
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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