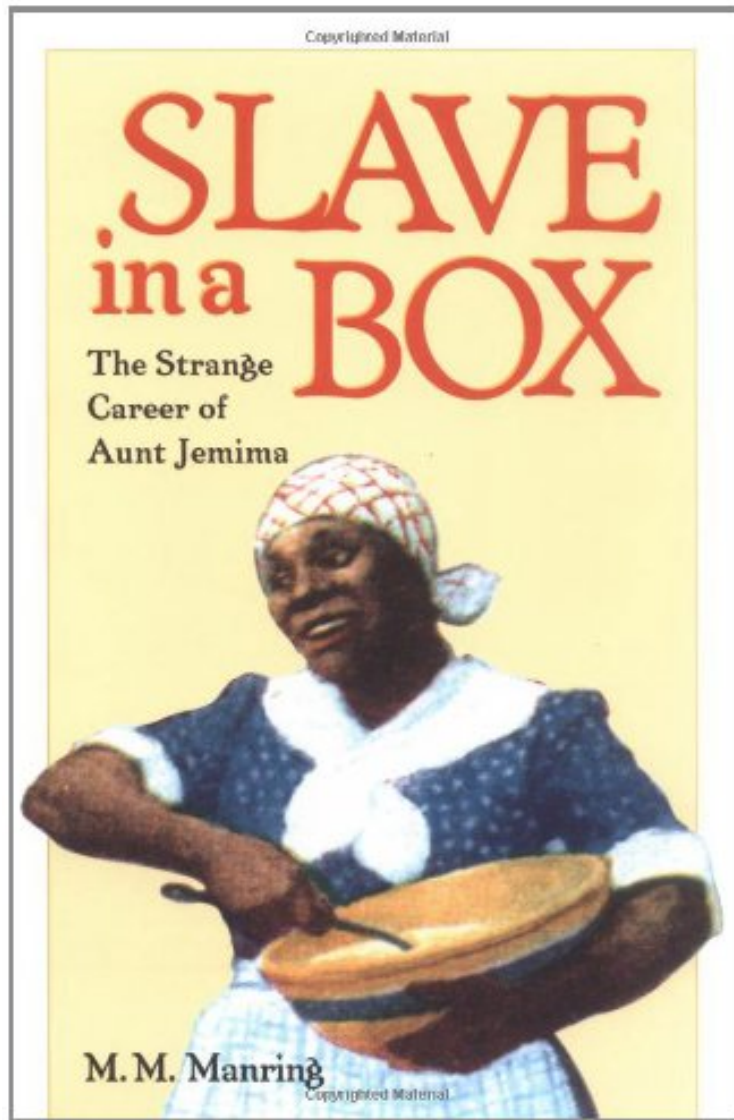


(Library ebook) Slave in A Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima (The American South Series)

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Maurice M. Manring

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Maurice M. Manring : Slave in A Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima (The American South Series) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slave in A Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima (The American South Series):

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. absorbing, thorough, and highly readable By A CustomerProf. Manring has accomplished something rare: an academic book free of jargon, a cultural history free of polemic, and a

thorough analysis that never drags. She writes clear, lively prose -- this is a book for the general reader as well as the student of American history. Brava! 15 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Absorbing read overall...By Zarah Mayes-Horowitz

Balanced treatment of highly sensitive issues centering around how and why America invented, promoted and continues to promulgate the demoralizing image of Aunt Jemima as the black female archetype. Manring explores the process by which the mammy was popularized having been transplanted from the pantheon of the minstrel show circuit and strategically positioned into the larger society as an iconic figure in the minds of American whites; albeit, an egregious symbol in the minds of blacks. It's crucial to note that Aunt Jemima had her genesis as a white male in blackface and drag. In 1889, her likeness was crafted for marketing purposes, and the process of building a brand on servility and slavery had begun. Her handlers hired Nancy Green, a black woman who was actually born a slave in 1834, to play the part of Aunt Jemima. They paraded her about at state fairs aping and cooning, flipping pancakes, and speaking in mangled, plantation dialect much to the rip-roarious amusement of the white crowds. She was featured in such magazines as the Saturday Evening Post and Good Housekeeping as a mammy cooking pancakes for her white master, Colonel Higbee. Then came the mammy paraphernalia, i.e. the hideous mammy rag doll. Thus, the nation's most overtly racist trademark was constructed and delivered into the consciousness of America, complete with enormous girth, exaggerated and grotesque facial features; broad, cartoonish smile; obsequious expression; and that ignominious kerchief tied about her head. In 1923, the United Daughters of the Confederacy campaigned to build a national mammy memorial in Washington, D.C. Fortunately, angry protests from blacks prevented this tragedy from ever being realized. Being portrayed by a white man in black face and drag was a bad enough insult to black women's femininity and basic humanity, but the very thought of mammy being immortalized as a symbol of black womanhood is simply too much to bear. A mammy statue erected in our nation's capital would have become an eternal glorification of the black woman as nothing more than an object of ridicule and easily dismissible as a big fat joke, whose life's purpose was to flip pancakes and keep white folks happy. This demonstrates the degree to which black women more than any other group of women in this country (and perhaps, abroad) have been systematically humiliated, marginalized and devalued. In actual fact, the advertising industry has yet to target the female members of any racial group, other than black women, with the variety of calculated and degrading campaigns described in this book. No other group of women has ever had to fight against the assembling of a national monument that demeans them as human beings, except black women. Certainly, the image of Aunt Jemima was designed to venerate white femininity and elegance. Moreover, mammy served specifically to create a sense of racial nostalgia among whites who romanticized the antebellum/postbellum eras in which white leisure and black servitude afforded whites an idyllic existence in the paradisiacal culture of the south. The evolution of Aunt Jemima unfurled amid several decades of vehement protests in the black community. In 1989, one hundred years after the initial appropriation of this character, these protests eventually prompted Aunt Jemima's current owners (The Quaker Oats Company), to modify her image. They removed such stereotypical accouterments as the bandanna headdress and apron and trimmed her portly figure a bit, yet she remained a slave, though sanitized. Naturally, blacks wanted mammy abolished altogether, but Quaker Oats would have none of that since she'd become so deeply entrenched in the American consumer consciousness and remains one of the most recognizable brands in consumer history. Nevertheless, she propagates an image of black servitude, inferiority and dehumanization in the memories and minds of black people. On top of which, she's a fallacious representation of the standard of black femininity and gentility. Hence, the ubiquitous dissemination of unflattering, unrefined, sexless, corpulent black women in film, television, magazines, advertisements, etc. While "Slave In A Box" is an absorbing read, and Manring delivers an unbiased approach to the subject, I must take issue with the explanation in Chapter 6 for why black boys play the dozens, i.e. mama jokes. Manring cites Roger Abrahams' work in which he concludes that playing the dozens is somehow a young man's rite of passage from "mother-oriented to gang-oriented values, and that playing the dozens is rooted in a black boy's resentment against his own mother." This analysis is completely ridiculous if not laughable. To suggest that this form of child's play is anything more than just that is preposterous! It is simplistic, and it is absurd to conclude that making mama jokes indicates a transition from boyhood to gang life? Absolutely nothing can be further from the truth. Had the author adequately researched this aspect of child's play in black culture, it would have been discovered that "playing the dozens" is nothing more than a game of matching wits to see who can deliver the cleverest and funniest insult to his opponent. To wit, the insult is directed at the player's opponent and not at his mother by proxy. Surely, if you want to mortally wound a black boy (or black girl, for that matter), you hit him where he's most vulnerable, you talk about his mother. In fact, if you got into an altercation with a classmate on the playground and wanted to raise your opponent's fury, you only had to utter 2 words: "Yo' mama!" And those 2 little words would start an epic fist fight for the "code" of the culture was to defend your mama's honor before your own. Thus, there is a huge difference between "playing the dozens" and actually talking about somebody's mama although the nuances seem paradoxical to those not part of the culture. It is just a game (which is meant to get laughs from the crowd of friends witnessing it), but getting into a fight and directing a personal insult at somebody's mother is quite different than "playing the dozens" and can get you seriously hurt. No one would suggest that playing "step on a crack, you break your mama's back" masks a hatred for one's own mother, so why would black children playing a variation of the same game be considered

some deviation from normal child's play? From personal experience and observation, I can assure you that black boys and men have a holy reverence and deep love for their mothers as opposed to some subconscious resentment as is cited in this book. Indeed, many an RB artist, and even more Gospel artists, have written, recorded and sold a plethora of beautiful anthems in honor of their mothers. I have yet to meet a black man who did not dearly love his Mama. So, to purport that playing the dozens springs from some latent hatred for Mother and serves as a passage from "mother-oriented to gang-oriented" life is an overreach and a gross mischaracterization. Mama jokes are just that, jokes...and they're very common; there is no mysterious psychological pathology connected to playing this game. Just as there's none connected to white boys playing "step on a crack, you break your mama's back." Nevertheless, this is an important book overall; I'm grateful to the author for writing it. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. One StarBy Marcus GabilheriBoring...

The figure of the mammy occupies a central place in the lore of the Old South and has long been used to illustrate distinct social phenomena, including racial oppression and class identity. In the early twentieth century, the mammy became immortalized as Aunt Jemima, the spokesperson for a line of ready-mixed breakfast products. Although Aunt Jemima has undergone many makeovers over the years, she apparently has not lost her commercial appeal; her face graces more than forty food products nationwide and she still resonates in some form for millions of Americans. In *Slave in a Box*, M.M. Manring addresses the vexing question of why the troubling figure of Aunt Jemima has endured in American culture. Manring traces the evolution of the mammy from her roots in the Old South slave reality and mythology, through reinterpretations during Reconstruction and in minstrel shows and turn-of-the-century advertisements, to Aunt Jemima's symbolic role in the Civil Rights movement and her present incarnation as a "working grandmother." We learn how advertising entrepreneur James Webb Young, aided by celebrated illustrator N.C. Wyeth, skillfully tapped into nostalgic 1920s perceptions of the South as a culture of white leisure and black labor. Aunt Jemima's ready-mixed products offered middle-class housewives the next best thing to a black servant: a "slave in a box" that conjured up romantic images of not only the food but also the social hierarchy of the plantation South. The initial success of the Aunt Jemima brand, Manring reveals, was based on a variety of factors, from lingering attempts to reunite the country after the Civil War to marketing strategies around World War I. Her continued appeal in the late twentieth century is a more complex and disturbing phenomenon we may never fully understand. Manring suggests that by documenting Aunt Jemima's fascinating evolution, however, we can learn important lessons about our collective cultural identity.

From Publishers Weekly The troubling figure of Aunt Jemima, the "simple, earnest smiling mammy" who currently adorns more than 40 food products manufactured by Quaker Oats, is now over 100 years old. With origins in the "mammies" of the antebellum South and in the minstrel shows (where she was played by white men in drag and blackface) and magazine ads of the early 1900s, Aunt Jemima has undergone various makeovers, independent scholar Manring notes. However, she landed her present incarnation as benevolent pancake maker through the attempts of ad men James Webb Young and N. C. Wyeth in the 1920s to capitalize on white nostalgia for the "leisure" of the plantation system. Geared for middle-class homemakers, Aunt Jemima's "ready-mixed" breakfast thus served as a "slave in a box," according to Manring. Though rid of her bandanna and toothy grin by the 1960s, Aunt Jemima remains a metaphor for whites' idealized relations between the races, with a nonthreatening, asexual elderly black woman happily serving the powers that be. A careful cultural study of this familiar image of Americana, Manring's analysis covers broad-ranging materials from popular fiction, folk songs, movies and ads, as well as historical events such as the 1893 World's Fair and Disney's theme park opening in 1955 of "Aunt Jemima's Pancake House." The book is less concerned with tracing a "strange career," however, than with the way marketing strategies can both mirror and create white fantasies. Aunt Jemima's static character only underscores the intractability of cultural change when moving product has the upper hand over social conscience. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. In the white imagination few images are as recognizable as Aunt Jemima. As a negative stereotype reinforcing both racism and sexism, Aunt Jemima symbolically valued the humanity of black women. As M.M. Manring's thoughtful and well written account makes clear, the racist image of the black mammy has had a powerful impact upon American culture and society. *Slave in a Box* documents the continuing commodification of racial and gender inequality within white America. (Manning Marable, Professor of History, and Director, Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University) About the Author M.M. Manring is an independent scholar living in Columbia, Missouri.