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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ MYSTERY

Black, White, and RED All Over: A Gritty, Current, Clean Christian Mystery

Deeann D. Mathews
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In the Christian novel Black, White, and RED All Over*, a small Southern town's history of racism is exposed and troubled through.*

In Deeann D. Mathews's Christian novel *Black, White, and RED All Over*, racist law enforcement officers and faith complicate life in the American South.

Captain Hamilton is the new police commissioner of Tinyville, Virginia, where the recent Freedom of Information Act allows a Black-owned press, the *Lofton County Free Voice*, to demand files from police stations across the region. The paper investigates cases from the past decade in order to reveal unfair, racialized sentencings. Most of Hamilton's colleagues are resistant to the request; they look for loopholes, hoping to escape prosecution and to camouflage their bigotry. However, Hamilton and his deputy cousin, Captain Lee, have more difficulty when it comes to justifying their beliefs and actions; they worry under the watchful eye of God.

When they're alone or away from the office, Hamilton and Lee discuss Christian beliefs and the teachings of Jesus, musing how these relate to their work as policemen and their investigation into the requested files. After an initial discussion with the other police officers who wish to hide their legalized transgressions, Hamilton invites Lee back to his family home. As a former member of the United States military, Lee contends with PTSD and worries he is imposing, but Hamilton recites Christian teachings to exemplify hospitality. Touching scenes of family care and genuine generosity follow. Later, Lee (known as the Angel of Death during his military service) struggles with his moral compass and worries about causing harm in passing; at one point, he even moves to shoot a member of the media.

However, in trading between its domestic scenes, its discussions of Christian teachings, and its police investigation, the novel falters. It is also impeded by its heavy-handed messaging around its Christian cast's struggles to determine who God's word justifies. There are similar treatments of the issue of racism when the centered employees of the *Lofton County Free Voice*, Turner and Varick, form a give-and-take relationship with Hamilton and Lee once the police hand over the requested files. Turner's angered reaction to Hamilton's suggestions to work together emphasizes how Black communities have been harmed via false promises of justice in the past; knowledgeable but overt analyses of racist systems follow. The book's treatments of other contemporary issues, including fake news and the digital dissemination of information, are comparatively brief. The novel often seems most concerned with giving its cast an opportunity to relay their Christian values; their long discussions are a distraction from the central investigation. Still, the novel is poignant in addressing complicated questions of police missteps, despite its general lack of urgency.

In the Christian novel *Black, White, and RED All Over*, a small Southern town's history of racism is exposed and religious idealists muse through the past.

ALEENA ORTIZ (November 16, 2022)

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