

Let Spirit Speak! Cultural Journeys through the African Diaspora. Edited by Vanessa K. Valdés. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012. 164 pp.

Let Spirit Speak! Cultural Journeys through the African Diaspora was a conference held at the City College of New York in 2010, several months after the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. Like the conference, the book begins with Gina Athena Ulysse's performance, "Because When God is Too Busy: Haiti, me and THE WORLD." This reading helped me recall my feelings and state of mind during that time of crisis in Haiti. I remember communicating via Facebook with a friend who was in Haiti for the semester and changing my profile picture to the Haitian flag, asking my brothers and sisters in the African Diaspora to unite and offer support to the people of that nation. As I grow as a scholar, my interest in the memories and narratives of everyday people has become extremely important. Vanessa Valdés's conference and the diverse contributors she selected for this book demonstrate how vital and thought-provoking writings about the African Diaspora are then and now, using memory and sustainability of culture as the link between both.

The African culture's struggle to survive despite slavery's oppression is the theme that resonates the strongest in this collection. Ligia S. Aldana provided me with my favorite quote in the book: "Blackness means to belong to a marked collectivity that affirms its identity through political struggle and economic survival, expressing itself via particular cultural practices borne of a diasporic condition" (46). She offered this gem while speaking of the Columbian Caribbean, although it still hits home for me and how my culture is a lasting memory of slavery. Aldana's quote and explanation of the origins of champeta music and at the 2010 conference are important contributions to how the African Diaspora is studied in the west because we tend to forget how much the people on the continent and of the diaspora continue to inspire one another to do great things and to adapt similar habits, even if we are separated by oceans or last names defined by European or Spanish origins.

Another section by Heather Shirey, which discusses Cuban artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons's work, *My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese: Chinese Painting Lesson* and *China Porcelain: My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese*, offers a history of the labor movement and the relationship between Afro-Cubans and Chinese who worked alongside each other as slaves and laborers. The possibilities born from this combination allows Campos-Pons to provide a vivid description of her "past" and her centeredness with her African ancestry. This rich mixture of cultures also speaks to a closeness that many African Americans do not experience while growing up in comparison to those located in the Caribbean and South America.

Let Spirit Speak! is an important link to redefining how we should think about the continent of Africa and other continents and countries its descendants have made home. The creative nature of the Diaspora, born out of a dark period in history, serves as a proper epilogue to those slaves around the world who never knew that their stories of resilience would be celebrated and appreciated as much they have been and continue to be. Books and conferences like *Let Spirit Speak!* are important for young scholars like myself, who want to experience stories presented without discrimination or discredit, since earlier attempts to share them were neglected because they did not appeal to many at the time. The book describes various people fighting to maintain cultural representation through the decades and highlights the ongoing reciprocal relationship that is shared between Africa and the Diaspora, but the intentions behind the book and this conference show how necessary it is for all of us to make sure that this knowledge is passed on and constantly shared so that we can change our world narrative.

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