



Understanding Suzan-Lori Parks (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)

Jennifer Larson

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Understanding Suzan-Lori Parks is a critical study of a playwright and screenwriter who was the first African American woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Suzan-Lori Parks is also the recipient of a MacArthur Genius Award, a Whiting Writers Award, a CalArts/Alpert Award in the Arts, two Obie Awards, and a Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts. In this book Jennifer Larson examines how Parks, through the innovative language and narratives of her extensive body of work, investigates and invigorates literary and cultural history.

Larson discusses all of Parks's genres—play, screenplay, essay, and novel—closely reading key texts from Parks's more experimental earlier pieces as well as her more linear later narratives. Larson's study begins with a survey of Parks's earliest and most difficult texts including *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*. Larson then analyzes *Venus, In the Blood*, and the *Lincoln Plays: The America Play* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *TopDog/Underdog*. Larson also discusses two of Parks's most important screenplays, *Girl 6* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In interpreting these screenplays, Larson examines film's role in the popularization and representation of African American culture and history. These essays suggest an approach to all genres of literature and blend creativity, form, culture, and history into a revisionary aesthetic that allows for no identity or history to remain fixed, with Parks arguing that in order to be relevant they must all be dynamic and democratic.

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