

# Black laughter/Black protest: civil rights, respectability, and the cultural politics of African American comedy, 1934-1968

Selected item



## Black laughter / Black protest: civil rights, respectability, and the cultural politics of African American comedy, 1934-1968



PDF

PDF-1 (1.27 MB)

Citation & Export

View Usage Statistics

Staff View

### Description

**Uniform Title** [Black laughter / Black protest: civil rights, respectability, and the cultural politics of African American comedy, 1934-1968](#)

**Name** [Lorts, Justin T. \(author\)](#); [Fabian, Ann \(chair\)](#); [Lawson, Steven \(internal member\)](#); [Wailoo, Keith \(internal member\)](#); [Martin, Waldo \(outside member\)](#); [Rutgers University; Graduate School - New Brunswick](#)

**Date Created** 2008

**Other Date** 2008-10 (degree)

**Subject** [History, African American wit and humor--History and criticism](#)

**Extent** vii, 283 pages

**Description** Black Laughter / Black Protest explores the relationship between comedy and the modern civil rights movement. In the early years of the civil rights movement, black leaders, intellectuals and journalists claimed that African American comedy undermined black claims to respectability and prevented policy makers and the white public from taking black concerns seriously. In an effort to eliminate these images from the mass media, the NAACP, with assistance from other organizations and members of the black press, organized a number of campaigns against Hollywood studios, Broadway producers and most notably, the Amos 'n' Andy television show. Though often overlooked by civil rights scholars, these actions were a central component of civil rights activism during the 1940s and 1950s and an important precursor to Brown v. Board of Education. In detailing these efforts, this project provides new evidence of the cultural dimensions of the civil rights struggle and contributes to the growing literature on the significance of respectability in black politics.

At the same time, Black Laughter / Black Protest also examines the significant role that African American comedians played in the movement. As prominent members of the black community, comedians such as Pigmeat Markham, Moms Mabley, Redd Foxx, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dick Gregory and Godfrey Cambridge had access to large, and often multi-racial, audiences. Using published interviews and recorded performances, I trace the development of African American comedy through various forms and mediums, including vaudeville, burlesque, nightclub routines, comedy albums, motion pictures and television. Over the course of this development, black comedians effectively used their privileged positions to engage their audiences in a civil rights dialogue that challenged mainstream assumptions on racial issues. Comics also directly participated in the civil rights movement by integrating entertainment venues, testifying before government officials, performing at fundraisers and rallies and providing much needed financial support to the cause. Dick Gregory went even further by actually leading marches and demonstrations, lending visibility and vitality to local protests. By highlighting these efforts, this project sheds scholarly light on the role that black artists played in shaping political consciousness and action during the civil rights era.

**Note** Ph.D.

**Note** Includes bibliographical references (p. 268-282).

**Genre** theses

**Persistent URL** <https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T3765FMP>

**Language** English

**Collection** Graduate School - New Brunswick Electronic Theses and Dissertations

**Organization Name** Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

**Rights** The author owns the copyright to this work.

#### About Us

[How does RUcore work?](#)

[Policies](#)

[Services](#)

[Participate in RUcore](#)

[Collections](#)

#### Infrastructure

[Trusted Repository](#)

[Preservation](#)

[Understanding Metadata](#)

[Technical Glossary](#)

#### Open Source

[OpenWMS](#)

[OpenETD](#)

[OpenMIC](#)

[OpenWAAND](#)

#### Developers

[Reference Materials](#)

[Web Services/APIs](#)

[Schemas](#)

[Harvesting](#)