



Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester

Joseph Boskin

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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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