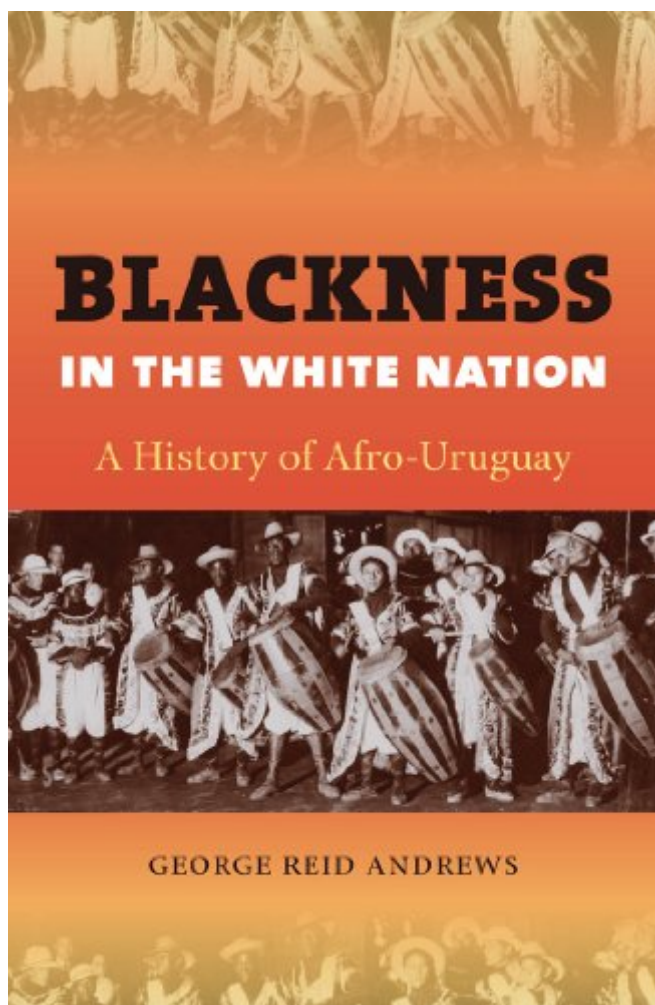


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Blackness In The White Nation: A History Of Afro-Uruguay



Synopsis

Uruguay is not conventionally thought of as part of the African diaspora, yet during the period of Spanish colonial rule, thousands of enslaved Africans arrived in the country. Afro-Uruguayans played important roles in Uruguay's national life, creating the second-largest black press in Latin America, a racially defined political party, and numerous social and civic organizations.

Afro-Uruguayans were also central participants in the creation of Uruguayan popular culture and the country's principal musical forms, tango and candombe. Candombe, a style of African-inflected music, is one of the defining features of the nation's culture, embraced equally by white and black citizens. In *Blackness in the White Nation*, George Reid Andrews offers a comprehensive history of Afro-Uruguayans from the colonial period to the present. Showing how social and political mobilization is intertwined with candombe, he traces the development of Afro-Uruguayan racial discourse and argues that candombe's evolution as a central part of the nation's culture has not fundamentally helped the cause of racial equality. Incorporating lively descriptions of his own experiences as a member of a candombe drumming and performance group, Andrews consistently connects the struggles of Afro-Uruguayans to the broader issues of race, culture, gender, and politics throughout Latin America and the African diaspora generally.

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Customer Reviews

Visitors to Uruguay (there aren't very many from North America!) are often surprised to find a vibrant Black culture there, with strong affinities to Afro-Caribbean religion and art forms. Years ago I went to a candombe show in Montevideo and was absolutely floored--it was the most sensual dance performance I had ever seen. The company was all Black, so I was surprised when reading this book to learn that candombe as an art form has been thoroughly integrated into Uruguayan culture to the extent that white Uruguayos perform it too. This is a fascinating work of semi-popular sociology addressing how race plays out in a culture quite different from our own. It is full of surprises. Who knew that in 1950 the Cuban bandleader Xavier Cugat and his American wife Abbe Lane were invited to be the presiding royalty of Carnival, and the greatest of the Afro-Uruguayan Carnival "vedettes" (a word lifted from French, meaning "starlet" but more accurately here, "hottie"), Martha Gularte of the performance club Anoranzas Negras, set out to show Lane up--and did so, devastatingly: "a dance of mystery, of the jungle...a true religious rite on the altar of the night, inflamed with desire," said the newspaper "La Tribuna Popular." But the author's take-home is that the role of candombe has not fundamentally improved the socioeconomic status of black Uruguayans after all. A very good read for anyone "into" the sociology of race relations and the connections between stereotypes, both good and bad, and social reality. Meanwhile, if you go to Montevideo (which has long suffered from playing Oakland to Buenos Aires's San Francisco across the river), go to a good candombe club. You won't regret it.

I am Uruguayan and it is incredibly challenging to find literature about my own people. This book specifically looks at the African/Indigenous roots of Uruguay and how certain aspects were appropriated by white Europeans. It looks most specifically through the lens of Carnival and Candombe music. It was amazing and I learned so much about my culture. I LOVE this book.

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