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IL(LEGITIMATE) THIRD SPACES IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S THE DEW BREAKER

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Abstract: *Ethnic life narratives and works of fiction offer myriad ways for the exilic, diasporic writer and his or her characters to assert a form of identity and resist the homogenizing forces of dominant cultures. At times, the resistance displayed by diasporic individuals seems to reject a totalizing "American ethnicity," while simultaneously supporting the ideals on which the "American dream" is founded. As diasporic individuals seek to assert their individuality through their writing, the fragmented nature of their identities leads to the creation of narratives that are stylistically hybrid, experiment with chronology, and stretch the boundaries between genres. This in-betweenness mirrors the reality of individuals' lives in diaspora, where they are often found inhabiting "third spaces," both territorially and psychologically. Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* is a narrative of diaspora where the reader encounters Haitian immigrants attempting to straddle two cultures simultaneously. In the third space they inhabit, somewhere between Haiti and America, the characters are always walking the fine line between legitimacy and illegitimacy in the eyes of the "pure" Haitian community and the domineering gaze of "true" Americans. They live and work instead in an artificially constructed third space that allows for ease of movement, but which prevents the formation of a "grounded" or permanent identity. This feeling of being in constant flux between countries and emotions creates a permanent tension between an always encroaching, new identity in a foreign country and the nostalgia that engulfs memories of the homeland. Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* offers an unapologetic look into the political, social, and economic conditions that dictate a diasporic identity. The novel also complicates the idea that a "fixed" identity can ever truly exist, especially for diasporic individuals whose legitimacy is always questioned by the society in which they make their home away from home.*