

Open Call for Boycott

Goodman Theater to Premiere Controversial Rendition of The Emperor Jones



THE EMPEROR JONES
pictured: Kate Valk
photo: © Paula Court



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After the intense battle over the next President of the United States brought issues of race and gender to the forefront, the “isms” have once again reared their ugly heads. Merely days away from the inauguration of **America’s first Black President**, the world of theater has taken us back almost seventeen decades!

Scheduled to premiere at the Goodman Theater in Chicago, **The Emperor Jones** will feature a white, female actress in blackface. Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte and performed by members and associates of The Wooster Group, actress Kate Valk takes the role of Brutus Jones in a performance reminiscent of the early minstrel shows.



THE EMPEROR JONES
pictured: Kate Valk
photo: © Paula Court

Here is your chance to take action!

The Goodman invites audiences to attend two free special discussions to address the Wooster Group’s radical interpretation of this classic text:

“Performing Other: Constructing Race and Gender Onstage and Off”

TODAY, Wednesday, January 7

5:30 pm

Chicago Cultural Center

78 E. Washington St.

A panel featuring Romi Crawford of School of the Art Institute; Tanya Saracho of Teatro Luna; E. Patrick Johnson of Northwestern University; and performance artist Holly Hughes.

“The Wooster Group’s Impact on Contemporary Performance”

Saturday, January 10

3:00 pm

Goodman Theatre

170 N. Dearborn St.

Professors Harvey Young and Rachel Shteir speak with Director Elizabeth LeCompte and members of the Wooster Group.

Dating back to the 1830s, minstrel shows depicted Black people as ignorant, lazy, buffoonish, superstitious, joyous, and musical characters. By the turn of the century, the minstrel show survived as professional entertainment until about 1910 and slowly dissipated into amateur arenas such as high

schools, fraternities, and local theaters until the 1960s. As Blacks began to make legal and social gains against racism and successfully asserted their political power, minstrelsy eventually lost its popularity and became taboo in modern American culture.

Written by Eugene O'Neill, **THE EMPEROR JONES** tells the story of Brutus Jones, a self-appointed emperor of a West Indian island, who flees from both the natives he has exploited and his own haunted past. The play was originally premiered by the Provincetown Players at The Playwrights' Theatre in New York, November 1920 and made into a well-known film starring Paul Robeson in 1933.

THE WOOSTER GROUP is a collective of artists who make new work for the theater. For more than thirty years, under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte and with its associates and staff, the Group has produced over 40 works for theater, dance and media. The Group's permanent home and performance venue is The Performing Garage at 33 Wooster Street in Manhattan, New York. The Group owns and operates the Garage as a shareholder in the Grand Street Artists Co-op, which was originally established as part of the Fluxus art movement in the 1960s.

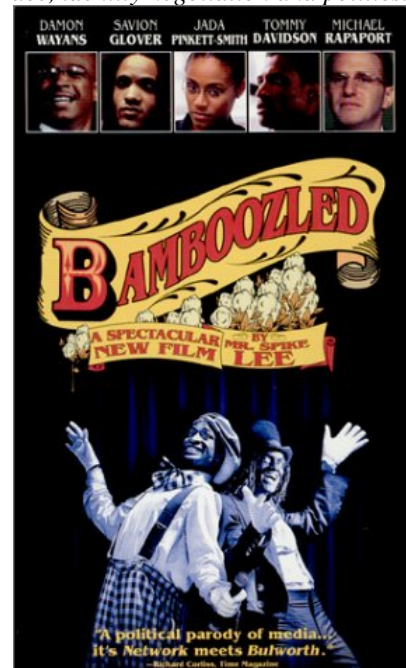


(Left) This reproduction of a 1900 William H. West minstrel show poster, originally published by the Strobridge Litho Co., shows the transformation from white to "black".

In both the United States and Britain, black face was most commonly used in the minstrel performance tradition and survived long past the heyday of the minstrel show. White blackface performers in the past used burnt cork and later greasepaint or shoe polish to blacken their skin and exaggerate their lips, often wearing woolly wigs, gloves, tailcoats, or ragged clothes to complete the transformation. Later, Black artists also performed in blackface.

(Below Right) In the 2000 box office release of *Bamboozled*, Spike Lee unearths degrading Black caricatures in an effort to satirize the racist media machine. Lee reconstructs a hugely popular TV minstrel show, in which he addresses social and political comments about race, identity negotiation and politics.

Stereotypes perpetuated by blackface minstrelsy have played a significant role in proliferating racist images, attitudes and perceptions of African Americans worldwide. By the mid-20th century, changing attitudes about race and racism effectively ended the prominence of blackface makeup used in performance in the U.S. and elsewhere. To date, its use is limited to a theatrical device, mostly outside the U.S., and is more commonly used today as a form of social commentary or satire. Its most enduring effect has been the distorted lens through which African American culture has been introduced to an international audience. Blackface's groundbreaking misappropriation and exploitation of African American culture—as well as the inter-ethnic artistic collaborations that stemmed from it—were but a prologue to the lucrative packaging, marketing, and dissemination of African American cultural expression and its myriad derivative forms in popular culture.



(Left) *The NEW blackface?* Robert Downey, Jr. went virtually unscathed for his performance in the 2008 movie *Tropic Thunder* written and directed by Ben Stiller. It earned \$26 million in its opening weekend and retained the number one position for its first three consecutive weekends of release. The film went on to gross more than \$180 million in theaters worldwide before its release on home video on November 18, 2008.