



A Multi-Disciplinary and Multicultural "Acrobat Of God":

Carla Blank's A Jew In Ramallah and Other Essays

On Martha Graham's famous aphorisms, "And of course her belief that dancers are the 'acrobats of God'"

~ Carla Blank

"Maybe ten, or twelve, something like that. Limón choreographed the piece as a quartet, based upon Shakespeare's Othello. Limón danced Othello, Loui Hoving danced Iago, Betty Jones danced Desdemona, and Pauline Koner danced Emilia. Set to Henry Purcell's music, that great dance is considered one of the classics of modern dance. It influenced me, certainly."

~ Carla Blank

"In 2013, I lived in Ramallah, Palestine, co-directing Palestinian and Syrian actors in an Arabic translation of American Philip Barry's play, Holiday, at the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque, which presented this production in partnership with the American General in Jerusalem. My essay "A Jew in Ramallah" recalls that experience."

~ Carla Blank

In Ishmael Reed's NeoHooDoo and graphic novel Mumbo Jumbo—"mumbo jumbo" is mandingo, "grandmothers who chases the trouble spirits away; not the "Nonsense" of the Americans—there is a photo of a woman standing up while a young girl is crouching down, holding an American flag. When I interviewed Ishmael Reed in Oakland, California, two decades ago, he identified the photo as Tennessee Reed holding in her right hand what seems to be a small flag and Carla Blank, her mother and Reed's wife, wrapped in an American flag à la Olympic athletes, after a dance performance. Since then, I

thought of Carla as an international dance choreographer. That changed when I began reading A Jew in Ramallah and Other Essays. A multifaceted American Jewish artist sympathizing with the dire plight of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli military, informing the world that the situation in Gaza and Ramallah is much more complex than what the regular American media have been reporting. A kind of Theater of the Oppressed in Ramallah by an American with a Jewish heritage.

Thank you, Carla, Saturday am, January 11, 2025. I wrote this after reading a pdf version of Carla Blank's A Jew in Ramallah and Other Essays sent to me by Robin Philpot, courtesy of Baraka Books.

Introduced by Carla Blank Interviewed by Ishmael Reed—a jazz improvisation—A Jew in Ramallah and Other Essays comprises twenty-three essays of variegated length that Carla Blank wrote over the last twenty years. Like her other books, the essays highlight "events and individuals who have been forgotten or widely neglected in most historical and critical accounts."

Covered topics include:

- Postmodernism
- Abstract Art
- America, the Beautiful,
- Pioneer Women Architects
- Carla Blank on Art & Inspiration
- Nell Painter, Sister Aimee, Anna Halprin (A Grande Dame of Dance)
- Broadway & Dollars and Cents
- Mildred Howard
- Finding Nature in a Built Environment
- Jew in Ramallah.

Not only has Carla Blank

written about her teaching experiences across America, co-authored textbooks to help teachers integrate arts into their basic curriculum—combining performing arts traditions from around the world across several disciplines—but she also has penned Rediscovering America, the Making of Multicultural America, 1900-2000. As a trained violinist, Carla has performed all over Europe and in Japan. She is also admired by veteran jazz musicians for her tone on The Hands of Grace CD and for all we know, Ishmael Reed's jazz album which features David Murray and Roger Glenn and is dedicated to those young men and women who enroll in the US army in order to sponsor their education.

When I hold A Jew in Ramallah and Other Essays against current events, I must admire Carla Blank's courage and the potency of her

book.

I am writing this paragraph on May 23, 2025. Yesterday, two Israeli Embassy employees in Washington, DC, were shot by a young man from Chicago, shouting to free Palestine. They were days away from being engaged. An executive order was signed to prevent Harvard University from recruiting international students, accusing it of tolerating antisemitism and allowing Palestinian and Arab students to protest on campus. While the OMS Secretary General is begging the Israeli government to feel sympathy for Gaza and to stop destroying health infrastructure, the UN Secretary General is calling on Israel to allow life-saving aid to reach Gaza and other areas. Thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, are on the brink of total starvation, as Israel has blocked international aid from entering Gaza. Realizing that Hamas, a terrorist organization or a freedom fighters for others, cannot be vanquished by guns, well-meaning Israelis inside Israel have been protesting against their government's continued bombings of Gaza, which hinders the release of hostages held by Hamas. During a meeting of European Union, the President of Slovenia noted that what has been happening in Gaza constituted a case of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Under pressure, the Israeli government has decided to allow one thousand trucks carrying food and humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, which is hardly enough.

I am Dr. Pierre Mvuyekure, Griot for The SoulTown Magazine and I want to wish Carla Blank for having SOUL! ☺



**Pierre-Damien
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Book cover to Carla Blank's novel.