

Tess Onwueme's Perspective on Oppression in Her Play Riot in Heaven

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Abstract:

Artists utilize popular culture to reflect and reinforce race and ethnicity from various perspectives. The two concepts are closely related but somehow each is distinct in meaning. Both connote a kind of superiority complex, prejudice, and discrimination by a race against another. Ethnicity seems to be localized while racism is practiced globally. African playwrights have depicted situations in which a presumed superior race attributes negative stereotypes to the perceived inferior race and consequently, maltreat people from the perceived inferior race unequally. African playwrights like Athol Fugard in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in *Trials of Dedan Kimathi* present racial conflict produced by the perception of white superiority and black inferiority which promote violence, intolerance resentment from the whites while the blacks are frustrated and depressed by the humiliation they experience in their own country. This paper presents an exploration of race and popular culture in Tess Onwueme's *Riot in Heaven* from another perspective. Set in America, this play highlights the imaging of 'self' against the 'other' within realm of cultural differences in America. Utilizing the existential revolt variant of Robert Brustein's Theatre of Revolt Theory, the study shows Onwueme's challenge of race stereotypes as the Blacks force themselves into heaven. The methodology is basically analytical using the play and other relevant materials. The conclusion is that the oppressed should not accept oppression or discrimination as norm but should challenge their oppressors to promote equal cultural understanding among nations. It recommends the exploration of race, ethnicity and popular culture geared towards egalitarian societies by more artists.