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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ CULTURE

Chicken Soup for the African American Soul: Celebrating and Sharing Our Culture One Story at a Time

Jack Canfield Mark Victor Hansen Lisa Nichols
Health Communications (May 18, 2004)
Unknown $14.95 (384pp)
978-1-62361-014-2

A fourteen-year-old from inner-city Chicago becomes a millionaire. The murder of a child inspires her mother to renounce drugs and become an inspirational speaker. An old lady's gift of one dollar reminds a college student not to take her middle-class privileges for granted.

Each vignette in this gem of an anthology is like the sparks trailing from the tail of a phoenix as it rises reborn above a horizon of fear, doubt, and despair. The contributors come from all walks of life and will inspire readers with their perseverance and fortitude in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

Two of the three editors, Canfield and Hansen, are nationally known for the *Chicken Soup* series; the third, Nichols, is a personal empowerment advocate who has won acclaim for her work with teens, improving the world through education. She is also the author of two essays and a poem in this collection.

Many celebrities join the lesser-known writers in these pages, both as essayists and in the epigraphs that introduce each piece. Sojourner Truth, Malcolm X, Colin Powell, Earvin "Magic" Johnson, and many others contribute to the reader's sense of entering a community in which past failures matter less than present success and the acknowledgment of the hard work it takes to make it against the odds.

Oprah Winfrey ensured the success of one struggling writer's debut novel by choosing it for her Book Club. A chance encounter with Maya Angelou in line at a grocery store restored the flagging spirits of a poet. Rich and poor, famous and unknown, the people in these stories show us how a community can become a "village."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes about how prayer restored his faith during his early days as a civil rights leader. In story after story, the themes of faith, hope, charity, and hard work ring clear, teaching readers that failure is an opportunity that often leads to a better, more meaningful path than the one they thought they wanted in the first place.

One wishes the name of each writer appeared at the beginning of his or her story, rather than at the end. It would save readers the aggravation of constantly flipping pages to see the author's name.

With over seventy-five individual selections, this book encourages browsing. Open to any page, and the story is there: "I succeeded." A much-needed remedy to the defeat and despair that make up much of the news coverage of African Americans, here is a collection that will inspire, awe, and yes, soothe those in need of comfort food for the soul. (January)

Elizabeth Breau
ELIZABETH BREAU (August 18, 2009)

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