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Negro Ensemble Company

Jocelyn L. Buckner

Chapman University, jbuckner@chapman.edu

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Negro Ensemble Company (NEC). Founded in 1967 by actor/director Robert Hooks, artistic director/playwright Douglas Turner Ward, and administrator Gerald Krone, the NEC is dedicated to increasing opportunities for black artists to create theatre that depicts and celebrates black life. After Ward published an article in the *New York Times* questioning the dearth of black theatre in the United States, the Ford Foundation awarded the founders \$1.2 million to establish NEC. The company's early home was in New York City at St Mark's Playhouse, followed by a move to the 55th Street Theatre. It now produces in a variety of locations. In its first two decades, NEC promoted the development of black theatre through writing and acting workshops, a works-in-progress series, playwright residencies, a three- to four-show season, and a touring arm that promoted black theatre and the NEC throughout

NESTROY, JOHANN NEPOMUK

the United States, Europe, and Australia. Awards include a Pulitzer, a Tony, three Drama Desk Awards, and several Obies. While widely acclaimed for its authentic portrayals of black life, NEC was also criticized for pandering to white audiences and funders and largely excluding female playwrights from its seasons. Following the loss of a permanent production space and cutbacks in funding, the NEC's operations have been diminished, though it remains one of the longest-running black theatre companies in the country, continuing to produce at least one show per year and fostering the creativity of black artists through ongoing workshops and class offerings.

JOCELYN L. BUCKNER