

2015

Charles Sidney Gilpin

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Recommended Citation

Buckner, Jocelyn. "Charles Sidney Gilpin." *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Stage Actors and Acting*. Ed. Simon Williams. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 220. Print.

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Gilpin, Charles (b. Richmond, Virginia, 20 November 1878; d. Eldridge Park, New Jersey, 6 May 1930). US actor. Simultaneously one of the most celebrated and under-appreciated African-American performers of the early twentieth century, as a young man Gilpin toured as a variety performer and singer with the acclaimed Williams and Walker Vaudeville Company and the Canadian Jubilee Singers. He joined the Anita Bush Company, appearing in *The Girl at the Fort* and later *Over the Footlights* at the Lafayette Theatre. Bush sold the company and it became the Lafayette Players, the first stock company in Harlem, which Gilpin was instrumental in organizing. Gilpin's career accelerated with performances in whiteface as Jacob McClosky in a 1916 production of *The Octoroon* and Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* (1919). He originated the title role in *The Emperor Jones* (1920), a performance which earned him the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 1921, recognition from the Drama League of New York, and an invitation to the White House by President Warren G. Harding. While heralded for his performance in *Jones*, Gilpin clashed with O'Neill over the actor's tendency to change words in the script, and he began to show signs on stage of incipient alcoholism. O'Neill replaced Gilpin with PAUL ROBESON in the London production and the film version of the show. The loss of his defining role pushed Gilpin further into alcoholism. His career ended after an illness resulting in the loss of his voice.

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