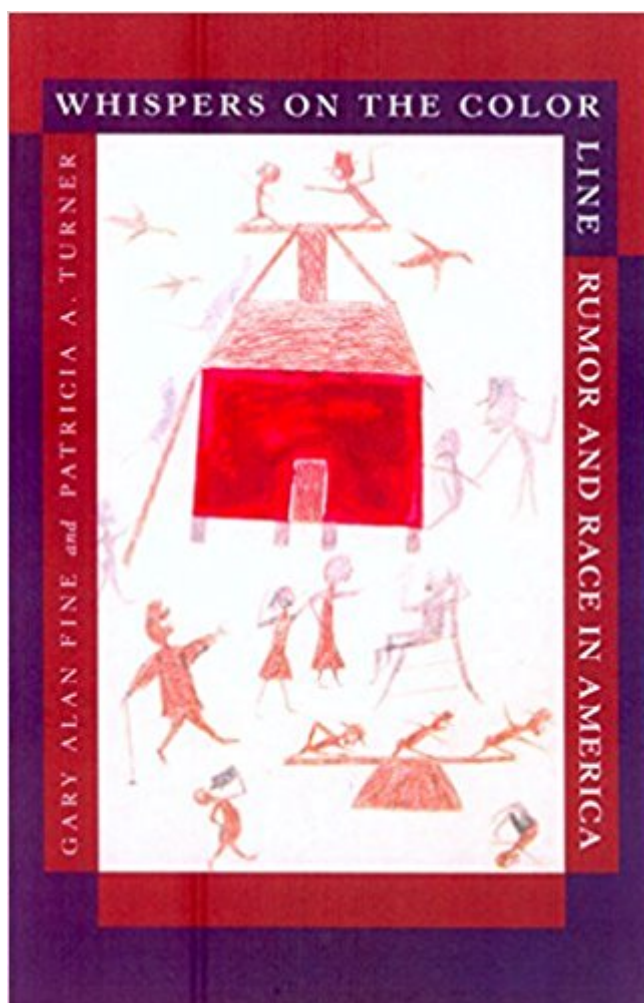


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# Whispers On The Color Line: Rumor And Race In America



## Synopsis

Legends are arguably the most common narrative form of folklore in American society. From sex acts to business transactions, from fashion to food, from heroes to heroin, rumors and legends take on every charged topic. Children circulate texts about toys and candy; teenagers share stories about sex, drugs, and rock and roll; young professionals commiserate over the hazards of the work world. These stories address aspects of life about which we receive mixed or ambiguous messages. Given that matters relevant to race remain confused and divisive in many corridors of American society, it is not surprising that rumors and legends that reflect racial misunderstanding and mistrust frequently circulate. *Whispers on the Color Line* focuses on a wide array of tales told in black and white communities across America. Topics run the gamut from alleged governmental conspiracies, possible food tampering, gang violence, and the sex lives of celebrities. Such beliefs travel by word of mouth, in print, and increasingly over the Internet. In many instances these stories reflect the tenacious level of racial misunderstanding that continues to vex efforts to foster racial harmony, creating separate racialized pools of knowledge. The authors have spent over twenty years collecting and analyzing rumors and contemporary legends--from the ever-durable Kentucky Fried Rat cycle to persistent beliefs about athletic footwear manufacturers and their support for white supremacist regimes. These implausible stories serve many purposes: they assuage anxieties, entertain friends, increase our sense of control--all without directly proclaiming our own attitudes. Fine and Turner consider how these tales reflect attitudes that blacks and whites have both about each other and about the world they face. In an engaging and penetrating narrative, they brilliantly demonstrate how--by transforming unacceptable impulses into a narrative that is claimed to have actually happened--we are able to express the inexpressible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Adult/High School-This book looks beyond the question of factual veracity and challenges readers to examine the underlying racial attitudes revealed by particular kinds of alleged actions and behaviors. Focus is on rumors spread by Caucasian and African-American populations about one another throughout American history. At heart a scholarly work, the first two chapters are devoted to describing structures used to analyze the assumed beliefs in the rest of the book. However, there are plenty of juicy stories inside. A number of the rumors cited as being typically spread only in black communities may sound incredible to whites, and vice versa. In providing historical and sociological background, the authors show how people who view themselves as reasonable can still accept outrageous assertions as fact. It is likely that there will be readers who vehemently disagree with at least some of the authors' analysis. Nevertheless, this provocative work excels at challenging readers to think about and hopefully better understand people on the other side of the color line. Five sensible and practical steps that every individual should take in order to bring about racial healing end the book on a positive and constructive note. This is a must-read for students and teachers with a scholarly interest in race relations. Even for casual readers, *Whispers* supplies a starting point for discussions. Sheila Shoup, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Urban legends are a large part of today's society. Nearly everyone has heard the myths about why Kentucky Fried Chicken changed its name or who owns Snapple or the woman who was saved from attack by a gas station attendant. But how do urban legends affect how different races see each other, and how do these legends change according to which ethnic group is being targeted? In this fascinating book, Fine (African American studies, Univ. of California, Davis; *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture*) and Turner (sociology, Northwestern Univ.; *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*) explore not only the basis of many of these urban legends but also how they shape opinions. They discuss different kinds of rumors and how these rumors are shared within the community. They also discuss how to cope with rumors and to stop them in their tracks. With a fairly extensive notes section, this is an important and useful book that

should find a home in every library. Danna Bell-Russel, Library of Congress Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you're looking for a good story book about racism, this is not the book for you. If you're looking for factual accounts that are analyzed and researched, then this is the book for you.

Drawing upon more than twenty years of study and analysis, by Gary Fine (Professor of Sociology, Northwestern University) and Patricia Turner (Vice-Provost of Undergraduate Studies and Professor of African American and African Studies, University of California, Davis) *Whispers On The Color Line: Rumor And Race In America* is a superbly presented, collaborative treatise on narrative folklore prevalent in contemporary American society in the form of legends and stories informally circulated among the general public, and which have served to confuse and reinforce misinformation regarding a wide range of social issues. These are tales traveling mostly by word-of-mouth and focusing a diversity of subjects ranging from alleged governmental conspiracies, to possible food tampering, to the foibles of celebrities. An impressive, seminal, and scholarly work, *Whispers On The Color Line* addresses how these gossip laden tales reflect attitudes that blacks and whites have about each other, and how such stories serve a pervasive social purpose of "expressing the inexpressible. *Whispers On The Color Line* is a ground breaking work and highly recommended for Contemporary Sociology, Social Anthropology, African-American Studies, and American Popular Culture Studies supplemental reading lists and academic reference collections.

We've all heard the rumors. The rumors that Tommy Hilfiger is a racist. The rumors that Liz Claiborne is a Satanist. The rumors that KFC serves fried rats and that's why it can no longer legally be called Kentucky Fried Chicken. And most of us probably take these rumors with, at least, a grain of salt. Believability issues aside, from where do these rumors stem? What is the meaning behind them? Those are the questions Fine and Turner attempt to answer, and their answers are quite informative. These rumors, when analyzed, tell us quite a bit about race relations. They allow people to communicate feelings that they otherwise would not feel comfortable communicating.

I've read pretty much every book I ever got my hands on when it came to Urban Legends, but this one is quite possibly the most scholarly. Instead of just parroting the rumors and tracing the origins, it goes into depth about WHY the rumors are believable and what it says about race relations in the US. If you're interested in urban legends and want something a little meatier, this book is an

intelligent treat. It's denser than most books on the same subject, but it's also more rewarding.

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