



God, Doctor Buzzard, and the Bolito Man: A Saltwater Geechee Talks about Life on Sapelo Island

Christena Bledsoe, Cornelia Walker Bailey

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In this beautiful cultural memoir, Sapelo Island native Cornelia Walker Bailey tells the fascinating history of her remarkable and threatened Georgia homeland. Off the coast of Georgia, a small close-knit community of African Americans traces their lineage to enslaved West Africans. Living on a barrier island in almost total isolation, the people of Sapelo have been able to do what most others could not: They have preserved many of the folkways of their forebears in West Africa, believing in "signs and spirits and all kinds of magic."

Cornelia Walker Bailey, a direct descendant of Bilali, the most famous and powerful enslaved African to inhabit the island, is the keeper of cultural secrets and the sage of Sapelo. In words that are poetic and straight to the point, she tells the story of her Sapelo--including the Geechee belief in the equal power of God, "Dr. Buzzard" (voodoo), and the "Bolito Man" (luck).

But her tale is not without peril, for the old folkways are quickly slipping away. The elders are dying, the young must leave the island to go to school and to find work, and the community's ability to live on the land is in jeopardy. The State of Georgia owns nine-tenths of the land and the pressure on the inhabitants is ever-increasing.

Cornelia Walker Bailey is determined to save the community, but time will tell whether the people of Sapelo will be able to retain the land, and the treasured culture which their forebears bestowed upon them more than two hundred years ago.

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