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The Problem of the Color[blind]: Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)

Brandi Wilkins Catanese

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"Catanese's beautifully written and cogently argued book addresses one of the most persistent sociopolitical questions in contemporary culture. She suggests that it is performance and the difference it makes that complicates the terms by which we can even understand 'multicultural' and 'colorblind' concepts. A tremendously illuminating study that promises to break new ground in the fields of theatre and performance studies, African American studies, feminist theory, cultural studies, and film and television studies."
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"Adds immeasurably to the ways in which we can understand the contradictory aspects of racial discourse and performance as they have emerged during the last two decades. An ambitious, smart, and fascinating book."
---Jennifer DeVere Brody, Duke University

Are we a multicultural nation, or a colorblind one? *The Problem of the Color[blind]* examines this vexed question in American culture by focusing on black performance in theater, film, and television. The practice of colorblind casting---choosing actors without regard to race---assumes a performing body that is somehow race neutral. But where, exactly, is race neutrality located---in the eyes of the spectator, in the body of the performer, in the medium of the performance? In analyzing and theorizing such questions, Brandi Wilkins Catanese explores a range of engaging and provocative subjects, including the infamous debate between playwright August Wilson and drama critic Robert Brustein, the film career of Denzel Washington, Suzan-Lori Parks's play *Venus*, the phenomenon of postblackness (as represented in the Studio Museum in Harlem's "Freestyle" exhibition), the performer Ice Cube's transformation from icon of gangsta rap to family movie star, and the controversial reality television series *Black. White*. Concluding that ideologies of transcendence are ahistorical and therefore unenforceable, Catanese advances the concept of racial transgression---a process of acknowledging rather than ignoring the racialized histories of performance---as her chapters move between readings of dramatic texts, films, popular culture, and debates in critical race theory and the culture wars.

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