

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
STAGE DIRECTORS IN AMERICAN THEATRE

Shirley Basfield Dunlap, PhD 2018

Directed by: Dr. Beverly Bickel, Clinical Associate Professor,
Language, Literacy, and Culture Program and
Dr. Michelle Scott, Associate Professor, History Department

This dissertation presents an oral history of African American stage directors of American mainstream theatre. They are four of many African American directors who are undocumented in the annals of American history as seen in the publication of over two hundred interviews of directors working in American theatres. Drawing on preliminary interviews, conducted by me, of stage managers, actors and designers of each director, along with articles about each director, a compilation of questions were constructed for the oral history interview.

This dissertation will show that the director's staging of the theatrical artwork is a commentary on experience, ideologies, interpretations and representations of the world of the play through the cultural lenses of the director who brings cultural heritage to life through performative art. Each director contributes another dimension to historicizing moments that have not had adequate attention. Scripts and performances directed by these African American directors have been chronicled in African American theatre history books but the cultural processes of 'making' of the play and the creating the production, have not.

Marjorie Moon of The Billie Holiday Theatre; Clinton Turner Davis of the Negro Ensemble Company and co-founder of The Non-Traditional Casting Project; Mabel Robinson of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company; and Woodie King, Jr. of the New Federal Theatre describe the intersectionality of the lived history of African Americans in theatre as early as the National Black Arts/Theatre Movement and the discrimination that ensues in the lack of documentation of African Americans' performance in American theatre history.

The history of African Americans is the history of America and this dissertation begins the journey of inclusion of African American stage directors in American theatre history.