

## Brothers: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Race

**Nico Slate**

Temple University Press (May 12, 2023)

Softcover \$30.00 (246pp)

978-1-4399-2382-5

Nico Slate's memoir *Brothers* circles the question of race's meaningfulness and meaninglessness as a social construct as seen through the relationship of two siblings: one Black and one white.

*Brothers* is a *memento mori* for Slate's older brother Peter, a prolific scriptwriter and DJ also known as XL the 11. A biracial Black man raised by a white single mother, Peter also helped raise his white younger brother. In a family where Peter was not only foundational but adored, their "love defied the color line but did not erase it" from affecting Peter's life. While the immediate family tried to bridge the irrelevance of race with celebrating the diversity of color, outside the family Peter was a Black person when everyone else was white.

The memoir wrestles with the invisible difficulties of racism in the United States. Though Slate admits he cannot "name a wound [he] will never know," in order to examine their family history with a historian's eye, he acknowledges not only his brother's Blackness but his own whiteness and the experiential gulf that simple difference opened between them. Exploring this difference fills the memoir with narrative cul-de-sacs that interlace family dynamics, racism, a seven-year age gap, the hypocrisy of West Coast liberal culture, and class privilege.

In Slate's examination of life with his brother, he attempts to trace the influence of race on Peter's life trajectory while allowing his personhood to be broader than this one aspect. The results toe the line between fruitful and fruitless, illustrating the fundamental entanglement of race, especially Blackness, on a life.

A gentle elegy, *Brothers* also goes beyond grief and childhood memories to comment on culture's intimate ramifications while resurrecting the complexity of Peter as a person: creative, dreamer, brother, father figure, and Black man.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May / June 2023)

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