

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN FOUR PLAYS BY LYNN NOTTAGE

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Abstract: *Since the 1990s, Lynn Nottage's drama has constantly spoken to audiences and critics alike, as her plays have depicted characters whose individual struggles question the status quo and inspire self-interrogation for audiences in the United States of America and elsewhere. Working with an expanded definition of political engagement, the analysis here examines four plays in which Nottage turns a seamstress from the turn of the twentieth century into a protagonist capable of holding the audience's attention for the entire length of a play (Intimate Apparel), reevaluates the communist overtones of the fight for racial justice at mid-century (Crumbs from the Table of Joy), exposes lingering colonialism and cultural appropriation (Mud, River, Stone), and attacks extreme violence enacted on women as part of the ravages of war (Ruined). In an interview, Nottage talks about the need to challenge oneself and she does live up to her goal of defying labels. As the current study shows, she cannot simply be celebrated as an African American woman playwright, but as an important voice in American drama today.*

Keywords: *drama, performance, African American identity, race, gender, sisterhood, social change, colonialism in Africa, rewriting history, bearing witness*