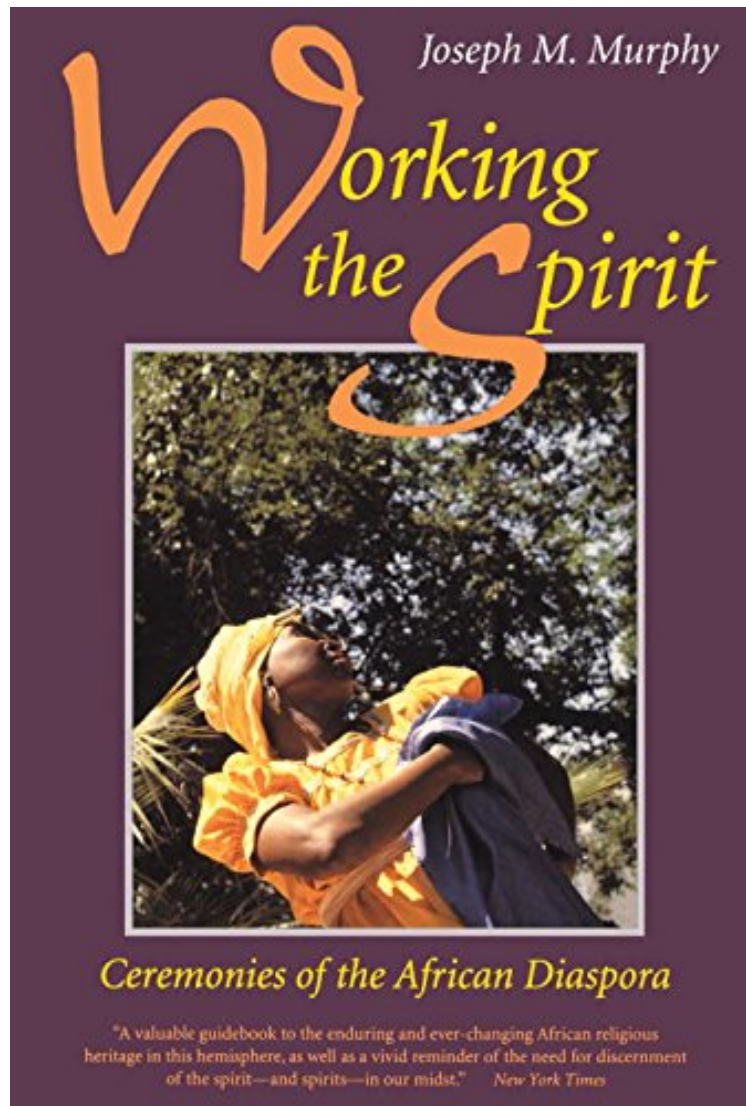


(Library ebook) Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora

Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora

Joseph M. Murphy

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"An appreciative and user-friendly book on religion in the African diaspora. Murphy's skillfully drawn portraits offer an inviting introduction to the religious worlds of Vodou, Candomble, Santeria, Revival Zion, and the Black Church"
David W. Wills, Amherst College

From Library Journal
Murphy (*Santeria: African Spirits in America* , Beacon, 1988) casts his net wider in this work, examining and experiencing the commonalities of African traditions found in five cases of black religious rituals in the Western hemisphere. The reader is exposed to santeria in Haiti and Cuba, a Revival Zion church in Jamaica, candomble in Brazil, and African American church services in Washington, D.C. Running through all of them, he feels, is an African "spirituality of incarnation" through which each of them, despite their differences, celebrates a spiritual freedom from an oppressive world. Recommended for black studies and religion collections.- Paul H. Thomas, Hoover Inst. Lib., Stanford, Cal.
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From Booklist
Murphy explores five contemporary religious practices, Cuba's Santeria, Brazil's Candomble, Haitian Vodou (voodoo), Jamaican Revival Zion, and the black church in the U.S., in terms of their common roots in African religions. He presents each on its own terms, clearly translating unfamiliar terms and ideas, leaving many of the similarities open to the reader to find. Only in the concluding chapter, titled "Working the Spirit," does he put these commonalities together. Murphy's strong points are in tracing the various ceremonies through their African slave roots back to their countries of origin and in showing how these ceremonies were used by slaves to evoke nourishing spirits and, later, to help them strive toward independence. This is a far-reaching and intriguing inquiry, though Murphy does rely heavily on others' fieldwork, much of it done several decades ago. Murphy's own expertise is in Vodou and Candomble, and on these subjects his writing really shines. David Cline
From Kirkus s
Murphy's *Santera* (1988) was a dramatic firsthand, if scholarly, account of that African-Cuban religion. The Georgetown theology professor's new book--equally scholarly and at once more controversial yet more subdued--more often employs others' eyewitness reports as he traces the threads connecting five African-inspired religions: Santera, Brazil's Candombl, Haitian Vodou, Jamaica's Revival Zion, and the "Black Church" in the US. The author's basic contention--radical when he applies it to an expressly Christian church like the one he visits in Washington, D.C.--is that in all of these religions, the same force, which he calls "the spirit," may be experienced and manifested by celebrants as they "work" it through physical ceremonies involving song, rhythm, and dance. A black Christian transported by ecstatic gospel singing, then, may be communing with the same spirit as a Santera initiate "mounted" by a Yoruban god--despite the different theological explanations given by the respective religions: The "actions of ceremony are at least as important." Moreover, Murphy says, there's a reciprocity between community and spirit in these religions, with their respective ceremonies--which allow the spirit to manifest in the community--reminding the congregations of their African heritage. Murphy takes each religion in turn, looking at its history, rituals, and relationship to the spirit. His coverage of ritual invariably highlights each discussion, enlivened as it is by, in turn, Maya Deren's account of Vodou ceremony; a recap of a film of a Candombl ritual, complete with possession; and his own observations of Revival Zion and black Christian ceremonies. Surprisingly, though, Murphy (who's white) relies not on his own Santera initiation to elucidate that religion's method of "service" but on a recent film, *The King Does Not Lie*. Though couched in well-mannered, even cautious, prose, Murphy's linkages offer a provocative new interpretation of the black American religious experience--one that's likely to inspire Afrocentrics even as it wrinkles the collars of conservative clerics and theologians. --
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