

Roger D. Abrahams, ed. *Stories from Black Traditions in the New World.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) xxii, 327 pp. \$22.95; \$11.95 paper.

Abrahams has selected this collection of tales concerning the experiences of African-Americans during and after slavery in South and Central America, the Caribbean, and the American South in an attempt to seriously look at Afro-American folktales (mostly collected by whites) in the New World.

The content is potent, diverse, and can be controversial, as it moves from a sexist "Never Seen His Equal" tale about "... how God gave her the curse ..." to a vulgar "Stakolee" via Philadelphia, to a stereotypical "John Outruns the Lord" plantation story and moral tales suitable for children.

Abrahams is scholarly sympathetic to the work of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales, which he admits are racist, but "deserve to be looked at more closely and sympathetically" because they have been "neglected by those who wish to celebrate the Black Achievement." However, he is quick to mention that although "... many of these tales appear to confirm certain stereotypical notions about Afro-Americans ..." his intent is to dispel those notions by organizing this collection. Thus, he writes "... the majority of the stories go far beyond Uncle Remus and his friends ..." to report "... not only the perseverance of an uprooted and enslaved people but the vitality of the cultural traditions they were able to maintain and build upon ..." in many parts of the New World where Afro-American communities were established.

Those who want to "... celebrate the Black Achievement ..." as Abrahams calls it, will be disappointed by the lack of praise songs, epics, rebel slave stories and other experiences that portray an aggressive and vibrant Afro-American tradition of resistance to oppression. Thus this well organized (bibliographical notes, prefatory essay, appendix, introductions) thematic 107 tale volume is not a "progressive" collection of literature, but rather a work for folklore students and those who want a glimpse of 19th and 20th century folklore and who can wade through the pages to find the sexist, the vulgar unrepresentative urban tales, and the lone Sea Island moral tale will enjoy, and remember, "... this is a book of elaborate fictions told by tale spinners, first and last, for the fun of it"

—Itibari M. Zulu
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