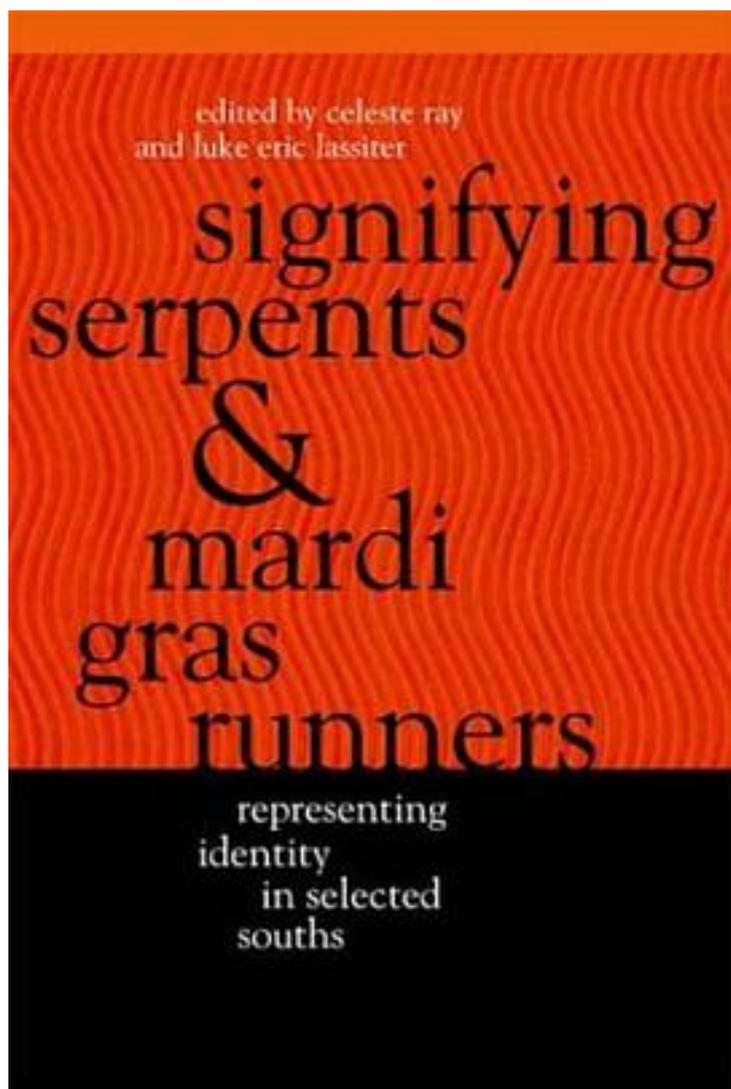


# Signifying Serpents and Mardi Gras Runners



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出版者:

出版时间:2003-3

装帧:

isbn:9780820324722

These case studies explore how competing interests among the keepers of a community's heritage shape how that community both regards itself and reveals itself to others. As editors Celeste Ray and Luke Eric Lassiter note in their introduction, such stakeholders are no longer just of the community itself, but are now often "outsiders"--tourists, the mass media, and even anthropologists and folklorists. The setting of each study is a different marginalized community in the South. Arranged around three themes that have often surfaced in debates about public folklore and anthropology over the last two decades, the studies consider issues of representation, identity, and practice. One study of representation discusses how Appalachian Pentecostal serpent handlers try to reconcile their exotic popular image with their personal religious beliefs. A case study on identity tells why a segment of the Cajun population has appropriated the term "coonass," once widely considered derogatory. Essays on practice look at an Appalachian Virginia coal town and Snee Farm, a National Heritage Site in lowland South Carolina. Both pieces reveal how dynamic and contradictory views of community life can be silenced in favor of producing a more easily consumable vision of a "past." "Signifying Serpents and Mardi Gras Runners" offers challenging new insights into some of the roles that the media, tourism, and charismatic community members can play when a community compromises its heritage or even denies it.

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