



The Search for Wholeness and Diaspora Literacy in Contemporary African American Literature

Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego

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This volume has as a cohesive argument the exploration of the different manifestations of the search for wholeness and spirituality in the writings of contemporary African American women writers, covering different literary genres such as fiction (both novels and short stories), drama and poetry. Together with the issue of spirituality, the African American search for wholeness is analyzed as a source of creativity and agency. As expressed in the contemporary literature of black women writers, starting in the 1980s, the search for wholeness reflects a beauty realized through the healing of the spirit and the body, and is a process that takes on dimensions of reconciling the past and the present, the mythical and the real, the spiritual and the physical all in the context of an emerging world view that welcomes synthesis and expects both synthesis and generative contradictions. The book will be a valuable collection for scholars of African American literature, comparative American Ethnic literature, American literature, and spirituality, as well as women's studies. In addition, it will be an important text for both undergraduate and graduate students in those fields. As Professor Johnella Butler (2006) points out, the African American search for wholeness is tightly linked to the search for freedom and agency. Ever since the 19th century, African American writers have given expression to an African American self which functions in Western civilization simultaneously as a 'colonized' other and an assertive 'self.' Due to the continuous ordeal of the African Diaspora, this self is caught in between the binaries proposed by the material and the spiritual world, seeking a balance where the person can become whole. The search for wholeness feeds from cultural roots that imply the presence of ancestral spiritualism, rememory, and double consciousness. Contemporary black women writers reflect the metaphor of building spiritual bridges, seeking the possibilities of building a bridge to the archetypal African past that is carried in their memories as a presence that offers sustenance via spiritual reconnection. Their works seek to bridge the gap between the myths and traditions of the past and contemporary African American culture. The texts included in this collection are examples of writing as an exercise of what Véné Clark calls 'Diaspora literacy.' The texts written by contemporary African American women writers explicitly show how to recognize and read the cultural signs left scattered along the road of progress. In this way, material acquisition is achieved along with cultural dispossession, becoming a metaphor for the history of the African in America. The powerful message is that one should not exclude the other.

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