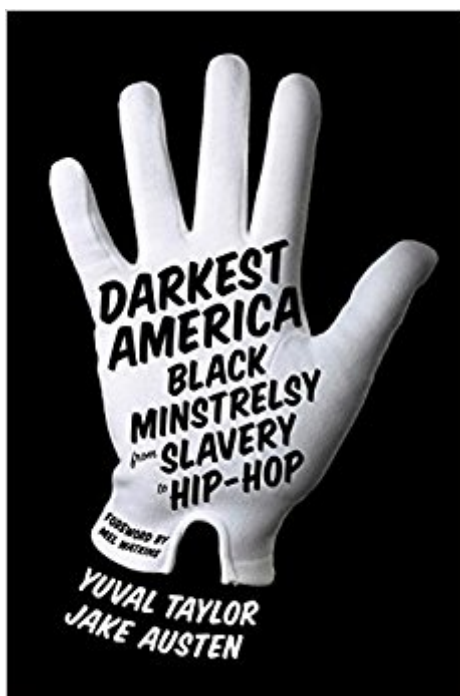


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Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy From Slavery To Hip-Hop



Synopsis

An exploration and celebration of a controversial tradition that, contrary to popular opinion, is alive and active after more than 150 years. Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen investigate the complex history of black minstrelsy, adopted in the mid-nineteenth century by African American performers who played the grinning blackface fool to entertain black and white audiences. We now consider minstrelsy an embarrassing relic, but once blacks and whites alike saw it as a black art form and embraced it as such. And, as the authors reveal, black minstrelsy remains deeply relevant to popular black entertainment, particularly in the work of contemporary artists like Dave Chappelle, Flavor Flav, Spike Lee, and Lil Wayne. *Darkest America* explores the origins, heyday, and present-day manifestations of this tradition, exploding the myth that it was a form of entertainment that whites foisted on blacks, and shining a sure-to-be controversial light on how these incendiary performances can be not only demeaning but also, paradoxically, liberating. 12 illustrations

Book Information

Hardcover: 368 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company (August 27, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393070980

ISBN-13: 978-0393070989

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.2 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #197,740 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #101 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Rap #133 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > History & Criticism #153 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Television > Shows

Customer Reviews

Minstrelsy, the American art form with a solid racist core, was adopted by blacks pursuing survival and accommodationist strategies. Yet the adoption often included a subversive embracing of caricature. White minstrelsy, historically done in blackface, varied from North to South was yet so popular that black participation in blackface became accepted, if not preferred. Black performers also entertained black audiences in blackface, using the same demeaning story lines. Taylor and Austen examine the tensions between black entertainers' use and the communities'

embrace of minstrelsy for their own amusement versus its use to appeal to white audiences. While the embrace appears to be self-hating, Taylor and Austen also take the reader on a journey connecting the roots of many contemporary expressions via Dave Chappell to the Good Times character JJ to Amos and Andy radio and television shows. They note that Cosby's sitcom and other shows were counterpoints to contemporary minstrel shows. Yet, Cosby in his earlier cartoon show presented characters that appeared to embrace the old time minstrels. --Vernon Ford

"A provocative, compelling exploration. . . . An innovative, marvelous book about comedy, stereotypes and the struggle to steer through the sometimes fierce internal debates over African-American identity in a society still struggling with its racial past." --Kirkus Reviews (starred review)"A comprehensive history and critique of black minstrelsy. . . . This well-informed work deepens our understanding of a lasting element of American culture." --Publishers Weekly"[This] illuminating book demonstrates serious regard for the history of black performance and . . . encourages further exploration. It will interest both general readers and specialists in black entertainment." --Library Journal

[A] fascinating and authoritative critical history that traces the roots of minstrelsy back to Africa and the Civil War era... Whatever your perspective on the sensitive issues it raises, Darkest America is a thoughtful and well-written exploration of themes that cut to the heart of our national identity and culture. • - Reed Johnson, Los Angeles Times

While the authors acknowledge the appalling truth about minstrelsy, its carefree trafficking in vicious stereotype, they also successfully suggest that we've averted our eyes too quickly... Darkest America contains delicious twists... [and] carries a truth so heavy it trumps race. • - Preston Lauterbach, Wall Street Journal

In the long, powerful title chapter, [the authors] tell a story absent from the many minstrelsy studies to arrive since Robert Toll's Blacking Up in 1974.... Their polemic is convincing. • - Robert Christgau, Barnes and Noble Review

Exciting... convincing... entertaining and well-paced... rich in detail. • - San Francisco Chronicle

A comprehensive history and critique of black minstrelsy.... This well-informed work deepens our understanding of a lasting element of American culture. • - Publishers Weekly

Starred review. A provocative, compelling exploration of one of the most controversial elements of the black entertainment world... An innovative, marvelous book about comedy, stereotypes and the struggle to steer through the sometimes-fierce internal debates over African-American identity in a society still struggling with its racial past. • - Kirkus Reviews

[This] illuminating book demonstrates serious regard for the history of black performance and... encourages further exploration. It will interest both general readers and specialists in black entertainment. • - Library Journal

Important - and honest - bit of American history!

Thank you!

written with a compassionate point of view and gives attention to overlooked black entertainers from decades past. in good condition too.

An incredibly thoughtful collection of essays.

This is such a nuanced, complex topic - this book provides valuable information to someone fascinated with American culture. There is better stuff out there and some of the book's statements are controversial, however.

NEVER READ IT! why did i buy it.

Well documented and very comprehensive, Taylor and Austen are at ease discussing the artistry and social traditions of the Zulu Krewe at the Mardi Gras carnival from the zaniness of Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston to the rich hip-hop clowns Flavor Flav and Lil Wayne. However, pay attention to the astute analysis of Tyler Perry's commercially profitable films and plays which are an offshoot of the low brow theatre vehicles from the "Chitlin Circuit" pipeline. The writers also zoom in on one of the most satirical, articulate Spike Lee films, Bamboozled, a modern take on a latter-day minstrel show. Remove the blackface, the yuk-yuks, shabby rags, and shuffling, and a craving for watermelon and yardbird, and still the concept and themes of minstrelsy are there in our mass media. Black folks endure this madness every day. Read the full review and more book reviews from AALBC.com on your Kindle Edition

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