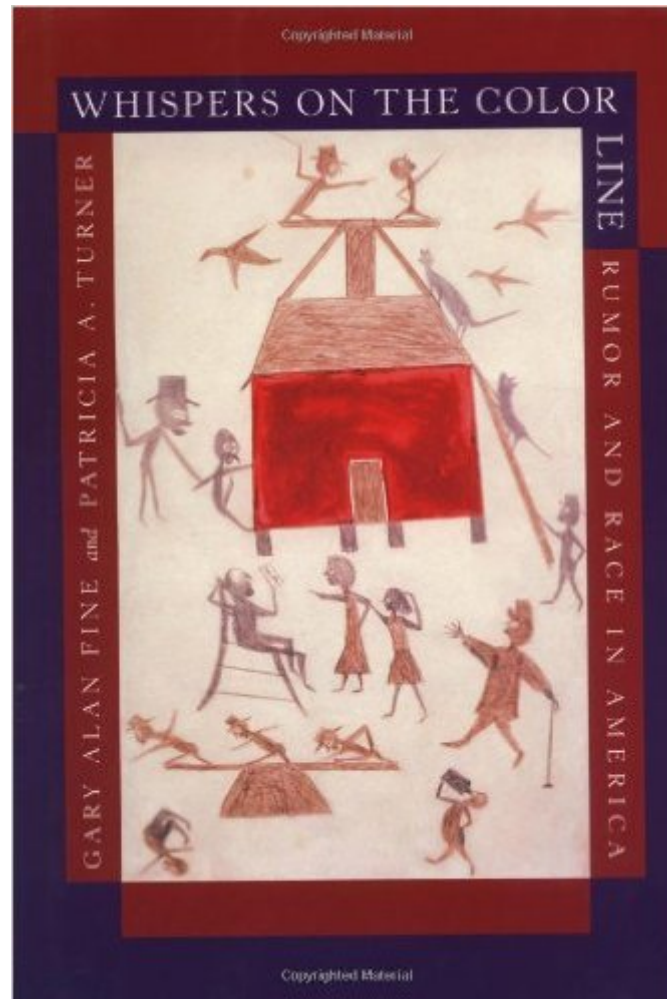


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# Whispers On The Color Line: Rumor And Race In America



## 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

Hardcover: 360 pages

Publisher: University of California Press (October 1, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520209885

ISBN-13: 978-0520209886

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 6.2 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,323,101 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #78 in [Books > Humor &](#)

Entertainment > Humor > Urban Legends #304 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > General #4481 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Minority Studies

## Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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.

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