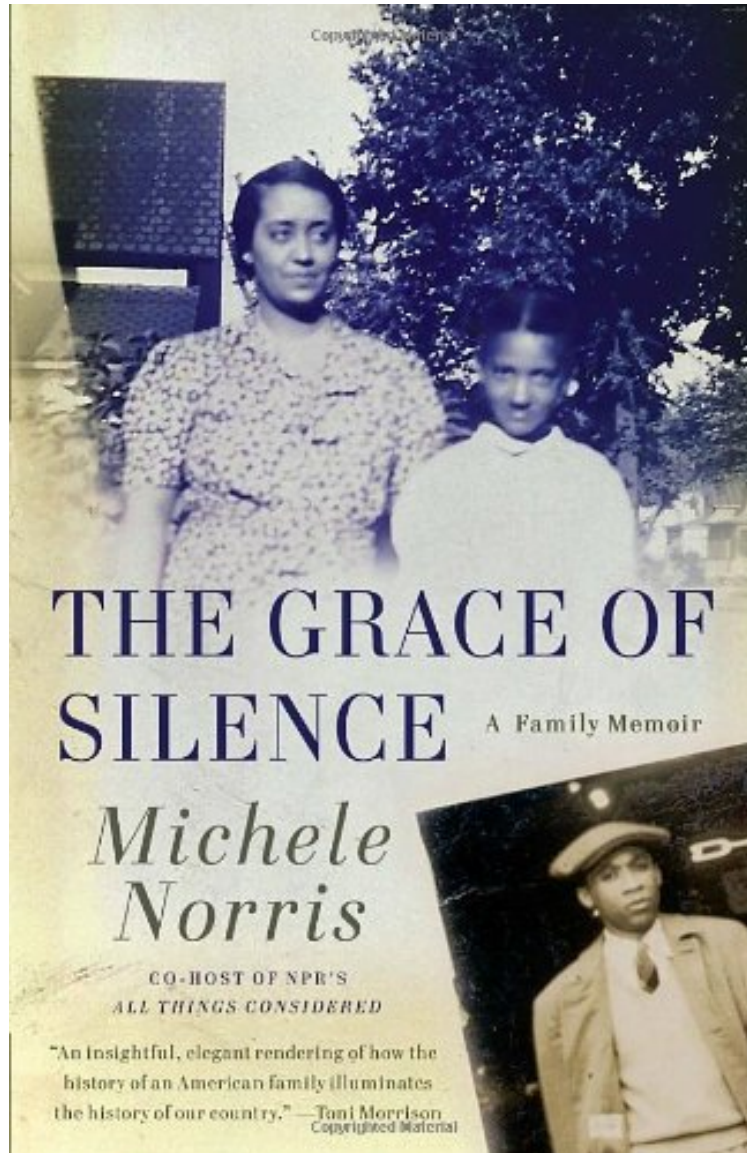


[PDF] The Grace of Silence: A Family Memoir

The Grace of Silence: A Family Memoir

Michele Norris

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#73957 in Books Michele Norris 2011-09-06 2011-09-06 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .75 x 5.201, .54 #File Name: 0307475271240 pages The Grace of Silence A Family Memoir | File size: 60.Mb

Michele Norris : The Grace of Silence: A Family Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Grace of Silence: A Family Memoir:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the best books I've read - a book that everyone in the U.S. should read! By Laura's Reviews The Grace of Silence is a moving family memoir about one woman's journey as she digs into her family's past and discovers much more than she had ever imagined. After Barack Obama's historic win of the presidential nomination in 2008, NPR correspondent Michele Norris decided to take a deeper look into her

African American family to see how they ended up where they are today. Once Norris started looking into it, she found her family had many secrets in their past and that maybe the best thing they had done to move the family forward was to have a “grace of silence.” This book was chosen as the fall Diversity Book Club choice for this fall at the college I work at. I vastly enjoyed reading it and talking about it at our book club meetings. I’m hoping the club continues this spring with another book. I was only able to make two out of the four book club meetings, but it was great thought provoking discussion. This was a great book – and definitely in the top books I read in 2016. This book had MANY great quotes and points of discussion. Here are just a few: “After spending a lifetime trying to be a model minority – one of the few black men in his neighborhood, at his workplace, or on his daughters’ school committees – my father now sat facing the condemnation of two blond scolds. They had apparently concluded that he was an early morning lush instead of a grey-haired man fighting a losing battle with a devastating disease. Here is the conundrum of racism. You know it’s there, but you can’t prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, how it colors a particular situation. Those pink satin ladies were strangers to me, so I have no idea if they would have been as quick to judge a gray-haired white man with impaired speech. However, I do know this: The fact that they were white women added mightily to my father’s humiliation.” This passage generated a lot of conversation. What is a model minority? I had never heard the term before, but we discussed how a minority, especially living in a community where they are not with other minorities, will feel the need to overcompensate and show that they are a great person and don’t fall into your preconceived notions of race. In this situation, Norris was helping her father who was very sick with cancer get onto an airplane and he wasn’t doing well. She wondered how race colored the reactions of the white ladies in the airport. Along these lines was another great quote: “Even then I knew the answer. Blacks often feel the dispiriting burden of being perceived willy-nilly as representing an entire race. The idea made my head hurt and it still does if I dwell on it too much. To this day I have to tamp down anxiety when I step on a stage or into a studio. The notion that I can lift up others through stellar work or stall their progress by falling short has been drummed into me since childhood.” Michele Norris discovered her grandmother was an “Aunt Jemima.” She dressed up as the maple syrup and pancake character Aunt Jemima and traveled around the Midwest making and selling pancakes. While some family members were proud of her as she was a “star” others were ashamed as she was representing a caricature. I love this quote. “I respect Grandma Ione for having taken a job, despite being haunted by stigma, and having used it to lift her family up. We judge Aunt Jemima and ourselves by what we see reflected in the mirror in her history.” Norris does a great job of explaining that history in this chapter. “Mom and Dad were obsessive about looking clean and stylish and sophisticated because they lived in a society that perpetuated the notion that black people, in the main, were none of these things.” Her parents were “blockbusters” and were the first black family to move into a white neighborhood in Minneapolis. They overcompensated by always appearing stylish when outside and being the first family to have their snow shoveled. Norris’s father was originally from Birmingham Alabama. Through her research, she discovered he had a past that was very much unlike the rather she knew growing up, something he had never discussed. He had been shot by a police officer just after the end of WWII. “In the mid-1940’s, Birmingham, Alabama, was a place where even the best-dressed black man might have to step off the sidewalk if a white person – regardless of class – was heading in his direction.” Norris discovered that prejudice ran both ways in Birmingham in the current climate. She talked to a relative who said, “I don’t talk about this, and I barely know why I’m talking about this now. I am not a prejudiced person, but I do not trust American white people. When you have seen people treated that way and hurt and the shooting and the bombing and the constant disrespect, it bothers me. It really bothers me to this day.” These thoughts actually went through the family and even the grandkids “hate white people.” Norris then says “Many people of color wanted to move the country forward, wanted to convince white people, by moral suasion, no longer to hate and subjugate black American, while the themselves secretly clung to festering, old grudges, the better to foster communal solidarity.” I thought this entire passage was very relevant for today: “Race is often seen as a black issue in America. When any institution puts together a panel or symposium or committee on race or diversity, you can be sure that it will focus on reaching out to, hearing from, or being more inclusive of people of color. Reluctance among whites to talk about race and discomfort when doing so are usually seen as the chief obstacles to progress.” Less explored is the legacy of distrust black parents pass on to their children. Many of us are advised by our elders to beware of whites. Race is the black boy who has not been told to be on guard in all encounters with white police officers. This advice comes in many forms. Sometimes it’s subtle. Sometimes severe. Sometimes it’s subtle.” A section of the book tells the horrific story of the blinding of an African American veteran after his return from WWII. He suffered from the same problem that Norris’s father did, returning after fighting a war to discover that extreme prejudice that still existed in our country. As Orson Welles stated, “What does it cost to be a Negro? In Aiken, South Carolina, it cost a man his eyes.” “Eric Holder, soon to become the attorney general, told me that all day he harbored thoughts of his father, an immigrant from Barbados who fiercely loved the United States and fought in the war but who, on his way home, had to stand for hours on end during his train ride, while German prisoners of war, all white men, sat comfortably in cushioned seats.” The Grace of Silence is an important book that takes a very thoughtful look into life as an African American in the United States today and the history behind it. Many, many topics we discussed that happened in the 1940’s we realized are not too different sadly than current days. I feel like I can’t adequately describe this book, but it

was one of the best books I read in 2016 and is a book that everyone in the United States should read. Book Source: Purchased from .com 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Poignant story by NPR Host/ Reporter By Carolyn Wilhelm The book encourages people to really learn more about their family histories. I grew up near where the author did and was familiar with the settings. My family went to Arkansas though, not Alabama. I went to the same high school she attended, although years before she did. She wrote: "The civil rights icon Julian Bond has said that the protest for equal rights by black World War II veterans and the blinding of Isaac Woodard marked the beginning of the modern-day civil rights movement." Civil rights are discussed but in a deeply personal way to the author, mostly through what she learned about her father and the ill treatment given to him and other African American veterans after WW2. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Race Intimacy: How Well Do You Know Your Family? By Baseball Fan Nowadays it is fairly common to read/hear/see in the media a call for a national dialogue on race. In her memoir titled, "The Grace of Silence", while acknowledging that race relations in America have improved immeasurably since the mid-sixties, Michele Norris postulates the need for such a 'national conversation' so as to enable America to continue to move forward as a great nation. In fact, Norris points out that this "hidden conversation" on race is already unfolding nationwide. However, Norris infers that in order to ensure that such a 'national dialogue' will be meaningful and authentic, it would behoove each individual (regardless of race or ethnicity) to examine his/her own attitudes about race. Norris hypothesizes that a person's attitudes about race have been shaped, in part, by his/her forebears' life experiences/feelings, many of which have never been shared with family members. In an effort to better understand her own attitudes about race, Norris embarks on a mission to uncover her own 'family secrets'. [Michele Norris is the host of "All Things Considered", a popular news program on National Public Radio (NPR); she happens to be African American]. During one phase of her investigation Norris discovers that, in order to support her family, her late grandmother, Ione, once took a job working for Quaker Oats dressing up as Aunt Jemima selling pancake mix to farmwives all over the country. Norris cites the stigma and tortured history associated with this caricature--- "...the happy-go-lucky, eager to please slave on the pancake box." Norris points out that neither she, nor most of Ione's grandchildren were previously aware of this part of her background, and she contemplates as to why her grandmother had locked this life experience away in a secret place. Norris indicates her deep respect for her grandmother for having taken a job in order to uplift her family, despite being haunted by the painful stigma. During another phase of her search, Norris discovers that her late father, Belvin, had a brush with law enforcement in 'Jim Crow' Birmingham Alabama on February 7, 1946, shortly after he was discharged from the U.S. Navy; Belvin had been shot and wounded by a policeman. As it turns out, Norris' father had never discussed this incident with his wife, his children, his coworkers, or his fellow church members. Norris' investigation of her father's 'incident' leads her to explore: (1) the racially charged political/social climate in Birmingham Alabama during the 1940's and beyond; (2) her father's military service in the segregated Navy during World War II; (3) various seminal events leading up to President Truman's enactment of Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the armed forces; and (4) the plight of African American veterans attempting to integrate into civilian life 'at home' in the Jim Crow south, and to claim their constitutional rights (e.g., voting, et al), after having served successfully overseas in the fight for other peoples' rights. Norris states, "...While they hoped for and, in some cases, demanded the right to vote, fair wages, and equal housing, they were also asserting a much more basic claim. They wanted the right simply to be ordinary...". Norris contemplates as to how this incident had shaped her father. She wonders whether he felt anger, frustration, and/or shame; whatever he felt had been locked away in a secret place. Norris theorizes that a person's attitudes about race have been partially shaped by the secret life experiences of the people who raised him/her, mainly one's elders (e.g., grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles). She questions as to how well we know the people around us. Norris emphasizes the importance of learning about one's family as a means of learning about oneself. "The Grace of Silence, by Michele Norris, is a memoir about race and intimacy, told against the backdrop of an important phase of American history. The book is interesting and informative from beginning to end; and it is well-researched. The writing is crisp with a natural flow. At 174 pages (not counting the acknowledgements and notes) it is a relatively 'quick read'. I think that everyone should read this book.

ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR: San Francisco Chronicle, The Christian Science Monitor, Kansas City Star. A profoundly moving and deeply personal memoir by the co-host of National Public Radio's flagship program All Things Considered. While exploring the hidden conversation on race unfolding throughout America in the wake of President Obama's election, Michele Norris discovered that there were painful secrets within her own family that had been willfully withheld. These revelations—from her father's shooting by a Birmingham police officer to her maternal grandmother's job as an itinerant Aunt Jemima in the Midwest—inspired a bracing journey into her family's past, from her childhood home in Minneapolis to her ancestral roots in the Deep South. The result is a rich and extraordinary family memoir—filled with stories that elegantly explore the power of silence and secrets—that boldly examines racial legacy and what it means to be an American.

From Publishers Weekly In this eloquent and affecting memoir, Norris, co-host of NPR's All Things Considered,

examines both her family's racial roots and secrets. Spurred on by Barack Obama's campaign and a multipart NPR piece she spearheaded about race relations in America, Norris realized that she couldn't fully understand how other people talked about race until she understood how her own family dealt with it, particularly with their silence regarding two key events. She intersperses memories of her Minneapolis childhood with the events that shaped her parents' lives: her maternal grandmother's short career as a traveling "Aunt Jemima," which always embarrassed her mother, and her father's shooting by a white policeman in Alabama in 1946. It is the shooting, which occurred soon after Belvin Norris Jr. was honorably discharged from the navy, that forms the narrative and emotional backbone of Norris's story, as she travels to Birmingham to try and piece together what happened. Though the quest is a personal one, Norris poignantly illuminates the struggle of black veterans returning home and receiving nothing but condemnation for their service. The issue of race in America is the subject of an ongoing conversation, and Norris never shies away from asking the same difficult questions of herself that she asks of others because "all of us should be willing to remain at the table even when things get uncomfortable." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist*Starred* Lauded journalist Norris, cohost for All Things Considered on NPR, intended to write a book analyzing the changing conversation about race in the Obama era. But once she realized that even within her own family, discussions about race were "not completely honest," she changed course. The result is an investigative family memoir of rare candor and artistry that dramatically reveals essential yet hidden aspects of African American life. A fifth-generation Minnesotan on her mother's side, Norris was stunned to learn that her maternal grandmother worked for Quaker Oats as a traveling Aunt Jemima, a revelation that sparks a paramount interpretation of this loaded icon. The next shock was discovering that when her father returned to Birmingham, Alabama, after serving in WWII, he was shot by a white policeman. This painful secret inspires a commanding exposé of the "scandalous violence against black men who had fought for human rights abroad" only to be denied freedom at home. A balance-beam writer, Norris looks at both sides of every question while seeking truth's razor-edge. But she is also a remarkably warm, witty, and spellbinding storyteller, enriching her illuminating family chronicle with profound understanding of the protective "grace of silence" and the powers unchained when, at last, all that has been unsaid is finally spoken. --Donna Seaman "An insightful, elegant rendering of how the history of an American family illuminates the history of our country." --Toni Morrison "Exquisite. . . [A] rich account of family history." --Seattle Times "Powerful and heartbreaking. . . . [Norris] explores race within her family history while tracing its complex legacy in the United States." --San Francisco Chronicle "A riveting, inspiring memoir of an at once singular and representative American family. Norris takes us on a painful yet triumphant journey of self-discovery. . . . Powerful and tender, *The Grace of Silence* reveals our human complexity in exemplary fashion." --Henry Louis Gates, Jr., University Professor and Director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, Harvard University, and author of *Colored People* "A deeply personal reflection on what her parents and grandparents did and did not tell her about her history and identity as a black woman. . . . A fresh and candid reflection on this most important conversation." --Minneapolis Star Tribune "Gracefully written and carefully researched, it offers up long-buried family secrets as a testimony to racism's power and reach." --Los Angeles Times "A powerful plea to readers to doggedly pursue their families' story lines. She reminds us that speaking candidly about race in America starts not at the president's teleprompter but at our own dinner tables." --The Washington Post "An open and honest examination of race relations in her family's and the country's past." --Chicago Tribune "Jaw-dropping. Can't put down. . . . Riveting. . . . [Norris] uses her signature calm and steady voice to open up about her complicated relatives." --Essence "A revealing, affectionate and sometimes painful memoir which dispenses with stereotype to get to the heart of what makes a family." --Gwen Ifill, Moderator, "Washington Week," PBS "With learned candor, [Norris] describes the corrosive effect of family stories left untold. . . . We may not hear those stories until we ask for them. But some things simply must be said." --Ms. "Revelatory, heart-piercing." --The Baltimore Sun "In the hands of a gifted storyteller, a memoir becomes more than a chronicle of the writer's life. It becomes the history of a time and a place. So it is with this magnificent memoir—one of the most eloquent, moving and insightful memoirs I have ever read." --Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of the New York Times bestseller *Team of Rivals* "Letter-perfect, beguiling. . . . Powerful. . . . Her well rounded view of the world demonstrates wisdom given by her strong, intelligent mother and her hard-working, proud father." --Louisville Courier-Journal "Michele Norris takes us on a riveting personal journey from north to south and back again through the tangled landscape of race in America—and teaches anew about the pain and possibilities of our past and future." --Tom Brokaw, author of New York Times bestsellers *The Greatest Generation* and *Boom*