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Robert Johnson, Mythmaking, and Contemporary American Culture (Music in American Life)

Patricia R. Schroeder

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An examination of the culture of myth making by looking at the myths surrounding Robert Johnson and how they were used by various writers and artists. Suddenly Robert Johnson is everywhere. Though the Mississippi bluesman died young and recorded only twenty-nine songs, the legacy, legend, and lore surrounding him continue to grow. Focusing on these developments, Patricia R. Schroeder's Robert Johnson, Mythmaking, and Contemporary American Culture breaks new ground in Johnson scholarship, going beyond simple or speculative biography to explore him in his larger role as a contemporary cultural icon. Robert Johnson, Mythmaking, and Contemporary American Culture shows the Robert Johnson of today to be less a two-dimensional character fixed by the few known facts of his life than a dynamic and contested set of ideas. Represented in novels, in plays, and even on a postage stamp, he provides inspiration for highbrow cultural artifacts--such as poems--as well as Hollywood movies and T-shirts. Schroeder's detailed and scholarly analysis directly engages key images and stories about Johnson (such as the Faustian crossroads exchange of his soul for guitar virtuosity), navigating the many competing interpretations that swirl around him to reveal the cultural purposes these stories and their tellers serve. examination of the relationships among Johnson's life, its subsequent portrayals, and the cultural forces that drove these representations. With penetrating insights into both Johnson and the society that perpetuates him, Robert Johnson, Mythmaking, and Contemporary American Culture is essential reading for cultural critics and blues fans alike.

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