

The Life and Times of Louis Lomax: The Art of Deliberate Disunity

Thomas Aiello

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Thomas Aiello's *The Life and Times of Louis Lomax* is an incisive, engaging study of the out-of-the-box life and outspoken journalism of a man whose character and precedent-setting work mirrored the turbulence and dramatic change of 1960s America.

The book follows Lomax's rise from a Depression-era childhood in Georgia, with its national reputation for white supremacist violence, to become one of the twentieth century's most important Black journalists. Early exposure to the horrors and indignities of racism taught the Valdosta Baptist preacher's grandson that cunning and guile could keep him alive and be used as weapons against racists. Quick to see both the faults and strengths in an argument, Lomax was able to pivot, and even dissemble when necessary, to gain his ends. And while he favored non-violence, he made an exception for dealing with American white men, calling them "a racist, violent people...who only understand violence."

A staunch ally of both Malcolm X and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Lomax defied categorization. The book's lively and often disturbing narrative reveals that the pioneering journalist and syndicated radio and television host was also a convicted criminal and a serial liar with a record of domestic abuse, four divorces, and two DUI arrests. He was a study in contradictions, and not above embellishing a story, especially if doing so put him in the spotlight.

Mystery surrounds Lomax's death in a car crash on July 31, 1970, at the age of forty-seven. A prominent psychic suggested foul play. Even in death, Lomax was an enigma.

Aiello's detailed, intense book honors Louis Lomax's contributions to Black journalism, to the civil rights movement, and to the ideal of a democracy that practices "the art of deliberate disunity," listening to, and valuing, a diversity of opinions.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2021)

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