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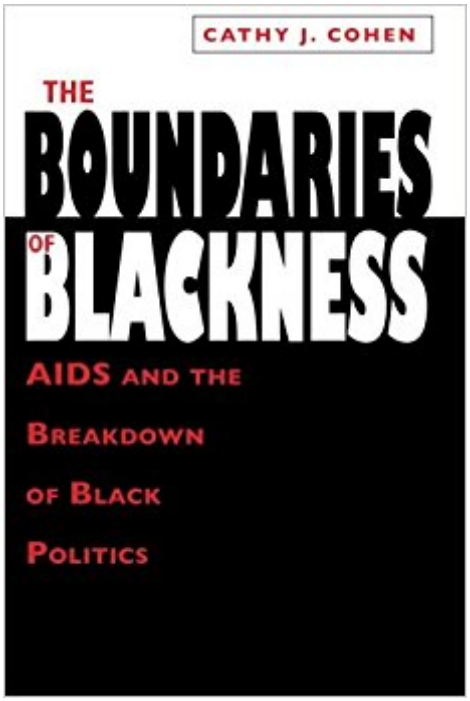
The Boundaries Of Blackness: AIDS And The Breakdown Of Black Politics



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Synopsis

Last year, more African Americans were reported with AIDS than any other racial or ethnic group. And while African Americans make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population, they account for more than 55 percent of all newly diagnosed HIV infections. These alarming developments have caused reactions ranging from profound grief to extreme anger in African-American communities, yet the organized political reaction has remained remarkably restrained.The Boundaries of Blackness is the first full-scale exploration of the social, political, and cultural impact of AIDS on the African-American community. Informed by interviews with activists, ministers, public officials, and people with AIDS, Cathy Cohen unflinchingly brings to light how the epidemic fractured, rather than united, the black community. She traces how the disease separated blacks along different fault lines and analyzes the ensuing struggles and debates.More broadly, Cohen analyzes how other cross-cutting issuesâ ”of class, gender, and sexualityâ ”challenge accepted ideas of who belongs in the community. Such issues, she predicts, will increasingly occupy the political agendas of black organizations and institutions and can lead to either greater inclusiveness or further divisiveness.The Boundaries of Blackness, by examining the response of a changing community to an issue laced with stigma, has much to teach us about oppression, resistance, and marginalization. It also offers valuable insight into how the politics of the African-American communityâ ”and other marginal groupsâ ”will evolve in the twenty-first century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cohen does an excellent job of providing a dual analysis -- one of the current state in the AIDS crisis as well as an honest look at the state of affairs of Black leaders and their inability to "fight the fight" on behalf on our communitites devasted by AIDS. Her scholarly work is provoking, courageous and long overdue. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Black politics and the REAL challenges facing the most marginal of Black communities.

The Boundaries of Blackness is a solid book which analyzes the response of black communities to the AIDS crisis. The complexity of black communities, which are so often described as a singular entity, emerges from Cohen's comprehensive but also nuanced and balanced study. I strongly recommend this book!

Reading it for a course in Political Theory and it is captivating. Having lived in NYC in the late eighties and early nineties, AIDS was of great concern and only the gay and lesbian communities were very active, so too the black communities, but on a smaller scale according to my black friends. It was heartwrenching to watch friends whiter away because not nearly enough was done and organizing increased too slow. Mostly because AIDS had to do with sex and drugs, and with an underclass of gays, lesbians and minorities. As a European I was astounded that Americans can only look at an issue that is so human and affects everybody, so viscerally and not in a pragmatic problem-solving way. This book shows darkest parts of American society and that the culture of denial is devastating. America has a lot to learn and a long way to go.

Rarely, if ever, does a reader encounter an analysis of black politics, of the AIDS crisis, or of government response to either that addresses such issues in a textured and multi-dimensional way. Cohen's book is an anomaly in that it acknowledges and builds upon those complexities while constructing an argument that does not end with them. Boundaries is a great, informative read and a must-have on the bookshelf of anyone who considers themselves a critical thinker.

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