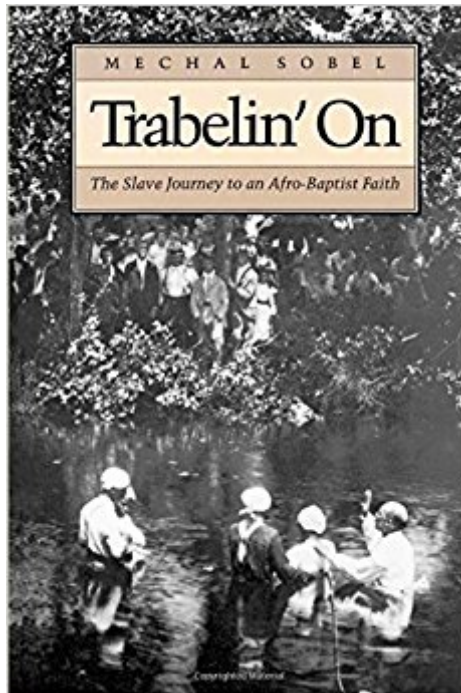




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Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey To An Afro-Baptist Faith



Synopsis

Mechal Sobel's fascinating study of the religious history of slaves and free blacks in antebellum America is presented here in a compact volume without the appendixes. Sobel's central thesis is that Africans brought their world views into North America where, eventually, under the tremendous pressures and hardships of chattel slavery, they created a coherent faith that preserved and revitalized crucial African understandings and usages regarding spirit and soul-travels, while melding them with Christian understandings of Jesus and individual salvation.

Book Information

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press (April 1, 1988)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691006032

ISBN-13: 978-0691006031

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #851,631 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #206 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Baptist #410 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales > Mythology #1456 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Colonial Period

Customer Reviews

"Sobel has used a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and history of religion, and has orchestrated them well to support her thesis. She has made good use of the extensive materials on black history now available, which present the views of blacks themselves on their own experience. Above all, Sobel takes seriously the religion of black people, and shows its creative power to construct a sacred cosmos. The book will not close the debate over continuity or discontinuity in the American black experience from Africa to America, but it will have to be taken seriously by all the debaters."--Andrew E. Murray, *Journal of American History*

"Mechal Sobel illuminates the form and content of the religious experience of the largest group of Christian slaves. She especially argues, and is largely convincing, for the centrality of the spiritual experience generally ignored by historians. The focus on the inner aspect of religious experience is

fresh and powerful."--Eugene Genovese, University of Rochester

This book is too scholarly for me. It is difficult for me to get a reading flow because there are so many references to related things that I get bogged down and side-tracked.

There is no separation of the sacred and the secular among Africans generally. It is all a part of life. The Africans were first brought to the US and quite a while afterwards, they practiced their own various religions. Generally, they believed that there was a Great God and lesser gods directing the every day drudgery of human existence. Of course God Al Mighty did not have time to be bothered by human petty annoyances. This where the lesser gods and dieties took over. It is beyond credibility that the whites believed or pretended that these people forgot who they were once landing on these shores in the bottom of the slave ships, packed like sardines in each other's bodily excretions. They were very slow to take on the oppressor's religion. They laughed at the few house slaves who did and held them and the religion with disdain. At the same time, many of the slave owners did not believe in giving the word to the slaves for a number of reasons. When they did they only gave them instructions of the verses that spoke to obeying your masters and looking for your heavenly home and happiness in heaven. Don't be expecting freedom and happiness in this world because, it ain't gonna happen. So get use to suffering and getting beat up, raped, children sold off, etc. This is your hell. Go on a pray now and hope for your heavenly reward when you kick de bucket. Anyway, after a while the Great Awakening happened and a large population of Africans became Baptists. Before than, they worshipped among themselves in the woods so they could be free to praise God in their way. Shoutin', dancing, singing, and praying soothed their damaged souls. They knew that the master's christianity was a fake religion. They knew they had the real thing. Worshipping freely did not occur until after the War (Civil War). They began to build their own churches where they could operate them as they saw fit without white meddling. Here in this community they could be important leaders and respected among their own. The history of how disparate Africans over time became Afro Americans than Afro Baptists is a fascinating thing. The Baptist African Americans are the largest and most influential christian sect in black American culture and tremendously influences the outside culture (mainstream). Yes, many of my ancestors eventually took on the master's religion. But they Africanized it and made it unique to their oppressed condition and their way of expressing their beliefs. The bible was appropriated. They created their own sacred music and songs. When they borrowed European songs, the songs and the music were totally rearranged and made uniquely theirs. African Americans have a unique of tackling a song that is like no other. I really love

this book, and I would like to share it with you. African Americans are highly spiritual people, just like their African forebears. If you have an interest in AA culture, this is a great book.

Mechal Sobel provides a detailed and deep history of the journey of African and African American slaves from the traditional West and Central African theology to the Black Baptist Theology in America. Her use of the concept of "sacred cosmos" to tie together the body of beliefs and practices which freight a people's awareness of God and man's response to God is excellent. She presents a picture of the early days of slavery and the failure of the organized religion of that day to meet the needs of bondservants. She then documents the transformation of this sacred cosmos in response to the evangelical outreach of the Baptists and the fulfillment of slaves' humanity in Jesus. This book is good history of a unique American trabel. I was, however, distressed to see that it is out of print. I was going to use it in my Black Theology class at Christian Bible College of Louisiana.

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