

***Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes.* Work Projects Administration, Georgia Writers' Project, Savannah Unit. Introduction by Charles JOYNER. Photographs by Muriel and Malcolm Bell, Jr. (Athens, CA., University of Georgia Press, 1986. Pp. xliv + 274 (reprint of the original 1940 ed.)**

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# Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes

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Until the 1940s, virtually all white students of Afro-American culture fell in line with the "catastrophist" interpretation of sociologists Robert E. Park and E. Franklin Frazier, who viewed the forced migration of Africans to North America as having resulted in a complete divestiture of their cultural heritage. The only exception was white musicologist Henry Edward Krehbiel whose early argument for the African origins of black spirituals in *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* (1914) found later support among black scholars such as N.G.J. Ballanta, James Weldon Johnson, and John Wesley Work. This alignment of race and scholarship began to crumble in 1940. Published a year before Melville Herskovits' seminal and controversial *Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes* was a major biracial, collaborative effort that emphasized African cultural retentions. It was produced by a group of federally sponsored (Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project) writers who made observations and conducted interviews in the 1930s under the astute supervision of novelist Mary Granger. As Charles Joyner explains in his informative introduction to this handsome reprint, it was Granger who "seems to have originated the survival emphasis," supporting her position through choosing Herskovits as a project advisor as well as Guy B. Johnson, a self-proclaimed moderate in the Africanist-Europeanist origins controversy, and three highly influential black consultants, poet Sterling Brown, linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner, and sociologist Charles S. Johnson.

The project's end product, *Drums and Shadows*, is a work in which the data speaks for itself. Intended to be accessible to the gener-

al reader, the book is a series of highly readable field reports on twenty coastal black communities in Georgia. Unlike B.A. Botkin's WPA collection (*Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*), quotations employ literary dialect, but this usage is not of the demeaning "eye dialect" variety; it is internally consistent, and it thoroughly demonstrates the development of a creole language among coastal blacks. Although the accounts in *Drums* are descriptive rather than analytical, an enumerated appendix annotating seventy cultural traits traceable to Africa (medicinal charms, funeral dances, drums, harvest festivals, sacrifice of fowl, etc.) is linked to numbered citations throughout the text, a simple but effective device that underscores cultural continuity. Like Walker Evans' photographs in James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the thirty-two pages of remarkable photographs by Muriel Barrow Bell and Malcolm Bell, Jr. are coequal with the text in their depiction of individuals in workaday surroundings and artifacts such as the astounding and often reprinted "Wooden grave markers at Sunbury."

All students of black folklore in the New World will welcome this reprint of a fascinating classic that has aged well.

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