

## Sacrifices

**Eric Williams**

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*In the novel Sacrifices, two lovers navigate complications of race, class, and sexual discrimination.*

A young couple faces the uncertainty and convulsion of the United States justice system in Eric Williams's *Sacrifices*, a dramatic novel full love, loss, and sexuality.

Brock is a Black man who lives in New Orleans with his Latina girlfriend, Gabrielle, whose voluptuousness garners unwanted attention from other men in their neighborhood. They lead a simple life; Brock works a low-wage job to support them both. When he is arrested and accused of shooting someone in possession of drugs, the young couple learns to navigate the messy, unjust court system of the United States. Testing the limits of their bond, their legal challenges feed into fears about their interpersonal relationships and the intersectionality of their identities.

The text concentrates on characters' physical desirability, and their vulnerability to situationality, as well as on circumstances in New Orleans. Because of antagonistic inmates and unsympathetic landlords, Brock and Gabrielle face discrimination and hardship at every turn. While he's in prison, Brock worries about Gabrielle's safety; he has frequent nightmares about her being coerced into sex or getting kicked out by their landlord. Gabrielle's sister pressures her to use her looks to gain favors, and the potential conflict over Gabrielle's faithfulness to Brock carries much of the book's tension.

Awareness about race, class, and sex divisions is conveyed via Brock's fears about losing Gabrielle, and through variations in people's speech patterns. Brock and Gabrielle are punished for traversing class and racial lines: when Gabrielle adjusts her speech patterns to get on the good side of the district attorney in charge of Brock's case, she becomes the target of his harassment. But the execution of these elements is slow and unfocused, serving as mere setup for Brock's anxiety over losing Gabrielle in most instances.

While Brock is in prison, Gabrielle is forced to get a job to make rent; she deals with her boss making sexual advances on her. She gains enough confidence to use her sexuality against men to get the money that she needs, but this development occurs quite late in the novel. For most of the book, Gabrielle flounders to be an active participant in her own story; it is not until she becomes the central actor in the investigation to prove Brock's innocence that she becomes more prominent, but that transition is awkward. In addition, the narrative's intersectional issues are panned out for too long, and then are rushed through at the novel's end.

In the heady novel *Sacrifices*, two lovers search for justice, and pine for romantic commitment, while navigating complications of race, class, and sexual discrimination.

ALEENA ORTIZ (June 17, 2021)

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