

From the Editors

This double issue of the *Folklore Forum* has been long in coming. The last issue announced our intention to produce a special volume on the religion of the African Diaspora. In the last year, we have solicited, refereed, and edited these articles from promising scholars who are focusing their work on these traditions.

In recent years, much research has focused on the intricacies of folk religions which have their roots in African traditions. The "syncretism"—the term so commonly used to describe the changes in these practices as they evolve—is in no way a haphazard process as the articles in this volume attest. Although we have made an exception to our usual rules about length with David Brown's article, we believe the importance and quality of the research presented justifies our variation; the article argues clearly for an understanding of African-American conjure as a social practice that served different people in different ways. Ysamur Flores shows how material culture traditions are changed by the people who produce and use the items; here again, change is not accidental but reflects new needs in a new environment, as Afro-Cuban *Santería* is adapted to its new location in the United States. Michael Nicklas explores the integration of new ideas and knowledge into Afro-Brazilian *Umbanda*; because possession offers a method for spirits to comment on new knowledge, Umbanda can incorporate new concepts with relative ease. Jim Wafer and Hédimio Rodrigues Santana provide an important historical commentary on the role of ideology in the changes of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions; they argue cogently that these traditions have subscribed to a notion of authentic African-ness that does not reflect the realities of their practice. Isabel Castellanos presents thorough documentation of the evolution, grammar, and religious usage of Afro-Cuban *bozal* language. This article constitutes an important contribution to the literature on bozal and the use of language in African Diaspora religious practices, and we are pleased to offer it to you.

Finally, we are glad to include in this issue the return of *Open Forum*. This short piece is a topical commentary on the use of a

traditional Haitian verbal art form in the political arena. This engaging case study deviates somewhat from the usual content of this section of the journal; however, it does offer a perspective on the use of folklore in politics, which is of growing significance in the discipline. We urge you to send your thoughts about important folklore issues of current interest to the Open Forum Editor. We are also glad to note that this issue's staff is larger and somewhat more diverse than in previous years; we hope this indicates growing support for the journal both among staff people and potential subscribers.

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