

# **Coleman Collins Oneirocritica**

March 1 - April 18, 2020

**Nothing Special**

4620 W. Jefferson Blvd., 90016

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## NOTHING SPECIAL No. 6

### Coleman Collins: *Oneirocritica*

**Coleman Collins** is an artist, writer, and athlete from Stone Mountain, GA.

**Nothing Special** is the name of an artist-run series of exhibitions in an 11 by 11 foot room on the second floor of an art studio in the West Adams neighborhood of Los Angeles.

This publication was designed and produced by Frank J. Stockton with images provided by Coleman Collins.

dreams. Sigmund Freud would have had a field day in interwar Harlem or San Juan Hill. About 6:30 A.M. on the morning of May 15, 1930, Gurnie Roberts, superintendent of the building at 149 West 134th Street, was sweeping the hall when he noticed a fellow standing on the street out front with a numbers pad in his hand. The numbers runner asked him, "You got change of a quarter?" Roberts went out to the street and gave him change for his quarter, after which they had the following exchange:

"Fellow ain't you playing?"

"No, but I had a dream last night."

"What did you dream."

"I saw a clock and the hands of the clock, one hand on five and the large hand on eight."

"Yea. You ought to play five eighteen."

"I don't play numbers but give me 18, I'll play a combination. Five and five is ten and eight is eighteen."

Then one of the tenants in his building who did play came downstairs and Roberts inquired about the reputation of the numbers runner, adding: "I hope to hit, I ain't played in a good while." As fate would have it, his number did hit, but the numbers runner's banker went broke and Roberts never received the \$16.50 he had coming to him.<sup>15</sup>

It was unusual for a specific number to be embedded in a dream but a veritable industry sprang up around the numbers game, the object of which was to help players interpret their dreams, and to translate images of, for example, white veils on black children into specific figures on which to bet. This returns us in much greater detail to dream books.<sup>16</sup>

This genre had been common enough in the nineteenth cen-

reading.<sup>75</sup> Princess Claudia's clients, mostly working-class, "had so much faith in her that they returned week after week for advice."<sup>76</sup>

Numbers players relied upon supernatural workers' dream books for the selection of winning numbers, believing that "dream books were key to unlocking the city of [winning] numbers."<sup>77</sup> Writer William Forbes observed that many "numbers players wouldn't think of making a play without consulting their treasured dream books."<sup>78</sup> Investigating Harlemites' intrigue with supernaturalism, one New York journalist recalled that, "dream books are as universally read in Harlem as the Bible. At least one-fourth of the population consults them as an aid to hitting the numbers."<sup>79</sup> Dream books were a byproduct of the public's fascination with gambling and the commercialization of supernaturalism. Dating back to the colonial era, American dream books offered solutions to the unknown and served as guides to interpreting dreams and superstitions, and most importantly enabled a dreamer to "turn sleep into capital."<sup>80</sup> Recognizing the economic value of dreams, NYAN columnist and well-known Harlem beauty parlor owner Madame Sarah Spencer Washington advised her readers to "keep a pencil and pad at their bedside and jot down" their dreams. A committed numbers player like fifty-year-old Mamie Sprinkle "never fail[ed] to dream up a breeze and always sees numbers floating around in the atmosphere."<sup>81</sup> Dream books paired corresponding aspects of life, people's names, natural and man-made symbols, and every imaginable circumstance that might occur in a dream with a particular number or set of numbers. For instance, Mme. Fu Futtam's 1937 dream book *Madam Fu Futtam's Magical-Spiritual Dream Book* suggested that dreaming of a casket "denotes marriage" and the dreamer should play 427. To dream of oranges meant "comfort and relief" and the corresponding number was 213. Dreaming of money meant "that [the dreamer] will be tempted to commit an unbecoming act, and the dreamer's lucky numbers were 565."<sup>82</sup>

Selling dream books became a profitable way for supernatural consultants to earn a living without breaching state gambling laws. Some of New York's most popular clairvoyants and "professors" of mystic science, including Carl Z., "Rajah Rabo" Talbot, Herbert Gladstone "Professor Uriah Komje" Parris, and Mme Fu Futtam, authored dream books.<sup>83</sup> Dorothy "Mme Fu Futtam" Matthews's commonly read dream books including *Madam Fu Futtam's Magical-Spiritual Dream Book* (1937) and *Madam Fu Futtam's Lucky Numbers Dream Book* (1945) sold for thirty-five cents each at local newsstands, at stationery stores, and at her Harlem candle shop.<sup>84</sup> Competing with other popular dream guides, Fu Futtam claimed that her books offered "the newest, most thoroughly practical and authoritative collection of dream and numbers books. Through faith and science we can develop sufficient force to control all that surrounds us, be it poverty, loneliness, business, or love."<sup>85</sup>

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WHICH HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AND PLAY-  
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From *Old Aunt Dinah's Policy Dream Book* (New York, ca. 1851), title page. Collection of the author.

the world and, more important, the means of ordering and acting on the chaos. The actions impoverished dreaming policy bettors took were economic actions, even if they involved the expense of a single penny. It is appropriate that dreams—the least controlled and least predictable site of human imagining—led straight to the economy, a region that remained for the poor the least predictable site of human expression. Dream books quite literally contained the knowledge or information that made play possible. But what kind of knowledge was it?

American dream books were a continuation of a long tradition of popular knowledge, a sort of vernacular divination that offered keys to the unknown future. They were also part of the nineteenth-century proliferation of guides, keys, and manuals of interpretation which

**new  
experiences**

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9

15. Without a doubt. 327

33

10. A bed of roses. 430
12. Look up and live. I am here to serve you. 214
17. Hold out and hold on, we are coming on a Friday. 411
19. Live comfortably! Dress well! Rest in peace. 088
16. Watch and wait for my coming. 458
13. My dream, I have forgotten it! 294
11. Many years of happiness and undisturbed peace. 428
18. Live independently. 912
14. Just what I always hoped for. 229
15. Behold, I am coming! Come and get me. 000

34

10. Fire! Fire! It is raging above and below. 868
17. Rejoice and be glad, here is your fortune 310
12. Your door is locked. Open to knowledge and opportunity. 829
19. 428 It is blessed.
16. Leave all things entirely in their hands. 373
13. Turn the dark cloud inside out. 938
11. Your greatest friend in the spirit world. 625
18. Smile and the world will smile with you. 937
15. I will come to you again and again. 715
14. While others sleep. 345

35

10. I cheerfully offer. 625
17. This glorious day of days. 688
12. We have not forsaken you. We hear your cry. 601
19. The day of days. Oh, what a day! 183
16. Behold, he speaks to me! He is here. 389
13. He will visit you with great fortune. 451
11. 898 This is certain.
18. The chance of your life-time! 276
14. We are coming, we've given you our word. 225
15. Prosperity and blessing. 219

36

10. It is wonderful! Truly so. Lead! 832
17. Drown your enemies and oppressors. 613
12. No more weeping, no more sorrows! Behold! 351
19. Make the hills ring! This goes to show them! 668
16. We will not leave you desperate. We have come. 032
13. By neglecting your visions. 747
11. Scatter roses on your path. 487
18. Tomorrow will take care of itself. 382
14. A cup full of happy surprises, is ahead of you. 131
15. You will be beloved and respected. Wealth! 479

37

10. Hold fast till we come. We have given our word. 527

DREAMS

was a curious mixture of black uplift and social conservatism, dressed up in the pious language of self-help. After all, "love is the only supreme agency in the guidance of man's career and self-determination of his ultimate destiny," and, doubtless, after purchasing and using this dream book, readers would hit on the numbers and achieve the American dream.

Dream books were the key to unlocking the city of numbers. For the modern reader, perhaps the most noteworthy feature of this genre is the emphasis on violence in the city. Not only did these guides allow their readers to convert the images from their dreams into a three-digit number, but they also performed the same function for the incidents of everyday Harlem life. In *The H.P. Dream Book* (1927), readers were informed at the beginning of one section that "the following are not dreams, but things that you naturally see, hear or happen." The list began with "To see a race riot 291," and continued through such sights as "To see a funeral procession 976," and "To see a person bleeding 815." Similarly, *Policy Pete's Dream Book* (1933), under the heading "Dreams and Happenings," itemized "A Murder Committed 217," "A Cutting Affair 801," and "A Gang Fight 389." "Harlem Hunches for This Year," in *Rajah Rabo's 5 Star Mutuel Dream Book* (1933), was another litany of mayhem and violence: "To see a riot, 222," "To see a gang fight, 228," "To see cops chasing bandits, 299," "To see two men fighting, 797," and "To see two women fighting, 798." The actual listings for dreams likewise suggested a world suffused by violence and sudden death. To judge from the dream books, blades and blood certainly haunted the sleep of a large number of residents. *Policy Pete's Dream Book* listed, among others, "bayonet 100," "blade-razor 786," "blood 584," "carving knife 045," "cutthroat 517," "cutting 270," "dagger 802," "knife 397," "murder 183," "murderer 219," "murder-

detailed such arcane and mysterious subjects as the language of flowers. The first American dream book, *The New Book of Knowledge*, was published in Boston in 1767, but what made it American was largely its place of publication. Chapbooks, with similar interpretations, had been circulating in Europe since the sixteenth century. Like the American almanacs that often included chapters on the interpretation of dreams, European dream books frequently followed interpretations advanced by the Greek physician Artemidorus in the second century A.D. Artemidorus worked by analogy, by the juxtaposition of public and private elements whose patterns revealed the divine message hidden in dreams. As S. R. F. Price put it, Artemidorus understood that a "web of metaphor connects dream imagery and the real world. The interpretation of dreams was based on normative assumptions widespread in Artemidorus's day, and dreams thus belonged not to a baffling private universe but to the public sphere." Dreams offered every man access to the plans of the gods, but like all divination, meaning rested on correct interpretation. A dream that failed to predict the future accurately had been interpreted incorrectly. The fault lay not in the system but in the interpreter, and the dreamer might search for alternative readings.<sup>78</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, American dream books offered a number of alternative interpretations. Dream books for policy players, often printed as cheap pamphlets by popular publishers in Chicago, New York, and Baltimore, contain a remnant of Artemidorus's popular divination, but American divination is written in the language of African-American popular culture. The "web of metaphor" which connected the baffling present of the dream to its realization in the future was spun by the conjurers and seers who had once interpreted plantation life for fellow slaves.<sup>79</sup> Obviously dream books were marketed to urban, literate (largely northern) audiences, among whom they may well have competed not only with rational explanation but with storefront fortunetellers. However, by naming "Old Aunt Dinah," "Old Aunt Madge," and "The Gypsy Witch" or the Arabs "Professor Abdullah" and in the 1920s "Professor Uriah Konje" as fictional authors, publishers based expertise on folk wisdom derived from slave communities or on exotic knowledge increasingly lost to city dwellers. They called upon the interpreters, the wise figures of Africa and the Orient, who were privy to knowledge invisible to modern men and women. While the interpretations they advanced may have been arbitrary, superficial, and invented quite recently, the

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Oncirocritica Americana;  
NYPL 1944  
YAM p.v. 528 HWD (NYPL) p.v. 41

FUF Han \*Z-2559 \*CX p.v. 189-192

Abdullah F. Fufuon X → Stephanie St. Clair  
↓  
Abd. Hamid ↑

Opening Reception:  
March 1, 2020, 3-6pm

# *Oneirocritica*

By appointment  
through April 18



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