

Elizabeth McAlister

Rara!



Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora

18137

"An incalculable contribution . . ." —Edwidge Danticat

"A rare in-depth look at an extremely popular, yet often misunderstood phenomenon. With this book and CD, Elizabeth McAlister, an involved observer, makes an incalculable contribution to our musical and cultural literature."

—Edwidge Danticat, author of *The Farming of Bones: A Novel*

Rara is a vibrant annual street festival in Haiti, when followers of the Afro-Creole religion called Vodou march loudly into public space to take an active role in politics. During the six weeks of Lent, Rara bands parade for miles, playing music, dancing, and performing rituals for Afro-Haitian spirits, for the ancestors, and for local "big men." Working deftly with highly original ethnographic material, Elizabeth McAlister shows how Rara bands harness the power of Vodou spirits and the recently dead to broadcast coded points of view with historical, gendered, and transnational dimensions. In this first-ever book on Rara, she not only brings the Afro-Creole religious dimensions of the festival to light but also discusses the political uses Haitians are making of Rara, both in Haiti and in the United States. Carefully researched, deeply thoughtful, and extremely well written, this book includes a CD featuring Rara's lively, percussive music, as well as photographs by veteran photojournalist Chantal Regnault.

"This is a smart and thoughtful book by a very talented ethnographer. Anyone interested in Haiti will appreciate the work of Elizabeth McAlister."

—Karen Brown, author of *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*

"This is a startling, stunning, and fascinating book about the blend of music, religion, and politics in Haitian culture. McAlister's mastery of many different ways of knowing makes this study an endless source of insight, intrigue, and inspiration. *Rara!* succeeds magnificently as an exploration into Rara rituals and Haitian music, but it also presents original and generative insights into every aspect of Haiti's past, present, and future."

—George Lipsitz, author of *Dangerous Crossroads*

"This is a major contribution to the literature on Vodou, Haiti, popular culture, Caribbean culture and music, transnational immigrant practices, and the corpus of black religions in the Americas."

—Lawrence H. Mamiya, coauthor of *The Black Church in the African American Experience*

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