

Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962. By Michelle A. Stephens. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. 366 pp.

In *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*, Michelle Ann Stephens argues that early twentieth-century Caribbean intellectual men worked to create a Black internationalism that drew from discourses related to Blacks' transatlantic history. In the early 1900s, many Caribbean intellectuals resided in the United States, expatriates of various island colonies. Due to their inability to identify with U.S. nationalist rhetoric that excluded them on the basis of their nationalities and their black skin, these immigrants developed new ideals of nationalism. Stephens examines the ways that these intellects sought to imagine African Americans as part of a global political community in an effort to create a nationalism that extended beyond the borders of nation-states. She also argues that this form of Black nationalism was influenced by discourses on gender and the Black subject. In this way, *Black Empire* illustrates the complex ways Blacks in the Diaspora constructed a shared transatlantic history.

Stephens analyzes three post-World War I Black Caribbean intellectuals. Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and C. L. R. James imagined Black nationalism in ways that both countered and reinscribed colonial and Eurocentric ideals of nation. In Part I, Stephens focuses on the political and cultural developments of World War I and the Russian Revolution. These were key historical moments that affected the intellectual and political development of Garvey, McKay, and James. The author examines late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century writings to explain the gendered aspects of the quest for Black nationhood. She also charts the emergence of Marcus Garvey as a cultural and political figure for Blacks in the United States and the Caribbean. Part II looks to McKay's and James's works to identify constructions of Black identity and belonging. Stephens begins with a queer and gendered reading of McKay's work, as well as an analysis of the relationship between heterosexual gender roles and ideas of home and citizenship. Lastly, the author analyzes James's proposal for transnationalism, which argued for a nationalism based on the history of migration among people from the Caribbean islands and Black urban America.

The author includes an extensive amount of material in this book, carefully examining the ways various disciplines and ideologies intersect to complicate definitions of nationalism. She uses an intersectional analysis, weaving together categories of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. She does not privilege one identity or methodological grouping over another but instead illuminates the intricate ways they connect. The author does not rely on the notion that the global Black imaginary was inclusive of all Blacks. Instead, she illustrates the ways these three Black intellectuals created a "transnational blackness" that used masculine traits from preconceived notions of nationalism, often resulting in gender-based exclusion. She also reveals how their ideas of nation challenged those same hegemonic discourses of nationalism. Stephens engages theories of nation, race, queerness, and gender by drawing from scholars such as Edward Said, Paul Gilroy, David Eng, and Audre Lorde. Additionally, she uses historical and literary analysis to frame her argument. This work fits properly within the fields of African American Studies, American Studies, Caribbean Studies, and Gender Studies due to its intersectional, multi-methodological, and interdisciplinary approach.

Overall, Stephens challenges the idea that borders and boundaries are intrinsically linked to nationalist agendas. Her analysis of the link between the African diaspora and nation-formation illustrates the ways national belonging exists outside of geopolitical divisions of

nation-states. The author complicates notions of Black nationalism by exploring the use of the image of the Black “ship of state,” an agile, mobile body. She contends that nationalist theorists need to engage with the work of Black intellectuals who analyze colonial space to show the multiple and complex nature of empire. Stephens does so quite successfully in *Black Empire*, challenging the ways nationalist discourse is formulated, defined, and critiqued.

Katie E. Dieter
Indiana University, Bloomington