



The Beast Side: Living (and Dying) While Black in America

D. Watkins

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The Beast Side harnesses narrative and personal voice to uproot America's bloody culture of racism.

The Beast Side: Living (and Dying) While Black in America, by D. Watkins, is a personal, as well as historical and sociological look at America's deep and deadly racism.

Watkins shares an unvarnished look at what it's like to fight for the same rights that many people are given without question. His reflections are divided into two sections: side one contains his reflections on his younger years and the nuances of the problems that have been plaguing communities of color for generations (including police brutality, neighborhood violence, and poor eating habits); side two is focused on the present crises, particularly in Baltimore, with the killing of Freddie Gray. It's hard for a book to be more timely and yet more timeless. Violence against people of color is happening every day, and yet, racism and oppression are older than America and woven into the fiber of the nation.

As a writing professor, Watkins knows that the most powerful means for any person to tell his story is by way of his own voice. And so he uses his to the full to tell his story, as he should—on his own terms. His one human voice flies in the face of the dehumanization of racism. His voice is intelligent and righteously irate, eschewing squeaky-clean diction in favor of fervor, and always eloquent and honest. He doesn't care what people think of him; he wants white America to see the truth.

The problems Watkins examines are overwhelming, and there are so many failed solutions (Watkins cites Christian rhetoric and increased police presence, among others, in this category). But the high stakes demand a solution. For Watkins, the solution begins with education and literacy; learning what life is like for black men can change white perspectives, and literacy gives hope in communities where there is little.

Those whose lives are similar to his will find an advocate, a rallying cry. Those whose experience is different will hear what it's really like: a raw, honest glimpse into a reality that many deny—and that's a true gift.

MELISSA WUSKE (Winter 2016)

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