



# "Or Does It Explode?": Black Harlem in the Great Depression

*Cheryl Greenberg*

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The Great Depression was a time of hardship for many Americans, but for the citizens of Harlem it was made worse by past and present discrimination. *Or Does It Explode?* examines Black Harlem from the 1920s through the Depression and New Deal to the outbreak of World War II. It describes the changing economic and social lives of Harlemites, and the complex responses of a resilient community to racism and poverty. Greenberg demonstrates that far from remaining passive in the face of hard times, Harlemites mobilized to better their opportunities and living conditions through numerous organizations and grass-roots political activism. Their successes led to changed employment practices and new government programs. This progress was not always enough, however, and the resulting anger of the community twice exploded in riot, in 1935 and 1943. The book traces the history of these protests, both organized and spontaneous. It places them within their political and economic contexts by exploring the diversity of Harlem's family and community life, its experiences with work and relief, and its interaction with the administrations of New York City and New Deal agencies.

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