

**Transgressions: An Editor's Crusade to Thwart  
America's First Black Shakespearean Acting Company**

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*Abstract*

A reading of newspaper coverage of the first Black Shakespearean stage productions in the United States reveals a great deal about the challenges facing Black underclasses striving for legitimacy, social mobility, even a pleasant evening of theater. Coverage in New York City's newspapers of the 1820s demonstrates the lengths mainstream society and a partisan press were willing to go to resist the inclusive, intercultural, multiracial national imaginary as projected by the country's first Black-run theater company. This research reveals why white editors led by the *National Advocate's* Mordecai Manuel Noah, as well as white theater owners and patrons, would seek to divest this pioneering Black theater company of its artistic agency. This research also seeks to better understand the many comedic enactments of race that would come after the African Grove Theatre's brief, violent, but important run.

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