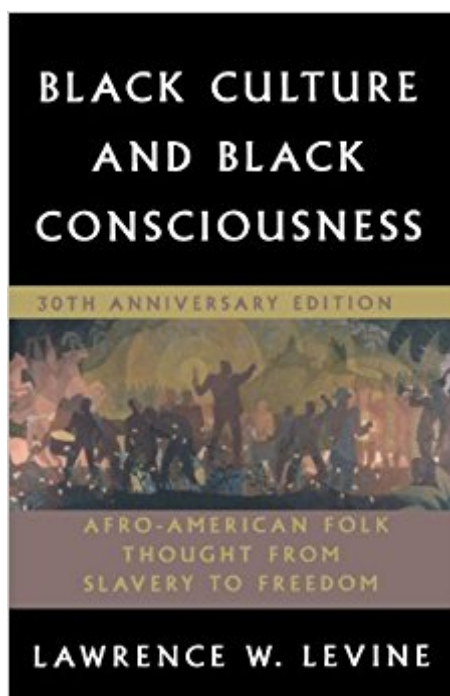


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Black Culture And Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom



Synopsis

When *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* first appeared thirty years ago, it marked a revolution in our understanding of African American history. Contrary to prevailing ideas at the time, which held that African culture disappeared quickly under slavery and that black Americans had little group pride, history, or cohesiveness, Levine uncovered a cultural treasure trove, illuminating a rich and complex African American oral tradition, including songs, proverbs, jokes, folktales, and long narrative poems called toasts--work that dated from before and after emancipation. The fact that these ideas and sources seem so commonplace now is in large part due to this book and the scholarship that followed in its wake. A landmark work that was part of the "cultural turn" in American history, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* profoundly influenced an entire generation of historians and continues to be read and taught. For this anniversary reissue, Levine wrote a new preface reflecting on the writing of the book and its place within intellectual trends in African American and American cultural history.

Book Information

Paperback: 560 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 30th anniversary edition (April 27, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 019530568X

ISBN-13: 978-0195305685

Product Dimensions: 8 x 1.2 x 5.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #47,227 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #22 in Books > History > World >

Slavery & Emancipation #27 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales >

Mythology #32 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Abolition

Customer Reviews

"Must be read by all who would understand the Afro-American experience and American culture in general." --Eugene D. Genovese
"Through an exhaustive investigation of black songs, folk tales, proverbs, aphorisms, verbal games and the long narrative oral poems known as 'toasts,' Levine argues that the value system of Afro-Americans can only be understood through an analysis of black culture.... His work ranks among the best books written on the Afro-American experience in recent years." --Al-Tony Gilmore, *The Washington Post*

The late Lawrence W. Levine was Margaret Byrne Professor of History Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, and Professor of History and Cultural Studies at George Mason University in Virginia. A former MacArthur fellow and a Past President of the Organization of American Historians, he was the author of a number of books, among them *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, and *The People & the President: America's Extraordinary Conversation with FDR*

One of the few academic textbooks for a graduate readings course that I was really happy I purchased. Levine's book takes you on a journey through African-American culture, and explores the importance of song, folk tales, and Christianity in slave culture. A must read, particularly for anyone interested in the Civil War era, slave culture, or history of the American South.

I ordered this book as part of my course curriculum for my African American Folklore class and it turns out to be a good read.

If you want a reference for roots, sources of any Black song..work songs...and before then book is a great ref. for your shelf. Not light reading. Detailed and repeats= gives ref. to source of everything. That is what scholars do. I like the part, early, on, about observations of people who visited Africa either before or at beginning of Slave trade as to what they learned about African culture and tribal ways. Some tribes had/have a annual feast to poking fun at chief or ruler. I can see that has carried on into American culture now. Reminds me of Jewish Purim where everything is turned upside down for a day once a year. You can poke fun at chief and he has to take it. So when people say "It is a Black Thang" regarding something they find funny...maybe mimicing, or poking fun...has a very deep root. Over simplified.

FIVE STAR Seller! EXCELLENT!!

The book is very imformative, and explains alot about the culture and history of African Americans. It was used frequently during my studies in college for my history classes.

This book was decent. Took a little while to ship at home but worth the price! I needed this book for my anthropology class and its in excellent condition. Thank you very much!

In his impressive study of the African-American experience in America, "Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom," author Lawrence Levine assembles a vast collection of songs, jokes, medicine, tales, music, and humor to argue against the once widely held notion that slavery reduced blacks to a state of hopeless degradation, completely dissipated their African heritage, and left them largely dependent on white cultural norms. According to Levine, not only did blacks possess a culture and consciousness independent of the dominant white society, but this culture was extraordinarily complex and capable of constantly changing to fit the latest challenges confronting both white and black society. The author claims that up to the time of emancipation, slaves' oral communications created a "sacred" world that transcended bondage and went beyond the control of their white overlords. African influences consisting of "call and response" song and the reversal of the social hierarchy through stories remained important in all aspects of black life in the antebellum South, eventually informing spirituals, folk medicine, and story creation. When blacks told tales about the animal world, or sang songs with a spiritual focus, doing so created a sense of inclusive community while constructing a cosmology that gave blacks an important place in the unity of the physical world. This sacred world gave way to increasing secularization after emancipation when blacks assimilated some white influences during the move from the plantation to larger society. Since white society still limited the roles of blacks in society, the result of freedom was a cultural dualism, or the "double consciousness" articulated by W.E.B. DuBois, which Levine best expresses when he studies how blacks spoke the English language. When dealing with whites, blacks tended to communicate using proper English language forms. Among their own people they spoke using distinctive black constructions. Rather than seeing this as devious or ignorant, as many whites did during that time, the author sees this as a way blacks maintained their own identity during the heady days of freedom when white culture threatened to overwhelm their traditions. Blacks did adopt some white cultural ideas, which Levine rigorously outlines through the study of such diverse fields as hero stories and blues music, but they never accepted them at the expense of their own traditions. The blues particularly presented a significant challenge for the black community because this form of expression closely mirrored many aspects of white music: individual singing versus group singing and the creation of songs based on an individual's experiences and problems. The author argues that while blues did employ some white musical elements, the problems often articulated in the songs dealt with concerns affecting the entire black population. Moreover, blues music helped spread a sense of community through the wide distribution of recorded songs. Particularly impressive in Levine's study, aside from the massive

amount of material he collected and synthesized, is his study of the trickster tales. It is here, in the widely circulated black tales about Brer Rabbit and other denizens of the animal world, that African-American culture related a plethora of different meanings to changing times. "Black Culture and Black Consciousness" teases out multiple definitions from these ostensibly simple tales, showing how blacks imbued the stories with lessons about patience, the weak versus the strong, the value of listening, and the importance of marriage among many others. Most relevant is how these stories did not merely fall into a "hate the white man" mold, but reflected the broad concerns and hopes of an entire community. The trickster tales, in Levine's masterful hands, reveal that blacks often shared the same concerns about life that white people did. A superficial examination of the stories, as it seems many have made over the years, does not reveal the depth and breadth of the human experience contained within the tales. The author works wonders with these stories. As difficult as it is to criticize a work that accomplishes such a masterful fusion of diverse sources, Levine does make a few omissions. He introduces, for example, the concept of black toasts without discussing the origins of this rhyming wordplay. Were there other forms of black oral traditions that the author failed to analyze? Unfortunately, black religious sermons receive little attention from this scholar. Religion played an enormous role in African-American oral tradition, as evidenced in the examinations of spirituals and gospel music in the book. Where did the pulpit fit into the development and maintenance of culture and consciousness? We know from this book, along with Mia Bay's examination of ex-slave testimony, that black preachers existed and were important figures respected by black people as far back as the first conversions of African-Americans to Christianity. Black religious figures continued to exert considerable influence on their communities after emancipation. Even today, some black religious services easily conform to the modes of communication outlined in Levine's book, especially the African "call and response" patterns used in slave spiritual songs. Moreover, black newspapers created after the freeing of the slaves also served to unite the black community and functioned as a center of cultural consciousness. "Chicago Defender," a black newspaper, spoke out against problems confronting black people in the early part of the twentieth century. The paper also played a vital role in encouraging southern blacks to migrate to the North around the time of World War I. Black periodicals like the "Chicago Defender," regrettably unexamined by this book, fits the author's definition of black ethnicity after emancipation: adopting a white idea and melding the concept with black cultural concerns.

It said the latest it would arrive was September 30th 2013. it is now February the 10th and i still don't have it. The class i needed it for i already took and i no longer need it. the actual content of the

book itself i don't know if it is good or useful; because i never received it. But i would assume it's a good book. But i would suggest not buying from him.

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