



Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery

Bryan Wagner

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W. C. Handy waking up to the blues on a train platform, Buddy Bolden eavesdropping on the drums at Congo Square, John Lomax taking his phonograph recorder into a southern penitentiary? some foundational myths of the black vernacular remain inescapable, even as they come under increasing pressure from skeptics.

In *Disturbing the Peace*, Bryan Wagner revises the history of the black vernacular tradition and gives a new account of black culture by reading these myths in the context of the tradition's ongoing engagement with the law. Returning to some familiar examples (trickster tales, outlaw legends, blues lyrics) central to previous studies of the black vernacular expression, Wagner uses an analytic framework he has developed from the historical language of the law to give new and surprising analyses. Wagner's work draws both on his deep understanding of history and on a wealth of primary sources that range from novels to cartoons to popular ballads and early blues songs to newspapers and court reports. Through his innovative engagement with them, Wagner gives us a new and deeper understanding of black cultural expression, revealing its basis in the relational workings of African Americans in the social world.

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