

Note From the Editor-in-Chief:

The Role of Theatre at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

This special issue of *the Black Theatre Review* marks a vital convergence of historical recovery, critical testimony, and artistic celebration. It is not merely a themed volume—it is a necessary archive, one that amplifies the institutions, practitioners, and cultural ecosystems that have shaped Black theatre education and performance across generations. At its core, this issue asserts what has long been evident to those working within these spaces: theatre programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are not peripheral to the American theatrical imagination; they are foundational to its moral, cultural, and pedagogical compass.

the Black Theatre Review is honored to have partnered with Dr. Khalid Y. Long and Dr. DeRon S. Williams as special guest editors. Their leadership of this project reflects not only a deep well of scholarly expertise, but a nuanced understanding of the cultural and institutional importance of HBCUs within the Black theatrical tradition. Both Dr. Long and Dr. Williams are nationally recognized for their contributions to Black theatre and Performance Studies. They bring to this issue a rigorous academic lens shaped by years of research, teaching, and mentorship, alongside a powerful commitment to elevating voices within HBCU communities. As scholars and practitioners who have studied and worked intimately within and alongside HBCU contexts, they understand firsthand the structural complexities, artistic triumphs, and historical weight carried by these institutions. This insight has enabled them to steward an issue that is at once celebratory, critical, and forward-looking.

The timeliness of this issue cannot be overstated. At a moment when HBCUs remain underfunded despite serving a disproportionate number of first-generation, Pell-eligible, and Black students—and when the arts and humanities are increasingly devalued or cut altogether across higher education—theatre programs at HBCUs are being asked to do more with less. States across the U.S. have introduced legislation restricting how race, gender, and history can be taught, chilling the kinds of critical, liberatory performance work that HBCU programs have long modeled. Amid the closure of theatre departments, mergers of programs, and chronic

understaffing at many institutions, this issue reaffirms the enduring value of HBCU theatre as a site of intellectual rigor, cultural resilience, and visionary pedagogy.

In an era that demands both historical reckoning and radical reimagining, these programs show us what it means to build something liberatory and lasting, often in the face of extraordinary constraint. This issue arrives not only to preserve that history, but to provoke reinvestment in students and faculty, and in the transformative possibilities of Black theatre education and performance.

Through their editorial guidance, this issue assembles a compelling collection of essays, reflections, and reviews that interrogate, document, and honor the legacy and ongoing evolution of theatre at HBCUs. Dr. Long and Dr. Williams have curated not simply a collection of contributions, but a vital intervention—one that centers Black theatrical practice in educational environments that have long nurtured creativity, resilience, and radical imagination.

I thank them for their clarity of vision, editorial care, and commitment to excellence. This issue stands as a testament to the impact of HBCU theatre and to the scholar-artists who continue to ensure its future is as rich as its past.

—Omiyemi (Artisia) Green



The Black Theatre Network

*We are dedicated to the exploration and preservation
of the theatrical visions of the African diaspora.*