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Palgrave Macmillan

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English & American

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Goddard, Lynette. **Contemporary black British playwrights: margins to mainstream**. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 255p bibl index afp ISBN 9780230237483, \$90.00.

Goddard (Royal Holloway, Univ. of London, UK) explores contemporary black British theater through close analyses of work by Kwame Kwei-Armah, Debbie Tucker Green, Roy Williams, and Bola Agbaje. Bringing to the conversation the work of cultural studies scholars (Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer), Goddard explains these plays as “social documents of their era” that offer engagement with contemporary issues that “have a wide political resonance with contemporary black and white audiences.” Themes of youth violence and race in sport, legacies of slavery, domestic violence, sexual abuse, women’s solidarity, and human rights in Africa and the Caribbean arise in these plays, and thus Goddard’s descriptions. The author emphasizes that though playwrights did not intend to offer solutions to urgent social concerns, airing issues onstage reminds audiences of “latent and explicit anxieties and hostilities that inform race relations in the UK.” Goddard concludes that each author “stages black experience as ‘universal,’ and, in the process, foregrounds ‘black rights’ as ‘human rights.’” The book includes competent, straightforward renderings of plots and production values, critical responses of mainstream press, audience demographics, and Goddard’s sense of performance notability. Unfortunately, the writing style fails to convey an affective sense of performances, and the author does not include complete production histories or original collaborators.

--T. F. DeFrantz, *Duke University*

Summing Up: Recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty and professionals; general readers.