become the major focus, but different kinds of objects or sites are analyzed. The archaeological research deserves special mention. In this part’s first essay, Christopher Fennel writes that African-American archaeology knew a “period of great vitality” (p. 229) the fruits of which are presented in the exhibition and catalogue. One of the core symbols of Kongo religion reappearing in artifacts of black America is the Kongo cosmological diagram. It is used as a marking on what is known as colonoware, a pottery which was made and used on plantations and used as sacrificial pots that were thrown into the water at river sites. The diagram is also reflected in symbolic configurations of spaces and material agents placed in them, such as in Brice House in Annapolis, Maryland. Kathryn Deeley, Stefan Woehlke, Mark Leone, and Matthew Ccohran write: “The site was clandestinely transformed into an African American safe space through the practice of depositing materials under the brick floor, creating a cosmogram similar to those in the Kongo dikenga tradition” (p. 242). Such finds underscore intimate spiritual histories of affects, reflecting people’s mindset and actions as they sought protection and wellbeing.

The final part of the catalogue, “Kongo in Contemporary Arts,” starts with an essay giving a cross-cultural survey of artists—black Americans, Africans, and Europeans—inspired by Kongo culture. Subsequent chapters deal with the oeuvres of individual artists, explaining how each of these adopted Kongo heritage, alongside other inspirations, in their works: the Cuban-American José Bedia, the Haitian Edouard Duval-Carrié, the Americans Renée Stout and Radcliffe Bailey, and the Congolese Steve Bandoma. The American artists are “modern religious artists” whose work combines artistic and ritual practice, analogous to the arts in Kongo society. The artists as conjurers constitute their art works as power objects, in a similar way to Kongo minkisi. Many works reflect a personal search for the artists’ roots through the recollection of individual and family histories, with a communal project reconstituting black American history and legacies, going back and forth between conscious retrievals of the ancestral religion and vernacular renditions of it in Afro-American culture. Steve Bandoma, on the other hand, refigures minkisi to fit his vision of contemporary Congolese culture, to vent social critiques on the influence of Western media and consumer culture.

As noted, the book is divided into three parts with a total of twenty-six chapters. Seventeen chapters have a “focus” section that considers one object or a set of them more closely. Further, the book has seven catalogue sections. This complex structure makes the catalogue seem fragmented, because it is not chronologic. Perhaps the subdivisions could have been better integrated, and thus better synthesized on the whole. This being said, the catalogue’s merits are numerous. Rather than simply adding to the well-known literature on Kongo culture, this book devoted attention to a very wide range of objects, not only minkisi, ivory carvings, crucifixes, and grave sculptures, but equally to ephemeral and nonelite art forms, such as engraved calabashes, rock arts, basketry, and yard decorations. The focus sections provide more background data than a regular catalogue entry would and are much appreciated even though they complicate the book’s structure. The abundant color illustrations of objects and material culture, which are exceptionally well documented, give the reader a more vivid and versatile impression of Kongo culture and history. Finally, but most importantly, the section on Kongo influences in the US appears the most impressive for it does justice to the introduction’s ambition: “to mark a milestone in the history of African presence in North America” (p. 1). The way in which this legacy is rendered tangible by focusing on material culture, mostly in folk and contemporary art, but particularly in archaeological finds from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sheds light on the lives of Americans whose ancestors came from the Kongo. This is an important contribution.

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**book review**

**Africa in Florida: Five Hundred Years of African Presence in the Sunshine State**

*edited by Amanda B. Carlson and Robin Poynor*

Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. 480 pp. 127 color ill., bibliography, index. $79.95, paper reviewed by Pearlie M. Johnson

The West African proverb “Sankofa,” which means to “return to the root,” expresses the approach and perspective of *Africa in Florida* in terms of understanding cultural heritage, historical significance and contemporary interpretations of African influences. *Africa in Florida*, edited by Amanda B. Carlson and Robin Poynor, is a modern and inspiring text comprising eighteen essays written or cowritten by twenty different authors. Much of the research is original and presented by scholars who are experts in the fields of art history, anthropology, history, and religious studies.

The study’s well-developed essays are grouped into five parts. Part I, “Introducing Africa in Florida,” discusses Africa and its connection to the forthcoming analysis of four historical periods, the antebellum, Civil War, Jim Crow, and civil rights periods. Part II, “Seeking Freedom in and out of Florida,” provides a historical review of African captives and slavery, an examination of beadwork and black townships that connect African and Seminole communities, and a discussion of the famous Kingsley Plantation. Part III, “Forging New Identities,” examines African and African-descendant identities. We are reminded, conversely, that not all Africans in America came in chains under the yoke of slavery. We learn of Tomás de Salière Tucker, who came in search of opportunities. He earned a BA degree from Oberlin College in 1865 and a law degree at Straight University in New Orleans. Tucker
relocated to Florida, where he served as director of schools for colored teachers. We also learn of Laura Kofi, the daughter of an Asante king in Ghana, who was sent to the United States to educate and repatriate American blacks to Africa. Before being assassinated, she had been a rising star in the Florida branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Africa in Florida really comes alive with the fourth and fifth parts. In Part IV, “Connecting Across the Caribbean,” scholars examine cultural traditions in West African communities and their adapted versions in New World societies. This includes the examination of crowns as emblems of Catholic saints and Yoruba kings and the ways in which crowns are used in the veneration of orisha. Another interesting discussion is on Ekpe, a forest spirit associated with the Cross River regions of Nigeria and Cameroon, which was transplanted to Florida via the transatlantic trade. People in Florida celebrate aspects of Abakua (a society rooted in Ekpe) by holding festivals and parties. This unit makes a significant contribution to our understanding of African cultural retentions in African diasporas.

Part V, “(Re)Making Africa in Florida,” is innovative because the essays present original research along with captivating stories of black people who live and practice the African experience. For most people, this means learning about African cultures and customs. Serious African American scholars, such as Onahamiero Ogunleye, travel to Nigeria for knowledge and inspiration. Robin Poynor and Ade Ofunniyi explore such reconstructions of African American identity by observing Ogunleye as a follower of Yoruba religion and his efforts to create sacred spaces that are reflective of who he is and what he believes. They refer to Ogunleye as “Baba,” a term meaning “godfather”—one who is of great knowledge and who mentors or teaches others. The writers described Ogunleye as a self-taught sculptor who found inspiration from Robert Farris Thompson’s Black Gods and Kings and who perfected his artistic skills primarily through experimentation. After becoming rooted in African religious traditions Ogunleye was able to bring forth carvings symbolic of specific Yoruba gods. The text describes Ogunleye’s home (an Ilala compound) as a place where his sculptures (Esu, Ogun, and Obatala) are arranged in ways that create spiritual space conducive for orisha worship, as well as generate a spiritual environment favorable for living the African experience. According to Poynor these spaces are based on how sacred groves were organized in Nigeria, which create an openness that allows spiritual energies to be conjured, released, and embodied.

Also in Part V, Amanda Carlson provides an examination of Igbo culture in Nigeria and in Florida. She discusses, for example, how Nigeria was originally divided along ethnic boundaries—where the Muslim majority (Hausa and Fulani) made up the north and the Christian majority resided in the south (Yoruba in the southwest and Igbo in the southeast). Then, after Nigeria’s independence (1960), the search for a national identity ruptured relations between the people of the north and south, igniting the Biafra Civil War (1967–1970). Igbo led the rebellion; millions died due to starvation as a result of government blockades. After the surrender, Igbo were oppressed and marginalized throughout Nigeria. As a result, large numbers of Igbo migrated to the United Kingdom and the United States. Most interesting, however, is Carlson’s analysis of Igbo culture in Florida, where she finds organizations structured as the in Nigeria. Organizations such as the Igbo Union of Tampa Bay celebrate Igbo culture and transmit their values through masquerade. In Nigeria and in Florida, masquerade is viewed as a male profession. Because of gender restrictions, women in Nigeria were prohibited from attending masquerade, but in the United States women are an essential part of the audience. In Florida, performances take place in rented ballrooms rather than special groves and are accompanied by other organized events and Nigerian cuisine and dancing. Carlson maintains that masquerades are emblems of African identity that demonstrate continuity and change.

In the final analysis, Africa in Florida is a welcome addition to the current literature on the African diaspora. I highly recommend this book for graduate students and scholars interested in the retention and perpetuation of African cultural features in American visual and performance arts and religious practices.

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Notes

1 Vast numbers of blacks had migrated to Florida from the Caribbean during the first Great Migration period, bringing with them a more radical philosophy than that of US blacks. Verbert White explains that Miami’s UNIA had over two thousand members, composed of these culturally different groups who held suspicion and disdain for each other. We learn that it was these divisions that provided fertile ground for hate, harassment and murder. Laura Kofi was assassinated while lecturing at Liberty Hall.