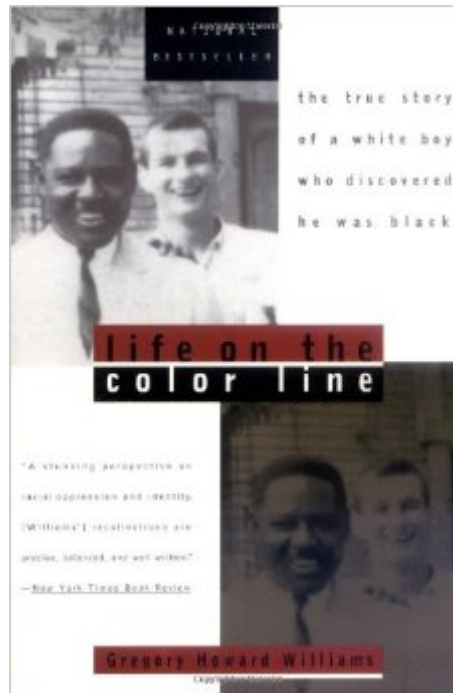


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Life On The Color Line: The True Story Of A White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black



Synopsis

Winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize — a triumph of storytelling as well as a triumph of spirit. —Alex Kotlowitz, award-winning author of *There Are No Children Here* As a child in 1950s segregated Virginia, Gregory Howard Williams grew up believing he was white. But when the family business failed and his parents' marriage fell apart, Williams discovered that his dark-skinned father, who had been passing as Italian-American, was half black. The family split up, and Greg, his younger brother, and their father moved to Muncie, Indiana, where the young boys learned the truth about their heritage. Overnight, Greg Williams became black. In this extraordinary and powerful memoir, Williams recounts his remarkable journey along the color line and illuminates the contrasts between the black and white worlds: one of privilege, opportunity and comfort, the other of deprivation, repression, and struggle. He tells of the hostility and prejudice he encountered all too often, from both blacks and whites, and the surprising moments of encouragement and acceptance he found from each. *Life on the Color Line* is a uniquely important book. It is a wonderfully inspiring testament of purpose, perseverance, and human triumph. —Heartbreaking and uplifting | a searing book about race and prejudice in America | brims with insights that only someone who has lived on both sides of the racial divide could gain. —Cleveland Plain Dealer

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Customer Reviews

This is an intriguing memoir that allows the reader to see what life was like for the author whose early life was defined by issues of race and color. The author had spent his early years in Virginia,

where his white mother and his dark-skinned "Italian" father operated a roadside tavern. Growing up in the South, where issues of race and color were so important, the author had always thought that he was white, as he had been raised as such. When his parents' business, as well as their marriage, collapsed, his mother left them, forcing his father to return home to his roots in Muncie, Indiana. Abandoned by their mother, it was there that the author and his younger brother, Mike, were to discover which side of the then great color divide he and his brother were on. The lesson would be a difficult one. In Muncie, Indiana, they were to discover that their father, rather than being Italian, was bi-racial, born of the union of a Black woman and a White father. In those times, however, you were considered to be either White or Black. So in Indiana, he was Black, even though, ironically, in the South he had passed for White. Now, his children, Greg and Mike, were to learn that, notwithstanding their appearance, they were considered to be Black, and forced to live in a segregated world on the wrong side of the race and color divide. They quickly learned what it was to be considered second class citizens. This was the nineteen fifties, during the heyday of the Klu Klux Klan, and well before the Civil Rights Movement had taken hold, so feelings ran very high on issues of race and color. Looking as if they were White but considered to be Black, the boys found themselves in a limbo of sorts, rejected by both Whites and Blacks.

Very few people in America could have imagined a life like Greg Williams had. His life and experiences were so unique that there couldn't have been a more appropriate title than "Life on the Color Line." The blatant racism he encounters all through his childhood and teenage years while trying to just grow-up and be a normal kid is something that American should be ashamed of when remembering this time in our history. Anyone that thinks racism wasn't THAT bad back then should read this book, reading about his perspective should definitely change their mind. Greg started growing up as a young white boy in Virginia. His life was pretty normal for him and his "white" family at that time. His father successfully passed as white, even though he had black blood running through his veins. He had a couple of successful business ventures, the most notable of which was a booming cafe/diner, which of course adhered to the laws of segregation. Greg's mother was white in the true sense of the term, and she seemed to care for her children deeply as any mother should. Everything was perfect for Greg and his family until misfortune hits and the veil is pulled off the charade of his father's false life. In a poetic justice type of moment the father's life in Virginia is devastated and shaken literally back to his roots. It looks initially like Greg and his brother Mike will stay with their mother in Virginia, but they have to tag along with their father back to Indiana where all 3 of their lives are changed forever. Back in Muncie, Indiana, the book almost splits into 3

separate interesting stories: Greg's life, his brother Mike's life, and the father's. Their struggles bring a new meaning to tough times.

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