Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

Dream Builders, Dream Killers: Voice of an Immigrant from Haiti
Berteau Joisil
Xlibris
978-1-4500-5545-1
Two Stars (out of Five)

Some twenty years after the United States gained its independence from England, Haiti won liberation from French rule and slavery, becoming the first republic ruled by citizens of African descent. As a prelude to their own struggle, a small number of freed Haitian slaves had fought beside colonists in the United States during the American Revolution. These respective battles for independence gave the two countries a reciprocal empathy that still exists today.

Born in 1958, in St. Marc, Haiti, a year after the controversial President-for-Life François Duvalier came to power, Berteau Joisil grew up in comfortable circumstances. His education in that country culminated with an engineering degree from the State University of Haiti. After receiving an advanced electrical engineering degree in Germany, he moved to the United States to work and live with his family. He maintains a strong loyalty to his homeland.

Joisil wrote *Dream Builders, Dream Killers* in English, rather than his native French. One of his goals in writing the book was to correct misconceptions about Haiti which he believes the media has encouraged. He posits that, although Haiti has experienced political corruption and human rights violations, many citizens have been able to live productive lives there. He writes about the Joisil/Estimé family history and his boyhood experiences and education in St. Marc and Port au Prince. Also covered are his views on corporate competition, success levels achieved by African Americans compared to more recent immigrant groups, and progress in African countries.

Haitians consider family background significant in determining the worth of an individual. Proud of his family's peasant heritage, the author also values a direct relationship to former Haitian president, Dumarsais Estimé. Explaining an incident of pettiness in his ancestor's behavior, he writes, "It was an individual weakness, an unfortunate mistake. But it reflects also a problem that has caused many damages to Haiti."

Despite some setbacks working for "corporate America," Joisil appreciates the advantages that particular life has given him. He says, "I was able to nurture a disposition to dream dreams that were not limited to some of the social enclosures so discernible in the United States."

After accumulating enough wealth to live an improved lifestyle in their native country, some Haitians return home to retire. "Though not belonging really to upper-middle class by education, profession, or background," Joisil explains, "they have now some sort of a new elite status acquired through their new buying power."

The author writes with heartfelt sincerity, but his narrative suffers from a poor command of English. Haiti's history and Joisil's family background and personal experiences command attention, but extraneous topics, opinions, and assumptions do not. The numerous quotes are not always adequately attributed. A glossary of acronyms would have provided clarity, as could closer editing for repeated information, names, and irrelevant details. Two sections of photographs add visual interest.

Readers may gain insight into Haitian life from this personal account, but the book lacks sufficient polish to attract a wider audience.

Margaret Cullison