

no final conclusions.

Most of the chapters by the American authors provide background but do not report on outdoor activities in U.S. early-childhood programs. However, the book is very informative on research and programs in many countries. It would be very useful for researchers studying outdoor play environments and for anyone establishing policies for early-childhood outdoor activities and designing nature-based early-childhood programs. The descriptions of outdoor play with indigenous populations in Scandinavia, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia should inspire early-childhood educators in the USA to develop outdoor programs relevant to the histories and cultures of its diverse population. Given the length of the book and its cost, readers, instead of buying it themselves, may wish to advocate its purchase by university, community, and early-childhood education program libraries. It is a valuable resource for policy makers, educators, and researchers.

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Yo' Mama, Mary Mack, and Boudreaux and Thibodeaux: Louisiana Children's Folklore and Play

Jeanne Pitre Soileau

Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Foreword, acknowledgments, introduction, black-and-white photographs, appendices, and index. 193 pp. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781496810403

Jeanne Pitre Soileau's *Yo' Mama, Mary Mack, and Boudreaux and Thibodeaux: Louisiana Children's Folklore and Play* celebrates and explores African American children's expressive culture in South Louisiana. It also celebrates the author's more than forty years of fieldwork with African American children and the persistence of child lore. And it explores genres gleaned from the author's first-hand observations of African American children at play. The book covers "the last part of the 20th century and the first ten years of the 21st," which "began with the era of integration in South Louisiana and ends with the age of computers and the Internet" (p. 3).

In this compact book, Soileau works out a problem in children's folklore that Gary Fine calls Newell's Paradox. Following in the steps of pioneering children's folklorist, William Wells Newell, Soileau asks how children's folklore can be conservative and inventive at the same time. She finds the conservative in the structures of the lore and the inventive in the performed content of the expressions of childhood.

Yo' Mama reminds me of what the forest industry calls a "select cut." As opposed to a "clear cut," which take down all trees in an area, the select cut culls trees that are representative in form and function. For Soileau "the narrative interactions presented in the following chapters are extracted from my forty-four-year compilation of the games and rhymes of children—boys and girls—from ages three to eighteen. The materials comprise several genres of study: oral narratives and songs, jokes and tales, and teasing formulas gleaned from . . . mostly African American sources" (p. 5). For this work, the author

has selected key examples of representative play in three areas of South Louisiana where she worked—Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and New Orleans. Her work addresses several audiences. “Because much of . . . [the] collection took place on public school playgrounds . . . this body of oral narratives could be of particular interest to teachers, folklorists, linguists, and parents” (p. 5). To this end, Soileau calls forth the expertise of folklorists, African Americanists, sociolinguists, psychologists, and anthropologists. There is no need for extra theory making in *Yo’ Mama*. Rather, it is another kind of celebration, that of the scholarly pursuit of cultural meaning according to scholars who have been there.

Yo’ Mama consists of a sampling of play traditions in four areas: boys’ verbal play, girls’ verbal play, the effect of media on play forms, and a exploration of how the computer age infiltrates play lore. Soileau’s samplings come from small-group interaction, which is interesting considering Dan Ben-Amos’ controversial definition of folklore in context as “artistic communication in small groups.” Soileau feels that the “distinct verbal, facial, gestural, proxemic, and kinesic elements make these school yard play performances recognizably African American” (pp. 6-7). We do not get a sense of how the author came to this conclusion beyond noting the ethnicity of the players. It would have been interesting to learn about the characteristics of African American childlore outside race and ethnicity.

After a brief discussion of herself as a fieldworker, Soileau invites us into her organized world of African American children’s play in South Louisiana. With the boys, the author discusses ritual insults

(the “dozens”)—their structure and reception as a kind of competitive repartee. Jokes are funny stories that might contain a dozen as a punch line and require a greater maturity on the part of the teller who can organize the joke with a narrative structure, like stories of the numbskull adventures of Boudreaux and Thibodeaux. With jokes and stories, there is an assumed element of evaluation among the group. Laughter signals the positive, silence the negative. Poems are recognized by Soileau, but she does not look at them with a sense of depth. Perhaps they were not as pervasive in her documentation frame.

Girls’ verbal play is not shaped by competition, as is boys’ play. Girls’ verbal play is more cooperative and kinetic. Jump rope rhymes and hand-clapping rhymes and routines such as Miss Mary Mack (all dressed in black) have a past documented by Lady Alice Gomme’s *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1898). Although Soileau recognizes the kinetic need in the girls’ lore, she continues in her quest for texts, a common practice in the documentation of expression. Nonetheless, our author does note that the African American girls’ dig deep into simple texts and mine from them complex renderings related to their lives, starting out innocently and ending with matters of maturity, including sex and marriage.

In the last two chapters, “The African American Child and the Media,” and “To Infinity and Beyond: Children’s Play in the Electronic Age,” Soileau reveals her identity as a text-oriented folklorist. She understands and links child lore to past research, but in these chapters, she finds herself almost trapped by Newell’s Paradox. How is the childlore in this period of

the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries maintained as communication and performance in small groups? Once again, she looks at structure and content, this time the manipulation of modern media (television, compact disks, and video) to fit with the range of expression by children. We learn, through her fieldwork, that the children have latched on to media heroes including Michael Jackson and kung fu champion Jackie Chan, whose movements, texts, costume, and props are incorporated into the performance of the present using the structures of the past, including poetry and break dancing. We also learn how boys use computers to engage in informal interaction framed by access to games and the Internet. Although these chapters are vital in rounding out the range of child lore, they could be better connected to the previous chapters. They are not free floating, but it is plain Soileau has some trouble making cultural sense of these media movements.

In three appendices, Soileau presents teenagers' memories of their play and a further sampling of her collection. In the former, she has gathered a group of girls who are active in the Japanese club system, the *anime* where members of local clubs further themselves in the media presentation of rewriting literary works according to their perceptions of them. In this setting, the author asks the girls to reflect and remember their child lore. It is the only place where children are given voice to think about their lore, its manifestations, and its functions. Had Soileau given similar voice to the children she documented in her more than forty years of work, it would have enriched her study.

In the latter appendices we receive a treat: selections of Soileau's collection and a cluster of black-and-white photographs of children at play. Readers may not be entirely sure why the author has given us these gifts, but there is every reason to be grateful for them.

All told, *Yo'Mama, Mary Mack, and Boudreaux and Thibodeaux* has the potential to become a classic in the study of Louisiana's African American children's folklore. It is thoughtful, respectful, and honoring without being patronizing. And it is an encouraging work that brings to the literature an overlooked heritage in many of its manifestations.

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Doll Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play

Miriam Forman-Brunell and Jennifer Dawn Whitney, eds.

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In a collection of essays called *Doll Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play*, Miriam Forman-Brunell and Jennifer Dawn Whitney offer a critical review of how play with dolls and the construction of dolls have affected imaginations, ideologies, and identities. The editors divided the book into five sections: "Objects, Narratives, Historical Memories"; "Performance and Identity"; "Mediating Contexts of Play";