



When the Devil Knocks: The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in Twentieth-Century Panama (Black Performance and Cultural Criticism)

Renée Alexander Craft

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Despite its long history of encounters with colonialism, slavery, and neocolonialism, Panama continues to be an under-researched site of African Diaspora identity, culture, and performance. To address this void, Renée Alexander Craft examines an Afro-Latin Carnival performance tradition called “Congo” as it is enacted in the town of Portobelo, Panama—the nexus of trade in the Spanish colonial world. In *When the Devil Knocks: The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in Twentieth-Century Panama*, Alexander Craft draws on over a decade of critical ethnographic research to argue that Congo traditions tell the story of *cimarronaje*, charting self-liberated Africans’ triumph over enslavement, their parody of the Spanish Crown and Catholic Church, their central values of communalism and self-determination, and their hard-won victories toward national inclusion and belonging.

When the Devil Knocks analyzes the Congo tradition as a dynamic cultural, ritual, and identity performance that tells an important story about a Black cultural past while continuing to create itself in a Black cultural present. This book examines “Congo” within the history of twentieth century Panamanian *etnia negra* culture, politics, and representation, including its circulation within the political economy of contemporary tourism.

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