

# THEATRE REVIEW



## disposable men

At The HERE Arts Center,  
Between Spring and Broome off Sixth Ave.  
Presented by HERE and Gertrude Stein's Repertory Theatre's  
Digital Performance Institute  
Created and Performed by James Scruggs  
Directed by Kristin Marting

by Radomir Luza Jr.

During the first few moments of *Disposable Men* at The HERE Arts Center, images of famous black actors like Paul Winfield, Samuel L. Jackson, James Brown and Scatman Crothers being disposed of or dying, jump off the large video screen upstage left. Later, scenes of King Kong and Frankenstein dominate the screen.

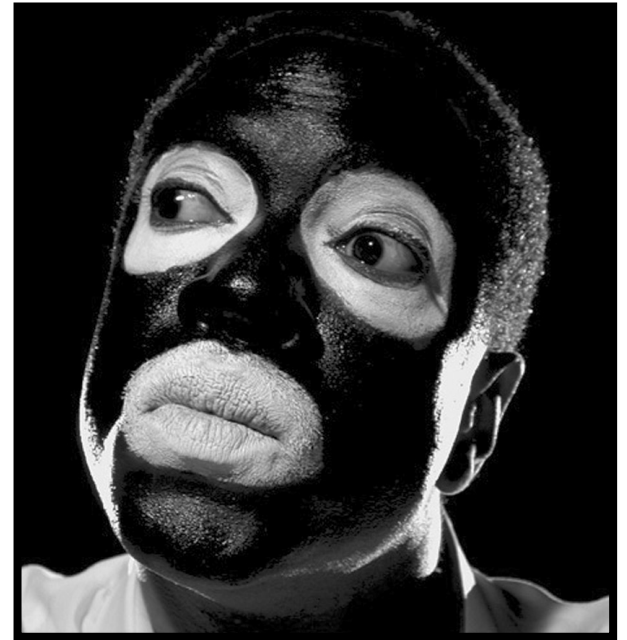
To many, slavery and racism are a thing of the past. To James Scruggs, creator and performer of this one-man show, they are here now, everyday in every way. Whether that is simply Mr. Scruggs' perspective is not the question. The question requires nearly an hour-and-a-half and takes us from buffoonery to incarceration to an empty vial of crack to a fully robed Klansman to 41 bullets in the murder of a black man at the hands of the NYPD.

Mr. Scruggs' point is clear. Since coming to America from Africa in chains, the black man has not only been treated like a second-class citizen, but in many cases looked upon as less than an animal. Indeed, it was not until the 1960s, a full century after the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Voting Rights Act that he was allowed to vote and had gained for himself a measure of hard-won dignity.

Director Kristin Marning reins Scruggs in when needed, it seems, and keeps the dialogue, though sometimes a tad wordy, flowing from point to point. The images of Frankenstein and King Kong nearly brought this critic to tears as the analogy between the two and the persecuted black man rose to a teeming crescendo by play's end.

Whether the video footage and electronic wizardry add to the message is questionable. As with the recent *All Wear Bowlers* it often made it more difficult to concentrate on the actor, and at times seemed redundant. Mr. Scruggs is very good as he brings a fierceness and intelligence to the many roles. What the performance, however, lacks is a differentiation between the roles. The restaurant worker is the prisoner is the drug addict. Indeed, the main problem with *Disposable Men* is that it is less a theatre piece than a dissertation. Sometimes, one must entertain before he can inform.

In development since 2000, *Disposable Men* makes a timely statement in this era of racial tensions and differences. Indeed, it is only through art and politics that changes in opinion and perspective can



DISPOSABLE MEN PHOTOS BY MICHAEL O'REILLY

bring about changes in loss of life and self-esteem. Whether you agree with its fervent arguments or not, *Men* shines a comet from one artist's heart and mind to a collective unconsciousness.

Scruggs, Marting, Technology Director Hal Eagar and HERE must be given major kudos for their passion, perseverance and courage in tackling this controversial project that almost certainly would not be seen on Broadway.