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Michl Rogin

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Michl Rogin : Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot:

9 of 13 people found the following review helpful. FASCINATING AND INVIGORATING SCHOLARSHIPBy Nathan D. BacklundThis is one of the five best non-fiction books I have ever read! It is superior to anything Rogin has written previously, magnificent as some of his earlier scholarship has been. I recommend this book for film buffs, as

well as anyone interested in learning how this country's history of racism has affected mass culture and how that has shaped our own understanding of what it means to be an American. Read and learn. This is cultural studies at its best. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Too much academic sociology in this book. That's what ...By Nancy Mitchell Too much academic sociology in this book. That's what it's about but I did not know that before purchasing it. It's a complicated read if you don't have a background in sociology with some psychology added. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Michael lee Fantastic

The tangled connections that have bound Jews to African Americans in popular culture and liberal politics are at the heart of Michael Rogin's arresting and unnerving book. Looking at films from *Birth of a Nation* to *Forrest Gump*, Rogin explores blackface in Hollywood films as an aperture to broader issues: the nature of "white" identity in America, the role of race in transforming immigrants into "Americans," the common experiences of Jews and African Americans that made Jews key supporters in the fight for racial equality, and the social importance of popular culture. Rogin's forcefully argued study challenges us to confront the harsh truths behind the popularity of racial masquerade.

From Publishers Weekly As part of the interest in stereotypical depictions of African Americans after Reconstruction, there have been a number of books on the powerful tradition of blackface minstrelsy. But it didn't just inform popular stage and film representations of blacks, says UC Berkeley political scientist Rogin (*Ronald Reagan the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*). In a story with some similarities to that told in Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish became White*, Rogin says blackface also served to "Americanize" or whiten immigrant Jewish blackface performers during a time of heavy domestic anti-Semitism. By donning blackface, immigrant Jewish performers could distance themselves from perceptions of ethnicity and position themselves as "more white" or "American" in a racist culture that viewed "whiteness" as the presumed goal of assimilation. Rogin documents the history of whites performing as blacks, from Queen Anne through Al Jolson. With chilling, bracing directness, he chronicles American culture's "contaminated" foundations in slavery and racism. He also observes that Jewish moguls in 1930s Hollywood evaded the subject of American anti-Semitism by "eliminating Jews from the screen." (At the time, Jews could play blacks, but they could not play themselves.) This is a complicated but revealing book which will be most profitably enjoyed by readers well-versed in the sometimes arcane historical celluloid material being discussed. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Scholars easily chastise blackface performances in early movies as examples of racist caricature. Political scientist Rogin, however, affords another view of this theatrical technique that derived from the antebellum minstrel show and reached its nadir in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). He is particularly interested in how and why Jewish immigrants borrowed this racial masquerade and incorporated it into stories about their identity and assimilation in America. He examines Al Jolson's Old World father-New World son saga, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), as a primary example of such incorporation. Rogin shows that the New Deal, World War II, and the civil-rights movement brought an end to movie blackface, but that blackface vestiges unintentionally remained, even in such progressive films as *Body and Soul* (1947) and *Home of the Brave* (1949). Rogin's historical research is thorough enough to make many of his fervent political views about his subject credible, and although he occasionally bogs down in critical theory, his analysis is a model of cinema studies at their most intriguing. Aaron Cohen From Kirkus s Over-argued, under-organized examination of the cultural significance of blackface in American film. Blackface is one of those phenomena that time has made almost utterly incomprehensible. What was there about the sight of a white man, "all corked up," performing as a black minstrel, that appealed to audiences? Certainly, there was a transgressive thrill in this carnivalesque appropriation of identity, but how to explain its phenomenal popularity, not only in vaudeville but in movies right through WW II? Rogin's (Ronald Reagan, *The Movie*, 1987, etc.) answer is that blackface was a way for new Americans--particularly Jewish immigrants--to join the mainstream: "Blackface flourished in the transitional period when immigrants and their children were leaving behind Old World identities and trying on new ones." Rogin may be on to something. From its very beginnings Hollywood was run largely by Jewish businessmen. Again, the first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, was all about a Jewish blackface performer. This is tantalizing evidence, but Rogin goes too far when he tries to make blackface into a great Archimedean lever of American culture: "The view through burnt cork places race relations at the center of mass politics and culture in the United States." This kind of sweeping overstatement is typical of Rogin's style. He also refuses to quit when he's ahead. Rogin tries unsuccessfully to extend his argument up to the period when real black actors began appearing in films by taking it to absurd extremes. For example, *Singin' in the Rain* reflects "anxiety about black dance influence." In comparison to his analysis of blackface, his treatment of Jewish assimilation also seems insufficient. An intelligent but sometimes too clever deconstruction of this strange, disquieting aspect of early cinema. (61 bw photos, not seen) -- Copyright 1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.