This excellent book by the well-known American folklorist is the result of prolonged study extending over a period of some eighteen years and more than nine trips. The author has spent varying periods of time in all parts of Haiti and collected a rich treasure of observations, songs, musical recordings, tales, proverbs, etc., examples of all of which are richly represented in this volume. The book contains much documentary material in the form of texts, translations, musical transcriptions by M. Kolinski and photographs. The recordings themselves are on file in the musicological archives of Indiana University and Northwestern University.

Courlander is well acquainted with the work of other scholars relating to Haiti and is interested in the African antecedents of much of the material he has collected. Because of his extensive knowledge of many regions of Haiti, he does not fall prey to the temptation to which some other observers have succumbed: he does not attempt to create a standardized version of Haitian belief and practice whether in the realm of vodoun, the Afro-Catholic folk religion of Haiti, or in the secular aspects of the people's lives. Indeed, he insists on the lack of standardization and points to regional variety as a reason for the many conflicting reports by observers, who worked in different localities.

This book is in the best tradition of folklore research, with its emphasis on Folk customs, Mardi gras and the much neglected Rara bands of Holy Week, children's games and songs, non-ritual songs and dances etc. The report on vodoun is balanced and a background is sketched out in the brief chapter "Land and Work" which indicates graphically the disastrous economic situation of the Haitian peasant and urban worker.
Those unacquainted with Haiti might be surprised to find a total absence of mythology in a volume much of which is dedicated to the recording of oral tradition. The fact is that there is no corpus of oral mythology in Haiti and the stories of the vodoun deities are preserved and modified by being acted out in the dance drama of ritual, in the personalities of the gods, in the ritual songs. The folk tales do not deal with the gods, they are secular animal fables, stories of kings and wizards etc.

This handsome, well presented volume, also contains a series of excellent photographs, including some that illustrate the variety of musical instruments and of arts in wood, iron, and flour which the author discusses. This is the fullest presentation and documentation of Haitian folklore available in English and is to be highly recommended to the student of folklore, the Afro-Americanist and the layman.

Erika Bourguignon