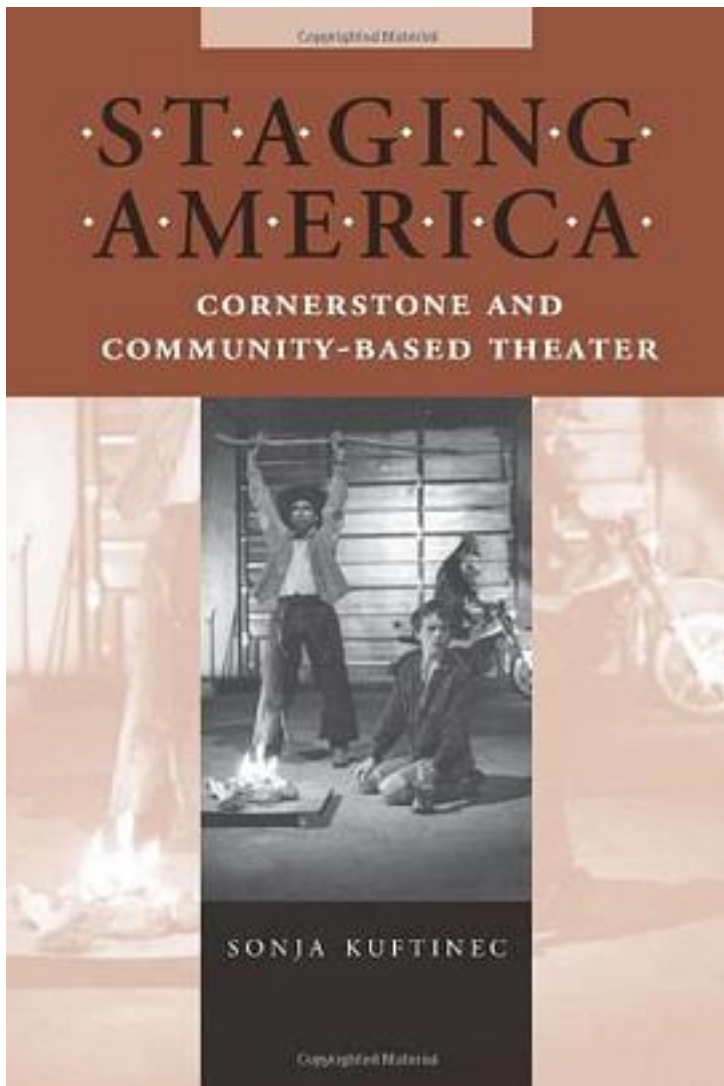


# Staging America



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This captivating study "maps a history and theory of community-based theater in the United States through the Cornerstone Theater Company. Detailing how the performance-making process contributes to an ongoing negotiation of American identity, Sonja Kuftinec investigates community-based theater to trace the historical affiliations of the form and critically examines how community-based theater both enables community and challenges the very notion of "community" as a stable site. The process of making and unmaking community is vividly illuminated in the work of the Cornerstone Theater Company, a Los Angeles-based ensemble founded in 1986. From 1986 to 1991, Cornerstone toured nationwide, working mainly with rural towns to create adaptations of classical texts. A Wild West musical "Hamlet" was performed with residents of Marmarth, North Dakota (population 190), and "The House on Walker River," an adaptation of the "Oresteia" trilogy, was developed with a Native American reservation in Nevada. Since 1991, Cornerstone has performed with urban communities, developing original shows and adaptations of Western and non-Western texts incorporating local histories and community players. These performances rearticulate distinctions among various urban group and between amateur and professional theater. While Cornerstone's contemporary work can be contextualized within a historical tradition of grassroots performance, it also complicates this tradition, suggesting that identity may be more dynamic than rooted. By using Cornerstone as a case study, Kuftinec's analysis of community-based theater's impact upon rural, urban, and professional sites across the United States proposes that "community" and "America" are vital terms of negotiation rather than fixed entities.

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