



Black, White, and Gray All Over: A Black Man's Odyssey In Life And Law Enforcement

Frederick Douglass Reynolds

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Black, White, and Gray All Over is a gritty, authentic memoir about what it's like to be a Black police officer in the US.

Frederick Douglass Reynolds's memoir *Black, White, and Gray All Over* recounts a life spent in law enforcement in the city of Compton, reflecting on the toll it took on him and his family.

This chronological tale follows Reynolds, a Black officer who grew up in Detroit, through his service in the marines and decision to become a police officer in one of the most dangerous cities in the country during the 1980s. He racked up many commendations before Compton's police department was dissolved into the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, following departmental and municipal corruption. His book is stark in detailing shootouts, robberies, gang turf wars, and anonymous death threats, all contributing to the trauma of the job. Later, he worked as a bodyguard for Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, and other Death Row Records artists.

Among other subjects, Reynolds recalls the blatant racism that he encountered before joining the force, including from police officers. He suggests that every police department has several Derek Chauvins, but also insists that most officers have honorable intentions. He recounts conversations with others—many laced with profanities—that recreate the culture and camaraderie of police departments well, down to their coarse banter, shop talk, and teasing.

But in addition to the realistic liveliness of these everyday scenes, Reynolds fleshes out his style with quotes from Franz Kafka, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Louis Stevenson. His images are strong: he writes about “my heart tap-dancing in construction boots” and cops who are “the type of cop disappearing like snow leopards.” A mayor is recalled to have resembled a movie mortician who “carried himself with an air of superiority like a casket on his shoulder.” Such cultural references are frequent and make the book more accessible.

The book builds toward a contemplative ending in which Reynolds reflects on the city officials he worked among, as well as on the corruption in department and city governments. Still, it honors fellow officers who gave their lives to the work, and its conclusion is heartfelt. This helps to make *Black, White, and Gray All Over* a gritty but authentic memoir about what it's like to be a Black police officer in the US, as well as about the scars that such work leaves.

JOSEPH S. PETE (March 23, 2022)

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