

# WPA Players Set to Give 'Macbeth' With Tropical Locale to Give Color

Edna Thomas to Essay the  
Role of Lord's Lady—  
Known as Veteran

PREMIER THURSDAY

Jack Carter in Title Role—  
150 in Shakespeare's  
Immortal Tragedy

The long-heralded opening which will attempt to break down the stereotype of the Negro in the theatre, will take place at the Lafayette Theatre, Thursday evening, April 9, when the Federal Negro Theatre brings the colorful spectacle of "Macbeth" to the stage, with the veteran Edna Thomas in the role of Lady Macbeth and Jack Carter in the title role.

The most brilliant premiere that Harlem has seen is predicted by the already mounting advance sale. Critics, producers, students of the theatre will move in the direction of the Lafayette to witness a milestone in the cultural life of the American Negro.

A cast of 150, undoubtedly one of the largest companies ever to present Shakespeare's immortal tragedy, "Macbeth," is conducting rehearsals daily from midnight on to the early hours. These nocturnal labors are not of the cast's volition, but the stage of the Lafayette is taken up evenings by "The Conjur Man Dies," current offering of the Federal Negro Theatre.

Not content with the distinction due it by the very nature of the size of the cast, augmented by twenty-five musicians, the Negro Theatre is anxious to disprove for all time the palpably common belief that Negro actors are adapted only for special character parts or for dialectical bits.

#### Unadulterated Version.

By presenting this unadulterated version of "Macbeth," adapted and directed by Orson Welles, erstwhile director at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, the Negro Theatre is confident that its actors will establish themselves as protagonists of classical figures, equal in depth of interpretation and perception, to their colleagues in all corners of the globe.

The play will be marked by three settings with the action taking place in a tropical jungle, a majestic castle and a seaboard town. John Houseman, director of the Negro Theatre, has given his promise that absolutely no verbal liberties will be taken with the Shakespearean script. Of course, minor condensations and deletions, a common procedure in a dramatization of a play of this sort, will have to be countenanced.

#### Not Blackface.

Mr. Houseman made this announcement to offset the prevalent, erroneous impression that the Negro Theatre's version of "Macbeth" will turn out to be a blackface comedy or a satirical skit. Rumors that the play would be a farcical sketch followed on the heels of an announcement that the locale of the play would be the Island of Haiti instead of the witch-ridden Kingdom of Scotland.

The change of the locale was necessitated by the virtual physical impossibility of bringing the atmosphere of Scotland during Duncan's reign to the stage. Intermittent presentations of this play have been prematurely doomed to failure for this reason.

The atmosphere of Haiti in the early years of the nineteenth century, more amenable to stage effects and traditions, was reminiscent of the stormy era of violence in Scotland. Furthermore, the Island of Haiti was beset by violence and superstition and controlled by tyrants, making a realistic picture of Shakespeare's Scotland.

#### Color of Haiti.

The natural brilliance of color of Haiti was also a factor in Mr. Houseman's determination to change the locale of "Macbeth." All costumes worn in the play are of the nineteenth century military empire variety. Color and military pomp vie with each other for prominence.

In Haiti at the time, however, voodooism was rampant. Hence, in the Negro Theatre's version of the play

voodooism was substituted for witchcraft. However, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is no tampering with the script. The word Haiti is never mentioned in the play. The setting is self-suggestive.

One of the most stirring scenes in the play, which will not lack vivid scenes, will show the respective armies of Macbeth and Macduff on the battlefield. In the burning woods of Birnam will also be seen soldiers marching towards Dunshane.

All costumes and scenery for the play were made by the Negro Theatre with the aid of the Federal Theatre Workshop.