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How powerful can narratives be when it comes to describing a culture or an ethnic group? In a personal note, I can state that narratives are quite prevailing in the portrayal of culture, ethnicity and history. Having had the opportunity to read several African American narratives, gave me a chance to explore deeper into this cultural ethnic group and view much of its history from the perspective of its own people. The narratives expanded into a variety of themes that gave the reader a profound observation of the African American life. Some of the main ideas that were presented through the different narratives included: home and connections to Africa, Love, and Social Justice. These particular themes give the opportunity to understand the main arguments that the different narratives are striving to present and how they each contribute to the overall portrayal of African Americans as a whole.

In the narrative Carlos Aldama's Life in Bata, we are able to see how both of its authors (Umi Vaughan and Carlos Aldama) come together and expand in the themes of home and at the same time make several connections to African. Carlos' life, identity, and home are directly connected to his country of Cuba and derived from his strong African Background. Throughout his writing, Carlos is often recalling his years in Cuba, how he grew up there, what customs surrounded him and how he came to be the man he is by the way his life unfolded in his country. He takes much pride upon the island of Cuba and particularly the city of La Habana, which is home to his musical style and to many anecdotes of musicians and drums. Nevertheless, the music of the bata drum can be trace beyond the shores of Cuba into the African continent.

Although Aldama's life and passion began and unfolded in Cuba, he traces both to the African origins and the Yoruba ancestry which is a solid part of him. An imminent connection between Carlos' homeland of Cuba and his ancestry in Africa is described by his personal experiences: "Traveling in Africa, Carlos was fascinated that the Yoruba he learned in Cuba (the Yoruba brought by his ancestors a century earlier) was intelligible to contemporary Yoruba speakers in Africa" (97). It is quite interesting to see how the African diaspora was able to spread language, music and traditions that have persisted throughout the years and continue to stay alive thanks to those like Carlos Aldama who share them. The "Afro-Cuban *toques*" that sound as Carlos plays his drums are live memories of his home and past. Aldama states: "I can't play unless I remember something and hold that image in my mind. A collective of people: the drummers, the singers, the priests, *Los sin verguenzas*" (34). All of his memories and much of his knowledge go back to Cuba and although Carlos now lives far from the island, as long as he plays his drums he will continue to recall his homeland and to allude to his African ancestry; referring to both, his home and his connection with Africa.

In regards to the theme of love, James MacBride's *The Color Of Water*, makes several remarks to it in different scenarios. First, there is the appearance of love beyond the boundaries of color and race as Ruth falls in love with a black man: "I loved that boy to death and he loved me. At least, I thought he did. Who cared that he was black? He was the only man other than my grandfather that ever showed me any kindness in my life, and he did it at the risk of his own because they would've strung him up faster than you can blink if they'd have found out" (111). Ruth absolutely did not see barriers between her feelings and the appearance of her first love; all that matter was that for the first time in her life she felt loved and had some sense in her life. On the other hand, the society in which she lived relayed on appearances rather than sentiments

which directed her first relationship to a predicted failure. However, Ruth was never ruled by the means of society and she remained with an unprejudiced mind that at end allowed her to find her true love in the arms of a black man. Her love, her strength, and the maturity that she had gathered with the years were the main defendants of her second relationship for which she left everything. For the love of Dennis, she sacrificed her stability and she became a dead woman for all of her relatives. During her marriage she suffered economic hardships and several racial judgments, but among all she was as happy as she could have been: “See a marriage needs love. And God and little money. That’s all. The rest you can deal with. It’s not about black or white” (233). Beyond the love that persisted through the barriers of races, Ruth’s character also becomes a representation tough maternal love. As a widowed mother, she was able to raise eight children and manage to set them all in a successful path. She remained with the appearance of a strong woman in front of her children and at times her words were harsh, but all of her action where made for the greater good of every single one of them: “‘If you stay here, you’ll fool around’ she’d say. ‘Go away and learn to live on your own’ Yet, she’d wipe her eyes with the back of her hand and watch silently through the living room window goodbye from the sidewalk” (190). Ruth serves as both, an explicit example of a person who is willing to make sacrifices for her love and her personal happiness and as loving mother who will lead her children to their own success and happiness.

Social Justice is another theme among African American narratives, but it is particularly portrayed in Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson. This collection of letters narrates the hardships of a black man who lived the injustice of a racist system and ended his life in prison due to circumstances that appeared merely absurd. Jackson was man who saw the deprivation of equality for his race and a need for change. He had a revolutionary mind that

challenged ideology of the majority of society and had to fear to express; he felt the need to express and advocate for a change: “Nothing is more dangerous to a system that depends on misinformation than a voice that obeys its own dictates and has the courage to speak out. George Jackson’s imprisonment and further isolation within the prison system were clearly a function of the state’s response to its outspoken opposition to the capitalist structure” (xix). The writing of his letters was a way for him to dissipate his frustration and denounce his discontent with the social issues that surrounded him. He did not speak for the simple matter of speaking; his imprisonment gave him time to educate his mind and forge strong ideologies that could influence in the path for a social change. He wanted to prove that he had the capacity to evoke change, to become some sort of a leader, and to overall resist the system to which many African Americans had been forced to follow. He stated: “After I am finish with myself, an observer who could read my thoughts and watch my actions would never believe that I was raised in the United States, and much less would he believe that I came from the lowest class, the black stratum of slave mentality” (38). The way, in which he expressed himself throughout his letter, illustrate a man with a strong mind and a strong will. Unfortunately his life ended in a tragic way, but the legacy of his words served to understand that there are several challenges society has faced on their way to reaching a social justice and changes can only be made as courageous voices are heard.

All of the works mentioned above contribute to African American Narratives in their own way. Carlos Aldama’s Life in Bata offers a personal narrative of the African diaspora through American and makes several references to African traditions that have survived throughout the diaspora. It is also supported by historical facts and research and has a special tone with the incorporation of the Yoruba and Spanish language that brings a more vivid image of Carlos Aldama’s life and background. The Color Of Water has a unique structure that joins two

different voices; that of Ruth's who had the experience of white woman who joined the African American community and her son James who is the descendant of a mixed marriage. We heard from to different stories that relate back to the issues to race and identity, but emphasize on a love that trespasses the walls of these issues. Among all, Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson, brings a more personal perspective. We are able to analyze his ideologies and relationship through his words and experience a close image of his imprisonment. He highlights several issues that surrounded the African American community and can be consider an activist from change. Nonetheless, these can all be considered African American Narrative simply because they add on to our knowledge and understanding of the African American community. Through the different stories, we are provided different scenarios that have been encounter by this community and that give us an insight to their issues, their cultures, traditions, and identity.

Having the opportunity to come across a Narrative that specifically relates to a culture or ethnic group, gives you the chance to enjoy a little piece of their world. The world is very broad and the only way to often expand our minds to new things is by reading passages that will share with us a variety of images and perspectives. On its side, African American narratives can be considered an important piece in the learning of the community and the understanding of its characteristics. They possess valuable pieces of information and enjoyable excerpts.