

Title: Black in the Middle: An Anthology of the Black Midwest

Editors: Terrion L. Williamson

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Part of Series: No

When you read *Black in the Middle* you experience the profound joy and utter despair that the Black community has faced over many years. The novel features five sections: Home, Past, Love, Now, and Onward. Each section contains essays, poems, art, and photographs, showcasing different aspects of what it means to be Black in the middle region of the US. While there are some essays within the book focusing on negative aspects of life as a Black person in the Midwest, there is also an overwhelming number of stories about love and community, and about finding yourself in the midst of a seemingly dying town. *Black in the Middle* features a diverse collection of authors, all of whom have roots in the Midwest. In reading the book you will find stories from a photographer at an orgy (“Stay Debaucherous” by David Weathersby), a series of photographs featuring immigrants in Detroit (“Photographs” by Rachel Elise Thomas), and even a criticism of anti-black culture within well known universities (“The Reality of Being Black in Iowa” by Wylliam Smith). At times the book is difficult, showing the hard reality that many Black people face in a region that is often hailed for their “niceness.” But more frequently, the book revels in the community that has come together in the face of adversity. One story that sticks out features three Black women traveling at night through a well-known sundown town (a town that does not allow Black people to pass through unharmed after sundown). The narrator, a young girl at the time, reminisces about how the car breaks down and her mother and her aunt tell stories of their survival to pass the time. This particular narrative is heartbreaking and heartwarming, all at the same time, and is a good example of how the novel as a whole intertwines sorrow and celebration. It shows the strength of Black women in the face of adversity and tells of the hidden communities Black people have created in order to feel safe.

Despite the subject matter, this book does not issue a call for radical change, but instead for radical awareness. These stories seem aimed at demonstrating, simply, that Black people live in the Midwest and they’re not going anywhere. Readers walk away with increased appreciation for the Midwest as a place with many faces and even more stories, ones that often span centuries. *Black in the Middle* is a welcome breath of fresh air that nods to the true diversity lying within the middle of the country.

Reviewed by: Sarah Morrow.