

## Casting Shadows: Integration on the American Stage

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Many of the productions that we now consider highlights in the history of African Americans on the stage—*Shuffle Along* (1921), *The Green Pastures* (1930), *Porgy and Bess* (1935)—were performed by entirely African American casts. This exhibition features productions and performers that attempted to bridge racial divisions through integrated casting.

Initially viewed as a novelty, as when Sam Lucas became the first African American man to play the lead in Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1878, crossing the color line on stage would soon be held up as a triumph in the multi-pronged fight against Jim Crow. By the middle of the 20th century, commentators embraced the appearance of black and white actors onstage together as a symbol of progressive civil rights. Later playwrights, however, most notably August Wilson, questioned the validity of integration as a worthy goal in itself, advocating instead the celebration of African American life on the stage.

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