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he must be present to guide the development of his son and, later, his other children. He saw his bonding with the children become even more crucial, as he observed the increasing rate of fatherless families in the black community.

Nathan McCall has lived a life that includes abandonment, racism, drugs, violence, criminal activity, and even prison. But rather than allowing these demons of his past to help him build walls, he miraculously constructed bridges instead. A success story of this nature is rare. Readers should celebrate it by enjoying the contents of this book and passing it on to another. *Makes Me Wanna Holler* inspires one to think about yesterday without regret and to focus on tomorrow without fear.

Sydne Mahone, ed. *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun: Plays by African-American Women*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994. 448 pp. \$15.95.

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In the United States, the early nineteenth century was a period of intense abolitionist and women's suffragist activism. Those few black women whose voices were heard during this politically charged era encountered the challenges of oppressive race and gender policies that were and in many ways still are ingrained in the cultural psyche and social practices of the United States. Many black women recognized the racist ideology that informed the thinking of many of their white suffragist women allies, and at the same time black women also recognized the sexist ideology of many of the black men with whom they worked for freedom of the black body within the civil structure of the United States. Among the black women whose voices have triumphed over time and challenged audiences to hear them are

Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Frances E. W. Harper. Cooper, in fact, reminded white suffragists that racial freedom was not a subordinate issue; yet other women made the hard decision to support abolition and subordinate women's suffrage, because at that time black women certainly would remain disfranchised if abolition failed and women's suffrage succeeded.

When black women of the nineteenth century combined artistic impulses and political concerns, as did Sojourner Truth and Frances E. W. Harper, the result was political drama. Harper, born free and educated in the home of her uncle, and Truth, born into bondage and denied education, shared an affinity for the drama and power of oral expression. Sojourner Truth's straightforward eloquence and drama-filled improvised presentations of her own liberating versions of biblical tales positioned her as a precursor of the female blues performers who would dominate blues entertainment early in the next century. Harper, a published poet, also presented some of her poetry orally as abolitionist and suffragist dramatic art. Harper's dramatic presentations were powerful, yet reserved. Her poetry and speeches often were presented extemporaneously from memory. Although Harper and Truth had different styles of presentation, both women illustrate early examples of oral dramatic art by black women that prevailed well into the twentieth century in the form of vaudeville blues by performers such as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Sippie Wallace, Ida Cox, and numerous other female blues singers who illustrated some of the variety, depth, and drama of life as they knew it. Indeed, the influences of these nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century predecessors are apparent in later dramatic performers such as Beah Richards, a woman who—in the 1950s—formalized black women's performance art with her presentations of *A Black Woman Speaks*.

Each of the nineteenth-century women mentioned above had her own unique perspective on the dual aspects of oppression that black women encounter. Historically, then, drama has served as a vehicle through which black women's art

and lives are given voice. Sydne Mahone's drama anthology *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun: Plays by African-American Women* compiles works by black women dramatists of the twentieth-century fin de siècle. Mahone's anthology, in fact, could serve as a companion volume to Margaret B. Wilkerson's *Nine Plays by Black Women* (1986). Together these two volumes anthologize eighteen playwrights and more than forty years of valuable black women's drama of the twentieth century. Mahone covers eleven contemporary playwrights, including two—Aishah Rahman and ntozake shange—who are among Wilkerson's nine. Mahone chooses some of the best contemporary drama by black women. In *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun*, she selects plays such as Kia Corthron's *Cage Rhythm*, a powerful play about black women in prison—a determinedly gender-centered topic—yet some plays in the anthology, such as Aishah Rahman's blues play *The Mojo and the Sayso*, are not necessarily gender-centered. Other plays, Thulani Davis's jazz opera *X* as well as Suzan-Lori Parks's *The Death of the Last Black Man . . .* and *Sally's Rape* by Robbie McCauley, dramatize and comment on history and our reception of history.

If, however, there is one quality that is found among all of the plays in this anthology, that quality is the playwrights' consistent breaks with conventional theatrical forms or their disruptions of audience expectations. According to Mahone, "These playwrights venture beyond the linear, the cornered, the squared-off edge of dramatic convention to find the rounded edge of reinvention" (xiv). And perhaps this is the major strength of this collection, as well as a possible weakness. Plays most often are written for performance. And in the minds of some people, dramatic performance may be confined to linear movement and logical progression of events on the stage. A general audience in search of conventional theater, then, may find somewhat confounding Corthron's astral projection, Parks's Ishmael Reed-influenced two-hour experiment with language and dramatic form, and Rahman's car in the middle of her main characters' living room. Sometimes, though, a little discomfiture is just what an audience needs. A number of the playwrights that Mahone includes in this anthology do not fail on this point. Some of the most challenging and innovative works on stage today are one-person performance-art plays which often require the performer to present a multiplicity of characters and voices. Both Judith Alexa Jackson's *WOMBmanWARs* and Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* bring contemporary social issues—and, in the case of Smith (a '90s Studs Terkel), quotidian American voices—to the stage. Mahone's anthology also contains improvisational/audience-participation plays that revise our notions of how we should experience theater: *White Chocolate for My Father* by Laurie Carlos, *Live and in Color* by Danitra Vance (also a one-person performance-art play), and McCauley's *Sally's Rape*. In addition to these plays by more recent dramatic innovators, Mahone adds the interesting and rich Adrienne Kennedy play *The Dramatic Circle* and an unusual excerpt from shange's novel *Liliane*.

In Mahone's avowedly political—although sometimes heavy-handed—introduction, she addresses a number of concerns that black women playwrights encounter, including gender and race tokenism, paternalism, static black images that are perpetuated by theaters that refuse to engage "living black artists who present new views of black life" (xix), and black theaters that do little to expand and develop African American theater (xxii). All of the above concerns are important, yet Mahone's presentation of them in her introduction could have been more concise and focused. Mahone's format for her anthology, however, is excellent—a wonderful complement to her consistently good selection of plays. Through interviews—later transformed into introductory essays—that Mahone conducted with the playwrights, the editor of *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun* gives readers of these plays insights into each writer's ideas about art, her plays, heroism, and other issues related to the playwright's personal aesthetic. In this anthology, Mahone collects the plays and the insights of eleven contemporary playwrights and, by doing so, ensures that these

writers' literary successors need not search overly hard to find a few of the gardens of twentieth-century African American women playwrights.

Austin Sonnier, Jr. *A Guide to the Blues: History, Who's Who, Research Sources*. Westport: Greenwood, 1994. 306 pp. \$49.95.

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The CD revolution of the past decade has helped to fuel an interest in traditional blues, both acoustic and electric, unequaled since the 1960s. As a result, 1996 has seen more books about the blues in print than has been the case for many years. Add to the list Austin Sonnier's *A Guide to the Blues*, a sometimes adequate, but often deeply flawed, introduction to the blues. More specifically, the thumbnail artist biographies which make up over half of this book's text are frequently so inaccurate and incomplete that their historical and biographical weaknesses greatly compromise their usefulness. Novices to the blues will assume to be true "facts" which are, in reality, incorrect, while long-time blues students and fans will be so frustrated by the sloppy documenta-

tion that whatever value Sonnier's theoretical and factual content may offer is frequently not worth the effort.

Sonnier's original vision is admirable, as he strives to present a concise, distilled view of the blues to serve as an introductory volume for beginners and a condensed biographical and media reference for more seasoned blues scholars and fans. He opens with ninety pages (six chapters) that lay out the history of the blues, starting with African musical and social sources and then preceding through the evolution of African American music in the New World. His third chapter presents a solid overview of early blues history, including sections on the Mississippi Delta, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, the Piedmont area of the East Coast, and Chicago. The historical review continues with a chapter on the jazz- and vaudeville-influenced Classic Blues singers of the '20s and '30s.

Sonnier's next overview chapter is a discussion of blues poetry as it reflects traditional African American religious beliefs, a theology born in the earliest years of the African American experience and blending West African animism with Christianity under names as diverse as Condomblé, Santaria, Obeah, Voodoo, and Hoodoo. His discussion of this issue is very brief, running only eight pages, but it will be a fascinating introduction to the subject for readers whose only knowledge about traditional African American religion comes from Hollywood or pulp fiction. Concluding the introductory overview, *A Guide to the Blues* presents a six-page discussion of the role of the blues in shaping modern American music, including rhythm & blues, jazz, soul, rap, and rock 'n' roll. Unfortunately, discussions of the blues' influence on more far-afield musics, such as traditional hill music, country and western, gospel, mainstream Tin Pan Alley, and "pop" are not presented; as a result, the importance of the blues as the single most pervasively influential American music of the 20th century is surely understated in this chapter.

Although at most times these preceding chapters will be far too brief for advanced blues fans and scholars, they will serve as excellent introductions for beginners; the same is true of the selected film-, bibli-, and discographies at the end of the book. As is always the case with "selected" listings, some inclusions and omissions can be questioned, but most of the important sources are presented, although recently published, and groundbreaking, biographies of Leadbelly, Robert Johnson, and Charley Patton are absent from the bibliography, leaving these legendary artists represented by works now 15, 23, and 26 years old, respectively. Taken as a whole, however, these reference lists provide an excellent jumping-off point for anyone