

White Space: Essays on Culture, Race, & Writing

Jennifer De Leon

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Structured around a life-changing trip to Guatemala, Jennifer De Leon's *White Space* is a lively collection of personal essays about becoming a writer and growing up the child of immigrants.

When she was a teenager, De Leon's father left her family to drive toward his home country, Guatemala, making it as far as Washington D.C. before turning around. *White Space* is divided into three sections: before, during, and after De Leon's own Guatemala trip, taken in her twenties to discover the country that almost lured her father away.

De Leon unifies the collection with frequent references to her Guatemala trip. At the same time, she covers a variety of subjects, including complicated family dynamics, body image, feeling out of place at an elite New England college, struggling to find footing as a writer, and the challenges of international travel.

The title unifies the book as a powerful metaphor that captures the intersection of race and writing. Many of the essays describe De Leon's struggles as a woman of color working in a field—creative writing—that is dominated by white people. The book is, in part, a journey toward claiming her right to take up space, whether it be space on a page, in the classroom, or on the street as a world traveler.

The essays are engaging, funny, and thoughtful, written with an appealing ease and directness. Whether describing climbing a mountain in Guatemala, disobeying her father, or taking her first creative writing class, De Leon writes with honesty and warmth. Members of her family become memorable characters, particularly her mother and father, as De Leon describes their strengths and flaws with vibrant details.

Jennifer De Leon's *White Space* is an entertaining, thought-provoking personal essay collection that explores race and writing with humor and wisdom.

REBECCA HUSSEY (March / April 2021)

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