

The Untold Success Story: African American Performers And Audiences In 1930s Hollywood

When we think of the Golden Age of Hollywood, images of glamorous stars and iconic films flood our minds. However, there is an untold narrative within the glitz and glamour: the significant contributions of African American performers and their audiences during the 1930s. In this article, we will explore the remarkable stories of African American artists who challenged racial barriers and paved the way for future generations.

Breaking Boundaries: The Birth of African American Performers in Hollywood

During the 1930s, racial discrimination was deeply rooted in many aspects of American society, including the entertainment industry. African American performers faced limited opportunities and were often relegated to stereotypical roles that perpetuated racist tropes. However, amidst these challenging circumstances, remarkable trailblazers emerged.

One of the most influential figures of the era was Josephine Baker, a talented dancer and singer. Baker became an international sensation, captivating audiences with her electrifying performances and breaking barriers for African American artists in Hollywood.

Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood

by Miriam J. Petty(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English



File size	: 7905 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 317 pages
Lending	: Enabled



Another prominent name was Paul Robeson, an extraordinary actor, singer, and civil rights activist. Robeson's powerful voice and commanding stage presence made him a force to be reckoned with. Despite facing constant discrimination, Robeson managed to secure roles in several Hollywood productions, showcasing his immense talent to the world.

Resilience in the Face of Adversity: African American Audiences

While African American performers fought for recognition and equality, their audiences played a crucial role in their success. Despite being barred from many mainstream theaters, African American audiences sought out alternative venues where they could enjoy the artistry of their beloved performers.

Enter the "race movies" – independent films made specifically for African American audiences. These films featured African American actors in leading roles and told stories that resonated with their community. Race movies were not only a form of entertainment but also a powerful tool for social empowerment and representation.

Actors like Hattie McDaniel, who later became the first African American to win an Academy Award, were central figures in race movies. Her talent and resilience inspired many, as she portrayed complex and multidimensional characters that defied stereotypes.

The Impetus for Change

As the 1930s progressed, the social and political climate started shifting. African American performers and their audiences began demanding equal opportunities and respect. Their struggles paved the way for significant changes in Hollywood and American society as a whole.

The of revues and musicals specifically created for African American talent, such as "Stormy Weather," provided a platform for showcasing their skills to a broader audience. These productions opened doors for African American performers on a larger scale and ultimately challenged the status quo.

Furthermore, the rise of prominent African American owned and operated theater circuits, such as the Lincoln Theater in Los Angeles, defied racial barriers and offered African American performers and audiences a space for artistic expression and community solidarity.

The Legacy Lives On

The contributions and achievements of African American performers and audiences in 1930s Hollywood serve as a testament to their indomitable spirit and resilience. Their success stories laid the groundwork for future generations, ensuring that African American artists continue to shape and influence the entertainment industry.

Today, as we celebrate diversity and strive for inclusion, it is essential to recognize and appreciate the struggles and triumphs of those who paved the way. African American performers of the 1930s Hollywood era may not have received the recognition they deserved in their time, but their legacy lives on through the generations of artists who continue to challenge norms and break barriers.

So, the next time you venture into the world of classic Hollywood, remember the untold stories of African American performers and audiences who shaped the very fabric of the entertainment industry we know and love today.



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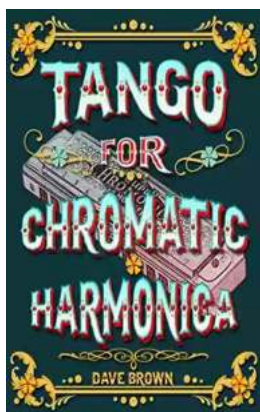
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Stealing the Show is a study of African American actors in Hollywood during the 1930s, a decade that saw the consolidation of stardom as a potent cultural and industrial force. Petty focuses on five performers whose Hollywood film careers flourished during this period—Louise Beavers, Fredi Washington, Lincoln “Stepin Fetchit” Perry, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and Hattie McDaniel—to reveal the

“problematic stardom” and the enduring, interdependent patterns of performance and spectatorship for performers and audiences of color. She maps how these actors—though regularly cast in stereotyped and marginalized roles—employed various strategies of cinematic and extracinematic performance to negotiate their complex positions in Hollywood and to ultimately “steal the show.” Drawing on a variety of source materials, Petty explores these stars’ reception among Black audiences and theorizes African American viewership in the early twentieth century. Her book is an important and welcome contribution to the literature on the movies.



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