



The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States

Edwidge Danticat

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In five sections--Childhood, Migration, Half/First Generation, Return, and Future--the thirty-three contributors to this anthology write movingly, often hauntingly, of their lives in Haiti and the United States. Their *dyaspora*, much like a butterfly's fluctuating path, is a shifting landscape in which there is much travel between two worlds, between their place of origin and their adopted land.

This compilation of essays and poetry brings together Haitian-Americans of different generations and backgrounds, linking the voices for whom English is a first language and others whose dreams will always be in French and *Kreyòl*. Community activists, scholars, visual artists and filmmakers join renowned journalists, poets, novelists and memoirists to produce a poignant portrayal of lives in transition.

Edwidge Danticat, in her powerful introduction, pays tribute to Jean Dominique, a sometime participant in the Haitian *dyaspora* and a recent martyr to Haiti's troubled politics, and the many members of the *dyaspora* who refused to be silenced. Their stories confidently and passionately illustrate the joys and heartaches, hopes and aspirations of a relatively new group of immigrants belonging to two countries that have each at times maligned and embraced them.

The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Dyaspora in the United States Details

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From Reader Review *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* for online ebook

Chrissy says

Short stories from perspective of Haitian-Americans of different generations and backgrounds, different careers and lifestyles, etc.

"I stand not between two cultures, one Haitian, the other American, but between generations, one belonging to the pre-Duvalier era and the other belonging to the post-Duvalier era. Sometimes it is like standing in a barren no-man's land, but I know that some of us need to be the in-betweens so the gaps will not bleed, so that the discarded will be remembered and the wounds of forgetfulness staunches" (pg. 229).

Lala says

I just love books like this.

Nellie K. says

I want to read her books because I met her in person and I like her story and history, view from an immigrant's perspective and I can identify with her too since I'm also an immigrant.

Trinity School Summer Reading says

The essays, poems, and stories that Edwidge Danticat has collected in this anthology explore the themes of childhood, migration, and return in the Haitian experience.

Mariana says

There's a tremendous + beautiful variety in *The Butterfly's Way* edited by Edwidge Danticat. There are 33 Haitian-American authors + each one writes about a different experiences.

Ginny Page says

A very complete collection of stories from the Haitian Diaspora. Beautifully introduced by Danticat in such a way that the threads all pull together.

Nina says

Read *Black Crows* and *Zombie Girls*

Pam Richmond says

Well rounded collection of short auto-biographical essays and fictional stories by a variety of authors and non-authors. Valuable insights into what it's like to be a refugee, the relationship to one's country of birth, and between generations. An important time to spend time thinking about the refugee experience. These stories can't help but be educational, each life touched by politics, and ancient punishments of the singular history of a successful national slave revolt, defeat of Napoleon and long struggle to retain independence since. Each person embodies a lineage of African slave-trade diaspora, European imperialists and the indigenous Arawak people who lived on the island before their arrival. Their first language is usually Kreyol, quickly lost in the states, except among Haitians. Generations are divided and lives bi-or tri-sected by Duvalier, Papa Doc, Baby Doc

The book is divided into 5 sections: Childhood, Migration, Half/First Generation, Return and Future.

Childhood covers young years spent in Haiti before migration. In "Restavek," Jean-Robert Cadet writes of a slave class of children in a heart-breaking story about the abandoned children of white elites who are sold off to be cared for by whoever will take them. This one was heart-wrenching.

Migration is the period of living in the US. Some stories hint at the journey getting here, all dramatic, some traumatic, even life-threatening like "The Red Dress," by Patricia Benoit, who as a volunteer translator for new immigrants met a young woman insistent on acquiring a particular outfit. Not out of vanity, but an affirmation of life, when her story comes out, "I spent two days in the water holding on to a piece of wood from the boat. There were dead people all around me. I'm not going back." This was a favorite of mine, because of Benoit's own self-exploration as she encountered newer immigrants from her homeland, just arriving.

There are also two stories about inter-racial relationships, "The White Wife" by Gary Pierre-Pierre and "You and Me Against the World" by Martine Bury. These are told with candor and clarity, whether talking about the fetishization of black lovers' bodies, or the disapproval of relationships that cross color lines. As immigrants here, there seems to be more freedom to explore what Americans may be too jaded to notice or squeamish to write about.

Half/First Generation stories continue with the theme of living in the US, focusing on the dynamic between parents whose lives were interrupted by migration and their children preparing for their lives as Haitian-Americans. In "Exiled," Sandy Alexandre tells the story of conflict with his mother that escalated to his being 'exiled' back to Haiti for a crash course in the Haitian half of his identity. Ironically, my ex-husband tried this on our son...but he was sent to Missouri (from California, that's a big change though not as big as Haiti). In "The Million Man March," Anthony Calypso writes another favorite, a very reflective, poetic piece about that historic event from the perspective of a black-skinned immigrant, who felt for the first time a sense of belonging and brotherhood with African Americans.

In Return, there is a reckoning, whether in coming to terms with what it was migrants were fleeing, or the difference between being Haitian-American and Haitian--when in Haiti. Babette Wainwright writes in "Do Something for Your Soul, Go to Haiti" a poignant epiphany of the reality behind charity work in the poorer parts of the island.

The last chapter, Future, consists of a sole piece, "Lazarus Rising: An Open Letter to My Daughter," by Myriam J. A. Chancy. She recounts with longing her grandmother, in memories that blend family and homeland into a seamless dream-haze, in an effort to record and preserve for her daughter the thread of

ancestry that leads back to Haiti. It's a naive piece, dismissing generations of women before her, along with their traditional life, as deficient, even while valuing those same women for the connection they provide to her past. But that is an ambiguity or duality that runs throughout the collection.

A note about the language. The book is full of French phrases and words, some translated, some not. Using a translator is helpful, and there is a small glossary in the back.

Shaina says

This book is intriguing. The stories differed in setting, perspectives, and sentiment, although a common aching for Haiti was felt in all the stories. As a member of the Haitian diaspora myself, I thought the book perfectly illustrated the struggle between knowing Haiti as home, feeling disconnected to it (along with all the other places we immigrants grow to familiarize ourselves with), and recognizing the persistent tug of Haiti and Haitian culture throughout our lives. No matter the amount of time spent in Haiti, the circumstances of leaving the country, or the trajectory of each life as time passed - Haiti was present in every moment. It's strange to realize that a place can pull at someone throughout their entire life, while making that person feel some sort of discordance. It's like a reluctant mother who is saddened and angered by her child's departure, and although she shows bitterness towards the absence, she embraces her child with love - consistent over distance and time.

Meghan says

this book has something for everyone... some sad, some touching, some sweet stories and poems from haitian-american people living in the 'tenth district.' edited by my favorite author, edwidge danticat.

Stephen Matlock says

Really very good. This is a collection of tales of the Haitian Diaspora--those who fled from Haiti for various reasons to settle elsewhere, and their reactions both to their new homes and their home in memory.

It was not what I expected, due to my own ignorance. I expected it to be much more a collection of writings by people just as if they were journaling, but these are more than that.

Yes, it is somewhat like a collection of journals, but the stories are thoughtful, and insightful, and beautifully written. They run the gamut from poignant to bitter, from angry to resigned to happy, from despair to hope.

This book, for the ignorant (like me), opens up the society and culture of Haiti and Haitians. Something as simple as a mother doing everything to help her son, or a father working two or three jobs for his family--ordinary things that take on new meaning when you realize how much they had to abandon when they left Haiti, but also how much they have not yet given up--not their dignity and feelings and purposes.

I did not know before I read this book something that's quite obvious to me now: Haiti is the first black republic in the world. There is a long history of self-determination (and the struggle to maintain that), and a long history of cultural and social development. There is a shock of one culture meeting another when

Haitian enter into the diaspora, but it is the meeting of cultural rivals, if not equals.

James F says

Because this was in the English literature section at the library, I expected it to be a collection of short stories, but actually it is a collection of about thirty essays (with a few poems interspersed), all by different authors, about the experiences of Haitians living in exile in the United States (and a few in Canada). The essays are divided into five sections, reminiscences about their childhoods in Haiti, narratives about the actual immigration, narratives by children of immigrants, stories about returning for visits to the island, and one essay addressed to the future. The authors are almost all writers, students or academics, and the essays are uneven; one or two are very informative about conditions and immigration policies -- the best is about the US camp at Guantanamo Bay; others take up questions of racism, interracial relationships, the conditions of women immigrants, etc.; and one or two are mainly platitudes or misguided attempts at humor. At least none of them try to contrast the Republicans with the Democrats on immigration questions; Haitians have learned better. I'm not sure whether the spelling dyaspora is just a Haitian variant or whether it is a deliberate choice to differentiate the diaspora of Haitian refugees, from Haiti as itself part of the African diaspora.

Linda says

A collection of short pieces from Haitian diaspora. Most of them read like college application essays, but worthwhile in terms of learning more about Haitian immigrant experience in North America.

Camellia says

Excellent!
