to ignore the needs of black Americans is as solidly entrenched as ever. The poems tell of bodies, some of them babies, floating in the stagnant water; no one picked them out, and no one seemed to care. Those who were "lucky" enough to get to what should have been a safe space faced violence, pollution, and additional hard times in places such as the now ironically named Superdome.

Some of the voices are of young people; others are older. But all are allowed through this poetry project to vent their emotions. We become privileged confidants to their grief, their dreams and their anger.

But Katrina was not the only area disaster to change the lives of people forever. Hurricane Rita did her damage too. Philip C. Kolin and Susan Swartwout edited *Hurricane Blues: Poems about Katrina and Rita*, a book so wonderfully arranged as to guide the reader through the entire event. The anxiety of those folk who knew that soon their lives would be transformed from calm and comfort to some mysterious and horrid newness is depicted in the section titled "Looming." The "Landing" of the hurricanes is described in poems like "Sorry," in which the trees keep apologizing for what is happening and their inability to make a difference. "The Katrina Dance" begins with a fast pace and light-heartedness and makes you feel the rhythm of "belly dancers" and "wind-lovers" until the language changes and the tone slows. With electric power suddenly gone and the oaks slowly losing form to become "ghostlike," there is no more music, only prayers. These are only a few of the more poignant and insightful poems. There are many others in this book that capture the sounds and the silences of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

If I had read *Hurricane Blues* before I had listened to *My Soul is Anchored*, I would claim *Hurricane Blues* as my favorite. As it is, I will carry the book around with me and read it when my soul needs to remember that courage and art are stronger than destruction and void. But the sounds of the voices themselves and the music on the CD draw me in quickly and hold me fast as I listen to the stories of lives permanently altered by water.

I n *Racism on the Victorian Stage*, Hazel Waters evokes the long history of blackness in British theater by providing an original look at the drastic changes suffered by ideas on race and racial relations in nascent imperial Britain, during a period seldom studied for its theatrical production. For Waters, theater is a privileged medium for the exploration of British public sentiment: "unlike other cultural forms, theatrical performance was accessible to the lettered and unlettered alike; the stage was able both to reflect and inflect prevailing cultural assumptions in a continuous, semi-subterranean process of change and development" (2).

The book's title is somewhat misleading: the scope of Waters's study extends from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, and about a third of the book discusses plays prior to the Victorian era per se. Early treatments of black characters in British theater generally portrayed them as villains bent on revenge. In Elizabethan times, the black African was foremost an incarnation of the Islamic world, and as such used as a figure of looming threat. With time, the theme of vengeance came to revolve around the issue of slavery, and testified to the uneasiness with which England saw its own involvement in the slave trade. By the end of the eighteenth century, black characters had become noble and pathetic heroes of sentimental drama. Waters connects this trend directly to Great Britain's economic and political

growth and its involvement in colonization and in the slave trade. This analysis and much of the preliminary historical background provided by Waters rely on the findings of Anthony Gerard Barthelemy in *Black Face, Maligned Race: the Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (1987). But Waters's study starts where Barthelemy's had ended, with Thomas Southerne's stage adaptation of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, and goes beyond.

Southerne's *Oroonoko* set the terms for black representation in the coming eighteenth century. It was "the product of a new age, marked by an emerging capitalist world order whose driving force was slavery" (11). In *Oroonoko* and later adaptations and variations on the theme, England voiced ambiguous and sometimes contradictory views on the subject of slavery. Plays provided a channel to express abolitionist sentiments as they artfully erased British involvement in the trade. But as Waters notes, "[t]he abolitionist movement had helped to sharpen both pro- and anti-slavery views"; the Haitian revolution and other slave uprisings "fuelled the rise of systematic racial theorizing aimed at justifying black slavery" (38). After the abolition of the slave trade in Britain, support for slave systems gained strength in public opinion. Planter interests helped spread the notion that "responsibility and freedom were incompatible with a black skin" (130). Theatrical representations of black characters became more and more caricatured, simplistic and racist. Black characters were generally found in tragedies all along the seventeenth and eighteenth century. By the late 1820s, they were gradually turned into grotesque objects of ridicule only fit for comedy. To document this evolution, Waters has exhumed an impressive amount of little known plays from the period. Her book leaves no doubt as to the omnipresence of black figures in British theater.

Minstrel shows and blackface performances have generated extensive scholarship. Works such as Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), W. T. Lhamon, Jr.'s *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (1998) and *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose from the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (2003), and more recently Daphne A. Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (2006) serve to name but a few. Yet while W. T. Lhamon, Jr., calls minstrelsy "the first Atlantic popular culture," studies of this cultural phenomenon have until recently almost exclusively focused on its American side. Waters's book is especially interesting in that it provides us with a fascinating look into the circumstances surrounding the advent of "Crow mania" in England. In the 1820s, British actor Charles Mathews had tremendous success with a one-man show deriding American types. It set the terms for the enthusiastic response American blackface actor T. D. Rice encountered on his arrival in England in 1836. For Waters, Crow mania had a tremendous effect on British views on race. It rendered "the black as a species apart; it was a conception that quickly rooted itself into popular culture and continued to grow there" (89). After Rice, British authors developed their own versions of plantation comedy, reflecting how new notions on the natural inferiority of black people were gaining hold in science and public opinion. Waters argues that those representations were widely assumed to be realistic.

In this regard, one of the most compelling sections of the book is a chapter devoted to the hardships encountered by African American actor Ira Aldridge throughout his life. Unable to pursue a career in the United States, he moved to England in the 1820s and obtained recognition in spite of the racist hostility of theater critics. Aldridge's story is all the more harrowing for being that of an isolated individual struggling against the overwhelming trends described by Waters. Aldridge had to contend not only with American prejudice and its exportation into England, but also with Great Britain's own brand of racism and the very idea of Britishness. Some of Waters's remarkable recovery of the long-forgotten Aldridge is also featured in Bernth Lindfors's recently published collection of essays *Ira Aldridge: The African Roscius* (2007).

Geographical and moral distance from slave societies helped in the gradual denial of the black character's humanity. While the American abolitionist movement was finding support in Great Britain, a form of condescending racism deeply rooted in popular culture accompanied this moral stance. The shift in representation was not innocent: the slavery party had strong support among British entrepreneurs and in the press. Visiting England, Frederick Douglass saw minstrel shows as "a mode of warfare . . . purely American." As black characters were reduced to comic relief, the burden of discourse on slavery was shifted to mulatto characters. As Waters advances, mulattoes in English plays are themselves examples and results of the rise of scientific racism and growing concerns about racial purity. By transposing slavery onto the mulatto character, British theater took the audience "towards a consideration of slavery as a personal, internally experienced tragedy and away from slavery as a social, structural issue" (154). Once a matter of universal morals, slavery was reduced to an attack on the family.

The scope covered by Waters's book purports to be rather large, in time and space, as it attempts to look at the theater of the Victorian period in the light of slavery, and more broadly "the cultural context within which slavery was opposed or accepted, justified or reconciled . . . with the prevailing ideas of the age . . . , one that was, at bottom, largely defined by . . . an early form of globalization" (1). Within this rather broad context, Waters discusses close to seventy forgotten plays, and she expectedly fails to treat all of them in depth. As she declares in the introduction, the terrain she means to explore has "largely been untrodden," and Waters's archival work is impressive. Yet the magnitude of her enterprise sometimes makes Waters fall short of her announced goals. For instance, while her analyses suggest a transatlantic scope, Waters often fails to step outside a somewhat constricted British frame. This is especially true in the light of studies such as Daphne A. Brooks's 2006 book *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. When both Brooks and Waters discuss Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon* and reach rather similar conclusions, Brooks uses numerous solid sources to support a parallel analysis of American and British audience reaction. Waters admittedly does not linger on this play and mentions many more examples, but her summary analyses leave the reader yearning for more.

Waters convincingly exposes the cultural, economic and political ties that connect planter interests in Britain, the steady rise of antiblack racism and "Crow mania." But she also advances that British representations of blacks were for the most part not based on "a direct, domestic relationship," the way American-derived stage characters later became. "The black slave in your field or your kitchen had to be imagined as a total grotesque, nonhuman, not just an inferior being" (90). According to Eric Lott and Lhamon, early blackface performance in the United States was a form of bonding between the lower white working class and urban black populations. For Waters, such analysis is impossible in a British context, considering the widely different experiences of the "much, much smaller" black British community. In asserting this, Waters dismisses possible connections between the popular success met by these shows and Great Britain's own complicated relation to slavery. For having abolished the slave trade in 1807, Britain still owned and used slaves in all of her West Indian colonies. Waters proposes that the popularity of minstrel shows was "perhaps, a way of containing, defusing and rendering safe [the] volatile presence" of potentially rebellious slaves, citing the failed uprisings of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner in the American South. Yet the Demerara uprising of 1823 or the Jamaican revolt of 1831 would have been more relevant and vivid references to a British public well aware of slavery in the Caribbean territories. Waters somewhat downplays Great Britain's own practice and support of slavery even after the abolition of the slave trade, in effect almost repeating the pattern of distancing she herself describes.

Nevertheless, Waters is at her strongest precisely when she reads Britain through its drama. She brilliantly demonstrates that in black characters, one can see England staging itself in the limelight of its enduring involvement with slavery. As she asserts, "the one common feature throughout the late eighteenth-century dramas and those of the nineteenth century . . . is the Englishness of liberty, the peculiarly English nature of freedom" (189-90). Britain redefined itself against revolutionary and imperial France as the land of freedom. In that process, the abolition of the slave trade served a crucial role, as it provided the moral screen behind which Britain dissimulated its participation in, and enormous economic profit through slavery.

The spread of racism through scientific discourse in the nineteenth century has been thoroughly studied, but to find out how the theories produced by upper-class scholars gained common currency "before the advent of universal education and mass literacy" is more delicate. What *Racism on the Victorian Stage* lacks in global perspective and analytical depth is made up by the compelling documentation and historical contextualization provided by Waters. This book will provide anyone interested in dramatic representations of blackness with valuable directions into the little-explored terrain of nineteenth-century British theater.