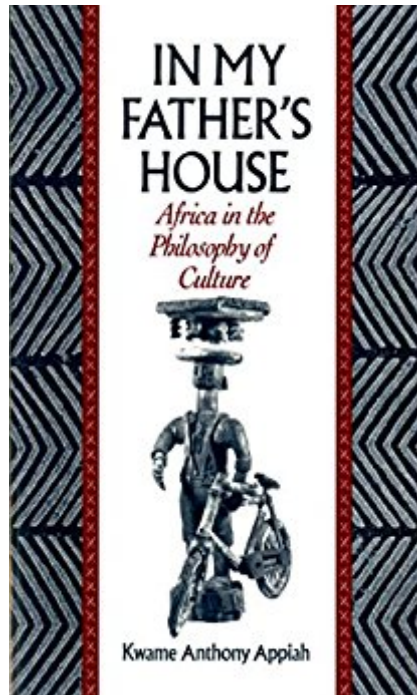


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In My Father's House: Africa In The Philosophy Of Culture



Synopsis

The beating of Rodney King and the resulting riots in South Central Los Angeles. The violent clash between Hasidim and African-Americans in Crown Heights. The boats of Haitian refugees being turned away from the Land of Opportunity. These are among the many racially-charged images that have burst across our television screens in the last year alone, images that show that for all our complacent beliefs in a melting-pot society, race is as much of a problem as ever in America. In this vastly important, widely-acclaimed volume, Kwame Anthony Appiah, a Ghanaian philosopher who now teaches at Harvard, explores, in his words, "the possibilities and pitfalls of an African identity in the late twentieth century." In the process he sheds new light on what it means to be an African-American, on the many preconceptions that have muddled discussions of race, Africa, and Afrocentrism since the end of the nineteenth century, and, in the end, to move beyond the idea of race. *In My Father's House* is especially wide-ranging, covering everything from Pan Africanism, to the works of early African-American intellectuals such as Alexander Crummell and W.E.B. Du Bois, to the ways in which African identity influences African literature. In his discussion of the latter subject, Appiah demonstrates how attempts to construct a uniquely African literature have ignored not only the inescapable influences that centuries of contact with the West have imposed, but also the multicultural nature of Africa itself. Emphasizing this last point is Appiah's eloquent title essay which offers a fitting finale to the volume. In a moving first-person account of his father's death and funeral in Ghana, Appiah offers a brilliant metaphor for the tension between Africa's aspirations to modernity and its desire to draw on its ancient cultural roots. During the Los Angeles riots, Rodney King appeared on television to make his now famous plea: "People, can we all get along?" In this beautiful, elegantly written volume, Appiah steers us along a path toward answering a question of the utmost importance to us all.

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Customer Reviews

Modern Africans find themselves at the juncture of several worlds: As Basil Davidson might have noted, revolution, episodic nationalism, and postcolonial debacles have cast a pall of chaos onto an already historically chaotic field of peoples. The philosophies of Europe, the roots of tradition, African nationalism, Pan-Africanism, racial, tribal and ethnic solidarity, and a modernity which seeks to unleash individualism all come into conflict when Africans attempt to assess the problems they face, and detail solutions for these problems. Kwame Antony Appiah calls African thinkers to take up this important work, and he offers several assessments of these problems and possible solutions in his book. He believes that a better basis for solidarity in Africa is needed to replace decaying philosophies of negritude, and he discredits Pan Africanism's ability to fulfill this role. He addresses the question of what African philosophers should be preoccupied with, and whether, in their seeking to establish, unify, or recreate cultures, African philosophers can really draw upon philosophies and identities unique to Africa. The importance of an "African" identity has emerged since colonialism, and Appiah questions what such an identity should be founded upon, using Wole Soyinka and his own father Joseph Appiah as examples of intellectuals at work on the question. After a reading of Appiah's book, I question whether an African solidarity can be usefully articulated. Can inclusive, constructive and accessible modern culture be derived in a continent-wide scale, with some collective experience as its sourcebook? Perhaps the question rides on whether tradition is truly expendable, although so far it has apparently not been expendable (although it has proven malleable).

Kwame Anthony Appiah (born 1955) is a Ghanaian philosopher, cultural theorist, and novelist who is currently Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University. He is also author of books such as The

Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (Issues of Our Time), The Ethics of Identity, Necessary Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy, and Thinking It Through: An Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy. He states in the Preface to this 1992 book, "in thinking about culture, which is the subject of this book, one is bound to be formed---morally, aesthetically, politically, religiously---by the range of lives one has known...

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