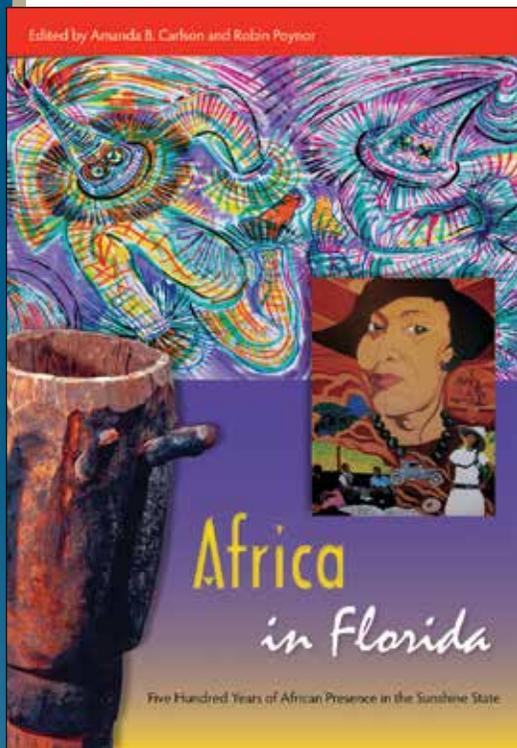


WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING



“One of the pleasures of this book and what would make it an ideal supplementary text for a graduate seminar is the discovery of illuminating narratives in what might appear to be trivial topics.”—**H-NET REVIEWS**

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AFRICA IN FLORIDA

*Five Hundred Years of African Presence
in the Sunshine State*

EDITED BY AMANDA B. CARLSON AND ROBIN POYNOR

978-0-8130-4966-3

Paperback \$31.95

480 pp. | 7 x 10 | 157 color photos

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Q & A with

AMANDA B. CARLSON AND ROBIN POYNOR

editors of

Africa in Florida

Five Hundred Years of African Presence in the Sunshine State

You've done an excellent job documenting all of the ways Africa is present in Florida, but what is the most significant takeaway from the sheer magnitude of African culture you've collected here?

AC: While this book reveals much about Florida, it's a bit misleading to think that it's just about the peninsula. *Africa in Florida* is full of fascinating case studies that enrich American history, providing a strong reminder of how African culture has impacted the development of our country.

RP: "Africa in Florida" sounds like an obscure topic, but it's not! We tried to demonstrate both the diversity of ways that Africa is present in Florida along with the "sheer magnitude" of this history. Because the book was written by many hands, we were able to achieve both breadth and depth.

How has African influence changed over the centuries in the Sunshine State?

AC: You can't think of it as a linear or singular influence that gradually changed over time. It's a complicated tapestry of stories that emerge from historical circumstances. But if there were one thread that ties them all together it would undoubtedly be how racial categories have impacted individual lives. In the United States we continue to struggle with the residue of slavery and Jim Crow, compelling us to remind readers to "listen to the past so that you may understand the present and direct the future."

Did you discover any little-known artistic influences in Florida that you found exceptionally important and were surprised weren't more well-known?

AC: As art historians, we tend to look at the world through the lens of visual culture. Along with fantastic chapters by specialists in literature, anthropology, religion, and history; this book does cover a lot of art and material culture. It's all original research that's never been published before.

RP: For instance, very little has been written about African and Afro-Cuban masquerades in the US, which are performed regularly in parts of Florida today. So, Ivor Miller's chapter on the Cuban Abakuá and Amanda's chapter on the Igbo Unions are extremely important for performance studies as it relates to the African diaspora.

Which specific work of art—whether visual, literary, musical, etc.—in the book stands out as a favorite to you both?

AC: I think that Adrian Castro's poem "Cross the Water" clarified for us what this book was about. Adrian's poem is the essence of the book, simultaneously musical and visual—communicating on multiple levels. And he drops phrases like "Into the lushness of history!" I was inspired by his words, and I think readers will be as well.

In addition to art, the food culture is treated as important to the development of the African diaspora in Florida. Where can we still find this influence today?

RP: Having grown up in the South, I assumed in my youth that Southern cooking was just food. In Louisiana, gumbo and rice and beans were just everyday fare. My being trained as an Africanist and living in Africa helped me realize that much of Southern cuisine is definitely African-inspired. When I ate akara in Nigeria, I immediately thought "hushpuppy!" Black-eyed peas are African. Here, they are considered "southern." Again, although we used Florida as a location, these things can be experienced broadly in this country.

Who are your favorite artists?

RP: Since I have worked closely with Baba Ona Ogunleye in north central Florida and have observed the way he creates and uses art, he is surely a favorite. I have been watching the evolution of his Ogun shrine over some fifteen years, and every time I see it, I am moved by its visual power. Witnessing that has also allowed me to be more receptive to the yard displays that may be tucked away in the countryside or in out-of-the-way neighborhoods of towns. The research of others has allowed me to see meaning in these displays.

AC: I don't have favorite artists. Sure, I'm more invested in thinking about the works of some artists more than others, but you appreciate each artist for their own unique contributions. I really enjoyed writing about Gordon Bleach's work. He is a white African (born in what is now Zimbabwe) who recognized similar ways in which Africa and Florida have been conceptualized, romanticized, understood and misunderstood. He was an amazing artist and intellectual who sadly died at a young age, but he left an incredible body of work that many people are not familiar with.

What do you think a reader would be most surprised to find in the book?

RP: Most people are not aware of the many ways we are beholden to generations of Africans and their descendants in the creation of a Floridian culture or an American culture. For example, many people are unaware that there were Black Seminoles, that there were maroon towns, that the most important reason for the Seminole wars was to check the freedom of maroons living in Florida, who were a beacon of freedom for Africans living to the north.

AC: Readers may also be surprised to learn about the black communities in Florida who migrated to Mexico and various parts of the Caribbean. Africans and their descendants went in and out of Florida over the course of 500 years.

What do you hope readers will enjoy the most about your book?

RP: I hope the reader will enjoy the scope of the book. It is like a big jigsaw puzzle. There are many pieces, but when all the pieces are engaged with each other, a larger picture emerges. I'd hope that someone who reads the book might recognize "pieces" that he or she might witness, and that some might be inspired to look more closely at African-inspired things in their own lives.

AC: I also hope that readers will enjoy flipping through the book and encountering one interesting image after another. Beautiful color images appear throughout, practically telling a story all by themselves.