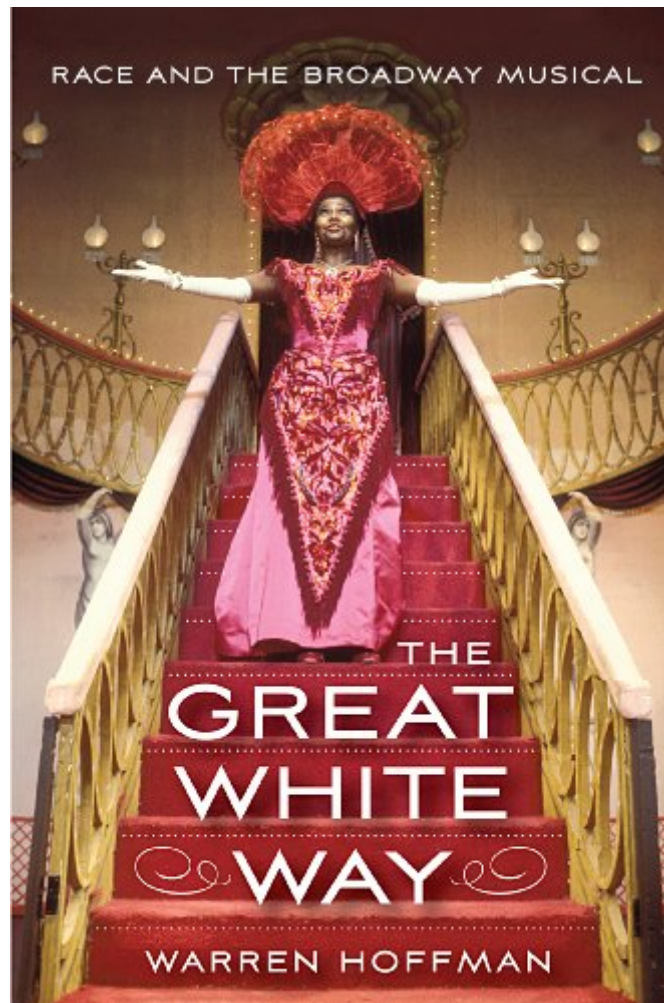


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# The Great White Way: Race And The Broadway Musical



## Synopsis

Broadway musicals are one of America's most beloved art forms and play to millions of people each year. But what do these shows, which are often thought to be just frothy entertainment, really have to say about our country and who we are as a nation? *The Great White Way* is the first book to reveal the racial politics, content, and subtexts that have haunted musicals for almost one hundred years from *Show Boat* (1927) to *The Scottsboro Boys* (2011). Musical mirror their time periods and reflect the political and social issues of their day. Warren Hoffman investigates the thematic content of the Broadway musical and considers how musicals work on a structural level, allowing them to simultaneously present and hide their racial agendas in plain view of their audiences. While the musical is informed by the cultural contributions of African Americans and Jewish immigrants, Hoffman argues that ultimately the history of the American musical is the history of white identity in the United States. Presented chronologically, *The Great White Way* shows how perceptions of race altered over time and how musicals dealt with those changes. Hoffman focuses first on shows leading up to and comprising the Golden Age of Broadway (1927–1960s), then turns his attention to the revivals and nostalgic vehicles that defined the final quarter of the twentieth century. He offers entirely new and surprising takes on shows from the American musical canon—*Show Boat* (1927), *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *The Music Man* (1957), *West Side Story* (1957), *A Chorus Line* (1975), and *42nd Street* (1980), among others. New archival research on the creators who produced and wrote these shows, including Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, Stephen Sondheim, and Edward Kleban, will have theater fans and scholars rethinking forever how they view this popular American entertainment.

## Book Information

File Size: 5065 KB

Print Length: 265 pages

Publisher: Rutgers University Press (February 18, 2014)

Publication Date: February 6, 2014

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00IK7X8TK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #774,095 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #106

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Theater > Broadway & Musicals #154

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > African American #529

in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Broadway & Musicals

## Customer Reviews

Having read Warren Hoffman's previous book, *The Passing Game*, I expected this new work to be filled with extensive research and deep analysis of a subject that I'm greatly interested in. I was not disappointed. This is a story that presents the American musical as an expression of the history of white identity in America, and how the experiences of people of color have become absent in our musical theater culture, even when there was every reason to consider making them part of the story of the 20th Century. Mr. Hoffman has a powerful vision and a good story to tell. His analysis takes us into the world of several classic musicals, from *Show Boat* in 1927 up to the present day musicals such as *The Book of Mormon*, in a way we have never seen them before. One particularly favorite part of the book is his detailed exploration of Rogers and Hammerstein's 1943 musical *Oklahoma!* and Irving Berlin's 1946 *Annie Get Your Gun*. Both musicals are about "the creation, negotiation and consolidation of caucasian identity as it is played out between whites and natives on the western frontier." (p.57) In *Oklahoma!*, cowboys like Curley function to protect the frontier from an unseen enemy: the Native American. Best of all, we learn the meaning of the name Oklahoma: Red People! I wonder how many people in Oklahoma know what their state's name actually means? "You're doing fine Oklahoma," is what the famous title song proudly proclaims. But the people in Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* are actually saying "You're doing fine Red people!," but there are no Red people to be seen in this show. There are other excellent chapters on *Show Boat*, *A Chorus Line*, *West Side Story* and *The Music Man*.

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