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Flash Of The Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy



Synopsis

This book reveals how five distinct African civilizations have shaped the specific cultures of their New World descendants.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If I could give this book 6 stars I would. Robert Farris Thompson presents our rich, ancient history making it quite clear that African Americans are not an isolated group but a group intimately connected to particular cultures and societies in West Africa and the African diaspora. The rich text is generously supported by illustrated plates. Essential reading for those who wish to gain an understanding of African cosmology, philosophy and art in relation to the African diaspora (North and South America, copious information on Brazil, the Caribbean etc) Great reference material for students, artists, writers, researchers and thinkers. As an educator, writer and author I highly recommend this book.

I had the privilege to see Robert Farris Thompson, when the *FACES OF THE GODS* exhibit came to the Seattle Art Museum. Dr. Thompson came to speak about the history of the orishas (gods and goddesses) in the santeria and voodoo religious practices amongst the Afro-Cubans, Afro-Brazilians and African-Americans. What sets Thompson apart from other scholars is his genuine passion for the subject matter he has well-researched, as well as his vast knowledge of the Diaspora, and the cultural interconnectedness of people of African descent throughout the globe. *FLASH OF THE SPIRIT* examines on a closer, more intimate level the cultural significance of the gods and

goddesses depicted in mythology and art of those who are practitioners of (among other religions) Yoruba, Santeria and Voodoo faiths. We see beautiful and powerful illustrations and photographs of the jewelry, textiles, plates and figurines used in worship, and we also get insight into the characteristics of the gods and goddesses, their meaning in the lives of those who pray to them, and how this plays into other parts of society, human interaction and behavior. I come away from this book feeling that we are lot closer than we think, and that while "African-American" and "African" are important distinctions to recognize in terms of cultural definition, they are also at times parallel and quite similar to the indigenous Native cultures of South and Central America, as well as other parts of the world. This is fascinating material and Farris Thompson's writing style is pure poetry. I guarantee that once you start reading this book, you won't be able to put it down.

I enjoyed this book when I first read it as much for the kinds of bridges it seemed to make as for his own writing style and subject matter. R.F. Thompson, who I had the pleasure of meeting once in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is someone who along with being highly knowledgeable cares a great deal for the subject. Where the book could be considered lacking I would say is it's way of seeming dated. It bares some cultural prejudice which, considering the cultural remoteness of the subject matter when compared to the intellectual/cultural arena of the writer(African and African-American, Afro-Cuban/Hispanic culture vs. Post-World War II Ivy League) - and how well he did anyway- is forgiveable, but present nonetheless. If you are expecting some pretty powerful things to be said about Coltrane, or the early days of Rap music and Hip-hop dance (now in its third decade of existence already), or Modigliani, or other things that are in the forefront of the present culture's mind, to a certain degree you will be disappointed. However, if you had no idea other than the Alex Haley "Roots" era rhetorical about the derivation of many African-American and Hispanic/Hispanic-American cultural paradigms, this will enlighten you in ways that will have you going to the bookstore to see what else he and many others have written on the subjects. I recommend it- particularly for lovers of European modern art, studies of religion, and other things influenced by the Mother country.

Thompson's work on African retentions in New World artforms is seminal in the field of African Diasporan art history. However, *Flash of the Spirit* reads more like a best seller than a textbook. Fascinating details and insights into the meanings of art from Haiti to Georgia to Brazil, with excellent context for all objects. Great for anyone at all curious about African heritage, religion, and art. Occasionally thick reading, as one must trace entire cosmologies, but well layed out, full of

illustrations, and textually easy to follow. Thompson makes an obscure genre easily accessible to readers of varied backgrounds.

It took me a very long time to come across this book, but I am very happy that I did. It is refreshing to read someone who obviously has a respect for African culture write about it and research very thoroughly rather than spewing some biased nonsense.

A very good resource on African religious practices that continued in the Americas when Africans were brought to the Americas and the Caribbean Islands during slavery. I had this book since the late 1980's and just got the chance to read it this year via Kindle. Yes, I still have the book (paperback) I purchased over 20 years ago. Anyhow, many of the practices mentioned in this book, I remember seeing as a kid when my parents would go to South Carolina or North Carolina for vacations or funerals. The biopic movie on Ray Charles (named Ray) shows a little of it when Ray is beginning to go blind. I now understand better the religious connection we Africans in the diaspora have with Africa despite slavery. I think anyone denying their African connection should read this book to better understand their religious connection to Africa. I love the exhibit that was once shown at the Smithsonian up until 2004. The name of the exhibit was "Fear Not" and it is a masterpiece. I did not see the masterpiece but seeing pictures of it online at the Smithsonian made me think of the Christian Bible and its creative African roots.

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