



Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life

Davarian L. Baldwin



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As early-twentieth-century Chicago swelled with an influx of at least 250,000 new black urban migrants, the city became a center of consumer capitalism, flourishing with professional sports, beauty shops, film production companies, recording studios, and other black cultural and communal institutions. Davarian Baldwin argues that this mass consumer marketplace generated a vibrant intellectual life and planted seeds of political dissent against the dehumanizing effects of white capitalism. Pushing the traditional boundaries of the Harlem Renaissance to new frontiers, Baldwin identifies a fresh model of urban culture rich with politics, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship.

Baldwin explores an abundant archive of cultural formations where an array of white observers, black cultural producers, critics, activists, reformers, and black migrant consumers converged in what he terms a "marketplace intellectual life." Here the thoughts and lives of Madam C. J. Walker, Oscar Micheaux, Andrew "Rube" Foster, Elder Lucy Smith, Jack Johnson, and Thomas Dorsey emerge as individual expressions of a much wider spectrum of black political and intellectual possibilities. By placing consumer-based amusements alongside the more formal arenas of church and academe, Baldwin suggests important new directions for both the historical study and the constructive future of ideas and politics in American life.



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