


Twentieth Century American Drama
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Lecture - 48
American Theatre in Context: 1945- Present Part 3

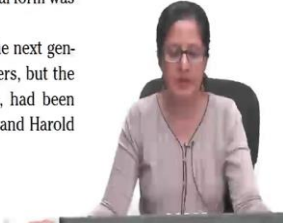
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Arnold Aronson 125


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tions. Choreographed by Jerome Robbins, Bernstein's first musical, *On the Town* (1944), was propelled not by the book or even the songs, but by a thorough musical score and sophisticated and athletic ballet and modern dance which supplanted lyrics and dialogue as a means of story-telling and emotional conveyance. Bernstein's revolutionary *West Side Story* (1957) transformed the emotional energy of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into complex rhythms and counterpoint in one of the most musically sophisticated scores ever to grace Broadway, while the tensions and energies of the show were brought to life in Robbins's stunningly balletic choreography. *West Side Story* marked the end of an era on Broadway – the book musical as a vital form was virtually dead within a decade.

With the exception of composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim, the next generation of musical theatre stars were not the composers or singers, but the choreographers and directors – Bob Fosse (who, like Robbins, had been trained by Broadway director George Abbott), Michael Bennett, and Harold

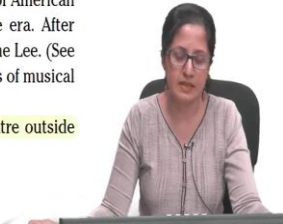


We are continuing to look at Arnold Aronson's essay which is trying to locate the American Theatre in a historical context.

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choreographers and directors – Bob Fosse (who, like Robbins, had been trained by Broadway director George Abbott), Michael Bennett, and Harold Prince. In the musicals developed by these choreographers and directors, which included *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, *Pippin*, *Chicago*, *Follies*, *Company*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Dreamgirls*, the emphasis was increasingly on staging and choreography over music and lyrics. These productions, especially those of Harold Prince, also revitalized American design. From the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies Prince worked with the Russian-born Boris Aronson. Though always highly regarded among his colleagues as one of the finest designers of the time, he had only moderate successes until he teamed up with Prince and Robbins on *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) with its Marc Chagall-inspired sets. Thereafter, his designs for Prince's productions blended Constructivist elements with contemporary technology and the occasional touch of American sentiment to create some of the most stunning designs of the era. After Aronson's death in 1980, Prince found another soulmate in Eugene Lee. (See Chapters 2 [Maslon, "Broadway"] and 4 for more detailed analysis of musical theatre.)

As Broadway declined there was a significant growth of theatre outside



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theatre.)

As Broadway declined there was a significant growth of theatre outside New York City. Although there had long been local professional theatres, stock companies, and touring shows, New York's position as the originator and focal point of theatre and entertainment was clear and dominant. Ultimately, a play or actor that did not perform in New York lacked credibility. As if the relationship were not clear enough, during the interwar years *Theatre Arts Monthly* had a regular feature entitled "The Tributary Theatre," which was a roundup of theatrical activity outside New York City. Some of the prewar theatres such as the Goodman Theatre of Chicago, the Cleveland Play House, and The Karamu Theatre of Cleveland continued to produce in the postwar years, but a new crop of theatres also emerged. Beginning with Margo Jones's theatre-in-the-round in Dallas known as Theatre '47 (then Theatre '48, and so on), others



The significant aspect of the changing decades is foregrounded in this work and it also makes the context of the different plays that we are looking at clearer. We reached this instance where the Aronson is beginning to talk about the decline of Broadway and capture and he is trying to capture the growth of the theatre American theatre outside of New York City after this movement.

So, after Broadway declined there was a significant growth of theatre outside of New York City. Although there had been long or although there had long been local professional theatres, stock companies and touring shows, New York's position as the originator and focal point of theatre and entertainment was clear and dominant. We see replication of similar kind of movement which happened in England at the peak of its theatrical activities.

We find that initially London is a center of all the theatre related activities and even London is the cultural capital. So, to speak of England for the longest time and then due to historical and other conditions, we find that that position also gets displaced in a very gradual way as the demographics shift happens in London too right after around the time of the industrial revolution. So, here it is a bit faster paced than the earlier centuries as we can see.

New York's position does not get challenged in terms of it continues to remain as the cultural capital of all artistic and its creative activities of the western world and in some

sense of the rest of the world as well, but we find that the theatre begins to grow everywhere after this after the decline of Broadway, there is a more democratic dissemination of the growth of theatre. And, but that does not challenge New York's position as mentioned it was such an extent that a play or actor that did not perform in New York lacked credibility.

Broadway becomes almost synonymous with all kinds of theatrical activities that come out of America. So, as if the relationship were not clear enough during the interwar years, theatre arts monthly had a regular feature entitled the tributary theatre, which was a roundup of theatrical activity outside New York City. So, New York continues to remain the center just as it were during the war times and between the war years.

And even when theatre continues to grow outside New York City, we find that the center remains as the New York City itself without little change in its status and the way its establishment works. Some of the pre-war theatre such as the Goodman Theatre of Chicago, the Cleveland play house and the Karamu theatre of Cleveland continued to produce in the post-war years, but a new crop of theatres also emerged.

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soon followed, notably the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and the Milwaukee Repertory Theater. The most important factor in this development was a study by the Ford Foundation in 1957 that led to funding of what became known as resident professional theatres. The Rockefeller Foundation also began to support such theatres, and finally, the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 led to more support. As a result there was an explosion of new theatres around the country presenting original productions. (See Chapter 2 [LoMonaco, "Regional/Resident Theatre"] for an expanded coverage of regional theatre.)

These theatres employed thousands of theatre professionals and created venues for classics, revivals, and, especially, new plays that the New York theatre could no longer produce or originate. With the virtual elimination of the "Road," the resident professional theatres allowed a broad spectrum of the population to see live theatre. Several of the early theatres were founded



There are lot of names which are being listed over here in order to get a holistic historical sense.

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and run by women, suggesting that the regional theatres provided opportunities that might have been denied to many in New York.

After half a century, however, despite developing many new plays, actors, directors, and designers, it is not clear that the regional theatre movement has advanced the American theatre significantly. Virtually all these theatres are not-for-profit and, having been founded with subsidies, they remain dependent on subsidies. When the theatres were run by visionary directors, the lack of dependence on the box office sometimes allowed for daring and innovative productions. But as support from foundations, federal and state agencies, and private donors diminished, and as production costs rose, and as the first generation of visionary artists died or retired, the resident theatres became increasingly conservative, producing cookie-cutter theatre they hoped would appeal, or at least be inoffensive to a conservative subscription-based audience. With a few notable exceptions, these "regional" theatres had nothing to do with their location; they rarely produced plays of local interest; they employed few local artists; most still had one eye on New York City. And in a development since the eighties, the best theatres moved their successful productions to Broadway. Notable examples include La Jolla Playhouse's pro-



This also had a heavy impact in the way employment opportunities began to be created these theatres employed thousands of theatre professionals and created venues for classics, revivals, and especially new plays at the New York theatre could no longer produce or originate. This leads to the way to towards the emergence of another kind of economy altogether as we can see.

With the virtual elimination of the road, the resident professional theatres allowed a broad spectrum of the population to see live theatre. Several of the early theatres were founded and run by women, suggesting that the regional theatres provided opportunities that might have been denied to many in New York. There is a demographic shift there are challenges related to that, but there are also newer opportunities.

There are also the marginalized otherwise marginalized communities such as women the other Latin American minorities African American minorities we find all of them getting more attention and getting accommodated in this new system that largely emerges outside the New York City.

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based audience. With a few notable exceptions, these "regional" theatres had nothing to do with their location; they rarely produced plays of local interest; they employed few local artists; most still had one eye on New York City. And in a development since the eighties, the best theatres moved their successful productions to Broadway. Notable examples include La Jolla Playhouse's productions of the musicals *Big River* and *Tommy*, the plays of August Wilson first produced by the Yale Repertory Theatre, and *Angels in America* developed by the Mark Taper Forum. The out-of-town tryout which used to be Broadway's primary development tool was largely supplanted by the out-of-town creation. Plays were created and developed in a resident theatre and then brought to New York. If successful, the originating theatre would reap financial rewards, while the Broadway producer was spared at least part of the high cost of developing a risky property. Depending on one's point of view, this was either the decentralization and democratization of the American theatre, or it



Aronson clarifies this in this section with a few notable exceptions these regional theatres had nothing to do with their location. They rarely produced plays of local interest, they employed few local artists most still had one eye on New York City and in the development since the eighties the best theatres moved their successful productions to Broadway.

This is something that we find as very central. We find that Broadway continues to remain as synonymous to all theatrical activities and this movement of movement in the demographic this shift in the demographics and this growth of theatre outside New York City, it is all it is always temporal in some sense the center of activities in some sense the center of the thematic construction continues to be New York City itself.

If it was successful, the originating theatre would reap financial rewards while the Broadway producer was spared at least part of the high cost of developing a rescue property there are also new sorts of arrangements economic arrangements, which are emerging during this time and as mentioned earlier in the Aronson's essay itself that theatre is beginning to be seen as a business as an industry.

While the elitist aspect of it, while the national consciousness that it emanates are all continuing to remain valid, we find that this is looking at this also the way in which theatre aligns itself to the new market conditions which emerge. So, depending on ones point of view this was either decentralization and democratization of the American

theatre or it was a further refinement of the tributary theatre with old streams still flowing into the great reservoir of New York City.

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In one regard, though, some of the regional theatres – the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, the Hartford Stage Company, the Arena, the Guthrie, La Jolla, American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, and the Mark Taper, as well as the New York Shakespeare Festival under the late Joseph Papp – provided an opportunity that commercial theatre did not. They allowed the more daring contemporary directors, including Andrei Serban, Robert Woodruff, Liviu Ciulei, Mark Lamos, Marcus Stern, François Rochaix, Anne Bogart, JoAnne Akalaitis, Robert Wilson, and Richard Foreman, to direct innovative productions of classics. Texts were re-examined, deconstructed, and abstracted in order to find contemporary resonances through theatrical means beyond the mere updating of sets and costumes. Meanwhile, many designers who worked internationally or were aware of international develop-



So, this is something which is very difficult for us to evaluate it even at this point. On the one hand of course, there are these positive elements like there is a decentralization and team democratization of the American theatre because it is not temporarily located just in New York City, its growth is more widespread more rampant in these spaces in the peripheral spaces in the spaces outside of the city.

But, it could also be seen as a more sophisticated operation of this tributary theatre with all regional streams with all these provincial streams still flowing into New York City. So, if that is the case in the prominence and the significance given to Broadway as well as New York City we may have to say that has only accentuated in this process.

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But nevertheless there were lot of newer opportunities that these regional theatres had and they also began to experiment in a way that the commercial theatre could not. Commercial theatre located and centralized in New York City could not. So, as Aronson points out there were a number of daring contemporary directors he names a few like Andrei Serban, Robert Woodruff, Liviu Ciulei, Mark Lamos, Marcus Stern, Francois Rochaix and Bogart and Joanne Akalaitis and Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman.

They were making innovative productions of classics they were trying to recreate classics in a more with a more contemporary flavour. This is what Aronson comments on it, texts were re-examined deconstructed and abstracted in order to find the contemporary resonances through theatrical means beyond the mere updating of sets and costumes.

It is not just an additional ornamental attribute of with technology, it is not just another experimentation with newer kinds of props there is a way in which texts become recreated resituated in a different context with contemporary resonance. Meanwhile, many designers who worked internationally or were aware of international developments expanded the visual component of this development.

So, we find an alignment of sorts in the textual as well as the technical elements over here performance and text they also seem to be working in more closer terms here when we think about the recreations of older classics and making them infusing them with

newer techniques and newer attributes in order to resonate with the contemporary audience and the contemporary requirements.

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Social Upheavals



One wonders what might have happened (or more accurately, not happened) had the country continued on the superficially benign course and prosperity of the Eisenhower years. But the near nuclear war caused by the Cuban missile crisis followed by the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 scarred the nation in ways that were not readily apparent for years by undermining a sense of stability and security and challenging the overall belief structure of the country. The rapidly increasing involvement in Vietnam, just at the point that the baby-boom generation was coming of draft age, divided the country along not only political but generational and class lines. For many of the younger generation the conflict was not a clear-cut "good war" but rather a war that seemed to be controlled by political factors and suspect ideology. Faith in government and political leadership was thus subverted and part of the mortar that held society together seemed to crumble.

The issue of race has always been the Achilles' heel of American society. The first half of the twentieth century was dotted with sporadic attempts by African Americans to achieve justice and equality. The National Association



Overall, it is a journey of prosperity that America witnesses through these decades in the post war decades, but it was not without challenges. So, this section particularly looks at the major social upheavals that the nation and the American society had to face. So, he begins with this rather speculative note one wonders what might have happened or more accurately not happened had the country continued on the superficially benign cause and prosperity of Eisenhower years.

Here, the term superficial is very important because by the 60s there is also an increasing realization that much of this prosperity is very superficial, it is not translating into the real happiness the real joy that American Dream also guarantees and also that two people taking up the same path towards American Dream may not find the same kind of prosperity or the same kind of happiness.

The individuals just like the individual journeys are different the quotient of prosperity the expectations and the contentment from it also is very different. More importantly, there was an increasing understanding that perhaps this entire notion of American Dream and this talk of prosperity could not have any more depth than what is superficially noticed.

There are also a lot of other crisis in the 1960s, the near Nuclear War caused by the Cuban missile crisis followed by the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, scarred the nation in ways that were not readily apparent for years by undermining a sense of stability and security and challenging the overall belief structure of the country.

So, this assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 is very important because that is also a time when America as a nation had begun to invest a lot as well as believe in the ideals on which they thought they were setting up the nation they were building the nation.

This assassination and the crisis that followed scarred the nation in so, many ways because it was undercutting this fundamental sense of stability and security. It was undercutting the notion that whatever went wrong in Europe or the rest of the world will not happen in America, it was like tragedy striking home and that also had challenged the very heavily shaken the overall belief system of the country.

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The issue of race has always been the Achilles' heel of American society. The first half of the twentieth century was dotted with sporadic attempts by African Americans to achieve justice and equality. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1910 in response to lynchings in Illinois, there were race riots in several urban centers in the years after World War I, and a concerted legal effort to end segregation had begun by the mid-thirties. The presence of substantial numbers of black



Also the rapidly increasing involvement in Vietnam just at that point that the baby boom generation was coming of draft age divided the country along not only along political, but generation and class lines. So, just like America in the post war years began to realize that we are not just a pioneering country, but they are a pioneer in civilization, they also realize that there are newer challenges that that they have to deal with in this world order.

The challenges will which perhaps would not just go away when the economic security is achieved once the personal prosperity quotient of every individual is taken care off. So, for the younger generation we find that when the with Americas increased involvement in Vietnam, there is another moral question which is beginning to emerge for many of the younger generation the conflict was not a clear cut good war.

But rather a war that seemed to be controlled by political factors and suspect ideology. So, here we find the American society as war at certain at war with certain factions within itself it within itself and the enemy as in the different context as in the environment context it was mentioned before.

The enemy was not outside the enemy was right with in and one was not even sure whether these were the national agendas that should be pursued in these after having seen the apparels and terrorists of the two world wars. So, faith in government and political leadership was subverted and now and part of the mortar that held society together seem to crumble.

So, the all those components on which the American Dream and the structure of the American society was built upon in rapid succession all of these things begin to completely fall apart or even fail and now we come to another significant issue that of race, the issue of race has always been the Achilles heel of American society. The first half of the twentieth century was dotted with sporadic attempts by African Americans to achieve justice and equality and we did talk about NAACP while we were discussing the earlier plays such as Lorraine Hansberry's a raisin in the sun.

So, NAACP was founded in 1910 in response to the Lynching's in Illinois were also a lot of riots in many of the urban centers in the years after the World War and there was a concerted legal effort to end segregation which had begun from the mid-thirties onwards, but we find that there is a lot of local resistance there is a lot of resistance from general public even after that which is the theme of a raisin in the sun as well.

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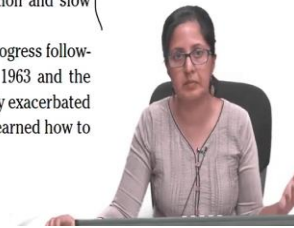
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American Theatre in Context



troops in World War II inevitably began to reshape the preconceptions and attitudes of many of the white soldiers who fought alongside them. 1954 saw the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court case that ended legal segregation of public schools – a ruling that had to be enforced in Little Rock in 1957 by the National Guard, raising specters of a military occupation. The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 led by Martin Luther King began a period of Thoreau-inspired civil disobedience that would inform the anti-war protests of the following decade. From the earliest days of the Civil Rights Movement and the philosophical differences between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, the struggle was between immediate action and slow progress; between integration and empowered separation.

The Civil Rights Movement had shown some faint signs of progress following the march on Washington led by Martin Luther King in 1963 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. But the Vietnam War only exacerbated the racial divide. Many middle-class and affluent white youth learned how to



So, there is there are lot of legal interventions from the 1950s onwards to bring an end to this legal segregation of public schools and we know the kind of the Montgomery bus boycott which we also refer to while discussing Hansberry's play and we find that the Thoreau inspired civil disobedience movement. So, all of these it is a 1950s is very turbulent in some sense.

But it is also highlighting the fact that despite all these decades of intense faith in this system, there were a certain issues such as race which will just refuse to go away because payway because they were not addressed properly in the first place . So, and this there was always this struggle that certain individuals and the society at large also witnessed and began to acknowledge that there was this the struggle was between immediate action and slow progress between integration and empowered separation which is very important .

In *A Raisin in the Sun* Lorraine Hansberry's play, there also we find that in a legal sense in a technical sense in a purely political sense it is an egalitarian society, they are able to buy property the African American family the younger family. They are allowed to legally possess property in that white neighborhood and they do go ahead and they are able to buy the property as well.

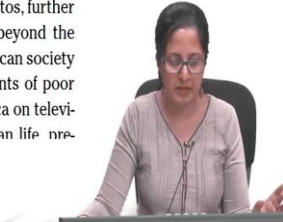

So, it is not a question of money, it is not a question of access anymore it is about how the public sphere continues to operate. So, the struggle as Aronson points out over here is

between the immediate action and slow progress there are certain actions which are taken immediately.

But it will take a while for that to get translated into real kind of progress which is tangible on an everyday basis and there was also this struggle between integration and empowered separation. What a play like Lorraine Hansberry's is also trying to address this struggle, there has there are a lot of a gray areas in between which needs to be addressed even after the legal and political changes and decisions have been made.

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the racial divide. Many middle-class and affluent white youth learned how to manipulate the system to avoid the draft or to avoid Vietnam service, so the troops were disproportionately black. But even before the height of the war, racial tensions were at the boiling point. There were riots in Harlem in the summer of 1964, Los Angeles in 1965, Chicago in 1966, and in Detroit and 127 other cities in 1967. The assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 touched off even more riots around the country. The reasons for the riots were varied and complex, but they marked a turning point in urban American history since they served as an indication that the inner cities were becoming predominantly black, while the system of authority remained predominantly white. The flight of whites from the cities meant a decline in the economic bases of the cities which led to declining services and crumbling infrastructures. The rise of drug use, disproportionately centered in the ghettos, further eroded the fabric of society. The role of television went well beyond the reshaping of American culture; it informed the self-image of American society in a way that no previous art form or medium ever had. Residents of poor urban areas, victims of *de facto* segregation, saw a view of America on television every night that depicted affluent white generally suburban life pre-



This becomes intensely clear to the American society from the 1960s onwards, which finds its reflection in these plays as well. So, the civil rights movement is briefly captured here in this paragraph led by Martin Luther king in 1963. The passage of the civil rights in 64, but we find that the Vietnam War happens in between as a major inconvenience challenging many of these notions on which the American society was built.

The Vietnam War only exacerbated the racial divide many middle class and affluent white youth learned how to manipulate the system to avoid the draft or to avoid Vietnam service. So, the troops were disproportionately black. So, here race comes back as a very different question altogether there is a different kind of segregation which is happening over here where the whites know how to manipulate the system they know how to circumvent certain kinds of inevitable things and its mostly the black population the

African American population which is enlisted during the Vietnam War which of course, becomes a huge political dilemma.

Even before the height of the war racial tensions were at the boiling point it only adds more aggression to this entire ongoing thing. There were riots in Harlem in the summer of 1964 look at the these turbulent years in succession one after the other there are these riots activities, 64 Los Angeles and 65 Chicago 66 and Detroit 127 other cities in 1967 , and with Martin Luther king's assassination in 1968.

We find that this the struggle around the question of race reaches it is peak. The reasons for the riots were varied and complex, but they marked a turning point in urban American history since they served as an indication that the inner cities were becoming predominantly black while the system of authority remained predominantly white.

So, Lorraine Hansberry's play if you may think about how it ends, it ends it is a precarious situation where there is lot of uncertainty ahead there is lot of uncertainty about each one's life would pan out to be. But there is a hope in the younger family that things will eventually be fine because they would want to be good neighbours, they want to assimilate in a positive way and they want to stick to their identity, but it should not. They do not want to compromise their nationalist consciousness in any way.

We find it in less than a decade this is the struggle only aggravates the inner cities becoming predominantly black which means there is a presence there is a very visible presence of the African American population. But the control the agency is entirely with the white population.

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in a way that no previous art form or medium ever had. Residents of poor urban areas, victims of *de facto* segregation, saw a view of America on television every night that depicted affluent, white, generally suburban life, presented as the epitome of the American dream that was clearly out of reach for a significant portion of the population. Television news also brought images and information about both the war and the riots into homes more graphically and more rapidly than at any previous time in history.

This was the context in which African American drama emerged. Examples of black theatre date to at least the 1820s, although there was little support for – in fact much antagonism toward – serious black playwrights and performers until the twenties, and even then it was minimal. Even during the thirties, when Langston Hughes and others were writing and there were Negro Units of the Federal Theatre Project, the ghost of the minstrel shows hung



The flight of white from the cities meant to decline in the socio economic bases of the cities which led to declining services and crumbling infrastructures. So, here what this essay is also doing is, drawing our attention to a range of socio political and historical things which are happening during the 1940s 50s and 60s. While also making us understand how these changes were getting resonated, how these changes were affecting the themes and the trends in the twentieth century American drama.

And this challenge has a sociological element which further complicated the notion that the African American population or such a migrant population will affect the purity of the society, there was an added moral element also to it which becomes clear in this essay as well, the rise of drug use disproportionately centered in the ghettos further eroded the fabric of society. So, it rightly also explains how in Lorraine Hansberry's play too, the presence of the African American family among the whites it is seen as a threat it is seen as a pollutant.

So, we do know that there is a very strong economic and historical reason for these sort of fears to emerge and what that play does is, though it does not get into a very overtly political statement making mode, what the player successfully does is to unravel that this is these are the realities that the African American community is also facing even while they are trying to assimilate into the integrate themselves into the dominant modes of living.

So, the role of television that went well beyond the reshaping of American culture it informed the self-image of American society in a way that previous art form or medium ever had. So, there are a lot of changes which is happening during this time and it is very important to state that, the African American drama was emerging though it was in its nascent stage in the 50s it is emerging from this context.

The African American drama emerges from such a turbulent state where there is prosperity but there are also a lot of challenges political socio economic cultural sociologically there are lot of changes lot of challenges which are affecting America despite the prosperity.

So, this also tells us very briefly about how the role of television went beyond it began to play a role which was beyond a just a medium of entertainment, restaurants of poor urban areas victims of de facto segregation saw a view of America on television every night that depicted affluent white generally suburban life presented as the epitome of the American Dream that was clearly out of reach for a significant portion of the population.

So, here the television and what it is showing it does not become it does not sees it is not seen just as a mode of entertainment, it is something which brings in a lot of discontent too, it also shows certain images which a vast population cannot aspire to become, it shows a set of images which a vast population want to become, but they have no means to become that. So, it also more than entertainment it becomes a source of discontent as well. Television news also brought images and information about both the war and the riots into homes more graphically and more rapidly than at any previous time in history.

So, the world was the context of the world was very different, the one use reached at a much slower pace this was almost like a real time the war news was reaching each living room it in a very rapid pace almost in a lifetime mode and that also accentuated this discontent, the fear, the anxiety and everything that possibly could go wrong during the war times and this is despite the fact that the wars were not really happening the war did not happen the Vietnam war for instance did not happen in the soil of America.

But there were of course, lot of riots those news were was also very creating a lot of distrust among the communities, which again we see if we recall Hansberry's Lorraine Hansberry's play there it is not that they have anything in particularly a complaint about this younger family about one particular African American family, it is about this news

they have been hearing all kinds things about the community about the bombs being set off.

So, that has generated a fear and anxiety which forces them to stay in this segregating mode. So, this was the context as Aronson points out in which African American African American drama emerged. So, examples on black theatre date to at least 1820s though there was little support in fact, there was lot of antagonism about these earlier plays there was little support for serious black playwrights and performers until the 20s even then it was minimal.

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over black theatre. While white audiences would be sporadically supportive of serious plays about black concerns, especially if written and produced by whites, they were most comfortable with musical revues that showcased singing and dancing and which, if not explicitly degrading, nonetheless seemed to reward black performers for their ability to entertain white audiences, not to make them think. Every seeming advance in black theatre ultimately led to a dead end, the victim of shifts in political or economic climates.

In the postwar era, black concerns with identity, family, and a place in American society were thematically similar to the concerns of white playwrights. The rising prosperity of the era, the beginnings of foundation grants that helped subsidize theatres, and the general spirit of liberal integrationism, all contributed to an atmosphere in which the black theatre could, relatively speaking, experiment and grow. When Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first Broadway play both written and directed by African Americans,



Even in 30s when Langston Hughes and others were writing, it was not an easy decade there were still struggles in order to be heard. So, the white while the white audience would be sporadically supportive of serious plays about black concerns especially if written and produced by whites they were most comfortable with the musical reviews that showcase singing and dancing and which if not explicitly degrading nonetheless in to reward black performance, performance for the ability to entertain white audiences not to make them think.

So here the question is very clear as long as the white population is addressing these inequalities and these racial segregations by themselves that were seen as all right. But it was not their place when the black playwrights were trying to educate the whites about

the situation. So, every seeming advance in black theatre ultimately led to a dead end the victim of shifts in political or economic climates.

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premiered in 1959 – the director was Lloyd Richards who would later become Dean of the Yale Drama School and the director of August Wilson's plays on Broadway – it seemed reasonable that this would be the first step toward a vigorous black presence in the mainstream theatre. The play, about a black family's decision to move to a white suburb and the emotional upheaval this decision caused within the family, embodied the African American attempt to claim its stake in the American dream and mirrored the first steps toward integration that were then being taken around the country. The chasm between black and white was a given in Hansberry's play – neither white society nor the underlying causes of this gulf were explored. In the best American dramatic tradition, society was encapsulated in the microcosm of the family, and the solution to social problems was seen in questions of identity, self-worth, and personal responsibility and action. If the play broke no new ground dramatically, it was certainly a well-crafted drama and its ability to tap into contemporary political liberalism without threatening white audiences contributed to its hit status.

Yet individual successes like this and subsequent ones in the sixties and seventies, such as *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The River Niger*, *A Soldier's*



So, now, we come to look at the play that we had centrally looked at the latest play Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. So, in the post war era black concerns with identity, family and a place in American society were thematically similar to the concerns of white playwrights.

So, in the at least in the initial years we find that Lorraine Hansberry is also forced to work within such templates for obvious reasons. So, the rising prosperity of the era, the beginning of foundation grants that helped subsidize theatres the general spirit of liberal integrationism all contributed to an atmosphere in which the black theatre could relatively speaking experiment and grow.

So, here we look at Aronson is taking a critical look at Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* which incidentally was the first Broadway play written and directed by African Americans. So, just to clarify this point until that point of time whenever race was discussed in the context of American drama, it was always by white playwrights it was never seen as a pejorative of the black artist to bring to the forefront such an issue because their role was seen to be to just the function as entertain us not to make the American population think as Aronson makes it clear.

So, this a Raisin in the Sun premiered in 1959 and it seemed reasonable that this would be the first step toward a vigorous black presence in the mainstream in the mainstream American theatre. So, what was this play about just a quick recall about a black families decision to move to a white suburb and now this also makes more sense to us because there was a demographic shift as we noted there was a lot of white population leaving the cities and moving to the suburbs to lead more comfortable and peaceful lives.

And we also find that during this period there is another our migration from the Latin American countries and from the south towards the city spaces in America. So, here it is a play about this play is about an African American family who makes the same who wants to make the same kind of decisions that most middle class whites had already made to move to the suburbs.

So, they want to move to this white suburb and the emotional upheaval becomes the central theme of this play. So, here is an American African American family who sees themselves that is the next generation the younger generation of the younger family, they see themselves as entirely American.

And hence they also believe that they have every right to claim their stake in the American Dream and this is a play in that sense it mirrored the first step towards integration which was technically in a legal sense was beginning to being taken around the country.

So, this there were lot of criticism against Hansberry's play, but we also need to see those in context that is this argument that the play broke new ground dramaturgically and it was just trying to toe the lines which were earlier the traditional lines which were set before, but we also need to accept that it was still at a very nascent stage. So, the chasm between white and black and white was a given in Hansberry's play neither white society nor the underlying causes of this gulf were explored.

If you recall towards the end when there is this conversation where the representative from the white community is trying to convince the younger family to say not to move. We find that the racial discrimination this segregation is seen as a very much matter of fact thing. There is absolutely no involvement or engagement to get to the bottom of this problem it is being dealt with very superficially arguably for very obvious reasons too.

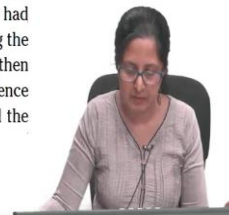
Because it was not it was still in its nascent stage and Hansberry was just making use of this opportunity to begin to address such a pressing problem. The best American dramatic tradition society was encapsulated in the microcosm of the family and the solution to social problems were seen in questions of identity self-worth and personal responsibility and action. We do find this play in that sense replicating what perhaps Arthur Miller's play did that it ultimately comes down upon the individual.

In this younger family to while they are all aware of a larger institutional systemic and structural problem that is resulted in racial segregation they also seem to be taking personal responsibility for their behaviour and for proving themselves to be good neighbors. So, in some sense it replicates the model of the American Dream, it replicates the model of the dramaturgical experiments done before.

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claim its stake in the American dream and mirrored the first steps toward integration that were then being taken around the country. The chasm between black and white was a given in Hansberry's play – neither white society nor the underlying causes of this gulf were explored. In the best American dramatic tradition, society was encapsulated in the microcosm of the family, and the solution to social problems was seen in questions of identity, self-worth, and personal responsibility and action. If the play broke no new ground dramaturgically, it was certainly a well-crafted drama and its ability to tap into contemporary political liberalism without threatening white audiences contributed to its hit status.

Yet individual successes like this and subsequent ones in the sixties and seventies, such as *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The River Niger*, *A Soldier's Play*, *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*, and *No Place to Be Somebody*, which had successful runs on and Off-Broadway, winning Tonys and Pulitzers along the way, faced the same problems as commercial drama as a whole, and then some. These plays were being produced during a period of declining audience support for serious drama. Moreover, these productions neither paved the



So, the play broke no new ground dramaturgically, it was certainly a well crafted drama and its ability to tap into contemporary political liberalism without threatening white audiences contributed to it is hit status. So, it is also very well crafted play in terms of knowing its audience because Hansberry's play is very carefully crafted as to not to make the mistake which would make it make the play a flop.

It did not want to be preachy it wanted to include the whites, the white liberal audience in this discussion and not to alienate them. So, we find the characterization being done in such careful ways to accommodate everyone in this discussion without alienating this as

a in a black and white sense this without foregrounding this as a black versus white population problem.

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American Theatre in Context



most of these names remain footnotes in the American canon or are relegated to a separate category. Only in the late eighties did a black playwright, August Wilson, make it into the list of major American playwrights.

Black playwrights and producers in the twentieth century have always confronted the equivalent dilemma as the social and political activists: do they write and produce for a black audience or for a white audience? The idealistic answer, that good drama knows no color line, ignores reality. Given the underlying truth of racial politics in the United States, it is virtually impossible for a black playwright to write serious drama that does not have racial implications. The playwright, then, must implicitly or explicitly envision an audience, and the decision can have significant financial implications. The American Negro Theatre, which spanned the war years, epitomized all these problems. Founded by Abram Hill and Frederick O'Neal in 1939 as an attempt to fill the gap left by the demise of the Federal Theatre Project's Negro Theatre Unit, the ANT sought to create a home for black playwrights while providing



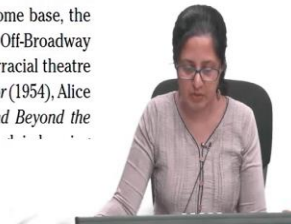
So, there is a gradually coming to the end of this discussion and this some of these aspects are quite outside the scope of what we would be covering in this course. But it is very useful to know that black playwrights and producers in the twentieth century have always confronted the equivalent dilemma as the social and political activists; do they write and produce for a black audience or for a white audience?

There is no need to answer to this question, but it is very important to start asking this question as you familiarize yourself more with drama produced by African American writers. So, the idealistic answer is that good drama knows no color line it ignores reality, but given the underlying truth of racial politics in the United States.

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an outlet and training for black actors, directors, and technicians. But its focus was never entirely clear. Its greatest success was *Anna Lucasta* by white playwright Philip Yordan. Originally about a Polish working-class family, the play was adapted for the ANT and its success led to a Broadway transfer. The drain on the resources and unity of the company because of this production led to the ultimate demise of the ANT. Their attempt to adapt to white institutions led to temporary success and ultimate failure.

A parallel to Off-Broadway emerged in Harlem in the late forties. Ironically, the very same forces that were reconfiguring the Broadway theatre were also affecting the Harlem theatres. Middle-class blacks who had provided the backbone of the theatregoing audience began moving out of Harlem to the suburbs or to other boroughs. The decline in audience and the general rise in various costs led to a loss of permanent theatre buildings. With no home base, the creation of new work became increasingly difficult. The Off-Broadway Greenwich Mews Theatre in Greenwich Village supported interracial theatre and in the mid-fifties produced William Branch's *In Splendid Error* (1954), Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind* (1955), and Loftin Mitchell's *Land Beyond the*



It is virtually impossible for a black playwright to write serious drama that does not have racial implications. So, this is also will lead us to certain larger questions about the connection between art and politics, how much of the creativity should be invested into the politics of those times and whether the art the creative expression which is devoid of the politics.

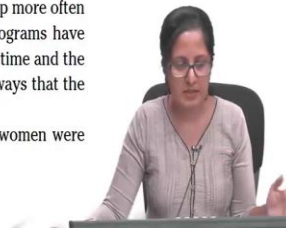
Does it lose out on something is it does so, that be seen as inferior form of art in some form. So, it there are larger questions that we need to address in order to be able to answer this question about whether the African American playwrights should be producing drama for the whites or for the blacks or can they write about something else altogether without addressing the question of race. So, I leave this as an open ended question for you to ponder upon.

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houses, and brings in touring large-scale shows.

Serious drama may have little place on contemporary Broadway anymore, but new Off-Broadway theatres are being built for the first time in years to house the large number of productions that are vying for space. Meanwhile, the regional theatres continue to be a major source of original productions and classic theatre, although the ever decreasing public subsidy is threatening the ability of many of these theatres to survive or to produce original contributions. Playwrights, almost none of whom can make an adequate living writing solely for the theatre, have been writing for film and television. While this is hardly a new phenomenon – writers have been devoured by Hollywood almost from the moment moving pictures first “talked” – critics have acknowledged an increasing quality in much television drama. The sort of serious dramatic writing that once was reserved for the stage now shows up more often on television’s police and hospital series. Writers for these programs have commented on the greater freedom to develop characters over time and the ability to explore these characters in a variety of situations in ways that the finite shape of a play does not allow.

The fifties was a decade of absolutes: men had jobs while women were

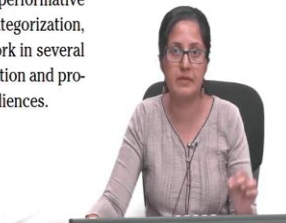


So, towards the end of this discussion it also talks about how serious drama was that was impossible to just focus on serious drama too as a means of livelihood and the playwrights also began to write simultaneously for television for movies.

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ability to explore these characters in a variety of situations in ways that the finite shape of a play does not allow.

The fifties was a decade of absolutes: men had jobs while women were housewives; the world was divided into “free” and Communist; one was a Republican or a Democrat, and so on. Shades of gray were suspect. Similarly, theatre was divided into drama, comedy, and musicals; other performance categories included opera and ballet. Popular entertainments such as the circus were not seriously considered as performance by most audiences. But just as the Civil Rights, women’s, and gay movements, the counterculture life styles, and the avant-garde all worked to break down barriers and alter assumptions about life and art, theatrical categories evaporated as well. Theatre became performance and included under its umbrella traditional and popular forms, rituals, paratheatrical activities, and even the performative aspects of daily life. Today, many presentations defy simple categorization, training incorporates a wide range of disciplines, and artists work in several genres. On the other hand, identity politics still informs the creation and producing of many theatres and defines the habits of particular audiences.



So, we do find decline in some sense, but also know opening up of newer opportunities. Now I know he also briefly focuses on the fifties, the fifties were a very different sort of decade which is why perhaps the most vibrant kinds of drama were also being written around the same time.

Capturing diverse sections of the society the fifties was a decade of absolutes men had jobs while women were housewives the world was divided into free and communist one was a republican or a democrat and so on shades of gray were suspect. So, this is the transition time which is why all the characters that we have seen in the plays that we have looked at there were very interesting in some sense they are trying to identify the gray areas and in that process they are also becoming outliers over here.

Similarly, theatre was divided into drama, comedy and musicals other performance categories included opera and ballet popular entertainments such as the circus were not seriously considered as performance, but just as a Civil Rights, women's and gay movements, the counterculture lifestyle and the avant-garde all worked to break down barriers and alter assumptions about life and art theatrical categories evaporated as well.

So, that is perhaps the most central achievement of the drama of the late 40s and 1950s because it could break down these barriers, break down these stereotypical notions about what to expect from different category in art and life about identity and this expectation was being challenged in many ways through these diverse and interesting characters. Theatre became performance and included under its umbrella traditional and popular forms rituals paratheatrical activities and even the performative acts aspects of daily life.

Today many presentations defies simple categorization training incorporates a wide range of disciplines and artists work in several genres. On the other hand, identity politics still informs the creation and producing of many theatres and defines the habits of particular audiences.

So, if we may underscore this statement we can find that it resonates very well with the plays that we have looked at identity politics in some form or the other had always informed the characterization. The decisions that these characters took and it also had defined the habits of particular audiences which in turn forced them to change trends and adopt different techniques while trying to suit different audiences.

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A great unknown for the future of theatre is the realm referred to as "cyber-space" – the world of computers, virtual reality, and digital communication. Some performance artists such as Laurie Anderson and George Coates have created performance pieces for the World Wide Web that allow "spectators" sitting at their computer terminals to interact with the work of art. There have been primitive attempts at three-dimensional scenery using special goggles and computer-enhanced images. While it seems unlikely that so-called virtual theatre or the gimmickry and wizardry of contemporary technology in and of itself will replace or even seriously alter live theatre, the new technologies are rapidly and subtly transforming the way in which we view and understand the world. Just as perspective painting and scientific thought transformed the art and theatre of the Renaissance, and relativity and quantum physics affected twentieth-century art and theatre, so too will the new digital and electronic technologies transform theatre for the next centuries through the alteration of perceptions in ways that cannot be predicted or even understood.



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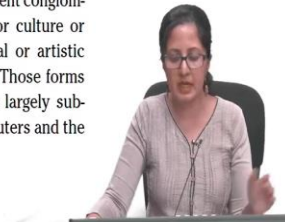
Arnold Aronson

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Vegas and its clones – more representative of theatre than the conventional drama or musical.

It is clear at the end of the twentieth century that the theatre is far from dead. Statistics suggest a stubborn vitality all across the country. Theatre training programs continue to have ample numbers of applicants; literary offices are swamped with submissions of new plays; almost every city of any size has at least one theatre. What has changed is theatre's place within the society and the means of production. Mainstream theatre is rarely casual entertainment any more. The large commercial theatres and the "official" theatres – the urban or state arts centers – are run by entertainment conglomerates or corporate boards. They have become showcases for culture or tourist destinations. Smaller venues are dedicated to political or artistic agendas aimed at generally narrow but supportive audiences. Those forms that have historically constituted popular theatre have been largely subsumed by television, film, popular music, and perhaps by computers and the



So, as we come to the end of this essay by Arnold Aronson which tries to situate American theatre in a historical context in a larger historical context tracing its trajectory in different decades. He at towards the end he accentuates this fact that the theatre is far from dead.

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venues of corporate boards. They have become enclaves for cultural tourist destinations. Smaller venues are dedicated to political or artistic agendas aimed at generally narrow but supportive audiences. Those forms that have historically constituted popular theatre have been largely subsumed by television, film, popular music, and perhaps by computers and the Internet. There is a potential danger in this last development. The popular theatre has always been the training ground for performers and writers. Learning to engage an audience, interact with it, and communicate with it is crucial for the continuation of a vital theatre. The loss of that venue will mean the loss of new generations of performers with adequate experience in the give and take of live theatre. Stand-up comedy, one of the last vestiges of variety entertainment, provides some of that experience, but it is not the same as the complex interactions of a narrative structure and several actors.

The human desire for live performance – what Aristotle understood as a human inclination to mimic – will keep theatre alive in the future as it has in the past. But the electronic media are a new factor which makes the future even more unpredictable than ever.



Statistics suggest a stubborn vitality all across the country, theatre training programs continue to have ample number of applicants what has changed then? So, what has changed is theatres place within the society and means of production mainstream theatre is rarely casual entertainment anymore. This was something which began to be witnessed from the 60s and 70s onwards theatre became seen to become a form of entertainment as television and movies majorly took over.

It became elitist exercise, it became a more serious exercise it became something which a performance which could not be witnessed in a casual sense and this we may say that a change which has come about in different parts of the world too where theatre requires a more niche kind of an audience, and it is not mass popular entertainment like cinema or TV and we also find that the commercial theatres the large commercial theatres were taken over by these entertainment conglomerates and corporate boards.

We find a mix of these two things happening, it becomes more serious business it also becomes more corporate, but without the say the glamour and glitz which is part of say television and cinema. Aronson throughout his essay have highlighted certain changes which are very local in nature and he has also experience his own discontent and his own discomfort with certain kinds of changes taking over that set he leaves this essay on a very pragmatic as well as promising note the human desire for live performance.

What Aristotle understood as a human inclination to mimic will keep theatre alive in the future as it has in the past but the electronic media are a new factor which makes the future even more unpredictable than ever. So, the very fact that in fairly recent essay like this we are talking about the decades which had functioned as the foundational aspect of American drama that itself illustrates that there is a continuity to this genre there is a need to go back to these plays particularly of the fifty 40s 50s and 60s in order to understand what American society was like.

On the one hand, we do have a lot of historical information about how life was lived, but American drama of those periods they also give us a very clear insight into how individuals individually lived those realities and how each person responded to situations in a political sense in a psychological sense in a in an familiar sense.

So, as we discussed before the highlight of these plays is perhaps is that it allows us to get into the psychology of these characters. We get to know the inner workings of their minds and that makes us that helps us to understand the historical and political circumstance with more humane element with a more humanitarian touch.

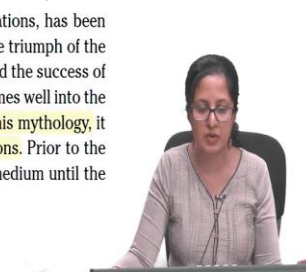
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American Theatre in Context: 1945–Present

Arnold Aronson

Introduction

The history of the United States, more than that of most nations, has been depicted as a grand and heroic narrative – a great epic of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, the victory of good over evil, and the success of the individual in the face of enormous odds. From colonial times well into the twentieth century, the theatre was not only a reflection of this mythology, it was a crucial instrument for the molding of public perceptions. Prior to the birth of the movies – which did not really become a mass medium until the



It is strongly encouraged to read through this essay on one's own as well American Theatre in Context 1945 to present by Arnold Aronson.