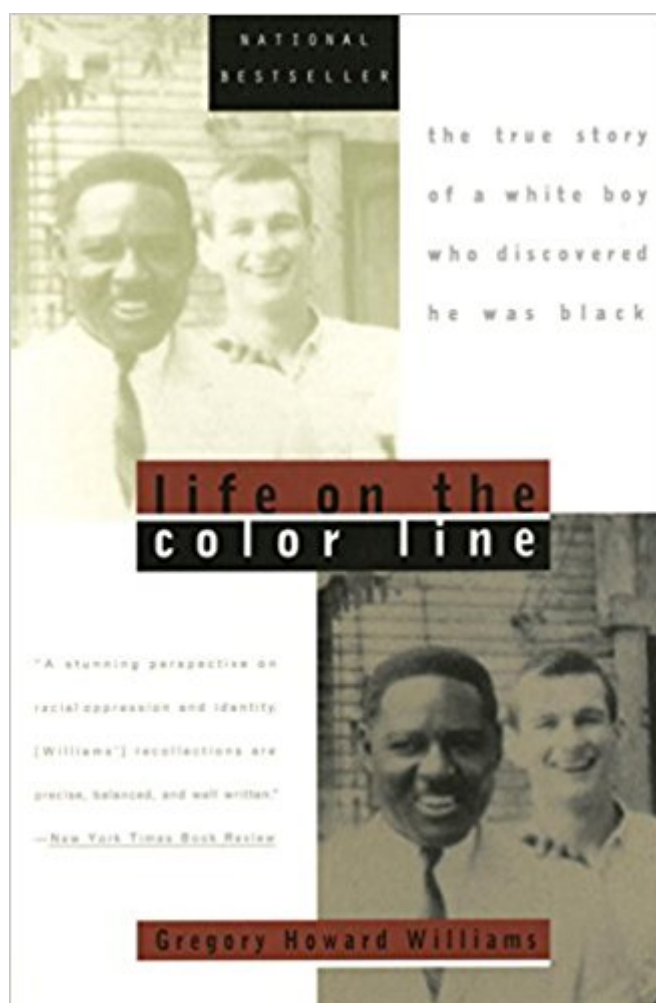


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# Life On The Color Line: The True Story Of A White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black



## 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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Williams, dean of the Ohio State University College of Law, tells the affecting and absorbing story of

his most unusual youth. Born to a white mother and a black father who passed for white, Williams was raised as white in Virginia until he was 10, when his mother left. His father brought his two sons back home to Muncie, Ind., in 1954 and sank further into drink. The two boys were eventually taken in by Miss Dora, a poor black widow. Williams's many anecdotes are a mixture of pain, struggle and triumph: learning "hustles" from Dad, receiving guidance from a friend's mother, facing racism from teachers and classmates, beginning a clandestine romance with a white girl he eventually married. And while his scarred, grandiloquent father was never reliable, he did instill in young Greg-though not in Greg's brother-sustaining dreams of professional success. Along the way the author decided, despite his appearance, he would proudly claim the black identity that white Muncie wouldn't let him forget. Williams ends his narrative when he reaches college; in the epilogue, he regrets that "there were too many who were unable to break the mold Muncie cast." Photos not seen by PW. Author tour. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Williams's coming-of-age years were hard. His father was an alcoholic, and his mother left when Greg was still in grade school, not to be seen for more than a decade. His father soon lost his business, and the rest of the family set out from Virginia for Muncie, Indiana to be near relatives. To Greg's amazement, having lived his short life as white, his fair-skinned father's relatives were black. Facing a lifetime of choosing whether to be black or white and, whatever his decision, opprobrium from both races, Greg opted for black. Today he is dean of a respected law school, a man who in the 1950s Muncie of his youth might have been patronizingly called "a credit to his race." "A credit to the human race" is more like it. Recommended for all libraries.--Jim Burns, Ottumwa, Ia.Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I had wanted to purchase this book years ago after seeing the author on Oprah. I would recommend getting a traditional paperback so you can enjoy the pictures better. Now about the content... This book should be a standard read for every student in America. It clearly helps to see how myths and misconceptions about how race have maligned our ability to just be good stewards of humanity. His life story shows just how connected we really are to one another. Everyone wants to dream, to love, to survive. We should thank him for sharing his sorrows and triumphs. This book is profound! After reading this story of making it, no child, no person should have any excuse as to why they can't achieve! All the elements for failure are here but Greg survived! Upon finishing this book you will ask

yourself? What is race? Why has society been allowed to continue to shape my views of what my eyes can see? Believe none of what you hear and only half of what you see.

This is one of the best books I have ever read! I will admit, I prefer suspense books and other fictions but, I could not stop reading this book until I finished. It was a page turner for sure. He has a powerful story of overcoming such oppressive situations. Mr. Williams gave an honest, open account of his fragile childhood. It was a look into the past and present of race relations in America. I would love read a part two. How has his feeling changed? Has he mentored others with similar backgrounds? How does his students relate to his story or see it as distant past?

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. They had to learn how to maneuver in this crazy patchwork quilt of absurd and confusing racial notions that would marginalize their existence and make them the target for every miscreant on either side of the race and color divide. This was to have great impact on the brothers, as they each found their own personal coping mechanism for the deprivation, poverty, hostility and prejudice that circumscribed their life in Indiana. Unfortunately, they ultimately each took divergent paths. The author would seek legitimate

work and higher education as a way to forge ahead in life, while Mike would seek solace in the lure of easy money, easy women, and life in the fast lane, a choice that would end in personal tragedy for him. The book clearly delineates the fact that, in the nineteen fifties, there were two Americas that existed side by side. One America was born of privilege and opportunity reserved for Whites. The other America was one of repression and lack of opportunity reserved for Blacks. Clearly, those who were defined as Black but wished to pass for White did not do so because of racial hatred. They did so as a way of bypassing a hated system that could so circumscribe someone's potential and ability to seek a better way of life. Who is White? Who is Black? These are questions that should generally be unnecessary. The response should be, "Who cares?". The author focuses on his early life, the part that evidently caused him so much pain, while skimming on the latter part of his life. It would have been interesting to have spent some additional time on the latter part, to see how those early experiences affected or shaped the man he was to become and is today. Still, this is an intriguing memoir that is written by someone who has lived in these two Americas and endured. It is a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit.

I wish I could thank Mr. Williams for writing this book. His personal accounts clearly show what mixed-race individuals go through, back in those days and these days, too. The book also shows whether a person is accepted or not depends much on what you look like and where you are. I was glad to read that he managed to rise above discrimination, and built a great career and family life for himself.

This book is a "must read" for everyone. The life this man has lived (not knowing he was black and then being thrust into a world which was all black) shows that we are definitely judged by color - or perception of color. Every person should read the story of this man. He is a fine human being whose life was torn by the difficulty of being thought black in a white world and white in a black world. This book allows us to enter both worlds - white and black - and experience the difficulties and prejudices, and then to look at others and ourselves with greater clarity and understanding. This should be required reading for all students.

Life on the Color Line is an inspirational account of an extraordinary life. I was drawn to the book when I learned my neighbor Sonny Sage, an outstanding quarterback for Richmond High School in Indiana, was mentioned in the story. Little did I know that I was about to read one of the best books of my life. The author details his journey from the most meager of beginnings in a manner that has

all the drama of a novel; he possesses that essential tool of any successful lawyer---a memory that includes details of conversations, scenes and situations. His utter surprise when his father tells him that he and his brother are black; his gritty poverty; his refusal to give up or give in; his will to succeed; his love of his family despite their many flaws; his love of those who raised him and his recounting of their many selfless acts---gripping scenes that will move most readers from tears to joy. I recommend this story of an heroic individual to any reader who desires to experience a detailed and motivational review of one man who had every reason to fail, but decided instead to succeed beyond all expectations. This book should be required reading for today's teenagers; it will direct young readers toward success regardless of circumstance.

I confess, I did not even finish the book. It was a very interesting story, but written so dry and bland that I was put off. It read more like a textbook than a real persons life. :(

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