People Get Ready: African American and Caribbean Cultural Exchange. Kevin Meehan. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009. xv + 231 pp. (Cloth US\$ 50.00)

So much of the relatively recent anthropological, historical, and theoretical writing about the Caribbean has been about the difficulty to erect clearly defined boundaries around the region, or about the futility of eventually engaging in such an attempt as the islands' histories and contemporary sociocultural realities come along with connections to virtually all the regions and peoples of the world. In that sense, a book published in 2007, *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, to take only one example, explores some of these Caribbean connections by focusing on the material aspects of transhistorical and intergeographic relationships between what is usually understood to be the American South and the Caribbean. There is between them, as the editors write, a multiplicitous, decentered circulation of cultural elements that defines the "interculture" "not so much by a shared set of geographical boundaries or by a single, common culture as by the weave of performances and identities moving across and throughout it" (Adams et al. 2007:6).

The subtitle of *People Get Ready* points to the main focus of the book: the exchange of cultural politics between the Caribbean and African Americans—specifically within the United States. As Meehan writes in the book's opening:

At its best, African American and Caribbean cultural dialogue is a music of solidarity. In its choruses, this music articulates exemplary zones of relational community in which understanding is, in Édouard Glissant's conceptualization, not a grasping appropriation (*com-prendre* in the original French) but rather a process of *donner avec*, translated as "giving-on-and-with." (pp. 3-4)

Indeed, the book is about the long history of dialogue and circulation of cultural politics of solidarity between U.S. African American and Caribbean peoples with the objective to reach liberation. The preface doesn't leave any doubt as to what kind of "liberation" Meehan has in mind: he interprets African Americans' political expressions as those from a population colonized within the U.S. empire that should be linked to revolutionary nationalist cadres globally because they both suffer a similar domination by the United States ("the prototype of the international fascist counterrevolution," writes

Meehan [p. xiv], citing Black Panther field marshal George Jackson)—particularly in the Caribbean.

In his exploration of these exchanges of cultural politics, Meehan relies mostly on written documents, but also brings in sound recordings, video-taped performances, and interviews broadcast on television. The very first example he elaborates on is perhaps the most revealing as it gave the book its title: the musical exchange—over ten years—between Curtis Mayfield, with the song “People Get Ready,” and Bob Marley, with the song “One Love,” which must be considered as “a single unit,” an intertext that will allow for a better understanding of each song’s lyrics. In fact, the discussion of the lyrics of the Mayfield-Marley intertext leads Meehan to better theorize what he calls “the decolonizing contact zone where Caribbean and African American cultures meet in dialogue” (p. 9), while also tracing three examples of enduring exchanges of solidarity and cultural politics between African Americans and three Caribbean nations: Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba. In Jamaica he explores the pattern of liberation rhetoric accentuated through evangelical contact that stretches back to 1783 and includes “Black Baptist,” “Native Baptist,” and “Ethiopian” churches. In Haiti he looks at everything from the participation of Haitian soldiers in the battles of the American Revolution, the impression of the Haitian Revolution on African Americans, and the migration of African Americans to postrevolution Haiti, to the designation of Frederick Douglass as American Consul to Haiti in 1889, and the support of African American Congressmen and -women and other leaders to the Aristide presidency. For Cuba he considers the African Methodist Episcopal Church missions, the migration of Afro-Cubans to Ybor City in Tampa, Florida, Afro-Cuban baseball players, participation in Negro League competitions, and the friendship between Arthur Schomburg and José Martí, followed by—among others—the literary collaboration between Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes.

After an informative introduction, the book unfolds in five chapters: Chapter 1 reveals Meehan’s theoretical framework and comparative methodology. Chapter 2 zeroes in on Arthur Alfonso Schomburg’s many connections to the Caribbean and their importance for his founding of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Chapter 3 reveals Zora Neale Hurston’s decolonizing goals and the way her “ethnographic narrative becomes ‘possessed’ by the Haitian *lwa* Papa Guedé” (p. 19) in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938). Chapter 4 shows how

Jayne Cortez's jazz poems, dedicated to so many Caribbean writers and artists, engaged with and extended a number of Caribbean literary and artistic movements to the hemisphere, including *négritude* in the Francophone Caribbean and *negrismo* in Cuba. Chapter 5 focuses on Haiti's "popular democracy movement (led by Aristide), and the role of African American solidarity in the recent history of Haitian democracy" (p. 20). The epilogue re-presents the argument in favor of bridging the multidisciplinary fields of inquiry called African American Studies on the one hand, and Caribbean Studies on the other, while also commenting upon more contemporary African American and Caribbean cultural politics, such as Wyclef Jean's self-conscious following of the Mayfield/Marley tradition, and the limits of popular culture to operate as a tool for liberatory cultural activity.

The book is well written and carefully argued. It provides a number of important points of entry into global black cultural politics (all U.S. and Caribbean based), what some have called "the global circuits of blackness." I recommend its adoption for graduate courses that deal with African and African Diaspora Studies theory. It would be particularly useful for the precise illustrations it gives to the theorizings of diaspora that are not limited to the more simplistic unidirectional travelings of black peoples and cultures from somewhere in continental Africa to elsewhere in the Americas, but that instead understand diaspora as the product of multidirectional movements and circulations.

Jean Muteba Rahier

African & African Diaspora Studies Program, Florida International University
Miami FL 33199, U.S.A.
jrahier@fiu.edu

Reference

Adams, Jessica, Michael P. Bibler & Cécile Accilien (eds.), 2007. *Just Below South: Inter-cultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.