

Sacred Ground: The Chicago Streets of Timuel Black

Timuel D. Black Jr.

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Susan Klonsky, Contributor

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A century of American race relations is seen in *Sacred Ground*, civil rights activist and historian Timuel D. Black Jr.'s story as it was related to, and recorded by, Susan Klonsky.

Black was born in 1918 in Alabama. His family soon moved to Chicago as part of the Great Migration. He lived through the Great Depression, fought in World War II, agitated for racial equality, and worked through the decades of the civil rights movement's aftermath. His historian's firsthand long view of the changes in the black American experience is keen.

The most intriguing parts of the memoir draw upon the shifts in how Black was treated as a black man in America over time. He contrasts the omnipresent casual racism of his youth with the more politically correct climate of today, in which prejudice still exists but hides behind a more polite mask. He also tackles subjects that have received little exposure in historical discussion, such as the disproportionate number of black American soldiers who were falsely accused of rape by European locals during WWII.

Still, Black's story was filtered through a second party, and that seems to have diminished his voice. The book relates events in a matter-of-fact tone, with only spotty use of illuminating details or emotional input. It often relates well-known information without a distinctive point of view. Rambling tangents about the many people Black has met become unwieldy.

Timuel Black's life has been long and fascinating, if *Sacred Ground* befits his incredible tale only in fits and spurts.

DANIEL SCHINDEL (January/February 2019)

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