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# The Problem of Race in the Twenty-first Century (The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures)

*Thomas C. HOLT*

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"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line," W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1903, and his words have proven sadly prophetic. As we enter the twenty-first century, the problem remains--and yet it, and the line that defines it, have shifted in subtle but significant ways. This brief book speaks powerfully to the question of how the circumstances of race and racism have changed in our time--and how these changes will affect our future.

Foremost among the book's concerns are the contradictions and incoherence of a system that idealizes black celebrities in politics, popular culture, and sports even as it diminishes the average African-American citizen. The world of the assembly line, boxer Jack Johnson's career, and *The Birth of a Nation* come under Holt's scrutiny as he relates the malign progress of race and racism to the loss of industrial jobs and the rise of our modern consumer society. Understanding race as ideology, he describes the processes of consumerism and commodification that have transformed, but not necessarily improved, the place of black citizens in our society.

As disturbing as it is enlightening, this timely work reveals the radical nature of change as it relates to race and its cultural phenomena. It offers conceptual tools and a new way to think and talk about racism as social reality.

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