
Reviewed by Laura Arntson Harris.

Drums and Shadows is a portrait of black coastal Georgia in the 1930s. It is a portrait painted by individuals from twenty rural communities and captured by the Savannah Unit of the Georgia Writer’s Project in photographs, descriptive verbal sketches and extensive quotations. We can hear the informants' voices in the transliteration of their black Georgian speech. We can also hear unrecorded assumptions and ideas about African "survivals" which the project’s writers brought to their study. The preoccupation with conjure, spirits, root doctors, and drums is a preoccupation of the project’s fieldworkers rather than that of their informants. A popular approach to anthropological data collection at the time of this study included the treatment of items of belief and specific practices as bits of archaeological evidence appropriate for cross-cultural comparison. Accounts of conjures and spirits, root medicines and charms, drum signalling and texts of African songs fit neatly into their scheme for collection, whereas belief complexes or a full account of foodways, for example, could not be so easily obtained in the course of a brief interview. The text is a portrait rather than an analysis, but the inclusion of an appendix of comparable African beliefs and practices to the exclusion of European parallels strongly suggests that the items collected are in fact
survivals of African traditions.

Charles Joyner, in his introduction to this 1986 Brown Thrasher edition, provides a valuable background to the text and to the objectives with which the project was carried out. Joyner asks us to look at the pictures of the cabins and praise houses, the ox cart, the wooden grave markers, carved walking sticks and figures, and woven baskets. He asks us to look at the photographs to see the faces, and to listen to the voices of these Georgians so that we too may see black coastal Georgia in the 1930s. It is, as Joyner says, "a portrait of a certain time and place, a portrait of an important part of southern culture" (xxiv).

This reissue of Drums and Shadows comes at a time of renewed interest in the people and culture of the South Carolina and Georgia lowlands, often referred to collectively as Gullah. Current research by members of the Gullah Research Committee at the University of Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College is now providing more concrete evidence of Gullah retentions of specific West African, and in particular Mende, traditional practices based on well-documented historical links between lowland rice agriculture and the Sierra Leone slave trade (see Opala 1986). The question of whether or not the Gullah have retained elements of their African heritage can now be set aside in order to ask the questions, "Which specific West African traditions have been retained?" and "How have they changed within the cultural environment of South Carolina and Georgia?" Because of the research done in the 1930s and 1940s by Lorenzo Dow Turner (Turner 1974 [1949]) and the Georgia Writer's Project, we can attempt to answer these questions now and learn more about the African heritage in American culture.
References Cited

Opala, Joseph A.

Turner, Lorenzo Dow


Reviewed by Mary Dart.

The Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University houses a collection of 6,985 wax cylinders recorded between 1893 and 1938, including material from approximately 150 culture groups in Africa, Black America, Native America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania. This collection is of tremendous value, containing the earliest recorded material in existence for many of the culture groups represented. (It contains, for example, Erich von Hornbostel's Demonstration Collection of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, the first anthology of traditional music ever issued.) Under the supervision of the editors, Anthony Seeger and Louise S. Spear, these wax cylinders have been recorded onto magnetic tape and their documentation has been painstakingly organized. The result is this fine catalogue which makes these rare materials available to scholars everywhere.

This book begins with an introductory section which describes the history and mechanics of wax