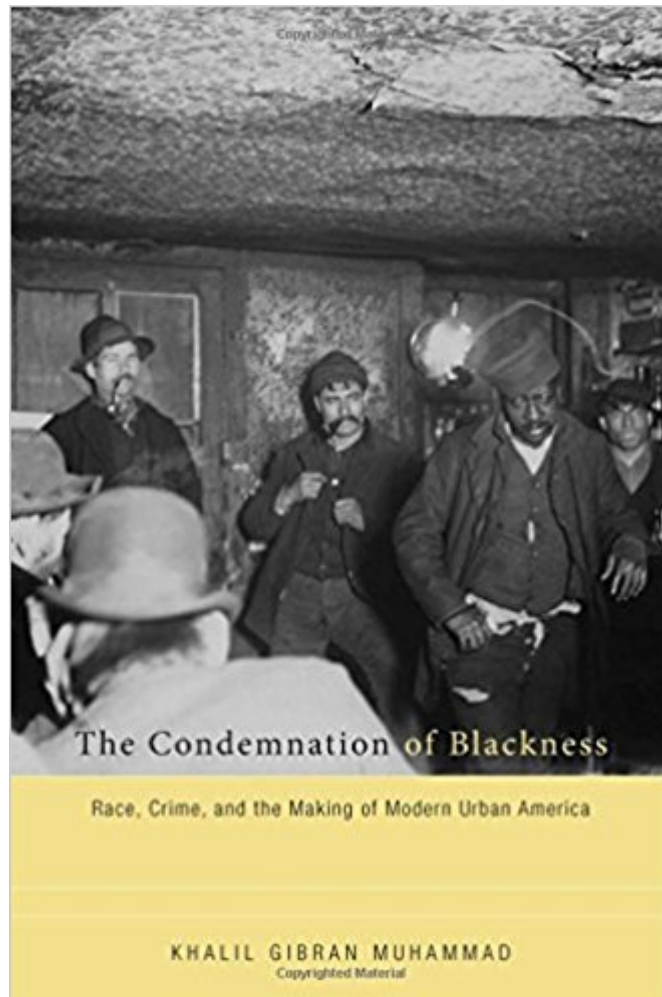


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The Condemnation Of Blackness: Race, Crime, And The Making Of Modern Urban America



Synopsis

Lynch mobs, chain gangs, and popular views of black southern criminals that defined the Jim Crow South are well known. We know less about the role of the urban North in shaping views of race and crime in American society. Following the 1890 census, the first to measure the generation of African Americans born after slavery, crime statistics, new migration and immigration trends, and symbolic references to America as the promised land of opportunity were woven into a cautionary tale about the exceptional threat black people posed to modern urban society. Excessive arrest rates and overrepresentation in northern prisons were seen by many whites—liberals and conservatives, northerners and southerners—as indisputable proof of blacks' inferiority. In the heyday of "separate but equal," what else but pathology could explain black failure in the "land of opportunity"? The idea of black criminality was crucial to the making of modern urban America, as were African Americans' own ideas about race and crime. Chronicling the emergence of deeply embedded notions of black people as a dangerous race of criminals by explicit contrast to working-class whites and European immigrants, this fascinating book reveals the influence such ideas have had on urban development and social policies.

Book Information

Paperback: 392 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 1st THUS edition (November 30, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674062116

ISBN-13: 978-0674062115

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (52 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #51,189 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Ethnic & Tribal](#) #96 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban](#) #183 in [Books > Law > Criminal Law](#)

Customer Reviews

The Condemnation of Blackness is a painstakingly researched narrative on the formation of social policy in the urban north rooted in a double-standard applied to African-Americans as opposed to immigrants of European descent, which attributed challenges faced by African Americans to their so-called innate traits to the exclusion of other factors such as employment opportunities,

educational disparities and housing segregation rooted in racism. Khalil Muhammad presents a compelling discourse on the historical roots of this policy which appeared to rely more on the racial bias of its progenitors than careful analysis of the other factors contributing to then-named "Negro Problem". Dr. Muhammad's assessment beginning from the 1890 census, the inception of the Progressive Era, through the 1940s, is rooted in factual presentation of the ideas and to a certain extent the biases of the influencers of social policy with respect to African Americans. He highlights the extent to which effort was made to integrate foreign-born immigrants into society while simultaneously excluding black Americans, often rationalizing such behavior by attributing the "waste" in investing resources such as education in African Americans. These same framers of public policy decreed that the challenges of urban life for European immigrants could be addressed through social intervention, placing the blame for rampant crime, unemployment and out of wedlock births on the inherent ills of overcrowded metropolises such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia as a result of mass migrations to these population hubs.

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