



# Harlem's Theaters: A Staging Ground for Community, Class, and Contradiction, 1923-1939

*Adrienne Macki Braconi*

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Honorable Mention, 2016 Errol Hill Book Award for Outstanding Scholarship in African American Theater, Drama and/or Performance

Based on a vast amount of archival research, Adrienne Macki Braconi's illuminating study of three important community-based theaters in Harlem shows how their work was essential to the formation of a public identity for African Americans and the articulation of their goals, laying the groundwork for the emergence of the Civil Rights movement. Macki Braconi uses textual analysis, performance reconstruction, and audience reception to examine the complex dynamics of productions by the Krigwa Players, the Harlem Experimental Theatre, and the Negro Theatre of the Federal Theatre Project. Even as these theaters demonstrated the extraordinary power of activist art, they also revealed its limits. The stage was a site in which ideological and class differences played out, theater being both a force for change and a collision of contradictory agendas. Macki Braconi's book alters our understanding of the Harlem Renaissance, the roots of the Civil Rights movement, and the history of community theater in America.

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