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# Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures

*By Paul Gilroy*



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**Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures** By Paul Gilroy

Small Acts charts the emergence of a distinctive cultural sensibility that accomplishes the difficult task of being simultaneously both black and English. Straddling the field of popular cultural forms, Paul Gilroy shows how the African diaspora born from slavery has given rise to a web of intimate social relationships in which African-American, Caribbean and now black English elements combine. Discussions of Spike Lee and Frank Bruno, record sleeves, photographs, film and literature from *Beloved* to Yardie are used to show how new and exciting possibilities have arisen from the transnational flows that create cultural links between the global African diaspora. *Small Acts* is a seminal work by an important young critic that changes the terms on which black culture will be understood and argued about.



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## Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures By Paul Gilroy Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #523761 in Books
- Published on: 1994-04-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .57" h x 5.44" w x 8.06" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Critics of multiculturalism and of calls for "diversity" often cite absolutist and exclusionary trends within the movement as evidence that its adherents are taking destructive aim at the liberal ideal of pluralist democracy. But "multiculturalism" is more complex than that and the questions raised by diversity's champions about democracy, national identity and our increasingly multinational culture are increasingly inescapable ones. Gilroy ( *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* ), a British cultural critic who is also black, transcends the common multiculturalist concept of ideal, essential racial cultures. He also aims trenchant criticism at the movement's more narrow-minded adherents. For him, black culture is itself becoming increasingly international. Pointing to rap music's hybridization of inner-city and Jamaican culture, he asks, "Why is rap discussed as if it sprang intact from the entrails of the blues? What is it about Afro-America's writing elite which means that they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way?" Though the prose is sometimes stiff, unnecessarily obscure and academic, and the book's photos add little, the essays, which include art reviews, speeches and interviews with bell hooks, Toni Morrison and black British filmmaker Isaac Julien, successfully broaden the scope of multiculturalist cultural criticism. Photos. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Kirkus Reviews

A black British sociologist weighs in with some jargon-heavy but stimulating essays on black identity at home and away. "Contemporary British racism deals in cultural difference rather than crude biological hierarchy," observes Gilroy ( *The Black Atlantic* ). He also explores how Britain's small and heterogeneous black community differs from that of the United States. Gilroy's academic locutions ("Rap is... rooted in the syncretic social relations of the South Bronx") obscure some of his points, and references to Brits not widely known in the States, like boxer Frank Bruno and comedian Lenny Henry, may be lost on some US readers. Perhaps most interesting to an American audience are his conversations with author Toni Morrison and critic bell hooks, and his innovative analysis of how black political discourse "colonized the record sleeve" of the 1960's and 1970's. Though rarefied, some worthy ideas. (Illustrations) -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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