



Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era

Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff

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In the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration--unwilling to antagonize a powerful southern congressional bloc--refused to endorse legislation that openly sought to improve political, economic, and social conditions for African Americans. Instead, as historian Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff shows, the administration recognized and celebrated African Americans by offering federal support to notable black intellectuals, celebrities, and artists.

Sklaroff illustrates how programs within the Federal Arts Projects and several war agencies gave voice to such notable African Americans as Lena Horne, Joe Louis, Duke Ellington, and Richard Wright, as well as lesser-known figures. She argues that these New Deal programs represent a key moment in the history of American race relations, as the cultural arena provided black men and women with unique employment opportunities and new outlets for political expression. Equally important, she contends that these cultural programs were not merely an attempt to appease a black constituency but were also part of the New Deal's larger goal of promoting a multiracial nation. Yet, while federal projects ushered in creativity and unprecedented possibilities, they were also subject to censorship, bigotry, and political machinations.

With numerous illustrations, *Black Culture and the New Deal* offers a fresh perspective on the New Deal's racial progressivism and provides a new framework for understanding black culture and politics in the Roosevelt era.

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