

Bid Whist at Midnight

Marva Washington

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With its abundance of historical detail, *Bid Whist at Midnight* should be required reading for anyone studying the American civil rights movement. Marva Washington's first novel follows the story of four Southern African American women from their college days in the late 1960s well into their adulthood in the late 1980s. Her tale is relatable and realistic, and her character development is superb. It is the background information she provides, however, that renders this a "must read." Although the author stumbles often with the past-perfect tense and parallel structure, the problems don't diminish the novel's appeal.

Washington's story works on several different levels. As a fictional account of four friends and their college experiences, romances, and marriages, it offers characters whose foibles and heartaches feel incredibly familiar. Despite their divergent backgrounds, these women become close friends, sharing both the best and worst times of their lives. Washington shows great skill in bringing all four, and their families and friends, realistically to life.

Where *Bid Whist at Midnight* rises from a good story to an excellent one is in the exceptional detail that Washington weaves so flawlessly into her fictional account. Obscure incidents that took place during the 1960s civil rights movement serve as significant milestones in the characters' lives. Learning about such events can be chilling, and Washington deserves credit for shining a light on them.

Washington also provides cultural background about the African American community that may be revelatory to many readers. She offers an insider's perspective about racial issues that are not often openly discussed. "Tradition and history served to separate them," she comments about two of her main characters, who are great friends at college but remain out of contact during the summer months despite living close enough to be neighbors. When she writes candidly about African Americans who "pass" as white, perceived differences between the North and the South, reasons why so many African American men served in Vietnam, or why employing an African American woman counts twice in fulfilling hiring quotas, Washington simply states the facts, allowing her characters to respond to the various situations.

Bid Whist at Midnight offers far more than its title and drab cover suggest. Washington tells a good story, and she tells it very well. Romance, friendship, love, and family obligation—universal topics—serve as ongoing themes, but the real-world situations the characters encounter transcend the fiction. She neither preaches nor condemns but instead carefully instructs, admirably and competently sharing her own knowledge and experiences through her four main characters and their families and friends. The portrayals are insightful, and the impact is substantial. *Bid Whist at Midnight* is a book that needs to be shared.

CHERYL HIBBARD (February 12, 2013)

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