

Playing a large part in all this is an institution without definite parallel anywhere else in the world, perhaps, is the “*eisteddfod*,” a series of nation-wide competitions in singing, instrumental music, dancing, recitation, and the like which culminates in a week-long festival in August in which the local winners compete before huge crowds and are rated for their accomplishments—a sort of cultural midwestern state fair!

To begin with, the higher ups—judges and the like—in the *eisteddfod* share power with the English overlords, and thus the culturally involved Welsh have very ambivalent views of them. One finds in this book such judgments as “All Welsh are actors,” for almost all Welsh take part in the *eisteddfod* at some level or other. Although the purpose of competition is enjoyment, still winning isn’t everything. In addition, there seems to be a total split between an acceptance of the judgment of the experts and the feeling that one person’s judgment is as good as another’s, and thus that the judges are wrong, or perhaps even that nobody can get at the truth.

The *eisteddfod* aside, Trosset finds that one of the main characteristics of the Welsh is that they are overly modest about their abilities and seem firmly convinced that it is impossible to change things—strange views in an area where the future of the Welsh language, the possibility of additional political power for Wales itself, and the ever-present, seemingly, problems of unemployment, are hotly debated. In short, then, the Welsh seem to suffer under what Trosset calls a “martyrdom scenario.”

The book is quite clearly written and is otherwise of interest because of its author’s insistence that subjectivity in judgments on what groups of people think is not only acceptable but probably necessary—an opinion that seems strange, but also rather sensible, to this reviewer.

In the broadest sense, too, this book offers us a chance to examine our own attitudes toward ourselves and society and to ponder the degree to which ethnicity plays a significant part in them.

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Patricia A. Turner. *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture*. (Berkeley: California, 1994) xvi, 260pp.

Patricia A. Turner, associate professor of African American and African Studies at the University of California at Davis, published *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* earlier in 1994.

Explorations in Sights and Sounds

Now she has made another valuable contribution to the study of African American culture with *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*; and in addition, has added to the understanding of how urban legends start and continue to persist. Just as Jan Harold Brunvand's *Vanishing Hitchhiker* made the general public aware of these legends, Turner's study makes both Black and White readers aware of the significance of rumor and urban legends in Black culture.

Of course, rumors have always existed in all cultures. This book causes me to recall the role of rumors in my own experience ranging from stories that FDR and JFK did not die but were gravely ill to those about Proctor & Gamble being an income producer for Satan to ones about Levi-Strauss giving a new pair of jeans for ten pocket tags.

Turner has presented a well organized, historical approach to rumors in African American culture. She begins with the earliest which purport to explain the reason Africans were captured and transported to America—cannibalism. She makes these rumors relevant to the Black experience in American history and brings them into the present with a discussion of the Jeffrey Dahmer case.

Her second chapter deals with rumors involving "the modes of intimidation" whites used in controlling Blacks from the earliest days of slavery down to the present. Closely aligned to these are those in her two chapters on white conspiracies to destroy Blacks. The Ku Klux Klan rumors credit white supremacists with the strengths, power, and successes they never had. Yet rumors about Klan ownership of businesses and corporations persists. "When confronted with evidence that Church's Fried Chicken was not owned by the Ku Klux Klan and was not contaminating the chicken so the male eater would be sterilized, a bright young African American female college junior responded 'Well, it's the kind of thing they would do if they could'" (57).

Out of such attitudes grow rumors about the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the Atlanta child murders, AIDS, and the sneaker company owned by South African white supremacists. Interestingly, in the discussion of assassinations, Turner fails to include Huey Long, Medgar Evers, and George Wallace rumors which also exist in the Black community. Certainly, just as interesting, is her failure to include the rumor that there is a white conspiracy to destroy or kill any Black man who becomes successful financially or politically.

Her book does include intriguing tables and a formula about consumer/corporate conflict. Table 1 entitled, "Mercantile Rumors in the Black Community," graphically analyzes the companies, the alleged conspirators, and the corporate rumors illustrated. Her formula involving three elements: product price, potential risks, and

negligible utility (Price + Risk Utility = Rumor) is a way to understand why rumors about a particular company start.

Crack, not a corporate activity, does not fit into this formula. Even though many whites use crack, the rumor persists in the Black community that there is a conspiracy to sell it to African Americans to control and eventually eliminate them from American society.

Her final chapter, "Epilogue: Continuing Concerns," points out that the collection of rumors is a continuing area of research. Since she mailed the draft of the book to her editor in 1991, she has collected rumors on forced birth control, Liz Claiborne, and expensive liquor. She is confident that each year will bring even more rumors and urban legends.

So Patricia Turner's research on rumors will never end because new rumors appear as fast as she documents old ones. We can look forward to the future work of Turner, because *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* is a carefully researched, well documented book that has a graceful style and organization that appeal to both the scholar and the general reader.

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Velma Wallis. *Two Old Women*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993) 140 pp., \$9.00.

Velma Wallis says of *Two Old Women*, it is "a story about my people and my past—something about me that I could grasp and call mine." She introduces her written story as an attempt to continue that which is rapidly being silenced by television and modern "conveniences"—the children who now seem uninterested in traditional tales to one day be able to call the legend theirs. In setting this tale to paper, she succeeds not only in her goal to interest future generations among her own people, but also in offering outside readers of all ages a representation of Athabaskan lore.

In a straightforward and engaging manner, and with vivid details that reify a landscape many readers can hardly imagine, Wallis retells the traditional Athabaskan legend of a nomadic tribe, caught in a brutally harsh winter, that can no longer care for a pair of old women who have become somewhat of a burden to them. Faced with imminent starvation, the tribe decides to leave the women, ages eighty and seventy-five, behind. Once the old women have recovered from the initial shock of being abandoned, they begin an unexpectedly spirited battle against the cruelest of elements and circumstances and uncover their untapped potential in the struggle to survive. Rediscovering the skills they learned in their youth, the