



# Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America

*Ayanna Thompson*

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## **Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America** Ayanna Thompson

Notions, constructions, and performances of race continue to define the contemporary American experience, including America's relationship to Shakespeare. In *Passing Strange*, Ayanna Thompson explores the myriad ways U.S. culture draws on the works and the mythology of the Bard to redefine the boundaries of the color line.

Drawing on an extensive--frequently unconventional--range of examples, Thompson examines the contact zones between constructions of Shakespeare and constructions of race. Among the questions she addresses are: Do Shakespeare's plays need to be edited, appropriated, updated, or rewritten to affirm racial equality and retain relevance? Can discussions of Shakespeare's universalism tell us anything beneficial about race? What advantages, if any, can a knowledge of Shakespeare provide to disadvantaged people of color, including those in prison? Do the answers to these questions impact our understandings of authorship, authority, and authenticity? In investigating this under-explored territory, *Passing Strange* examines a wide variety of contemporary texts, including films, novels, theatrical productions, YouTube videos, performances, and arts education programs.

Scholars, teachers, and performers will find a wealth of insights into the staging and performance of familiar plays, but they will also encounter new ways of viewing Shakespeare and American racial identity, enriching their understanding of each.

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