



# **I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago (Historical Studies of Urban America)**

*Cynthia M. Blair*

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For many years, the interrelated histories of prostitution and cities have perked the ears of urban scholars, but until now the history of urban sex work has dealt only in passing with questions of race. In *I've Got to Make My Livin'*, Cynthia Blair explores African American women's sex work in Chicago during the decades of some of the city's most explosive growth, expanding not just our view of prostitution, but also of black women's labor, the Great Migration, black and white reform movements, and the emergence of modern sexuality.

Focusing on the notorious sex districts of the city's south side, Blair paints a complex portrait of black prostitutes as conscious actors and historical agents; prostitution, she argues here, was both an arena of exploitation and abuse, as well as a means of resisting middle-class sexual and economic norms. Blair ultimately illustrates just how powerful these norms were, offering stories about the struggles that emerged among black and white urbanites in response to black women's increasing visibility in the city's sex economy. Through these powerful narratives, *I've Got to Make My Livin'* reveals the intersecting racial struggles and sexual anxieties that underpinned the celebration of Chicago as the quintessentially modern twentieth-century city.

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