

## **Of the Diaspora: Rediscovering Twenty-First Century Black Literature**

Erica Vital-Lazare, editor of McSweeney's Of the Diaspora series, will discuss the series origin, selection process & publicity strategy for this remarkable program. Launched in 2020, it identifies and republishes important previously published works by Black Americans with the goal of finding new contemporary audiences for works whose perspectives are more urgent today than ever. Titles include novels like *Tragic Magic* (Wesley Brown) and historic photos with new essays by Lester & Aisha Sloan.

Reprinting classic works in Black literature is a reclamation of a Diasporic aesthetic that connects character, imagery and theme to a shared cultural and psychic past that serves as a continuing thread to contemporary lives and literatures, including Speculative and Black futurist works. Vital-Lazare will explore these goals & how they were met with one of the series authors and its lead publicist. They'll discuss the challenges and the importance of re-issuing works in the contemporary market.

**Moderator:** Erica Vital-Lazare is a professor of English at the College of Southern Nevada. A past recipient of a Hurston/Wright Award, she earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Virginia Commonwealth University and is editor of the series *Of the Diaspora*.

Marita Golden is a novelist and nonfiction writer and co-founder and President Emerita of the Hurston/Wright Foundation. Her most recent book is *The Strong Black Woman How a Myth Endangers the Physical and Mental Health of Black Women*.

Aisha Sabatini Sloan is the author of the essay collections *The Fluency of Light* and *Dreaming of Ramadi in Detroit*, as well as the forthcoming *Borealis* and *Captioning the Archives*. She is an assistant professor of creative nonfiction at the University of Michigan.

Vital-Lazare begins the session with an explanation of McSweeney's *Of the Diaspora* series and its origins. She then introduces the two guests who speak about their work, especially in the context of Black American writers who have come before them as close mentors and as examples. Erica prompts the conversation with the following questions:

- 1) Time is a key part of what's important about this series. We know that when these works were originally released (and when Lester's photos were contemporary), they may have been received differently or by different audiences. How does the passage of time play into how these works are understood, then and now?
- 2) Our original hope was to release these works into the world in a way that would carve out special attention for their creators and these important books. I think we were able to

do so, though we never imagined we'd release them into a world stressed by a global pandemic. Has that been a factor in how you've approached these releases?

3) These books--particularly *Captioning the Archives* and the novels--are very different in form and content. Can you speak about how they fit together?

4) How did the series originate and how will it continue?