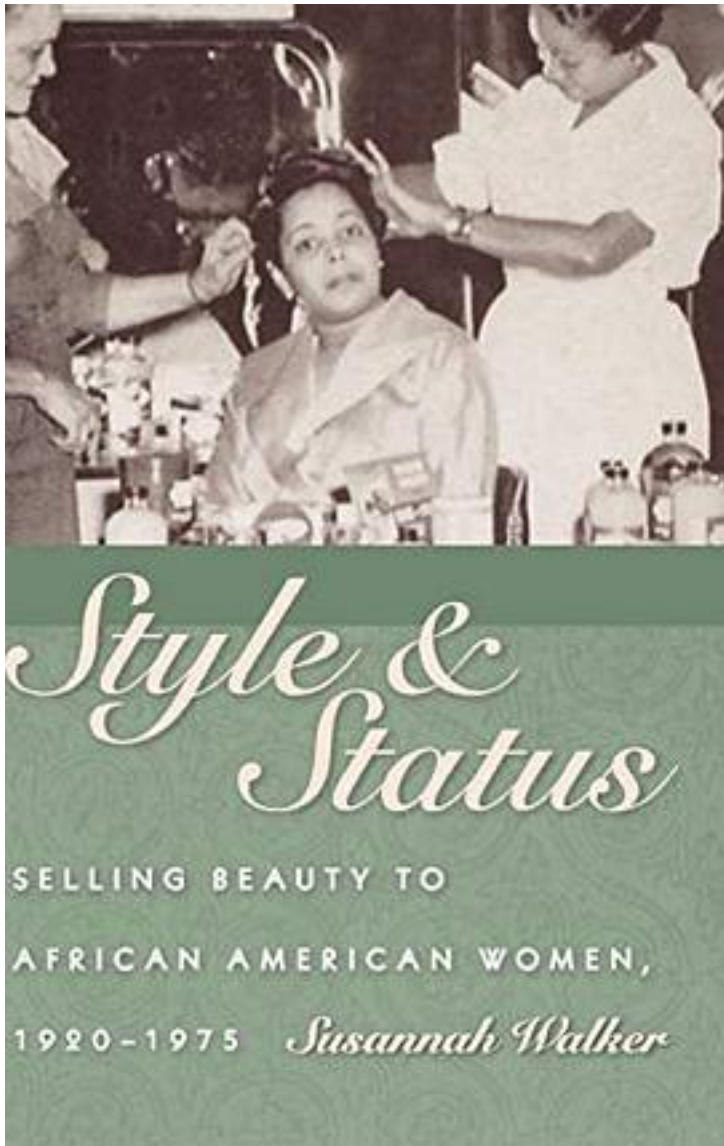


Style and Status



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Between the 1920s and the 1970s, American economic culture began to emphasize the value of consumption over production. At the same time, the rise of new mass media such as radio and television facilitated the advertising and sales of consumer goods on an unprecedented scale. In *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920--1975*, Susannah Walker analyzes an often-overlooked facet of twentieth-century consumer society as she explores the political, social, and racial implications of the business devoted to producing and marketing beauty products for African American women. Walker examines African American beauty culture as a significant component of twentieth-century consumerism, and she links both subjects to the complex racial politics of the era. The efforts of black entrepreneurs to participate in the American economy and to achieve self-determination of black beauty standards often caused conflict within the African American community. Additionally, a prevalence of white-owned firms in the African American beauty industry sparked widespread resentment, even among advocates of full integration in other areas of the American economy and culture. Concerned African Americans argued that whites had too much influence over black beauty culture and were invading the market, complicating matters of physical appearance with questions of race and power. Based on a wide variety of documentary and archival evidence, Walker concludes that African American beauty standards were shaped within black society as much as they were formed in reaction to, let alone imposed by, the majority culture. *Style and Status* challenges the notion that the civil rights and black power movements of the 1950s through the 1970s represents the first period in which African Americans wielded considerable influence over standards of appearance and beauty. Walker explores how beauty culture affected black women's racial and feminine identities, the role of black-owned businesses in African American communities, differences between black-owned and white-owned manufacturers of beauty products, and the concept of racial progress in the post--World War II era. Through the story of the development of black beauty culture, Walker examines the interplay of race, class, and gender in twentieth-century America.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Style and Status_下载链接1](#)

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