arts Council, 1976-79; and theatre and contributing editor, *Elan* magazine, New York, 1981-83. He has also been Writer-in-Residence at Columbia College, Chicago, where he developed *Anchorman*. His memberships include ATA, Society for Directors and Choreographers, and DG.

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- P.U.E.

James Earl Jones. A veteran actor, James Earl Jones (1931-) was born in Tate County, Mississippi, but grew up with his grandparents on a farm in Michigan. His father, Robert Earl Jones, was a stage, screen, and television actor from whom Jones probably received inspiration. He received a B.A. from the University of Michigan (1953) and, after U.S. Army service, a diploma from the American Theatre Wing (1957). Jones first acted in New York stage productions in the late 1950s. His stage debut came in 1955, his Broadway debut in 1957 in *Wedding in Japan*. He has played a bit of everything from Genet's *The Blacks* (1961) to Athol Fugard's *Blood Knot* (1964) to Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* (1968) to Sophoclean and Shakespearean roles. By the early 1960s, Jones started working in television. One of the first Black actors cast in a regular role on a soap opera, he played Dr. Jerry Turner on "The Guiding Light" (1967), and subsequently appeared on such television shows as "East Side, West Side" (1963); "Channing" (1964); "The Defenders" (1965); "Dr. Kildare" (1966); "Tarzan" (1968/69); "Trumpets of the Lord" (1968); "King Lear" (1975, title role); *Malcolm X* (narrator, 1972); "Jesus of Nazareth" (1979); "Paul Robeson" (1979); "Amy and the Angel" (1982); and "The Atlanta Child Murders" (1985). By 1964, he made his film debut in a small role in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. His film/television career underwent a significant change after his great Broadway success in *The Great White Hope* (1968). He repeated the role on film, for which he was nominated for an Oscar as Best Actor of 1970. He subsequently played leading roles in such films as *The Man* (1972), *Claudine* (1974), *The River Niger* (1976), and *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (1976). Some of his other movie credits include *The Greatest* (1977), *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977), *Soul Man* (1986), *Matewan* (1987), *Coming to America* (1989), and *Naked Gun 33 1/3* (1993). He was also the voice of Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* trilogy (1977, 80, 84), and portrayed the voice of Mufasa in the Disney animated smash hit, *The Lion King* (1994). Jones has continued to

perform character and star roles on film and on stage. He is the recipient of the Village Voice Off-Broadway Obie, 1962; the Daniel Blum Theatre World Award, 1962; and, for his performance in *The Great White Hope*, the Tony Award as Best Actor, 1969 (Jones is the first Black actor to win this Award), and the Drama Desk Award for Best Performance, 1968-69.

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Adrienne Kennedy. A playwright and creative writing teacher, Adrienne Kennedy (1931-) was born Adrienne Lita Hawkins in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where she attended Cleveland Public Schools. She was also educated at Ohio State University (B.A. 1952), with additional studies at Columbia University (1954-56), the New School for Social Research (1957), the American Theatre Wing (1958), and Edward Albee's workshop at the Circle in the Square (1962-64). Kennedy's playwriting career received a boost under Albee's tutelage, even though her first theatrical idol was Tennessee Williams. She has written several one-act and full length plays and musicals including *The Pale Blue Flower* (1955), *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (her best-known play, 1963, written on a trip through Europe and Africa [1960-61]), *The Owl Answers* (1963), *A Beast's Story* (1965), *The Lennon Play: In His Own Write* (adaptation of John Lennon's book, 1967), *A Rat's Mass/Procession in Shout* (improvisational jazz opera, 1976), *A Lancashire Lad* (children's musical, 1980), and *Diary of Lights* (1987). In addition to drama, Kennedy is the author of two novels, poems, short stories, a memoir *People Who Led to My Plays* (1987), books like *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act* (1988) and *Deadly Triplets: A Theatre Mystery and Journal* (1990), and an unpublished retrospective, "Recollections of Writers and Theatre People." She has taught playwriting and creative writing at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton Universities, and at the University of California at Berkeley and at Davis. Her memberships include playwriting unit of Actors Studio, 1962-65; New Black Playwrights; P.E.N.;

National Society of Literature and Arts; and National Register of Prominent Americans. She is the recipient of a Stanley Drama Award of \$500 from Wagner College, Staten Island, New York, for *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *The Owl Answers*, 1963; an Obie Award for *Funnyhouse*, 1964; a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing, 1967; Rockefeller grants, 1967-69, 1970, 1973, 1976; a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, 1972; a Yale Teaching Fellowship, 1972-73; and a New England Theatre Conference Grant, 1970s.

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Lafayette Theatre Stock Players. The Lafayette Players performed at the Lafayette Theatre located at 2227 Seventh Avenue, Harlem, New York. The Theatre was originally built by John Mulonski in 1912 to present White plays to White audiences. The builders of the two thousand seat theatre faced the problem of maintaining a segregated seating policy in a White theatre built in an area that was becoming increasingly Black. Meanwhile, many Blacks craved a theatre that would counter the stereotypical darky image of Blacks that dominated the American stage. For this reason, Lester Walton, a drama critic for the Black newspaper *New York Age*, leased the Lafayette Theatre and formed a stock company from among the many skilled Black theatre artists in the city. The Lafayette Theatre stock company was packed with such Black talent as Charles Gilpin, Flournoy Miller, Eddie Hunter, and Aubrey Lyles. Almost everyone in the company had been a part of early 20th century Black musical shows. They did dance-dramas and remade variations of popular and original plays. The Theatre's first hit came in 1913 with its presentation of the musical-based *Darktown Follies*. The group also produced a variety of other shows like *Madame X*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the Jewish comedy *Potash and Perlmutter*, *Darkydom*, *Haiti* (a

transplanting of *Macbeth* to a Haitian setting), and Shakespearean plays. Since African-Americans were not yet welcome in Broadway theatres, the Lafayette players often went on tour to produce Black versions of popular Broadway shows in Black theatres in other cities. These include Howard in Washington and the Dunbar in Philadelphia. The fortunes of the Lafayette troupe were sadly inconstant. As World War I approached, the tastes of Harlem's Black theatre-goers gradually changed. While these local audiences initially enjoyed seeing plays they had not seen before, they soon displayed a huge preference for melodrama and musical comedy. Thus, the Lafayette players were soon forced to narrow their range of offerings. On the whole, the company provided Black technicians, composers, actors, and directors the experience and training they could not otherwise have gotten; and Black audiences the opportunity to see Blacks on stage in something other than blackface routines and antics. For instance, contrary to the norm on White stages, the group presented shows in which Black men and women actually displayed tender, romantic love to one another. Unfortunately, and in spite of their enormous contributions to Black theatrical progress, the Lafayette players never presented serious dramas about Black life written by Blacks. With time, the company presented almost entirely musical comedies as demanded by Harlem audiences. This limitation soon affected the company adversely. Serious actors began to leave and around 1920 the Lafayette Theatre was taken over by new managers, the Coleman brothers, who concentrated on musical stage shows. It was later taken over by the Schiffman family, who also continued the musical stage show pattern. The Lafayette dramatic stock company would be reborn decades later at the New Lafayette Theatre.

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Minstrel Shows. Minstrel shows (1830s-early 1900s) are rooted in the humor, dance, music and song patterns of Black southern slaves. The formal minstrel show is associated with Thomas Dartmouth Rice, an itinerant White performer in the 1820s. Legend has it that around 1829/30 Rice witnessed a crippled Black slave, Jim Crow, sweeping out stables and singing a catchy song accompanied by a dance with short hopping and springing motions. Rice purchased the man's shabby clothes and learned the song and dance which he embellished with several new verses (over fifty with time). Blackening his face with burnt cork, he took his "Jim Crow" act on stage, prancing with syncopated hilarity and establishing the cornerstone of what became, for eighty years, America's most popular form of entertainment, the blackface minstrels. Referred to as "Ethiopian delineators," other White performers like E.P. Christy and Daniel Emmett Decatur, began to imitate Rice's routine. In the 1830s/40s, Emmett's Virginia Minstrels provided the formula which gave life to the minstrel form, parodying so-called northern dandyism and southern "Ethiopians." The common minstrel attire comprised striped, gaudy shirts; white trousers; oddly-shaped hats; and blue swallowtail calico coats; complemented by almost frightening countenances--wide-open mouths, bulging lips, and shiny eyes. The standard minstrel show constituted three parts, each focusing on distinct performance genres embracing music, song, dance, and comedy. A Black dancer, William Henry Lane, also known as Juba, occasionally performed in White minstrel shows. After the Civil War, Blacks began to appear on the minstrel stage. One of the first all-Black ensembles, the successful Georgia Minstrels, was organized in 1865 by Charles Hicks. Black minstrels took over bodily the entire minstrel convention, even to the use of burnt cork and thickened lips circled with red or white paint. But they also introduced new indigenous dances, songs, and comedy routines unappropriated by Whites. Minstrel shows fixed certain Black stereotypes in the American consciousness. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, two main types of Black impersonations crystallized and thereafter persisted for several decades: the uncouth, ragged, happy-go-lucky Black Southerner; and the ludicrous Black replica of the White dandy. But minstrelsy was also an outlet for Black performers and in the 19th century was the first training ground for Blacks in American entertainment. The minstrel show was the first authentic American theatre, and initiated the idea and practice of big-time show business. By the 1890s, the popularity of minstrelsy began to be replaced by the advent of the motion picture and the more refined versions of vaudeville. Around

this period, African-American theatrical pioneers also worked toward wiping out minstrel typecasting by putting on authentic Black musical shows. Although large groups of performers in blackface ceased to exist by the 1890s, many entertainers continued to work under cork in vaudeville for many years. Bert Williams, a famous Black comic, performed in blackface until his death in 1922. With White comedians, the tradition continued until Eddie Cantor died in 1964.

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Richard A. Long, *The Black Tradition in American Dance* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989);

Julian Mates, *America's Musical Stage: Two Hundred Years of Musical Theatre* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985);

Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

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Negro Ensemble Company. Situated on Manhattan's Lower East Side in New York, the Negro Ensemble Company, a theatre group, was formed in 1967. Its purpose was to establish a Black-oriented repertory company, provide a training ground for African-American actors, and increase employment opportunities for them. Formerly the Group Theatre Workshop cofounded by Barbara Ann Teer and Robert Hooks in 1964, the NEC's attempts to gain outside funding was successful when the Ford Foundation made a grant to cover its first three years of operation. Douglas Turner Ward, artistic director, and Robert Hooks, executive director, planned a trial season to include *Song of the Lusitania Bogey*; a revival of *Summer of the 17th Doll*; *Kongi's Harvest*; and *Daddy Goodness*. The second season was highlighted by the acclaimed *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*.

Subsequent seasons celebrated plays like *The Sty of the Blind Pig* and *The River Niger*. Although the NEC presented plays primarily about Black life, it did not exclude good drama from other sources and about other people. Unlike some Black companies, the NEC did not cater to only all-Black audiences.

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Ntozake Shange (Paulette Williams). A playwright, author, dancer, actress, musician, director, college teacher, and feminist, Ntozake Shange (1948-) was born Paulette Williams in Trenton, New Jersey. Growing up, her life was sheltered and comfortable. She was eight when her family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. There, in her early teens, she experienced prejudice when she was bused fifteen miles to integrate a previously all-White German-American school. Shange was thirteen when her family returned to New Jersey where she completed high school. In 1966, while attending Barnard College, New York City, her separation from her husband, a law student, led her to several unsuccessful suicide attempts. Shange was only eighteen at the time. She channelled her frustration and anger into political activism. In 1970, she earned an honors Bachelors degree from Barnard College, and, in 1973, a master's degree from the University of Southern California. In 1971, Shange dropped Paulette Williams and adopted the African (Zulu) name Ntozake Shange. Ntozake means "she who comes with her own things" while Shange means "one who walks like a lion." From 1972 to 1975, Shange taught in various California colleges, including Sonoma State where she began writing poetry in earnest. She danced and performed her poetry with a number of Black dance companies, including her own company then called For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide. She also participated in poetry readings at San Francisco State College and with the Shameless Hussy poets. Also in the early 1970s, Shange was introduced to Yoruba religions through the study of specific West African-oriented dance styles, some of which she applies to her drama. Working with Paula Moses, a choreographer friend, Shange produced the twenty-three poems of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), her most celebrated drama and the

second play by a Black woman to reach Broadway. At twenty-seven, Shange moved to New York where, in July 1975, *For Colored Girls* was professionally produced at Studio Ribea in New York City. This was the beginning in a series of 867 performances, 747 on Broadway. *For Colored Girls* best exemplifies the "Black," ceremonial **choreopoem** formula championed by Shange, which incorporates music, dance, ritual, poetry, narrative, and a non-linear plot structure. Her five major dramatic pieces employ this paradigm to different degrees. Shange has also written several novels, poetic collections, and essays; her writings appear in anthologies and periodicals. Her professional and civic affiliations include P.E.N., WGA, DG, AEA, Poets and Writers, National Association of Third World Writers, Feminist Art Institute, Women Against Violence Against Women and Children, NATAS, AFTRA, and American Film Institute. Shange is the recipient of Outer Critics' Circle, Obie, AUDELCO, and Mademoiselle Awards, 1977, for *For Colored Girls* (also nominated for Tony and Grammy Awards); a Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop Award, 1978; another Obie, 1980, for her outstanding adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*; a Guggenheim Fellowship for writing, 1981; a Columbia University Medal of Excellence, 1981; a New York State Council of the Arts Award, 1981; and an NEA Fellowship for creative writing, 1981.

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- Ntozake Shange, Preface, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975) xii-xxi;
- Valerie Smith et al, eds., *African American Writers: Profiles of Their Lives and Works from the 1700s to the Present* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991);
- Jane Splawn, "Rites of Passage in the Writing of Ntozake Shange: The Poetry, Drama, and Novels," Diss. U of Wisconsin, 1988.

Spirit House Theater. Founded in the heart of Newark's downtown slums in 1968 by Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), Spirit House Theatre (SHT) functioned as part of Spirit House--a Cultural Center, self-help operation, and community center for Black art and politics. The operation provided opportunities for community participation in sports, social gatherings, meetings, classes, and sports. Activities of the SHT centered on the ideals of Baraka's militant "Black Revolutionary Theatre" manifesto, which defied the ambivalence he associated with integrationist drama. The SHT presented functional, ritualistic, participatory dramas, mostly on weekends. The dramas were essentially about Black life and culture, and aimed at Black audiences; they were designed to regenerate African-Americans, promote self-redefinition, and instill a renewed spirit of self-pride and self-assertion. The SHT maintained a permanent ensemble of actors known as the Spirit House Movers.

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Barbara Ann Teer. A director, actress, author, educator, playwright, choreographer, theatre founder, and executive producer, Barbara Ann Teer (1937-) was born in East St. Louis, Illinois. She was educated at the University of Illinois (B.A., dance, 1957). She also studied drama with Sanford Meisner, Paul Mann, Phillip Burton, and Lloyd Richards; and received part of her dance training in Berlin and Paris, and with the Vigmont School of Dance. Teer has danced with Alvin Ailey and Louis Johnson dance companies. She was the dance captain on Broadway for Agnes DeMille in the musical *Kwamina*, and taught dance and drama in New York City public schools. She was the cofounder of the Group Theatre Workshop, 1964, which later became the Negro Ensemble Company; and was cultural director of the teenage workshop, Harlem School of the Arts, 1967. Teer is the founder, producer, director, and resident playwright of the militant National Black Theatre (NBT), 1968-

present. As the force and prime mover behind NBT, she has developed and taught ritualistic, participatory, and pragmatic, yet entertaining, dramatic standards. Such "ritualistic revivals" are partly African-based. Teer has also created the "Teer Technology of Soul"--a technique of teaching a consciousness-raising, communal, and spiritual aesthetic. She has toured with NBT in theatres and universities throughout the eastern United States, the Caribbean, and Nigeria. Since the early 1960s, Teer has performed frequently as an actress, appearing in New York productions like *Kwamina* (1961), *Raisin' Hell in the Sun* (1962), *Living Premise* (1963), *Home Movies* (1965), *Who's Got His Own* (1966), *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?* (1967), *Where's Daddy?* (1967), and *Day of Absence* (1970). Her film appearances include *Slaves* (1969) and *Angel Levine* (1970). In addition to directing productions of NBT, she has directed *The Believers* (1967), *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), *The Beauty of Blackness* (1970s), *Five on the Black Hand Side* (1970), and "Black Heritage Series" (CBS-TV, 1973). Teer's dramatic works (mostly nontraditional) include *Tribute to Brother Malcolm* (1960s historical document), *Revival* (ritual 1969/72), *Rise: A Love Song for Love People* (screenplay, 1975), and *Sojourney into Truth* (theatrical collage, 1975). She is a contributing writer to *Black Power Revolt* (1968); contributing editor to *Black Theatre* magazine, 1969; and contributor of numerous articles to *Negro Digest/Black World* and the drama section of the *Sunday New York Times*. Her memberships include Black Theatre Alliance; Board of Directors, Theatre Communications Group; Harlem Philharmonic Society; and Theatre Committee for the Second International Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC, Nigeria), 1975. Teer is the recipient of numerous awards and citations for her contributions to the theatre and the community, some of which include Vernon Rice/Drama Desk Award as Best Actress, 1965; first annual AUDELCO Recognition Award in theater, 1973; International Benin Award, 1974; National Association of Media Women's Black Film Festival Award, 1975, for Best Film, *Rise*; Cultural Arts Service Award, 1978; Monarch Merit Award for outstanding contributions to the performing and visual arts, 1983; and the National Black Treasure Award for outstanding contributions to Black American theatre.

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