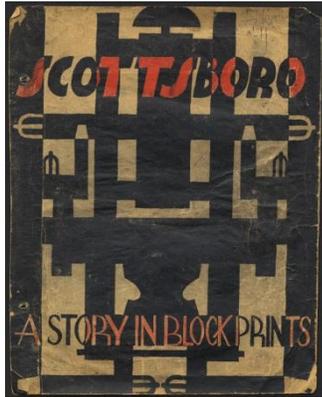


MEDIA: Language Arts/Social Studies

Description of *Scottsboro—A Story in Linoleum Cuts* Book



Cover, *Scottsboro – A Story in Linoleum Cuts*, c. 1933

Illustrated and written by Lin Shi Khan and Ralph Austin (American, b.1912)

USA

Ink and pencil on brown craft paper

83.3.3395

The Wolfsonian-FIU Library holds the original manuscript version of *Scottsboro: A Story in Linoleum Cuts*. Our copy is an extraordinarily rare piece—with only one other copy of this work having been found to date. Note that the cover title – *Scottsboro: A Story in Block Prints* – is different from the title page in the book. A revised version was also prepared for publication and printed in Seattle in 1935, although it was apparently never distributed. A hardcover edition of the revised version was published by New York University Press in 2002 (*Scottsboro, Alabama – A Story in Linoleum Cuts*, Lin Shi Khan and Tony Perez, Edited by Andrew H. Lee, and Foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley.)

Although the majority of the linocut plates are identical, the deletions and additions and the differences between the text of our handwritten manuscript copy and that of the more polished printed version are both interesting and significant. The Wolfsonian copy contains illustrated half-title and title pages apparently deleted from the finished product. The slavery experience is treated consistently in both versions, although the Seattle version includes an additional illustration that recognizes African-American agency in toppling the institution, with an aim at inspiring another revolution against the capitalist state. This plate, not found in our original manuscript version, depicts a pitchfork-wielding slave breaking free of his chains, and the caption, “The Negro slaves soon rose in rebellion.” Both the Wolfsonian and Seattle versions also focus on the post-Civil War Ku Klux Klan campaign of terror, and emphasize the shared misery of the Great Depression that forced both black and white sharecroppers into interracial Unions or else onto the rails in search of work.

The most significant difference between the Wolfsonian’s manuscript version and the more polished Seattle version is in the opposite treatment of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, the “victims” of the alleged rape. In the Wolfsonian’s manuscript, both women are graphically depicted in several plates as prostitutes who appear to countenance the sexual advances of the sheriffs, capitalists, and preachers coercing their tainted testimony. (See Plates, 22, 26, and 27.) None of these sexually-charged plates appear in the ready-to-publish version of the book; and Bates and Price are instead depicted as rigorously defending themselves from the lascivious advances of the local sheriff in a plate not appearing in our earlier edition. This editorial shift doubtlessly stemmed from the failed first defense of the Scottsboro boys by a prominent New York criminal lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz, hired by the International Labor Defense (I.L.D.). Although Leibowitz very successfully demonstrated in court that the two girls had been coerced into inventing the rape story, his characterization of them as women of “easy virtue” was considered an affront to the honor of Southern women, and so offended the all-white male jury that they rendered a guilty verdict against the boys. As a result, those in charge of editing the manuscript probably decided to underplay the sensitive gender issue, and instead focus more squarely on the problem of Southern racism, adding another two new plates dealing with this theme.

One final editorial change should also be recognized. In the original manuscript version, a plate ridiculing the NAACP is included that does not appear in the subsequent Seattle edition. It was only after Communist organizers from the I.L.D. visited the Scottsboro defendants in jail and launched a world-wide campaign on their behalf that the NAACP took notice of the case and also attempted to secure the boys a new trial. The rivalry between the two organizations is reflected in the handwritten text of the Wolfsonian manuscript, which reads: “The white boss uses the Negro boss organization the National Association for Advancement of the Colored People to stop the Negro people from uniting with the white workers.” The text is graphically illustrated with a unique plate depicting a capitalist “fat cat” puppet-master (complete with top hat) standing behind and manipulating an obese, derby-sporting NAACP leader dressed in a business suit, who stands with an outstretched arm putting a halt to three African American protesters in working clothes. Here again, the omission of this text and plate in the Seattle version is indicative of the changing strategy of the I.L.D. in 1935 when the Communist Party recognized the need to build a “Popular Front” consensus among liberal and radical groups against the common enemy of fascism and racism.