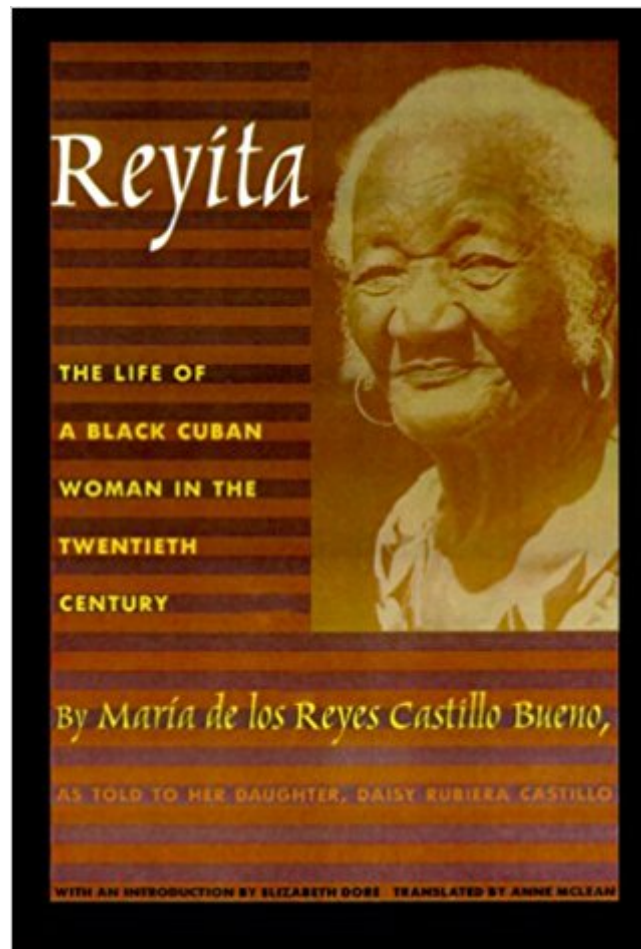




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Reyita: The Life Of A Black Cuban Woman In The Twentieth Century



Synopsis

María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno (1902–1997), a black woman known as “Reyita,” recounts her life in Cuba over the span of ninety years. Reyita’s voice is at once dignified, warm, defiant, strong, poetic, principled, and intelligent. Her story—as told to and recorded by her daughter Daisy Castillo—begins in Africa with her own grandmother’s abduction by slave-traders and continues through a century of experiences with prejudice, struggle, and change in Cuba for Reyita and her numerous family members. Sensitive to and deeply knowledgeable of the systemic causes and consequences of poverty, Reyita’s testimony considers the impact of slavery on succeeding generations, her mother’s internalized racism, and Cuba’s residual discrimination. The humiliation and poverty inflicted on the black Cuban community as well as her decision to marry a white man to ensure a higher standard of living form the basis of other chapters. Reyita actively participated in the life of the community—often caring for the children of prostitutes along with her own eight children and giving herbal medicine and “spiritualist” guidance to ill or troubled neighbors. She describes her growing resistance, over five decades of marriage, to her husband’s sexism and negativity. Strong-willed and frank about her sexuality as well as her religious and political convictions, Reyita recounts joining the revolutionary movement in the face of her husband’s stern objections, a decision that added significant political purpose to her life. At book’s end, Reyita radiates gratification that her 118 descendants have many different hues of skin, enjoy a variety of professions, and—most importantly—are free of racial prejudice.

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Customer Reviews

“I am Reyita, a regular, ordinary person. A natural person, respectful, helpful, decent, affectionate, and very independent. For my mother, it was an embarrassment, that I of her four daughters was the only black one. I always felt the difference between us, because she didn’t have as much affection for me as she did for my sisters. . . . I was the victim of terrible discrimination from my mother. And if you add that to the situation in Cuba, you can understand why I never wanted a black husband. I had good reason, you know. I didn’t want to have children as black as me, so that no one would look down on them, no one would harass and humiliate them. Oh, God only knows! I didn’t want my children to suffer what I had to suffer. This joyous, amusing, and self-reflective blending of personal, family, and community life is a splendid example of the testimonio genre which Cuban authors have pioneered. Like Miguel Barnet’s classic Autobiography of a Runaway Slave this book is obligatory reading for those of us interested in life histories, racism, subaltern studies, and Latin American history.” Barry Carr, La Trobe University

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"Reyita," subtitled "The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century," as told to her daughter, progresses in rich detail from what could have crushed a weaker spirit to the conclusion a year before her death: "I'm not worried about whether I've acted well or not. I'll always live in peace with myself, because I believe I always did what I had to do. I have walked along with life, I haven't been left behind. And so, at ninety-four years of age, I feel good as new." Reyita's grandmother, a slave, bore the last name of her "owner who was also her father." Reyita's own mother rebuked her for being the only black one of her four daughters. Because she was smart and diligent, Reyita at 18

passed the admissions test to the Institute, only to be kept out because she couldn't afford the required uniform. When she had tried to borrow the money, the response was "That negrita has gone crazy." To spare her own children from parallel treatment, Reyita determined to marry white. Reflecting back she expressed her feeling: "It goes without saying, now, that I love my race, that I'm proud to be black, but in those days, marrying white was vital...." By cooking for others, washing clothes, teaching school, caring for others' kids, including those of prostitutes, and sheer industry and intelligence, Reyita elevated her growing family. In the 1940s she joined the Popular Socialist Party because it fought for "equality between blacks and whites and between men and women." Later, she and her sons were part of the 26th of July Movement that prevailed in the Cuban Revolution. Her personal rewards: "Now I have lots of riches, not material but spiritual ones: my children and grandchildren, how wonderful! They are teachers, doctors, engineers, professors, technicians and workers. No drunks or thieves. I feel rich...." Read "Reyita" to share in her wealth.

Bob Buchanan

I could not put the book down. It is worth learning about hardships, deprivations, lack of respect for citizens of African Cubans. This is something people should read, it makes you think about your own well being as a person. God bless Reyita. She was a strong individual. Only the strong survive. Great book.

Beautiful book. Everyone should read it.

Great book! Let's break the silence!

Nice

Love it. Very interesting and informative.

great lesson in history

I bought the book because it's a biography of a witness of a time in the East of Cuba I didn't know much about, except what I read in history books. This prize winning account tells the story of an extraordinary black woman in the 20th century, living in a difficult, turbulent time. There are certain parallels with modern times too, it struck me that some things never change - at least in Cuba, at

least so far. You just can't stop reading if you're interested in stories of human survival and I guess especially if you're of afrocuban descent (which I'm not).

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