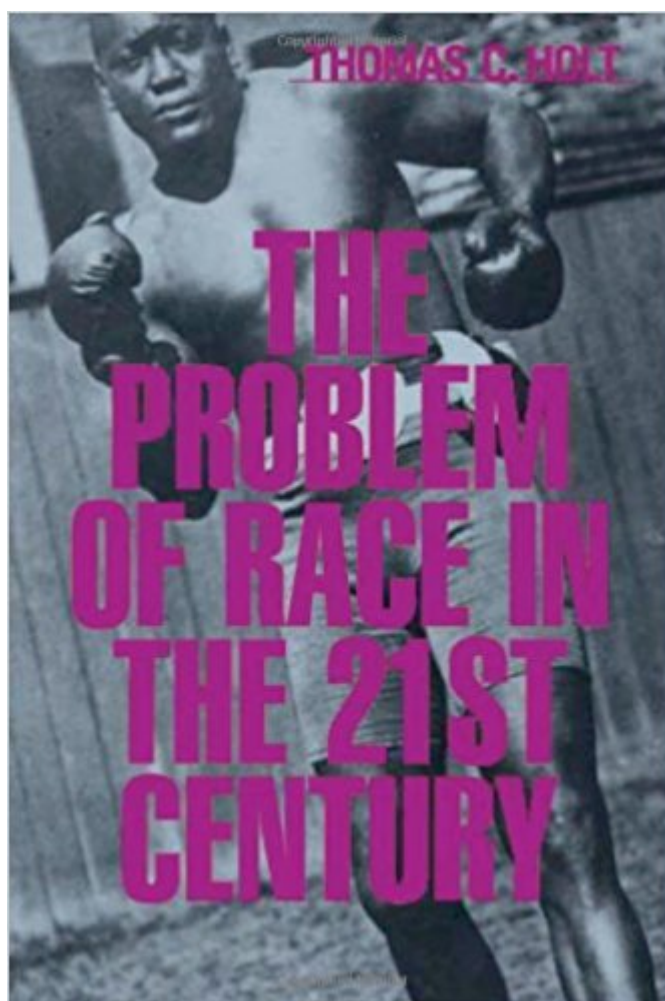


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The Problem Of Race In The Twenty-first Century (The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures)



Synopsis

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line," W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1903, and his words have proven sadly prophetic. As we enter the twenty-first century, the problem remains--and yet it, and the line that defines it, have shifted in subtle but significant ways. This brief book speaks powerfully to the question of how the circumstances of race and racism have changed in our time--and how these changes will affect our future. Foremost among the book's concerns are the contradictions and incoherence of a system that idealizes black celebrities in politics, popular culture, and sports even as it diminishes the average African-American citizen. The world of the assembly line, boxer Jack Johnson's career, and *The Birth of a Nation* come under Holt's scrutiny as he relates the malign progress of race and racism to the loss of industrial jobs and the rise of our modern consumer society. Understanding race as ideology, he describes the processes of consumerism and commodification that have transformed, but not necessarily improved, the place of black citizens in our society. As disturbing as it is enlightening, this timely work reveals the radical nature of change as it relates to race and its cultural phenomena. It offers conceptual tools and a new way to think and talk about racism as social reality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a country where retired U.S. Army Gen. Colin Powell--the son of Jamaican immigrants--can be nominated to be secretary of state while a group of servicemen in the U.S. Army can form a

neo-Nazi group and murder an African-American couple (as happened in North Carolina in 1997), readers don't need to turn to scholars to ascertain that race is an incredibly divisive issue. But they will benefit from Holt's expert and careful examination of these "narratives of contradiction and incoherence" as he attempts to forecast the reigning racial ethos for the next millennium, just as W.E.B. Du Bois did when he declared that "the color line" was "the problem of the twentieth century." Breaking from traditional paradigms, Holt, a professor of history at the University of Chicago, focuses on "what work race does"--that is, what role it plays in the economy and in consumer culture. Taking his cue from Du Bois's idea that "slavery was the first truly global market of exchange," Holt details how shifting conceptions of race have dovetailed with the realities of the U.S. economy before and after Ford's invention of the assembly line and mass production. Within this framework, he examines myriad phenomena of consumer culture, such as the NAACP boycott of *Birth of a Nation* and Michael Jordan's Nike endorsements. His major point is that the Civil Rights movement (unlike many other worldwide movements of people of color) failed to emphasize forging alliances with labor. Though he doesn't have the name recognition outside the academy of a Henry Louis Gates Jr. or Cornel West, Holt writes in clear, precise prose (these essays were originally given as the Nathan I. Huggins lectures at Harvard) and makes an important contribution to both public and academic discussions of race and labor and their intersections in U.S. politics. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Holt insists that race will play a crucial role in the future, but society is unable to identify that role. His conclusions are rooted in the belief that nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial roles and concepts currently utilized are inadequate for such an analysis. The popularity of Colin Powell or Michael Jordan implies progress that is apparently contradicted by daily realities. The same is true of acceptance that race is a social, not a biological, construct. Holt traces the ties between race and economics from the international slave trade to our current global economy. Moreover, he explores the shift from the role of blacks primarily as means of production in a capitalistic nation to consumers, with little value on the production side of the equation other than as surplus workers among the structurally unemployed. Holt rightly asserts that our racial legacy should be a point of departure--not a destination--in examining the enduring nature of racial enmity. As a nation and as individuals, we must imagine ourselves beyond, while remaining aware of, those forces that are at the root of the enmity. Vernon Ford

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this book presents a very clear and concise perspective on an infinitely complicated and complex issue.. cites relevant examples and really gives you something to think about. Highly recommended for anyone interested in the subject, not just students/scholars.

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