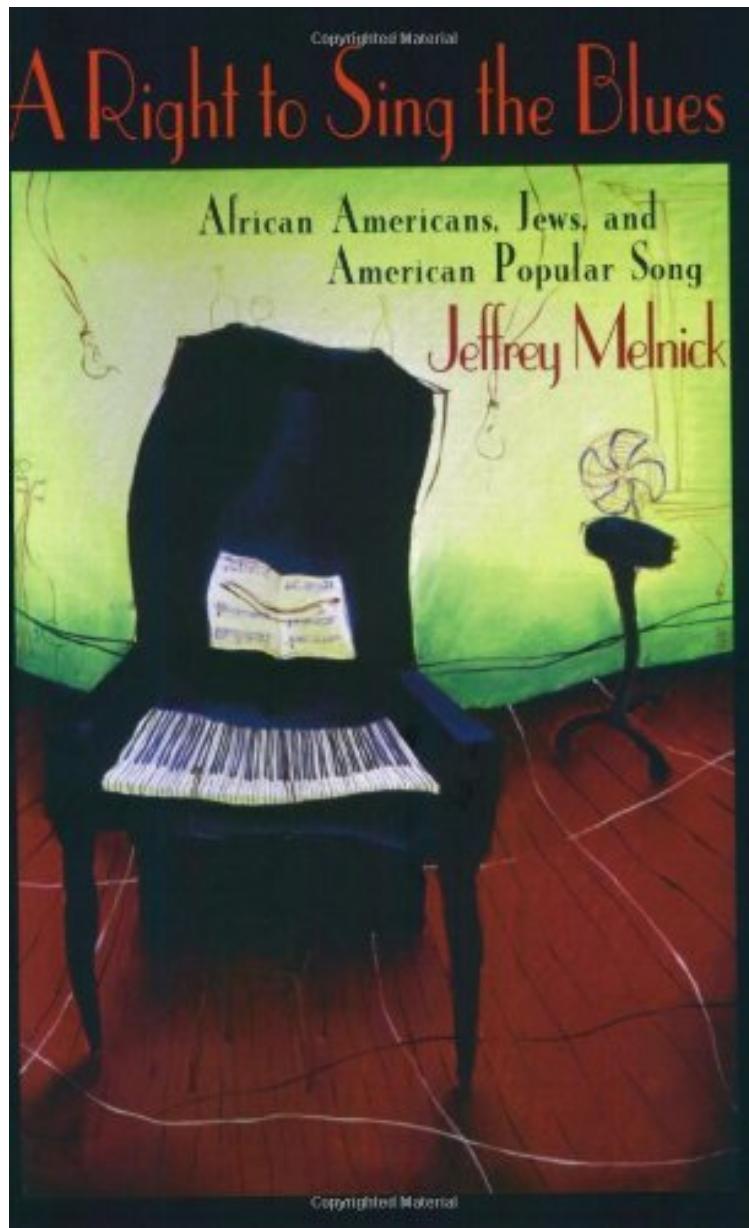


[Download ebook] A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song

A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song

Jeffrey Melnick

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Jeffrey Melnick : A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Intriguing study of american cultureBy Nikica GilicFirst of all, I agree that this book participates in a very dubious tendency of contemporary study of culture. You could call it "the metaphorical phallacy" but basically, it boils down to using wit and metaphor to construct actual connections between groups of people, while all the time explaining how the relations between the groups are very complex and, oh, so complicated to understand. So, instead of writing argumentative sociology, contemporary cultural analysis (Slavoj Zizek, for example) connects ideas in a way worthy of the best modernist fiction writers or even poets... While I am suspicious of the author's method, I think he applies it very well: his method is consistent and the richness of data is great. The thing I miss are mostly caused by my own slant: I like jazz, and whether Gershwin, Goodman, Shaw and Mezzrow are Jews or not, I'm interested in their direct or indirect contribution to the development of this multicultural artistic form. Not being American (nor African nor Jewish), I find this book very interesting as a clarification of an interesting side issue of my general interest in American art, culture and popular culture and my particular interest in jazz. So, here are only a few "culturological" quibbles I have with this interesting and insightful book: I miss a short paragraph on Sammy Davis Jr. (he was too popular and intriguing public figure to be missing from this sort of book) and, also, the relation of African American artists and their Jewish promoters, impresarios etc. needs more elaboration (wasn't Norman Granz Jewish? What about Joe Glaser?). Also, I'm not really comfortable with the way "queer" issues creep into this political and racial discussion; the connection could have been better explained (or illustrated); otherwise it seems only fashionable spice to the thesis (digression: once asked whether his computer HAL from 2001 Space Odyssey had homosexual undertone in his voice, Stanley Kubrick answered that HAL is absolutely heterosexual computer). 9 of 18 people found the following review helpful. If I Had a HammerBy Don DWhen you're holding a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. Jeffrey Melnick has a theory -- actually more a gripe -- and, by God, any piece of evidence, no matter how flimsy, no matter how anecdotal, is going to prove his theory. "A Right to Sing the Blues" might have been far more compelling or provocative if it had been a magazine article, or a piece for the New York Review of Books. It really doesn't stand up as a scholarly monograph -- the "research" consists largely of fairly wide reading in secondary sources, coupled with a number of anecdotes that get repeated and repeated and repeated until you get the feeling that what you're reading is not a "book" at all, but rather discarded paragraphs from Melnick's dissertation. This is probably the kind of trendy, jargon-filled claptrap that gets tenure at less-than-front-rank colleges; but, as scholarship it degenerates into a kind of poorly expressed ideological horse-beating for the easily impressed. No one, for example, not even George Gershwin has a "career" -- everyone has a "project." You get the idea. Melnick does not seem to understand, or care very much about, the art forms or the artists he's writing about, but he's damn-sure going to indict every Jew in show business who ever dared to write a pop song or appear onstage. I thought we were over Jewish self-loathing. Well, maybe most Jews are, but Jeffrey Melnick definitely ain't one of them. I was prepared to like this book; and I have to say there are moments of genuine insight. However, you have to slog through more than 200 pages of vacuous "argument" to find them. Not a very good deal. 7 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Semi-excruciatingBy XaurreauXI give this book two stars instead of one only because I'm assuming there is a significant amount of fact--dry fact. If this book is to be used as a reference for research it would best be utilized in combination with other books dealing with the same subject. It shouldn't be relied upon by itself. In addition to the Jew-bashing noted by another reviewer, I found the book to be boring. Although I purchased it over a year ago, I have been uninspired to complete more than half the book. I suppose I'll get around to it at some point, but I'm in no hurry.

All too often an incident or accident, such as the eruption in Crown Heights with its legacy of bitterness and recrimination, thrusts Black-Jewish relations into the news. A volley of discussion follows, but little in the way of progress or enlightenment results--and this is how things will remain until we radically revise the way we think about the complex interactions between African Americans and Jews. *A Right to Sing the Blues* offers just such a revision. "Black-Jewish relations," Jeffrey Melnick argues, has mostly been a way for American Jews to talk about their ambivalent racial status, a narrative collectively constructed at critical moments, when particular conflicts demand an explanation. Remarkably flexible, this narrative can organize diffuse materials into a coherent story that has a powerful hold on our imagination. Melnick elaborates this idea through an in-depth look at Jewish songwriters, composers, and performers who made "Black" music in the first few decades of this century. He shows how Jews such as George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Al Jolson, and others were able to portray their "natural" affinity for producing "Black" music as a product of their Jewishness while simultaneously depicting Jewishness as a stable white identity. Melnick also contends that this cultural activity competed directly with Harlem Renaissance attempts to define Blackness. Moving beyond the narrow focus of advocacy group politics, this book complicates and enriches our understanding of the cultural terrain shared by African Americans and Jews.