



Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy (The New Black Studies Series)

LaShawn Harris

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During the early twentieth century, a diverse group of African American women carved out unique niches for themselves within New York City's expansive informal economy. LaShawn Harris illuminates the labor patterns and economic activity of three perennials within this kaleidoscope of underground industry: sex work, numbers running for gambling enterprises, and the supernatural consulting business.

Mining police and prison records, newspaper accounts, and period literature, Harris teases out answers to essential questions about these women and their working lives. She also offers a surprising revelation, arguing that the burgeoning underground economy served as a catalyst in working-class black women's creation of the employment opportunities, occupational identities, and survival strategies that provided them with financial stability and a sense of labor autonomy and mobility. At the same time, urban black women, all striving for economic and social prospects and pleasures, experienced the conspicuous and hidden dangers associated with newfound labor opportunities.

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