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After The Dance: A Walk Through Carnival In Jacmel, Haiti (Crown Journeys)



Synopsis

In *After the Dance*, one of Haiti's most renowned daughters returns to her homeland, taking readers on a stunning, exquisitely rendered journey beyond the hedonistic surface of Carnival and into its deep heart. Edwidge Danticat had long been scared off from Carnival by a loved one, who spun tales of people dislocating hips from gyrating with too much abandon, losing their voices from singing too loudly, going deaf from the clamor of immense speakers, and being punched, stabbed, pummeled, or fondled by other lustful revelers. Now an adult, she resolves to return and exorcise her Carnival demons. She spends the week before Carnival in the area around Jacmel, exploring the rolling hills and lush forests and meeting the people who live and die in them. During her journeys she traces the heroic and tragic history of the island, from French colonists and Haitian revolutionaries to American invaders and home-grown dictators. Danticat also introduces us to many of the performers, artists, and organizers who re-create the myths and legends that bring the Carnival festivities to life. When Carnival arrives, we watch as she goes from observer to participant and finally loses herself in the overwhelming embrace of the crowd. Part travelogue, part memoir, this is a lyrical narrative of a writer rediscovering her country along with a part of herself. It's also a wonderful introduction to Haiti's southern coast and to the true beauty of Carnival.

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Customer Reviews

Twenty years after emigrating to America, Danticat (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*) returns to her native

Haiti and the coastal village of Jacmel to take part in her first Carnival. But she's not without reservations. As a child she was forbidden to partake in the festivities by her uncle, a Baptist minister with whom she lived before joining her parents in New York at age 12. "People always hurt themselves during carnival, he said, and it was their fault, for gyrating with so much abandon that they would dislocate their hips and shoulders and lose their voices while singing too loudly." Organized in sections that parallel Danticat's perambulations in the week leading up to the event, the author illuminates the political, economic and cultural history of the island nation, introducing Columbus, French colonists and Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, the dictator of Danticat's youth. Throughout, readers meet local artists, farmers and activists who call Jacmel home, including Ovid, a farmer whom Danticat meets having lost her way in an abandoned sugar plantation. Madame Ovid, his wife, crafts paper cones to hold the grilled corn flour she will sell during carnival. It's said that the act of writing leads to a deeper understanding of one's subject, and oneself. As the work reveals in its final pages, for no one is this more true than Danticat, who offers an enlightening look at the country and Carnival through the eyes of one of its finest writers. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Danticat (*Farming of Bones*; *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*) journeyed back to her native Haiti to explore what had been forbidden in her childhood: the colorful, raucous, dangerous carnival. Arriving a week before the annual event, she sought out some of the island's more unusual residents while exploring the history, folklore, and meaning of the many images of carnival. Her lively narrative describes a rich and complicated cultural history, influenced by Christianity, vodou, Europeans, pirates, dictators, past slavery, and an uncertain economy. From zombies, Arawak Indians, and SIDA (syndrome immuno-deficitaire acquis), representing the ravages of AIDS, to the devilish Mathurins, who battle the dragon-slaying archangel Saint Michel, the many masked and costumed carnival participants parade by Danticat. By the end of the story, she has overcome her childhood fears, dropped her inhibitions, and joined in the enthusiastic revelry that is carnival, embracing strangers and singing. A short but entertaining narrative; for academic and public libraries. [This is the first in a series called "Journeys" that will feature noted authors on favorite destinations; forthcoming works include Michael Cunningham on Provincetown, Laura Esquivel on Mexico, Ishmael Reed on Oakland, and Myla Goldberg on Prague. Ed.] Linda M. Kaufmann, Massachusetts Coll. of Liberal Arts Lib., North Adams.- Linda M. Kaufmann, Massachusetts Coll. of Liberal Arts Lib., North Adams Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Ms Edwidge Danticat continues to provide us with unique opportunities to look inside Haitian culture and "After the Dance" certainly does not disappoint. It is a quick read, though I felt it did not flow as smoothly as some of her other works. Reading about celebration and nostalgia in Haiti is a refreshing break from most of the available literature. It certainly speaks to the amazing resilience and pride that is distinctly Haitian. I certainly would have appreciated photographs/illustrations of some of the events, masks and locales.

If you have traveled to Jacmel or interested, a must read.

Carnival is one of the defining events of the Haitian year, and nowhere is it celebrated with more verve than in the seaside town of Jacmel. The Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat never had the opportunity to attend carnival. Thus, as an adult, she returns to Haiti, to Jacmel, to experience what she missed in childhood. This book is an account of Danticat's trip back. This is a travel essay, but at the same time, it's so much more. After the dance is a travel narrative, a memoir, and a history, of Haiti and of the carnival. A beautifully-written homage to the carnival, the book spins out in multiple directions, telling stories, and full of descriptive imagery. This is quite a short book, and given all of the things the book tries to do, it doesn't do any of them completely. Instead, we get snatches and tidbits of histories and memories, and the book is a pleasure to read. Danticat uses Carnival and its activities as metaphors to discuss larger events and issues in her own and Haiti's past and present. This is a book one should read to get a taste of Haiti. It's not necessarily comprehensive, but it paints a brilliant picture.

You are given a challenge that harkens back to your childhood ---return to carnival and write about it. You think about the consequences, and perhaps second guess yourself for allowing someone to even suggest going back to deal with the demons that sent you packing in the first place. Such is the case that the author contemplates in this installment of The Crown Journeys, a new series that has authors writing about different places around the world after traveling them on foot. While acquiescing and taking the walk that spawned this book, Edwidge Danticat doesn't disappoint. In recent years she has fast become a media darling and one of Haiti's rising stars in literature. Here she shares with her readers a poignant and compelling view of the Jacmel Carnival, one of the Caribbean's major carnivals --- rivaled with and compared only to Rio and Trinidad. She gives insight and deep-rooted analogies of historic content, exploration of the land in and around her

hometown of Jacmel, and the traditions of the people themselves as a true native would tell it. The old adage of "there's no place like home" will always have a sense of purpose when coming back, and relative to the aforementioned, Ms Danticat gives the readers something to digest. Along the way she visits a cemetery and reveals what she thinks of them: "I have always enjoyed cemeteries. Altars for the living as well as resting places for the dead they are entryways, I think to any town or city the best places to become acquainted with the tastes of the inhabitants, both present and gone." She also references Jacmel's uneven history via the landmarks she remembered as a child; gives a detailed explanation of how the masks and costumes play a major role based on age-old fables; and revisits the hills and rainforests with stories supporting political drama(s) relative thereof. The customs, social life, and other manna of experiences associated with carnival represents an expressive attitude that inspires the people of this proud nation a reason to shun struggle, forget present troubles and escape to the wild hedonistic, but sexual suggestive party that bring out carnal knowledge at its best. The one thing that got my interest early on in this narrative is the fact that she was scared off from celebrating the rituals associated with this celebration by a family member. How she has dealt with it over the years --- and the decision to face this challenge is worthy reading. In the process she is able to rediscover herself and shed inhibitions in embracing this festive time. Witness the reckless abandon as she describes the freedom she now can express without remorse. I feel that readers will feel as mesmerized as I was --- and feel as if you were there too. --- Reviewed by Alvin C. Romer

Until this short, entertaining book, part memoir and part travelogue, I'd never read much of anything positive about Haiti. Years of political strife and the Duvalier dictatorships have certainly taken its toll on this densely populated third of Hispaniola (the rest is the Dominican Republic), but apparently Haiti is ready for tourists again and there's much to attract us there. Carnival, those jubilant and reckless days before Lent, would be a grand time to go. Like similar celebrations in Rio, Venice, and New Orleans, this a festival of the bizarre and the ridiculously sublime. Danticat is a fine writer and portrays her native country and countrymen with clarity and passion. This is part of Crown Journeys, a very promising new series of travel essays, written by some of our finest contemporary authors. Educating and entertaining; makes you want to book passage on the next flight or ship.

"After the Dance" by Edwidge Danticat, is a celebration of the beauty, history and power of African culture in the diaspora of Haiti. Edwidge Danticat's writings stand on the shoulders of great writers

such as Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes and Walter Mosley. "After the Dance" champions the day to day experiences, joys, and challenges of people of African ancestry as they celebrate Carnival in Haiti. By accurately telling their story in "After the Danice", Edwidge Danticat paints a multi-sided portait of a community in transition, and as with any great writer, the truth she speaks about one community , informs our understanding of all communities. "After the Dance" is an excellent work by an excellent writer...

It's always refreshing to read about the Caribbean, especially when it involves carnival and when the recount is being done by such a great writer. I must say that at times I felt like screaming that this woman really does not know how to let loose and really enjoy carnival. Just imagine if she were in Trinidad instead playing j'ouvert, and doing carnival for 2 days straight!! Nevertheless, I liked the fact that she paid careful attention to detail and incorporated much historical content into the novel.

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