

The Lucky Ones

Linda Williams Jackson

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In Linda Williams Jackson's historical novel *The Lucky Ones*, a boy who's living in poverty finds strength and a way forward through education.

In 1968, Senator Robert Kennedy sets out on his Southern Poverty Tour, seeking to reveal to US citizens the dire living conditions experienced by their neighbors. He encounters people like eleven-year-old Ellis, who lives in the Mississippi Delta with his mother, eight siblings, and young niece. They share a three-room house without electricity or plumbing, where the icebox is often empty.

Even as Ellis's brothers and mother search for work, for which they are often paid half of what a white person receives, Ellis dreams of becoming a lawyer. Each week, his teacher picks him, his sister, and other students up, driving them to school. There, Ellis eats home-cooked meals and learns about luminaries like Thurgood Marshall and Marian Wright Edelman. He's sent home with books that he shares with his siblings; one, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, is the story of another poor boy—one who's sympathetic to Ellis as he tries to divide two mooncakes eleven ways to stretch out their sweetness.

Ellis is introduced to historical milestones in the classroom, including the Fair Housing Act; these help him to better understand the systemic racism that his family faces. Throughout, the relationships between Ellis and his family, friends, and teacher are tender and close; they share their fears about living in a South that's integrated in name only. With his mentor and his classmates, Ellis manages to meet Bobby Kennedy and create real change for his family, in spite of the many obstacles they face.

An inspiring story about a tight-knit family, *The Lucky Ones* makes real the people who lived, worked, and grew up in the Mississippi Delta amid the tumult of the 1960s.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (March / April 2022)

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