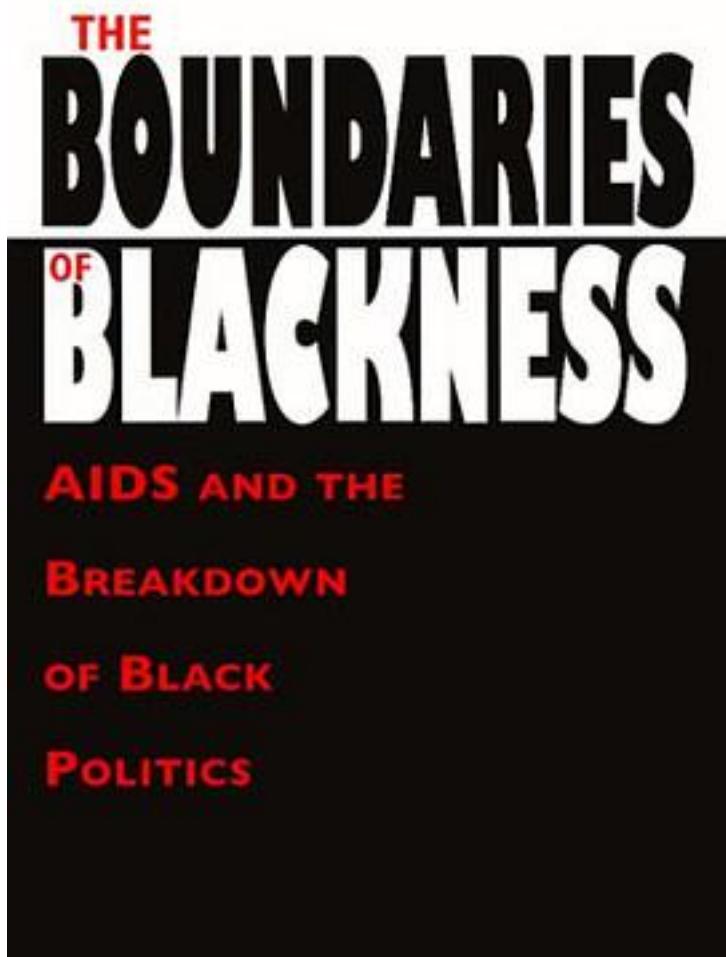


# The Boundaries of Blackness

CATHY J. COHEN



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In 1998, more African Americans were reported with AIDS than any other racial or ethnic group. And while African Americans make up only 13 per cent of the US population, they account for more than 55 per cent of all newly diagnosed HIV infections. These alarming developments have caused reactions ranging from profound grief to extreme anger in African-American communities, yet the organized political reaction has remained remarkably restrained. This book explores the social, political and cultural impact of AIDS on the African-American community. Informed by interviews with activists, ministers, public officials and people with AIDS, Cathy Cohen brings to light how the epidemic fractured, rather than united, the black community. She traces how the disease separated blacks along different fault lines and analyzes the ensuing struggles and debates. More broadly, Cohen analyzes how other cross-cutting issues - of class, gender, and sexuality - challenge accepted ideas of who belongs in the community. Such issues, she predicts, will increasingly occupy the political agendas of black organizations and institutions and can lead to either greater inclusiveness or further divisiveness. The book examines the response of a changing community to an issue laced with stigma, and aims to teach about oppression, resistance, and marginalization. It also offers insight into how the politics of the African-American community - and other marginal groups - will evolve in the 21st century.

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