

# AMERICAN THEATRE

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### 135 Years Ago (1882)

The New Charleston Theatre in South Carolina opens its doors, an opening made possible by a group of businessmen who formed the Charleston New Theatre Company after the old Charleston Theatre shuttered in 1833, leaving the city with no venues for so-called legitimate drama. Over the next several years, the company under the new name will support local playwriting and become a theatrical center in the South.

## 135 Years Ago (1882)

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The Bijou Theatre, the first performing arts venue in the United States lit entirely with electricity, opens in Boston. A prominent feature of the space is its circular proscenium arch, created to improve sightlines. The theatre opens with Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, the same piece with which the Savoy Theatre in London became the world's first theatre with electric lighting the previous month.

## 115 Years Ago (1902)

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T. Allston Brown's *A History of the New York Stage From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901, Volume 1* is published. Brown builds on and corrects William Dunlap's 1832 text *History of the American Theatre*, the first book written on the history of American theatre. Brown refutes Dunlap's claim that the first Western dramatic performance in North America occurred in 1752, citing a 1749 performance in Philadelphia.

## 90 Years Ago (1927)

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The first racially integrated musical in the United States opens on Broadway at the Ziegfeld Theatre. *Show Boat*, with book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and music by Jerome Kern, ushers in a new genre. Compared with popular entertainments of the time, musical comedies and Follies-type revues, this new form—dubbed the “musical play”—places narrative first, with songs serving the narrative arc.

## 70 Years Ago (1947)

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*A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams makes its Broadway debut at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, produced by Irene M. Selznick. Jessica Tandy will win a Tony for her performance as Blanche DuBois, and Marlon Brando will later recreate his portrayal of Stanley Kowalski in the 1951 film adaptation. The play will earn Williams his first of two Pulitzer Prizes in drama.

## 50 Years Ago (1967)

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Howard Sackler's *The Great White Hope* receives its world premiere at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage, featuring James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander, future chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. The production will run on Broadway in 1968, one of the first transfers from a nonprofit theatre to the Main Stem. The piece will win a Pulitzer and three Tonys: the best play award as well as acting prizes for Jones and Alexander.

## 45 Years Ago (1972)

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Intiman Theatre opens its first show, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, in the Creative Arts League, a 65-seat space in Kirkland, Wash. Founder Margaret Booker will direct all three productions this season, and will helm 33 more by 1985. Elizabeth Huddle will take over as artistic

director in 1986, and the company will find its first permanent home in Seattle in 1987. In 2006 the organization will receive the Tony for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

### **10 Years Ago (2007)**

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Josefina Báez performs *Dominicanish* at the Los Angeles Theatre Center's Opening Festival. The play explores Báez's many identities and experiences as a member of the Dominican diaspora to New York City. This performance of the piece comes after many others, including the 1999 premiere at the Dance Theatre Workshop in New York. The work evolved and changed with each staging and published edition.