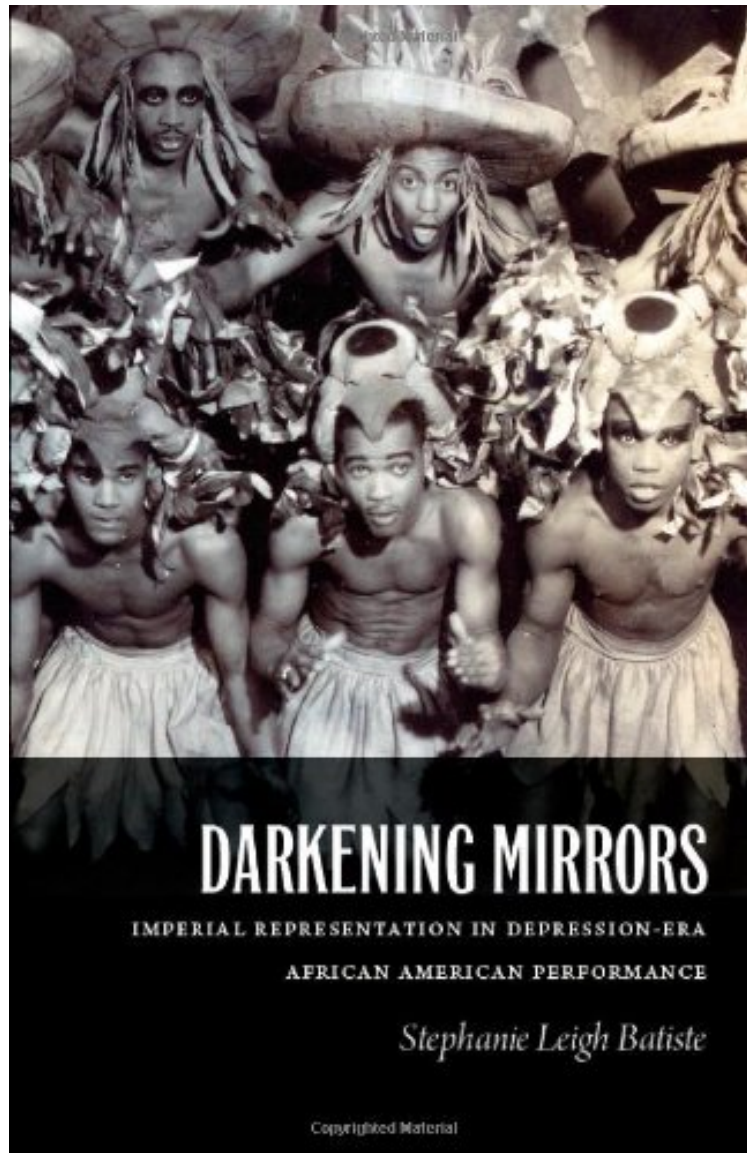


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Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance

Stephanie Leigh Batiste

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Stephanie Leigh Batiste : Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Book Review by Dennis MooreBy ShelleyB*Stephanie Leigh Batiste, Associate Professor of English and Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has written a thought provoking book and scholarly study on an under-theorized subject of black Americans' complicity in imperialist discourse; *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation In Depression-Era African American Performance*. As a performance artist at UCSB, Batiste is in a position to deliver this provocative study of the performances of Lena Horne, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Paul Robeson, and lesser known performers, and their social implications. She traces the black experience in theater through a turbulent period in our history to a point in time now better appreciated and understood. In *Darkening Mirrors*, Batiste examines how African Americans, a population treated as second-class citizens at home, imagined themselves as empowered, modern U.S. citizens and transnational actors in Depression-era plays, operas, ballets, and films. Many of these productions, such as the 1938 hits *Haiti* and *The "Swing" Mikado*, recruited unknown performers, involving the black community not only as participants but also as spectators. Performances of exoticism, orientalism, and primitivism are linked to issues of embodiment, including how bodies signify blackness as a cultural, racial, and global category. Whether enacting U.S. imperialism in westerns, dramas, dances, songs, or comedy sketches, African Americans maintained a national identity that registered a diasporic empowerment and resistance on the global stage. This message, this story that Batiste attempts to convey in her well researched and documented book, comes through vividly in the included photos and announcement of Lena Horne and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson in the classic, *Stormy Weather*. Read more at [...]

In *Darkening Mirrors*, Stephanie Leigh Batiste examines how African Americans participated in U.S. cultural imperialism in Depression-era stage and screen performances. A population treated as second-class citizens at home imagined themselves as empowered, modern U.S. citizens and transnational actors in plays, operas, ballets, and films. Many of these productions, such as the 1938 hits *Haiti* and *The "Swing" Mikado* recruited large casts of unknown performers, involving the black community not only as spectators but also as participants. Performances of exoticism, orientalism, and primitivism are inevitably linked to issues of embodiment, including how bodies signify blackness as a cultural, racial, and global category. Whether enacting U.S. imperialism in westerns, dramas, dances, songs, jokes, or comedy sketches, African Americans maintained a national identity that registered a diasporic empowerment and resistance on the global stage. Boldly addressing the contradictions in these performances, Batiste challenges the simplistic notion that the oppressed cannot identify with oppressive modes of power and enact themselves as empowered subjects. *Darkening Mirrors* adds nuance and depth to the history of African American subject formation and stage and screen performance.

"*Darkening Mirrors* is a powerful argument that during the 1930s, African American popular performers took part in U.S. imperial and nationalist projects even as they resisted the dominant culture's racism. In vivid, illuminating readings of films and stage shows from *The "Swing" Mikado* and the Federal Theater Project's 'voodoo' *Macbeth* to Katherine Dunham's concert ballet *L'Ag'Ya* Stephanie Leigh Batiste makes her case stick, and she makes it sting. At the same time, she writes beautifully about how black Americans asserted the genius of African and Afro-diasporic arts on the national and transnational scene." Joseph Roach, Yale University