

## Where Do They Bury the Dead

**Joseph P. Policape**

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(194pp)

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*Where Do They Bury the Dead is a humane historical novel set during a dark period in Haiti.*

In Joseph P. Policape's novel *Where Do They Bury the Dead*, a Haitian family becomes embroiled in a countrywide conspiracy.

The Dubois family is a prominent one, and so wishes to stay out of the complicated, often dangerous politics of 1980s Haiti. Thus, when Alvarez Dubois begins investigating the disappearance of his friends and being vocally critical of the government, the rest of his family tries to talk him out of his quest. But Alvarez will not be swayed.

When a terrible tragedy strikes the family, Alvarez's parents and brothers know that they can no longer turn a blind eye to the deadly actions of their government. As the Dubois family becomes more involved in unearthing the hundreds of bodies buried by the government's secret police, their investigation sets off a nationwide movement that could change Haiti forever.

Alvarez is intelligent and committed, but his mission is explained on repeat in conversations with his family and friends. At the periphery of these conversations are government sympathizers—always watching and waiting to feed the names of government dissenters to the secret police. There's a consistent air of suspicion and paranoia in the novel. Despite this, Alvarez remains firm, owing in part to his religious beliefs; his family's Christianity is highlighted in their conversations, too.

Alvarez's family is developed with more nuance, as they continue his work when he is unable to do so. They are swayed to action by grief, which is manifested in their varying depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. They speak openly about these tribulations and wrestle with their past neutrality. The novel's themes of privilege and maintaining the status quo at the expense of less fortunate citizens are clear through them. And the book's descriptions of shootings, kidnappings, and fields of dead bodies convey the lengths that the Haitian government and their paramilitary were willing to go to quiet dissenting voices.

But the book's timeline jumps impede it, dampening the effect of its twists and deaths. Its pace is further slowed by the rehashing of information in conversations and explanations. The book's middle section meanders away from Alvarez's mission; it is devoted to his contemplations of college and relationships.

The book's typographical errors and unbroken text lead to dense, reprieve-free pages. Supernatural elements are introduced late in the novel, and they are underdeveloped. The book's resolution is devoted to social commentary and a picture of Haiti's troubles—fraught with colonization, corruption, and tragedy.

*Where Do They Bury the Dead* is a humane historical novel set during a dark period in Haiti; in it, a family transforms their privilege into action.

DELIA STANLEY (September 15, 2021)

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