



College Freshman 101

Brenda Faye Collie

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Disillusionment and discouragement threaten to derail a young woman's aspirations in her first year of college in this revealing look at the reality of postsecondary school. In Brenda Faye Collie's *College Freshman 101*, an African-American student on a predominantly white campus feels marginalized and forced to immerse herself in the work of professors extolling the virtues of literary greats far removed from twenty-first-century concerns.

An emerging feminist intent on making her own mark in the competitive writing profession, eighteen-year-old Loresha Evans refuses to accept the financial and social barriers that confront her. She joins a literate group determined to launch an African-American literary journal, then finds herself confounded by resistance, even cynicism, when she presents the idea to those in positions of authority. A gifted poet, she believes they cannot relate to the experiences unique to her world as an aspiring black writer. Determination alone will not bring her happiness or satisfaction. She needs the support of her classmates and the inspiration of a boyfriend who is in graduate school.

Written in the first person with a confidential tone, this story portrays Loresha as a well-rounded heroine. In-depth personality development discloses positive and negative thought patterns, as well as down-to-earth traits that strike a chord of universality. Supporting characters convey a similar verisimilitude. The book's most outstanding quality is the lifelike narrative—a natural, conversational style that maintains high literary standards. All too many writers sacrifice editorial rules for the sake of realism, which is a temptation that Collie has not succumbed to in her work. Here, for example, she describes an attention-grabbing professor so vividly that the depiction is as mesmerizing as a photograph:

"She looked every year of her age, but dressed in that African outfit she looked regal. The lines in her face were well earned like lines of honor. Her white hair strands that peeked from her head dress added to her crown. The few brown spots and lines in her eyeballs had strained over books of great knowledge. I could see the contact lenses hugging her dark brown pupils giving assistance for her eyes although fifty-eight years old thirsted for more words."

One incongruous element is the cover—a simple picture of a student standing next to a bookshelf and holding an open text. The plot is serious and intellectual, not a casual excursion onto a college campus for social purposes, so the informal snapshot misleads.

A native of Harlem, Brenda Faye Collie is an award-winning playwright with an MFA from the University of Iowa. *College Freshman 101* is her second novel. An excellent choice for classroom discussion, this young-adult fiction touches upon sensitive issues regarding race and gender.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 3, 2014)

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