



Some of Us Are Very Hungry Now

Andre Perry

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An interrogation of language, pop culture, society, and the self, Andre Perry's essay collection *Some of Us Are Very Hungry Now* dissects uncomfortable truths and universalities. Utilizing prose, film excerpts, and fanciful talk-show interactions, Perry paints a broad-strokes portrait of coming of age as a black artist, searching for identity and belonging in often hostile environments.

A musician and writer, Perry followed his dream to the streets of San Francisco. But even among fellow artists in the touted liberal mecca, he found himself othered, his blackness both lusted after and loathed while his personhood went unacknowledged. Tearing down the myth of supposed liberal safe havens, Perry probes at white consumption of rap music, depictions of black men in film and pornography, and the everpresent slur he calls "the invisible noun: it just needs to be insinuated."

The contradictory nature of navigating diaspora is drawn in sharp relief as Perry struggles to balance embracing and challenging expectations and stereotypes. Upon moving to the Midwest, the plight of tokenism is confronted when Perry finds himself one of the few people of color at the University of Iowa, yet sees diverse photo-ops staged on university grounds. When invited to speak at a writers' conference on a "Writing the Midwest" panel, Perry wonders if he is expected to talk about being a black writer in the Midwest. "There's nothing worse than a room full of white people asking me to acknowledge my blackness. They are really just asking me to acknowledge their own expectations of my blackness," Perry writes, his blunt observations both refreshing and discomfiting.

While blistering cultural critique is a prominent force within the essays, there are also tender moments. The title essay details the heartbreak of ending a relationship that, once passionate and hopeful, has met a point of no return that neither party wishes to acknowledge. The closing "Heart" section is comprised of letters to an unknown Emma, their language pulsing with affection and soul-deep understanding.

With his frank, empathetic tone and no-nonsense prose, Andre Perry is a fresh American voice that demands to be heard.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (November / December 2019)

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