



Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester

By Joseph Boskin

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Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester By Joseph Boskin

Before the tumultuous events of the 1960's ended his long life, "Sambo" prevailed in American culture as the cheerful and comical entertainer. This stereotypical image of the black male, which developed during the Colonial period, extended into all regions and classes, pervading all levels of popular culture for over two centuries. It stands as an outstanding example of how American society has used humor oppressively.

Joseph Boskin's *Sambo* provides a comprehensive history of this American icon's rise and decline, tracing the image of "Sambo" in circuses and minstrel shows, in comic strips and novels, in children's stories, in advertisements and illustrations, in films and slides, in magazines and newspapers, and in knick-knacks found throughout the house. He demonstrates how the stereotype began to unravel in the 1930s with several radio series, specifically the *Jack Benny* show, which undercut and altered the "Sambo" image. Finally, the democratic thrust of World War II, coupled with the advent of the Civil Rights movement and growing national recognition of prominent black comedians in the 1950's and '60's, laid Sambo to rest.

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Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester By Joseph Boskin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Deftly revealing Sambo's roots in the jester of feudal tradition and focusing on five visages—plantation dandy, minstrel man, joke butt, postcard buffoon, and movie chauffeur—Boskin explores the old stereotype of the bug-eyed, dancing, dumb, grinning, shuffling dandy who once entertained all America. Every era and region knew the image: it filled the material culture from bric-a-brac to whisky pourers from the 1660s to the 1960s and made Sambo "the first truly indigenous American humor character," Boskin argues. His sharp portraits of the visages show how Sambo was used to imprison blacks and their resistance to it. His sometimes brilliant analysis deserves a reading by everyone interested in race and American popular culture. Highly recommended. Thomas J. Davis, African American Studies Dept., SUNY at Buffalo

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Review

"One of those rare works whose appearance must provoke astonishment that no previous author has ever tackled it."--*American Quarterly*

"A major contribution to an important topic in Afro-American history. Boskin has written a book that is both readable and informative and will add substantially to the scholarship in the field."--*Journal of Southern History*

"Intriguing, witty, and often insightful social history."--*The New York Times Book Review*

"A major contribution to the study of stereotypes, the history of theatricals and other entertainments in America, and the analysis of material culture in the United States."--*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"A model of American studies methodology and a premier popular culture study of a troublesome, yet fascinating American icon....A signal contribution to the study of the influence of popular culture upon American race relations."--*Choice*

"Deserves a reading by everyone interested in race and American popular culture. Highly recommended."--*Library Journal*

"A good investment for readers who want to know how it really was."--*West Coast Review of Books*

"This is very good--I will probably assign it the next time I teach my American humor course."--Dr. Thomas Altherr, *Metropolitan State College*

"An excellent book."--L. Cassuto, *Fordham University, Lincoln Center*

"A first-rate addition to cultural history."--*Booklist*

About the Author

Joseph Boskin is Professor of History and Afro-American Studies and Director of the Urban Studies and Public Policy Program at Boston University. He is the author of *Into Slavery* and *Humor and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peter Hudson:

The ability that you get from *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* will be the more deep you digging the information that hide within the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* giving you excitement feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by simply anyone who read it because the author of this book is well-known enough. This book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We highly recommend you for having this kind of *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* instantly.

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