



## Review

Goldberg, K. Meira. *Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

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*Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco* places the art of flamenco in new territory as a part of discourse on race and racism, spanning from medieval Spain to post-modern America. Author K. Meira Goldberg offers a meticulous array of facts that educe a new face to flamenco. She gives the readers the dots to connect in a dizzying analysis of cultural expressions, in which she demonstrates how flamenco dance carries the footprints of enslavement, religious indoctrination, and hegemony that were supported in Spain and by the Spanish Empire.

In a history lesson featuring the main character of the *pastor bobo*, Goldberg demonstrates how high art was maneuvered to sway the public to embrace Christianity, which stood side-by-side with the Spanish Monarchy, then wielding slavery as a tool of its empire. Goldberg argues that dance, in its misperception, became a symbol of impurity, which was associated with the blackness of Judaism, Islam, Africa, and the Roma, due to a medieval tradition of sorting sheep based on purity of white wool. The *pastor bobo*, according to Goldberg, is represented in subsequent characters of Mungo, Harlequin Friday, and Jim Crow, which communicated the ideas of race and racism outside of Spain and through modern history.

Chapters are filled with specific examples from written dance treatises, iconic paintings, song lyrics, and canonical literature from multiple countries that show how bodies in motion communicated historically the practices of marginalized communities. Many of the examples that Goldberg points to are central to the scholarly pillars of linguistics and fine art, which guided the education of the public in Spain as it became a nation. Goldberg points to real-life characters, such as a knife sharpener, a chain gang, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century cake walk dancers, as sources for some of the corporeal vocabulary that is central to flamenco. She draws her historic references into flamenco via the documented movements of accomplished flamenco dancers, such as Jacinto Padilla, “El Negro Meri,” and Antonio Montoya Flores, “El Farruco,” known, seen, and studied by flamenco aficionados, students, and professionals worldwide.

These same viewers of flamenco may draw a wealth of information from *Sonidos Negros*, because of the varied perspectives from which Goldberg has chosen to analyze the art form. She has a flamenco dance background, yet draws from all of the fields that support contemporary race theory in a long and meandering line of investigation that is of interest to scholars inside and well outside of the arts. While this monograph parallels other recent works that discuss slavery in Spain, the conclusions it draws regarding modern race issues make it relevant outside of Spain. In creating a white European, Christian source of power that could dominate two sides of the Atlantic Ocean,

Spain hatched the ideology that became the basis of slavery in the United States of America. With this fact as a lens, Goldberg draws flamenco out of its stereotypical shell of a Spanish cultural expression and shows how, by way of the Atlantic Slave Trade, flamenco is part of the African Diaspora.

Goldberg does not attempt to reduce the influence of Roma and Muslim influences in flamenco, nor does she suggest that any group should claim ownership of the art form. Goldberg's research creates a new layer to the power of the double-faced expression of flamenco and its expression of resistance in a dance form that has been reproduced across the planet. Her research is an essential component in expanding the study of the history, evolution, and varied expressions of flamenco. It will become the base upon which subsequent investigations will provide evidence to contribute to existing theories about flamenco history.

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