

MEDIA REVIEW

Much to Mourn, Much to Celebrate

(The continuing self-told saga of one of America's great writers.)

A review of *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* by Maya Angelou (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986) — Hardcover — \$15.95.

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes is the fifth in a series of autobiographic works by Maya Angelou. With this volume she expands the autobiographical format to provide a multi-layered look at what it means to be a Black woman in the 20th century. This volume covers the period of her sojourn in Ghana, West Africa. After a two-year stay in Cairo, Egypt, where her son, Guy, completed high school, the two go to Ghana to enroll him in the university in Accra. In Ghana they are simply Black Americans, who "for the first time in our lives the color of our skin was accepted as correct and normal."

Soon after their arrival, Guy is seriously injured in an automobile accident which left the drunken owner of the car unhurt. Although Richard, the car owner, offered profound apologies, the mother cannot match the son's calmness; her anger rages inside "like a blinded bull in a metal stall."



Maya Angelou

Observing his mother's anger, Guy said:

Mother, I know I'm your only child, but you must remember, this is my life, not yours . . . If I can see Richard and understand that he has been more hurt than I, what about you? Didn't you mean all those sermons about tolerance? All that stuff about understanding? About before you criticize a man, you should walk a mile in his shoes?"

The distraught mother realizes that these words were all part of the rhetoric. Of course she meant them in theory. Of course they applied to the underprivileged, the misunderstood and the oppressed of the world, but not to the man who had endangered her only son's life.

It is this near tragedy that brings the author closer to the "colony" of Black American expatriates in Ghana. She also finds love and support from Efua, a newly found Ghanaian "sister friend," who tells her that she needs to cry and someone to watch while she cries.

With rejuvenated spirits, Ms. Angelou sets out to experience Ghana not as a Black American, but as an African. She is enthralled by the kaleidoscopic homeland of her ancestors with its rich and vibrant colors, and fascinated by its strong and haunting rhythms. She is especially captivated by the people whose skin is the color of her "childhood cravings: peanut butter, licorice, chocolate and caramel."

Seeking to recapture her African identity, she has her hair fixed in a native style and begins to learn the strikingly beautiful Fanti language. She shares this desire to recapture the mysterious African spirit with all Black American expatriates. They all had the need "to believe in Africa's maternal welcome."

Ms. Angelou is secretly thrilled when she is mistaken

for a Bambara and cannot bring herself to correct the error. "For the first time since my arrival," she says, "I was very nearly home. Not a true Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African."

With the help of friends, Ms. Angelou organizes a symbolic march in support of Martin Luther King's March in Washington, D.C. Later, she chances upon a second meeting with Malcolm X.

Temporarily, she leaves Ghana to join the European tour of Genet's *The Blacks* and when she returns to Ghana, she accepts a position with the Organization for Afro-American Unity. At the Accra airport she is surrounded by family and friends. Her son, Guy, looked "like a young lord of summer, straight, sure among his Ghanaian companions." She gave and received generous embraces, but she was not sad.

At another time during her last days in Africa, Ms. Angelou had experienced feelings that were equally ambiguous:

A sadness descended on me simultaneously somber and wonderful. I had not consciously come to Ghana to find the roots of my beginnings, but I had continually and accidentally tripped over them or fallen upon them in my everyday life . . .

. . . I was also weeping with a curious joy. Despite the murders, rapes and suicides, we had survived. The middle passage and the auction block had not erased us. Not humiliations nor lynchings, individual cruelties nor collective oppression had been able to eradicate us from the earth. We had come through despite our own ignorance and gullibility, and the ignorance and rapacious greed of our assailants.

There was much to cry for, much to mourn, but in my heart I felt exalted knowing there was much to celebrate. Although separated from our languages, our families and customs, we had dared to continue to live . . . Through the centuries of despair and dislocation, we had been creative, because we faced down death by daring to hope.

We highly recommend this book and all of Ms. Angelou's other works to our readers. These works include *And Still I Rise*, *Gather Together in My Name*, *The Heart of a Woman*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Just Give Me A Cook Drink of Water 'Fore I Die*, *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*, *Singin' and Swingin'* and *Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*, and *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?*

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because of Gov. Evan Mecham's bias affront against the immortal Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s national holiday . . . The Pointer Sisters are doing it all through a joint new and solo album . . . The NAACP is flexing its muscles in hope of knocking bias out of the recording industry. It has called for a consolidated effort to remove racism from every measure of the industry . . . It's high time!

. . . You may just have time to submit an application for the American Newspaper Publishers Ass'n Minority Fellowships training Seminars for the second half of '87. However, you had better hurry — 7/31 is deadline, Nancy Osborn is your contact on the AT&T end of 703-648-1053. Good luck . . . "Cry Freedom," the Richard Attenborough production starring Kevin Kline, Denzel Washington and Penelope Wilton has a Nov date with your big silver screen . . . STAY LOOSE . . . Billy Rowe is a syndicated columnist.

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