



Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emerging World City. Copeland-Carson, Jacqueline. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 240pp.

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Copeland-Carson's *Creating Africa in America* might best be characterized as an ethnographic study focused on a Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization, the Cultural Wellness Center (CWC). The CWC centered on three core program dimensions and provided support groups, health counseling and attendant classes. Although the CWC's mission focused on cultural wellness in respect to the physical, mental and spiritual health of participants, the Center was also portrayed as addressing broader community concerns and ebbing a "downward [spiral] of illness and disease, community violence, and decay ... produced by a combination of factors" (p. 82). Further, while the CWC's general mission and programs applied to all participants, regardless of ethnocultural, educational or occupational background, its cultural wellness mission had a distinctly African base. The author describes the study's purpose as examining "how a neighborhood-based nonprofit attempts to create a sense of locality in a place where residents may have community affiliations that crosscut the globe" (p.3).

Although I clearly understood Copeland-Carson's conceptual arguments and the jargon she used, I was plagued throughout my reading by the following questions: Why is this study consequential and worth sharing? How does it truly contribute to the study of anthropology, especially to African Diasporan communities? At one point, the author even acknowledges the obtuseness of the work by identifying her research purposes as applying and combining modified versions of what "some scholars consider outmoded constructs—for example, "culture," "thick ethnographic description," and social network perspectives—with contemporary processural and reflexive approaches" (p. 9).

In many ways, I found myself unable to cogently decipher the ways in which the information contained within this book actually advanced such study. For example, the author spends considerable time fleshing out CWC conflicts centering on identity issues and the ways in which participants defined themselves in respect to ethnic, national, and racial identification rather than providing new and/or distinctive insights about identity and cultural affiliation.

Other such conflicts included the CWC's African-based mission and whether it was inclusive enough to welcome Europeans and other people of color. Other scholars in a number of diverse disciplines have documented this issue and presented it in ways that prove reflective and provocative. With this discussion of identity, as well as several others (including Copeland-Carson's research methodology), the book proved repetitive and the reading, itself became laborious. I did not find the text reader-friendly and instead deemed it overly reliant on academese.

The aspects of the text that were most interesting to me centered on the changing demographics of the Twin Cities region, namely the identity conflicts impacting the area, the manner in which the media presented these conflicts, as well as the ways in which the



community changed post-September 11th. For example, the author described two broader community issues that I found fascinating albeit both were left underdeveloped. Once centered on the shooting of Somali cabdriver and the ways in which the tragedy highlighted a shared commonality between recently arrived African immigrants and African Americans on the basis of race and shared experiences of racial discrimination. The other involved conflicts between Somali and African American youngsters at a local middle school. These conflicts were largely based upon a lack of cultural understanding by both parties and exacerbated by miscommunications.

Another potentially powerful discussion centered on the post-September 11th community. The topic is addressed primarily in the epilogue, in spite of the fact that the author acknowledges that “the Twin Cities, especially its African immigrants and Muslims, ...are still reeling from its aftershocks” (p. 163) and “Minnesota’s large Somali community, most of whom are Muslim, ha[d] come under great scrutiny as America’s War on Terror unfold[ed]” (p. 163). Unfortunately, these consequential issues were ancillary, as the CWC was the focus of the book.

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