

Why Didn't We Riot? A Black Man in Trumpland

Issac J. Bailey

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The essays of Issac J. Bailey's *Why Didn't We Riot?* are incisive as they confront the realities of systemic racism in America and in the age of Donald Trump.

Bailey begins his book by discussing blind spots—in particular, those of white Americans, who “have never known what life can be like for a black person who has to navigate a region in which the blood of their enslaved ancestors still fertilizes the soil.” A conversation with John Kasich, considered a moderate, punctuates this: Kasich doesn't believe, until Bailey proffers the facts, that life has actually gotten worse for people of color under the forty-fifth president. But it has, and Bailey's essays are the logical acid that eats away at the lies that white America tells itself about race.

The book is replete with reminders of established inequalities. It reveals racism in the justice system with an essay about a wrongly convicted man whose trial reflects the degree to which judges, juries, prosecutors, and sentencing guidelines work against Black Americans. It exposes the microaggressions that Bailey has been subject to, including suggestions that his successes are proof against systemic issues.

A late essay dismantles the lie of people voting for Trump for economic reasons, juxtaposing President Obama's economic successes with the predictable failings of his successor. Another essay tackles the persistent imperviousness of white Christian churches to antiracist work, with revealing discussions of how even ostensibly fair-minded religious people shut down when they become uncomfortable. Well-meaning white people are a recurrent presence; they are consistent in impeding progress.

The title question hangs over the book's deliberate accounting of Black marginalization, unanswerable if logic is applied. By the book's end, a “communal scream” is called for, rendering Issac J. Bailey's essays essential reading.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

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