



Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America

By Karen Sotiropoulos

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Staging Race casts a spotlight on the generation of black artists who came of age between 1890 and World War I in an era of Jim Crow segregation and heightened racial tensions. As public entertainment expanded through vaudeville, minstrel shows, and world's fairs, black performers, like the stage duo of Bert Williams and George Walker, used the conventions of blackface to appear in front of, and appeal to, white audiences. At the same time, they communicated a leitmotif of black cultural humor and political comment to the black audiences segregated in balcony seats. With ingenuity and innovation, they enacted racial stereotypes onstage while hoping to unmask the fictions that upheld them offstage.

Drawing extensively on black newspapers and commentary of the period, Karen Sotiropoulos shows how black performers and composers participated in a politically charged debate about the role of the expressive arts in the struggle for equality. Despite the racial violence, disenfranchisement, and the segregation of virtually all public space, they used America's new businesses of popular entertainment as vehicles for their own creativity and as spheres for political engagement.

The story of how African Americans entered the stage door and transformed popular culture is a largely untold story. Although ultimately unable to erase racist stereotypes, these pioneering artists brought black music and dance into America's mainstream and helped to spur racial advancement.

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Editorial Review

Review

Nowadays black minstrels are not seen as black performers trapped into humiliating roles, but as black performers helping to define what blackness was. Karen Sotiropoulos, in her extremely useful history, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America*, argues that the popular stage was a part of the political debate. (Darryl Pinckney *New York Review of Books* 2006-07-13)

By examining the history of leading black artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sotiropoulos addresses an important and often overlooked aspect of African American history. *Staging Race* is a valuable addition to the field of cultural studies and offers readers a new perspective on the role of commercial amusements and celebrity artists in the transformation of American race relations during the twentieth century. (Scott A. Newman *Journal of American History* 2006-12-01)

Review

Karen Sotiropoulos tells the riveting story of a group of black intellectuals who challenged social Darwinism, imperialism, segregation and promoted a discourse of black nation-building. Brilliantly written and conceived, *Staging Race* will force us all to rethink early 20th century black musical theater, as well as black political thought during the so-called "nadir" of African American history. (Robin D. G. Kelley, author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*)

About the Author

Karen Sotiropoulos is Associate Professor of History at Cleveland State University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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In this 21st centuries, people become competitive in most way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a e-book your ability to survive enhance then having chance to remain than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading a book, we give you this particular *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* book as basic and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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