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To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression (The African American History Series)

By Cheryl Lynn Greenberg



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To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression (The African American History Series) By Cheryl Lynn Greenberg

The Great Depression hit Americans hard, but none harder than African Americans and the working poor. *To Ask for an Equal Chance* explores black experiences during this period and the intertwined challenges posed by race and class. "Last hired, first fired," black workers lost their jobs at twice the rate of whites, and faced greater obstacles in their search for economic security. Black workers, who were generally urban newcomers, impoverished and lacking industrial skills, were already at a disadvantage. These difficulties were intensified by an overt, and in the South legally entrenched, system of racial segregation and discrimination. New federal programs offered hope as they redefined government's responsibility for its citizens, but local implementation often proved racially discriminatory.

As Cheryl Lynn Greenberg makes clear, African Americans were not passive victims of economic catastrophe or white racism; they responded to such challenges in a variety of political, social, and communal ways. The book explores both the external realities facing African Americans and individual and communal responses to them. While experiences varied depending on many factors including class, location, gender and community size, there are also unifying and overarching realities that applied universally. *To Ask for an Equal Chance* straddles the particular, with examinations of specific communities and experiences, and the general, with explorations of the broader effects of racism, discrimination, family, class, and political organizing.



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To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression (The African American History Series) By Cheryl Lynn Greenberg Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #3389506 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Rowman n Littlefield Publishers
- Published on: 2009-08-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.46" h x .69" w x 6.36" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 200 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Drawing upon both a wealth of existing scholarship and selected primary documents, this book offers a new synthesis of African American life during the Great Depression. It also provides a useful text for a variety of African American and U.S. History courses on this turbulent decade in the nation's history. (Joe W. Trotter)

This well-researched, insightful book includes photographs that enhance a sense of the times and the growing activism that eventually led to the civil rights movement. (*Booklist*)

This accessible, concise [book] describes living and working conditions and the black cultural, social, and political response. The author examines class, gender, health care, education, and the formation of self-help and political organizations, giving each a balanced, thorough analysis. . . . Extremely useful text. . . . Highly recommended. (*Choice*)

Concise, engaging, deeply grounded in the scholarly literature, and fully accessible to a general readership, *To Ask for an Equal Chance* provides a compelling account of the economic hardship and racial discrimination that defined the experience of African Americans in the Great Depression. Cheryl Greenberg shows persuasively both the transforming impact and the fundamental limitations of the New Deal's record on race, and she argues provocatively that subsequent civil rights protest was fueled in part by the community action, political organizing, and expansion of economic and educational opportunities among blacks in the 1930s. (Nancy Weiss Malkiel)

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About the Author

Cheryl Lynn Greenberg is the Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of History at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. She is the author of several books, including, most recently, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*.

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