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Main content

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In the final volume of their three-volume series, editors Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby assemble a distinguished group of authors to examine theatre from World War II to the mid-1990s. Wilmeth and Bigsby can be credited with exacting scholarly standards, demonstrated by the volume's superb reliance on primary sources and by its meticulous documentation. Chapters may be read individually or as part of the whole; each provides a wealth of valuable information.

Most impressive is the prodigious research that has been invested in this project, as evident in Christopher Bigsby's introduction and Arnold Aronson's "American Theatre in Context," both of which serve to develop the critical, social, and historical backdrop. Though covering somewhat similar ground, Bigsby and especially Aronson establish the important correlations between theatre and culture. Given Aronson's prescient analysis of the relationship between theatre and politics, it would have been interesting to read his assessment of two of the most important political (and theatrical) figures of the late twentieth century, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

The four essays in section two, "A Changing Theatre: Broadway to the Regions," make up a strong unit. Laurence Maslon explains the contributions of three principal producers, Harold Prince, David Merrick, and Joseph Papp. Mel Gussow, as a former New York theatre reviewer, shares his broad knowledge of the off- and off-off-Broadway scene, and Martha LoMonaco does an excellent job of surveying the potentially unwieldy subject of regional theatres. Marvin Carlson adds his considerable expertise on the avant-garde, describing the major companies that set the course of America's alternative theatre.

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