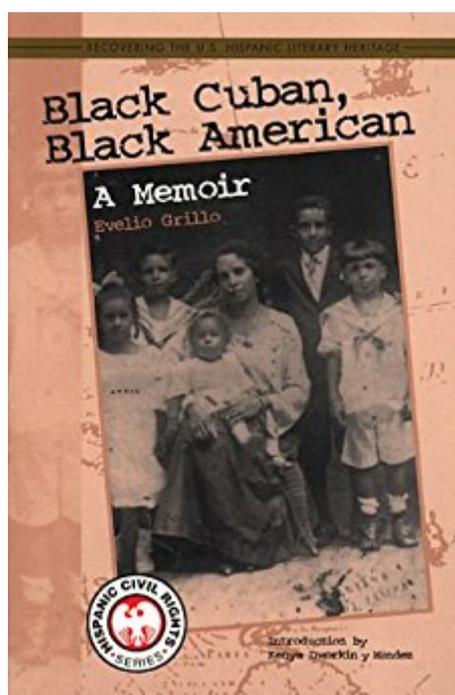


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Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir (Recovering The U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Series)



Synopsis

Ybor City, Florida, was once a thriving factory town populated by cigar-makers, mostly emigrants from Cuba and Spain. Growing up in Ybor City (now Tampa) in the early twentieth century, the young Evelio Grillo experienced the complexities of life in a horse-and-buggy society demarcated by both racial and linguistic lines: Life was different depending on whether one was Spanish- or English-speaking, a white or black Cuban, a Cuban American or a native-born U.S. citizen, well-off or poor. (Even American-born blacks did not always get along with their Hispanic counterparts.) Grillo recaptures in prose this unique world that slowly faded away as he grew to adulthood during the Depression. He relates his increasing assimilation into black American society, and then tells of his adventures as a soldier in an all-black unit during World War II. Booklovers may have read of Ybor City in the novels of Jose Yglesias, but never before has it been portrayed from this unique and vital perspective.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Black Cuban, Black American is the informative and engaging memoir of Evelio Grillo's life growing up in Ybor City (now part of Tampa, Florida). Evelio experienced the complexities and difficulties of

life in a horse-and-buggy society demarcated by both racial and linguistic lines. Evelio goes on to reveal how he was absorbed into the African-American community as he grew to adulthood during the Great Depression. He then relates his experiences as a soldier in an all-black unit serving in the China-Burma-India theater of operations during World War II. This lively, informative, superbly written and presented autobiography is enhanced with an eight-page photo insert.

Peace, I bought this book because one upon a time, I lived in Florida and met an elderly (older than me) black Cuban man whom I became good friends with named Santos. Santos had told me about many of his first experiences that he had when he came to the U.S., which seem to coincide with the experience of the author (Evelio Grillo). One of the most memorable stories that Santos told me was how while waiting in the "refuge" camps some men wearing robes and on horses had come in carrying torches. At first glance, he told me that they thought that they thought it was a parade or something. It wasn't until one of the men on horseback hit one of the Cuban men that they realized that these men meant to do them harm. These men were the KKK and it was because of this experience, Santos told me that he got a glimpse of what African Americans had to undergo in order to live. So, this book reminds me of my old friend and the stories that he used to tell me, which made me appreciate the contributions made by early African Americans and other people of color, in order to make the U.S. a great country.

Black Cubans existed in the U.S. since the early 1900s, but they were not acknowledged. Grillo had to identify as African American for years, in order to get work and educational opportunities. It wasn't until the 1980s that folks started to acknowledge that he was a Black CUBAN. If you want some background on Afro-Latinidad, this text must be part of your syllabus.

This was an easy read and quite enjoyable. The writer spent a lot of time giving details about his upbringing in Florida and struggles of his family, race, and handling cultural differences. The only reason I didn't give this book five stars is it ended abruptly. I would have loved to get more information on his work with the community and non profit organization. But it is rare to get firsthand accounts of the differences between black and white Cubans, Afro-Cuban and Black Americans, and life in a new country.

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