



Creating Black Americans: African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present

Nell Irvin Painter

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Here is a magnificent account of a past rich in beauty and creativity, but also in tragedy and trauma. Eminent historian Nell Irvin Painter blends a vivid narrative based on the latest research with a wonderful array of artwork by African American artists, works which add a new depth to our understanding of black history. Painter offers a history written for a new generation of African Americans, stretching from life in Africa before slavery to today's hip-hop culture. The book describes the staggering number of Africans--over ten million--forcibly transported to the New World, most doomed to brutal servitude in Brazil and the Caribbean. Painter looks at the free black population, numbering close to half a million by 1860 (compared to almost four million slaves), and provides a gripping account of the horrible conditions of slavery itself. The book examines the Civil War, revealing that it only slowly became a war to end slavery, and shows how Reconstruction, after a promising start, was shut down by terrorism by white supremacists. Painter traces how through the long Jim Crow decades, blacks succeeded against enormous odds, creating schools and businesses and laying the foundations of our popular culture. We read about the glorious outburst of artistic creativity of the Harlem Renaissance, the courageous struggles for Civil Rights in the 1960s, the rise and fall of Black Power, the modern hip-hop movement, and two black Secretaries of State. Painter concludes that African Americans today are wealthier and better educated, but the disadvantaged are as vulnerable as ever. Painter deeply enriches her narrative with a series of striking works of art--more than 150 in total, most in full color--works that profoundly engage with black history and that add a vital dimension to the story, a new form of witness that testifies to the passion and creativity of the African-American experience.

* Among the dozens of artists featured are Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Beauford Delaney, Jacob Lawrence, and Kara Walker

* Filled with sharp portraits of important African Americans, from Olaudah Equiano (one of the first African slaves to leave a record of his captivity) and Toussaint L'Ouverture (who led the Haitian revolution), to Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

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