

Book Reviews

Motherlove: Reinventing a Good and Blessed Future for Our Children

Esther Davis-Thompson
Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 1999

Reviewed by Trudelle Thomas

Motherlove opens with a poem by Lucille Clifton that captures the uplifting spirit of the book: "Come celebrate/ with me that everyday/ something has tried to kill me/ and has failed." This is a devotional book that promotes a strong and empowering spirituality, rooted in an African American Christian tradition. The author values shared mothering and acknowledges the difficulty of mothering in a hostile environment. She promotes a spirituality that values human dignity, self-assertion in the face of injustice, and spiritual empowerment of both self and children (not self-abnegation). Davis-Thompson's emphasis on power and on "collective motherspace" makes me think of the work of sociologist Patrica Hill Collins, who says that such qualities distinguish how African American women define motherhood.

In her introduction Davis-Thompson writes, "We have to start running headlong into the Spirit for the only safe vehicle to carry us, and our children, into the future... We ourselves need a strong, positive, unshakable self image... We must feed ourselves a daily diet of Hope, Faith, Courage, Lovingkindness." She writes from experience; she is pictured at the back of the book with her husband and ten children, ranging in age from 3 to 21. She has a degree in English and a teaching certificate in Early Childhood Education. In addition to raising children, she teaches college and writes freelance.

This book is organized along the same lines as other devotional "one-day-at-a-time" books with 120 entries, each a page or so long meant to be read easily in one sitting. It is divided into two sections, each of which includes sixty meditations. The first half, "Motherspace," focuses on strengthening one's own spirituality through roots, self-care spiritual-nourishment, "Collective

Motherspace,” etc. In this section, Davis- Thompson urges mothers to meditate to be kind to themselves, and to “settle yourself into the womb of God’s sweet motherlove.” The second half of the book, “Motherlove,” focuses on a mother’s relationship with her children (of all ages), with themes including discipline, influences, authority, and spiritual inheritance. She uses inclusive language throughout.

Most meditations are preceded by a quotation and followed by a brief affirmation, such as “I will point my child in the direction of his honorable self.” Davis- Thompson quotes a rich variety of sources, including Audre Lorde, Renita Weems, Wayne Dwyer, Deepak Chopra, and T.D. Jakes. There are also many biblical quotations. The book is beautifully put together with a colourful mural on the cover by African American artist Kimberly Camp; Gracing many of the pages are black and white African-inspired graphics.

There is nothing radical or earth-shaking about this book. The author is articulating for contemporary mothers a long standing tradition and she admirably fulfills her purpose of inspiring readers. I found myself wishing for more details, anecdotes, and illustrations. The book does not attempt to be scholarly, analytical, or even narrative; it is pithy, terse, and wise. It is superior to other similar books because it is so unsentimental; it does not idealize self-sacrifice or submission to men (the way so many devotional books do), and it is not at all legalistic. This is valuable reading for any mother (including Euro-Americans) who want daily inspiration for the gritty work of raising children today, especially those who were not nurtured well themselves. It speaks to “other mothers” such as fathers, teachers, mentors, and grandparents. Indirectly, it will interest scholars who seek insight into African American spirituality.

Motherlove is being marketed to African American mothers of all ages (including teen mothers, battered women, and low-income women); the publisher also promotes workshops by the author and a book-donation program for needy women.

Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency

E. N. Glenn, G. Chang and L. R. Forcey, Eds.
New York: Routledge, 1994

Reviewed by Leigh M. O’Brien

This book brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars who “provide a variety of perspectives on mothering as a socially constructed set of activities and relationships” (ix). The first chapter, which serves as an introduction,