



IT WAS THE TWILIGHT OF THE MYTHIC SOUTH, when machines were replacing field hands and African Americans were migrating out in great numbers, looking for new lives in cities like Chicago and Detroit. A domestic worker at the Melrose Plantation in Natchitoches, Louisiana, picked up some discarded paint and brushes she'd found and commenced depicting the life she'd known in bright primary colors. **CLEMENTINE HUNTER CAPTURED THE ESSENCE OF PLANTATION LIFE** in her scenes of baptisms, cotton-picking, pecan-harvesting, dances, weddings, and funerals. Until her 50s she had never so much as held a paint brush, but her vibrant scenes, with their fetching combination of fantasy and verisimilitude, captured the imagination of accomplished artists, who encouraged her to continue. **TODAY, HER PAINTINGS CAN BE SEEN AT THE SMITHSONIAN** in Washington and the Museum of American Folk Art in New York. But of all her work, the murals she painted at the Africa House, which is on the Melrose Plantation, are considered her best. Africa House was built in 1801 in the style of traditional huts of the Congo. It was used for storage and, at times, as a jail for slaves. Now it is a national historic landmark, and Melrose is part of Cane River Creole National Heritage Area, a network of sites managed in partnership with the National Park Service to commemorate 200 years of plantation life and Creole culture in the region. **IN EARLY 2005, THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR CREATION**, the murals were documented in large format photographs by the NPS Historic American Buildings Survey. Later, the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, in partnership with the National Park Service, published *Clementine Hunter: The African House Murals*, an appreciation of the work and its creator. In an essay on the murals' cultural significance, de Teel Patterson Tiller writes, "what draws us to [her] work is pleasure, that hard to explain, hard to quantify . . . freshness and openness. We are privileged to look in upon a now vanished world." **FOR MORE INFORMATION**, visit www.natchitoches.net/melrose/ or go to the heritage area at www.nps.gov/cari.