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Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, And Contemporary America



Synopsis

Notions, constructions, and performances of race continue to define the contemporary American experience, including America's relationship to Shakespeare. In *Passing Strange*, Ayanna Thompson explores the myriad ways U.S. culture draws on the works and the mythology of the Bard to redefine the boundaries of the color line. Drawing on an extensive--frequently unconventional--range of examples, Thompson examines the contact zones between constructions of Shakespeare and constructions of race. Among the questions she addresses are: Do Shakespeare's plays need to be edited, appropriated, updated, or rewritten to affirm racial equality and retain relevance? Can discussions of Shakespeare's universalism tell us anything beneficial about race? What advantages, if any, can a knowledge of Shakespeare provide to disadvantaged people of color, including those in prison? Do the answers to these questions impact our understandings of authorship, authority, and authenticity? In investigating this under-explored territory, *Passing Strange* examines a wide variety of contemporary texts, including films, novels, theatrical productions, YouTube videos, performances, and arts education programs. Scholars, teachers, and performers will find a wealth of insights into the staging and performance of familiar plays, but they will also encounter new ways of viewing Shakespeare and American racial identity, enriching their understanding of each.

Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (May 13, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195385853

ISBN-13: 978-0195385854

Product Dimensions: 9.4 x 0.7 x 6.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

"A readable, argumentative discussion of race in a variety of works." --*Studies in English Literature*

1500-1900" Ayanna Thompson's exciting new book forges a much needed bridge between Shakespeare studies and the study of race. In addition to analyzing deftly contemporary productions of Shakespeare, *Passing Strange* steps outside of convention and insightfully considers contemporary films and other performances that merely reference the Bard. In so doing Thompson boldly interrogates how race politics can inform our understanding of Shakespeare as well as how Shakespeare can impact our understanding of race. This is an important new work for scholars, students, and practitioners alike." --Harry J. Elam Jr., Editor of *African American Performance and Theater History*" This terrific book marks an important step forward in Shakespeare scholarship. With skill and passion, Ayanna Thompson argues that the discussion of Shakespeare and race needs to move beyond the venerable Shakespeare-plus-theme model. By staging the relationship between contemporary race studies and Shakespeare in the American present as a spirited dialogue between true equals, *Passing Strange* demonstrates how fully matters of race matter in the ways we teach, perform, use, and watch Shakespeare." --Douglas Lanier, author of *Shakespeare and Popular Culture*" Shakespeare never fails to ignite our idealism while remaining the great poet of compromise, disappointment, and failed hopes. This book is a report on Shakespeare at the coalface of contemporary America. Carefully observing with clarity and compassion the way Americans see themselves in Shakespeare's mirror, Ayanna Thompson subtly unravels hypocrisies, confusions and complications across a range of noble and ignoble motives that are by turns illuminating, chastening, and sometimes hard-to-watch. Its radical inclusivity and clear-headedness make *Passing Strange* a cause for hope, and a model for artistic and social redemption." --Peter Sellars, theater director" Ambitious... Recommended." --Choice

Ayanna Thompson is Associate Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author of *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* and the Editor of *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* and *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*.

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