



# **Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft (Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies)**

*Gary F. Dawson*

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American documentary theatre records the social issues that continue to shape the United States at the close of the twentieth century. This book provides an historical and critical survey of documentary theatre in the United States since John Reed's *The Pageant of the Paterson Strike* (1913). It defines documentary theatre as a dramatic representation of societal forces using a close reexamination of events, individuals, or situations. While documentary theatre reinvents itself from time to time, this study demonstrates that its constituent parts remain roughly the same. Because documentary theatre is rooted in oral traditions, it offers an alternative to conventional journalistic treatments of social history. Through a close look at the history of documentary theatre, the volume concludes that a new period of expression is presently underway in the United States.

Numerous social issues have marked the growth of the United States, and many of these continue to shape contemporary American culture. While many of these issues have been treated in novels, they have also captured the attention of playwrights. Documentary theatre explores the issues and events at the very heart of society. But in spite of its significance, this dramatic form continues to escape, for the most part, the awareness of the theatre community and its public. This book is an historical and critical survey of documentary theatre in the United States since John Reed's *The Pageant of the Paterson Strike* (1913). It defines documentary theatre as a dramatic representation of societal forces using a close reexamination of events, individuals, or situations.

By listing current and more distant examples of American documentary theatre, the book shows that the genre is richly steeped in the oral history tradition. Therefore, American documentary theatre is an alternative to conventional journalism. For the theatre practitioner, the volume provides valuable insight about the process of making a documentary play. For the investigative researcher, the book shows that documentary theatre possesses a non-Aristotelian dramatic structure, in contrast to the strictly narrative form generally found in conventional drama. Through an overview of numerous plays, the book observes that even though documentary theatre reinvents itself from time to time, its constituent parts remain roughly the same. It concludes that a new period of expression is presently underway in the United States, one that affirms that the theatre is a vital part of society and is as important as religion, education, and government.

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