

# MORE RACIAL INSANITY



Maya Phillips, *New York Times*' theater critic

by Samuel Hux

Among the *New York Times* theatre critics in the past were Walter Kerr, long ago, and my dear old friend the late Stanley Kauffmann, less long ago but too long. I don't remember many since, except the name Ben Brantley comes to mind, the reason being that I ceased being a regular *Times* reader several years ago, finding the intelligently conservative Wall Street Journal more to my liking, both politically and culturally. But my poet-playwright spouse keeps up with the *Times* theatre pages, and occasionally she calls my attention to a piece, sometimes in agreement, sometimes not. . . but mostly in the last few months in consternation. A featured *NYT* theatre

critic now is Maya Phillips.

Supposedly a poet—I have read some of her atrocious stuff, about as aesthetically pleasing as a flatulent eruption. Supposedly a critic—apparently she has one concern in her practical aesthetics: How well does this drama serve the interest of a Black audience and/or how well does it serve the talents of a Black playwright or actor? I am telling you she is obsessive.

I first observed her, or had my attention brought to her—by my wife of course—several months ago when she wrote a piece which approved of the Black dramatist demanding that in the final minutes of the play the White members of the audience were commanded to leave their seats, those minutes only for Blacks. I had to reread the piece to be sure I was reading what I was reading. A week or so later I read her piece in which she reported on a theatre festival at a New England college, complaining that there were only two Blacks in the audience—she and her mother—as if it were the theatre’s fault for not rounding up the missing. I kid you not. The NYT editorial board should be ashamed of itself!

On August 20<sup>th</sup> the “Critic’s Notebook” told us about two plays in London, each of which had a Black character, one, whose role was significant but not the lead. Of both plays Maya Phillips observed (actually she complained) that the Black characters departed the stage when their roles were over. Again I kid you not. I quote: “For both Naomi and Lillian, the departures are abrupt. It’s as if neither stage has a place for these Black women beyond their roles. . . .” Shouldn’t it require some basic knowledge of the dramatic arts to be a leading theatre critic for the famous national newspaper?

But Ms. Phillips is concerned not only for what she sees on the stage. She is also concerned with how *she* is seen. She begins her piece explaining how uncomfortable she feels in

London given all the stares she receives, in spite of the fact she notes that she observed five or six Black women here and there. She senses each look from a white Londoner is a "rebuke"—whether because of her race, or her tattoos or—pause—her *pink hair*. Dye your hair back black, you damned fool!

What ever happened to good old-fashioned racial paranoia?