



Between Starshine and Clay: Conversations from the African Diaspora

Sarah Ladipo Manyika

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In *Between Starshine and Clay*, Nigerian-born writer Sarah Ladipo Manyika gathers significant voices from the African diaspora for engaging discussions on race, culture, and society.

Bernardine Evaristo introduces the book with a note that its impetus was Ladipo Manyika's contemporary, current events-fed concerns, stemming from factors like the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the murder of George Floyd. She chose subjects whose views are "particularly resonant in these times." Some of her twelve encounters—as with the opening discussion with the late, Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison and an interview with Senator Cory Booker—are rendered in script form. Others, as with a treatment of former First Lady Michelle Obama, are essays.

Although Ladipo Manyika worries about rampant racism and how it may affect her Black son, she gained perspective through talking to others who have lived longer and seen worse. Ninety-six-year-old Willard Harris, whom she met at a nail salon, reminded her that the fact that the United States has had a Black president is "a big deal," and that she remembers a time when interracial marriage was unheard of. Ladipo Manyika also reflects upon the importance of role models and how empowering they can be. She mentions that a school in England saw a marked improvement in test scores following a visit from Michelle Obama.

While the interviews span from 2017 to 2020, as a whole, they form one continuous conversation. Morrison's name is brought up time and again, just as Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka is mentioned in discussions with Morrison, Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., pioneering publisher Margaret Busby, and playwright Anne Devere Smith. Names become motifs, creating connections between the pieces and revealing communities and cooperation that will enable those in succeeding generations to thrive.

In *Between Starshine and Clay*, Black movers, shakers, and change-makers probe pressing social issues with candor and insight.

SUZANNE KAMATA (January / February 2023)

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