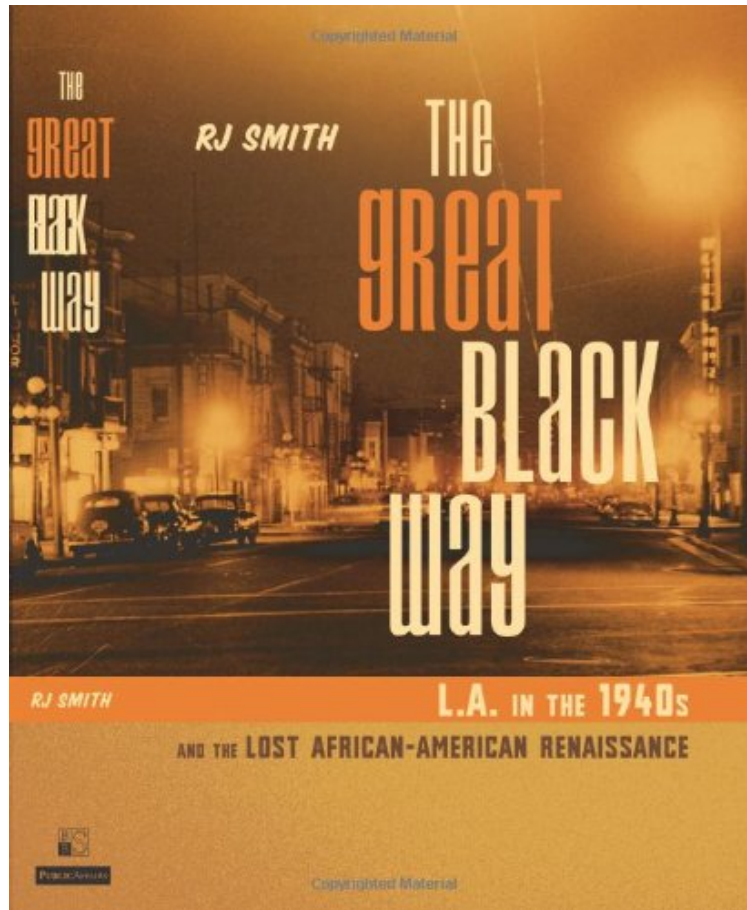


## The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance

R J Smith

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**R J Smith : The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A trip down a gritty road.By James ConleyI was researching this era for a theatrical production I'm working on, but couldn't find much in the way of source material. I came across this book at my local library and (in a figure of speech) haven't been able to put it down.It paints a vivid panorama of street life in Los Angeles in the 40's and '50, within the Black community. I kept referring to it while working on my project. When it was time to take it back to library, I recheck it out.It's a cultural time capsule on the West Coast Black Renaissance, now long since faded.I enjoyed it so much, I brought my own copy.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. West Coast Black HistoryBy TCGrowing up, I only learned of Black struggle and the Civil Rights Movement events as they happened in the South. I love that this book shows Black contributions to the shaping of the

state and the country, from a Los Angeles point of view. I especially love this because I grew up in the Los Angeles area and never knew of Central Avenue being the hub for Black culture and life during the Harlem Renaissance. The author did a great job of painting a vivid picture of Brother's and other places of interest in the area. I could almost picture walking into one of these places and smelling the Whiskey and cigarettes, and hearing the great jam sessions. After reading this book, I want to do more research and learn more about our contributions to the African American Renaissance. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. **Raves from a jazz master** By wildcanary I just gave this book as a gift to jazz master musician on upright bass, Joel Ector, whose folks lived near Central Ave and were part of that scene--his mother worked as a coat check gal at the Dunbar Hotel. He was thrilled, read it in one sitting and says BRILLIANT, well written and authentic. He loved it so much I just ordered another copy for myself.

This book, like a major archaeological dig, unearths a little-known, now vanished civilization and changes how we understand history. In the 1940s, when FDR opened up the defense industry to black workers, it inspired a massive wave of black migration to a small area of Los Angeles along Central Avenue—and cultural ferment in the arts, culture, and politics. In a neighborhood densely packed with black musicians, independent labels and after hours spots, rhythm and blues was spawned. Chester Himes fathered the black detective novel and a noir sensibility. Black comics took off minstrel blackface for the first time and addressed audiences directly with socially-tinged humor. And, Smith suggests, the civil rights movement helped get its start, as the strategy of building mass movements and giving power to ghetto dwellers gained favor in opposition to the top-down strategies of the NAACP and the Urban League. Harlem's Renaissance had been driven by the intellectual elite. In L.A., a new sense of black identity arose from street level. But when the moment was over, many hopes and lives were swept away with it. Based on original research and interviews, told through an engaging narrative, this book shows convincingly that much that we take for granted today, from hip hop and slang to modern-day street fashion, all flowed from the 1940s scene along the Great Black Way.

From Publishers Weekly With stunning descriptive language (and the occasional bit of cheese), Smith paints a portrait of 1940's Central Avenue in all its glory, serving as home-away-from-home for familiar figures such as Ellington, Dandridge and DuBois, as well as more obscure L.A. figures like sidewalk fortune-teller and backroom bookie Julius Juarez, L.A.'s janitorial services chief L.G. Robinson and singer Ivie Anderson. The first chapter introduces John Kinoch, a Harlem transplant and editor of the newspaper California Eagle. Kinoch and the Eagle served as a magnet for other Harlem transplants such as DuBois and Hurston, who came looking for opportunities in Hollywood; the paper also served as a medium for those speaking out against Jim Crow. Unfortunately, Smith spends too much time rehashing the big picture-national events such as A. Philip Randolph's march on Washington connects to L.A. only through the editorial support of the Eagle—which tend to detract from Smith's search for a "lost Negro Renaissance" in the L.A. scene. Though rich in detail, this story makes a more convincing justification for Smith's own fascination with black West Coast culture and history than a meaningful comparison to Harlem's groundbreaking black arts scene. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist While the Harlem Renaissance was marked by sophistication, led by the Talented Tenth identified by W. E. B. DuBois, an emerging cultural awakening was happening in the black community of Los Angeles. This one bubbled up from the bottom by way of what DuBois called the Debauched Tenth. Drawing primarily on interviews with black Angelenos who lived through the period, Smith offers an illuminating portrait of Central Avenue, the main thoroughfare. Aware of the limits of a white man evoking the history of fabled black L.A., Smith brings an obvious affection and deep attention to details and nuances from those who lived it and trusted him enough to recall zoot suits and jazz, the outspoken black newspaper California Eagle, and strategies to integrate the workforce at the defense plants as well as the military. Smith's account is lively and captivating as he evokes the social and cultural changes that made L.A. distinctive and added to the trends that spawned major changes in music, entertainment, and politics. Vanessa Bush Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved. "Consistently achieves what few writers on the subject have even attempted: perspective. And he does it with imagination and grace." -- LA Weekly "Few know this avenue as well as Smith...so passionate...he has the musicality of a jazz man." -- Los Angeles Times Book "Smith's account is lively and captivating as he evokes the social and cultural changes that made L.A. distinctive." -- Booklist "strong... The writing is vivid and accessible." -- Choice, May 2007 "The Great Black Way' is always worth reading...if it [becomes] Smith's magnum opus, no one will be surprised." -- Buffalo News