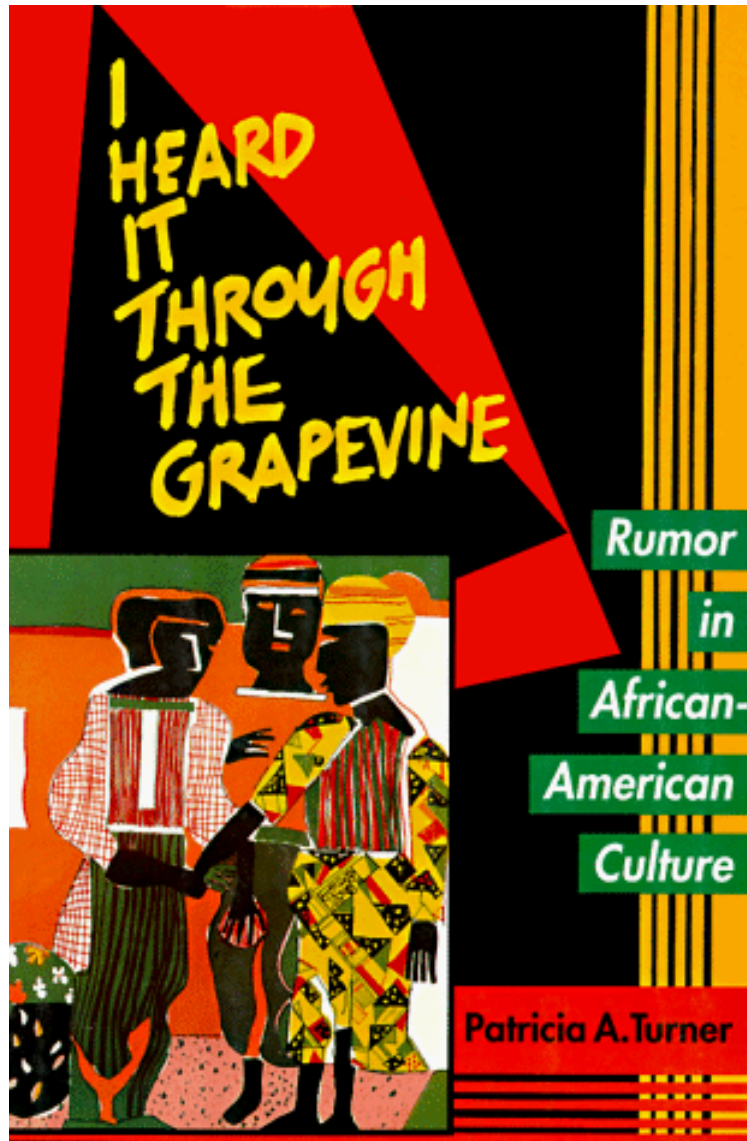


I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture

Patricia A. Turner

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Patricia A. Turner : I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful even-handed review of myopia in all races!By A

CustomerDr. 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. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interpreting Rumors and Legends By grasshopper4 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. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Discussion of African American Urban Legends By A Customer 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 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.

From Publishers Weekly 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. From Kirkus s 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 bw illustrations--not seen) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. A feast for those interested in historical and modern black folklore. . . . Engaging. -- Chicago Tribune [Turner's] book demonstrates how an

exemplary case study of folklore can reveal the positive side of . . . seemingly damaging rumors. Moreover, her work opens up new perspectives on black culture. -- Zack Zipes, New York Times Book