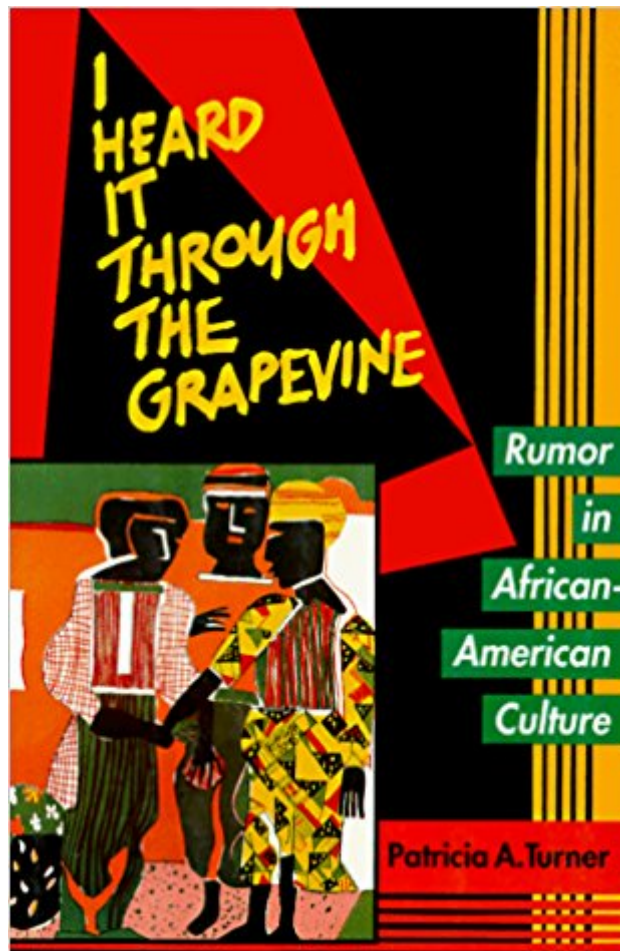




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I Heard It Through The Grapevine: Rumor In African-American Culture



Synopsis

This book divides into two basic parts. In Chapters 1 and 2 I discuss historical examples of "rumor" discourse and suggest why many blacks have--for good reason--channeled beliefs about race relations into familiar formulae, ones developed as early as the time of the first contact between sub-Saharan Africans and European white. Then in Chapters 3-7 it explores the continuation of these issues in late-twentieth-century African-American rumors and contemporary legends, using examples collected in the field. Because Turner was able to monitor these contemporary legends as they unfolded and played themselves out, rigorous analysis was possible. What follows, then, is an examination of the themes common to these contemporary items and related historical ones, and an explanation for their persistence. Concerns about conspiracy, contamination, cannibalism, and castration--perceived threats to individual black bodies, which are then translated into animosity toward the race as a whole--run through nearly four hundred years of black contemporary legend material and prove remarkable tenacious.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In an intriguing exploration of black folklore, Turner examines contemporary legends--like Ku Klux Klan ownership of a now defunct clothing firm--common in the black community. The author, who teaches African-American and African Studies at UC Davis, finds the roots of folk notions about racial difference in the contact between European explorers and black Africans, and in white attempts to control black bodies from slavery days through 20th-century riots. She offers close

analysis of several persistent conspiracy rumors: black belief that white-owned firms directed at black customers, e.g., Church's Fried Chicken, are run by the KKK; that sneaker-maker Reebok is owned by South Africa; that AIDS and crack are part of a white plot to suppress blacks. Turner insightfully observes that "products or places having strong symbolic potency for African-Americans"--some soul food is an example--can inspire folk speculation. She argues that most rumors are based on "readings or misreadings" of real oppression of blacks, and that combatting such rumors requires first addressing racial intolerance and inequality. However, Turner downplays the responsibility of the black community to support accurate reporting and education efforts. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Fried chicken will make you sterile; the FBI killed Martin Luther King, Jr.; the "powers that be" facilitated the crack epidemic, the AIDS epidemic, and the murders of black children in Atlanta: Here, folklore scholar Turner (African-American and African Studies/UC Davis) offers an illuminating examination of why rumors like these persist in the African-American community. Turner explores why these rumors, and not others, took root in black culture across the US; how they got started; and what they represent to even well-educated, well-informed African-Americans. Like ancient myths warning about the powers of nature, she says, rumors that the Ku Klux Klan owns a popular fried-chicken chain and has inserted an ingredient that will sterilize black men remind African-Americans that they live in a white society still hostile to blacks. The author traces the idea that whites are bent on physically destroying blacks back to Africa and the slave trade, during which many Africans believed they were being transported across the ocean in order to be eaten. The brutality of slave life, then of white supremacist oppression, and, today, of incidents like the Rodney King beating stir those early fears, handed down in family stories and fanned by rumor. Why domestic fried chicken and not some vague international conspiracy? Because, says Turner, an individual can take action against danger by boycotting a fried-chicken chain, but a nebulous conspiracy is beyond personal control. The author tracks down and dismisses many rumors dealing with corporations--the KKK does not appear to own fried-chicken chains, fruit-drink manufacturers, or sneaker companies--but she finds CIA and FBI intrigues more difficult to refute. An epilogue introduces the most recent rumors in the black community, including that the contraceptive Norplant is being used as a tool of genocide. Highly repetitious in detail and argument--but, still, an intriguing and thorough analysis. (Five b&w illustrations--not seen) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Dr. Patricia Turner's overview of rumor in the white communities and black communities of the past is excellent. She traces themes down through time, showing us how we all are grabbed and held prisoner by what we want to believe. Her delineation of what divides "them" from "us" is thought-provoking--and we all should be greatly intrigued by the people in her book who believe what they believe, in spite of logic and factual material available to them. We need more books like this and more authors like her. This should be required reading in a wide range of courses everywhere, because rumor is alive and well.

Many of the books on urban legends and rumors avoid discussion of stories told specifically within African-American communities. This book compensates for this lack of attention, and it provides interesting insights into the legends, rumors, and beliefs that Turner documents. She has arranged this book as a social history that stretches back to slavery times and extends into contemporary history. There are continuities and variations in the stories, but the overall themes remain the same. Mainly, the stories provide ways to understand how the history of racial tension in America is expressed through folklore and fantasy. In this respect, the book provides interesting ways to read the legends for psychological insight as Turner provides an interesting discussion of ways in which ideological constructs become expressed in fantasy.

I read this book a few years ago as part of research I was doing on urban legends. While Jan Brunvand's books are the most cited references for urban legends, he focuses mostly on ULs vectored by white, usually middle class, people. Turner, on the other hand, focuses specifically on ULs vectored in the black community. I thought this book was quite well written, and the commentary and analysis of the ULs were spot on. I highly recommend this book

This book is kinda cool. It delivers a lot of information and shocking stories that are both interesting and unbelievable. The only thing that bugs me is the fact that the information is delivered like a book report or news broadcast. The author doesn't really go in depth or use her opinion that much and it's a little bit dry. If you like your myths straight forward, buy this book, but if you prefer a little more color, perhaps you should look elsewhere.

This could have been a very good, if not great book. Mainly due to the author having a huge amount of bias of the left wing academic ivory tower variety, racial bias (I believe the author is one of these black "intellectuals" that every University seems to have one or two of working for them), poor

research and just general stupidity there's not much worthwhile stuff to glean from this book. The main purpose of this book is supposed to have been how rumors of the conspiratorial/persecutional sort, most I wouldn't even call conspiracy theories, they border on folklore, have a history of running wild throughout the black community. She gets started trying to debunk the long standing historical belief of whites that blacks in Africa indulge in cannibalism. While to state the obvious its only a tiny percentage that do it, even now it is not uncommon. Just in the past few months I've ran across articles on BBC where blacks were killing and eating Pygmies and Albinos. Albinos from certain countries in Africa have even been granted political asylum in European countries. So cannibalism in Africa is not a fantasy or an isolated incident. She does good when she talks about how many of the most violent race riots in American history were started because of false rumors. The blacks would hear some wild story that the KKK threw a black baby in a river or whites would hear about some heinous act that a black had allegedly committed and the rumor would run through the town by word of mouth and one or both sides would go crazy resulting in many people being killed. Turner shows her perverse mental masturbatory egghead side when she portrays the KKK as repressed gays and their penchant in the old south for referring to blacks as "boy" has to do with their alleged repressed pedophilic urges for young black boys!!! Some of the stuff that made it into this book I remember firsthand. For example the rumor that Reebok was owned by racist South Africans and helped fund apartheid in South Africa. I had a black friend that I remember going on and on about this a few times. A lot of the rumors covered in this book go into the black community believing that the KKK owns various companies that produce products that are popular in the black community, in particular clothing and shoes. Also rumors that certain restaurants and soft drinks were owned by the KKK who were putting chemicals into the food/drinks that would sterilize black men were hugely popular. Its almost comedic that so many blacks believe the KKK has any power, funding, or gumption to do things like this. They even believed the KKK owned Kool and Marlboro cigarettes! If you went to a KKK meeting you would have scared right wingers, mental patients, some very low IQ white trash and at least a couple of undercover agents, but your never going to find anybody with a controlling interest in a multi-national corporation. The author even falls for this nonsense saying the rumor that the KKK is the real culprit in the Atlanta child killings "have the most potential for accuracy", and hints that "the powers that be" were somehow working with the KKK and framed Williams for the murders. On one level Williams may have been used as a scapegoat, but nevermind that there is absolutely no evidence to support the KKKs involvement, and if you think Williams was an easy scapegoat to target what about the KKK? In many ways I think buying into this stuff works as a psychological crutch for many blacks. A real shame is this book could have

focused on real legitimate conspiracies and wrongs that have been done by "the powers that be" against blacks. For example she of course goes into the belief many have, including myself, that James Earl Ray was either a scapegoat, an mkultra type mindwash victim, or was knowingly working with the system to kill Martin Luther King she never really goes into the real reasons the system would have wanted King dead. Namely he quit focusing on the world orders agenda of forced race mixing and began to focus on workers rights and protesting the Vietnam war, which of course the system is against workers rights and was pro-Vietnam war. Turner also doesn't intelligently talk about the CIA's involvement in the crack cocaine explosion of the 1980's in the black community, which I believe to be legit, never even mentioning Gary Webb's book. She also tries to claim many times that the system did many of the bad things to blacks because they were out to protect whites. You really think the Republican Party cares about middle class white families!?!? That's definitely the wildest of all rumors covered in this book.

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