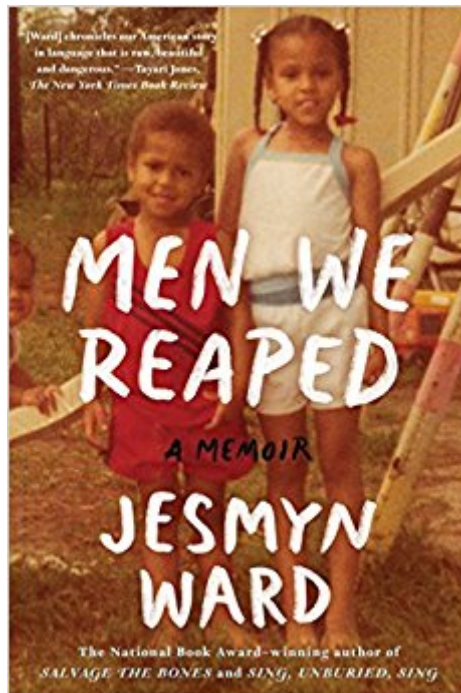




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Men We Reaped: A Memoir



Synopsis

Universally praised, Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped* confirmed her ascendancy as a writer of both fiction and nonfiction, her Southern requiem securing its place on bestseller and best books of the year lists, with honors and awards pouring in from around the country. Jesmyn's memoir shines a light on the community she comes from, in the small town of DeLisle, Mississippi, a place of quiet beauty and fierce attachment. Here, in the space of four years, she lost five young men dear to her, including her beloved brother-lost to drugs, accidents, murder, and suicide. Their deaths were seemingly unconnected, yet their lives had been connected, by identity and place, and as Jesmyn dealt with these losses, she came to a staggering truth: These young men died because of who they were and the place they were from, because certain disadvantages breed a certain kind of bad luck. Because they lived with a history of racism and economic struggle. The agonizing reality commanded Jesmyn to write, at last, their true stories and her own. *Men We Reaped* opens up a parallel universe, yet it points to problems whose roots are woven into the soil under all our feet. This indispensable American memoir is destined to become a classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In four years, five young men dear to Ward died of various causes, from drug overdose to accident to suicide, but the underlying cause of their deaths was a self-destructive spiral born of hopelessness. Surrounded by so much death and sorrow, Ward closely examined the heartbreakingly relentless deaths of her young relatives and friends growing up in the small town of DeLisle, Mississippi, with few job prospects and little to engage their time and talents other than

selling and using drugs and alcohol. She herself had partially escaped, going on to college in Michigan and California; but the pull of close family ties and a deep appreciation of southern culture lured her back each summer. Ward, author of *Salvage the Bones* (2011), lovingly profiles each of those she lost, including a brother, a cousin, and close friends, and their tragic ends as she weaves her family history and details her own difficulties of breaking away from home and the desperate need to do so. This is beautifully written homage, with a pathos and understanding that come from being a part of the culture described. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“An important, and perhaps even essential, book.” —San Francisco Chronicle
 “[Ward] chronicles our American story in language that is raw, beautiful and dangerous.” —[Her] singular voice and her full embrace of her anger and sorrow set this work apart from those that have trodden similar ground. —The New York Times Book Review
 “Heart-wrenching.” —A brilliant book about beauty and death —at once a coming-of-age story and a kind of mourning song —filled [with] intimate and familial moments, each described with the passion and precision of the polished novelist Ward has become —Ward is one of those rare writers who’s traveled across America’s deepening class rift with her sense of truth intact. —Los Angeles Times
 “A memoir that is as searing as her fiction, as poignant and as timely... in a country that is supposed to be post racial but still seems hell-bent on the epidemic destruction of young black men.” —Edwidge Danticat, *The Progressive*

This is a courageous book, in that Jesmyn lays bare the contents of her life in a way that maybe few authors could or would. I felt a sense of validation, after reading in the acknowledgment, "...I was still unsure I had written a memoir." I had this sense throughout the book that wow, this is her actual story, but the writing and telling of it feels like a novel. This makes the memoir a truly great read. In her examination of her rearing and the loss of her brother and other young men from the neighborhood, she puts a microscope on the socioeconomic conditions that keep Black people mired in grief, leading to poor choices based on hopelessness. She moves through the deaths backwards in time, in order to bring the story forward. This makes the first death, that of her brother, intersect with the present time. This was a very interesting way of framing the memoir and an accusatory look is taken at the forces of racism, economic opportunity and the lack of choices that exist among the black poor. The community at the center of this memoir is DeLisle, MS. The reader should see this as representative of any poor economically challenged neighborhood impacted by a

racist society. She clearly traces how she was haunted by the forces of poverty, history and racism. She writes, "I looked at myself and saw a walking embodiment of everything the world around me seemed to despise: an unattractive, poor, Black woman." The deaths of the men inquired in this book could have happened, indeed does happen far too frequently in poor black, USA. This is not endemic to the south. I can hear Malcolm X in my head chastising northerners in the 60's, who somehow thought they were at a geographical advantage. Malcolm admonished, "stop talking about the south, as long as you're south of the Canadian border, you're south." Yet, despite the deaths, the despair and the grief, Jesmyn longs for home. "I knew there was much to hate about home, the racism and inequality and poverty, which is why I'd left, yet I loved it." With all of her accomplishments, Jesmyn had the courage and fortitude to share this story and return to her home which she dearly missed. She has crafted a memoir that is one of the best I have ever read, and may her story help provide a sliver of light on the conditions that give life to the hopelessness and carelessness that exists in all the DeLisles of USA.

Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped* is a beautifully told memoir that is so intimate and self-exposing that it could have been penned, and then locked, in her secret diary. The stories of the lives of five men in Jesmyn's life, including that of her beloved only brother, are heartbreaking in their unrelenting revelation of the devastating effect that racism and poverty continue to have on the innate potential of America's young black men. The premature deaths of these men leave friends and family to struggle with loss and a hopelessness of their own. In Jesmyn's small Mississippi town, tragedy is a constant reality that infuses the air, the woods, and the bayous. I was there as I read, and I did not mind that she did not spare my emotions. Bettye Kears, *The Other Madisons: An American Griotte's Quest*

The title grabs you and makes you want to read it non-stop. It is not an emotionally raw story, which is what I wanted. Ward got closest to this in her account of Joseph. The other connections missed the mark. I wanted to see more of how the other guys specifically affected her life, we don't get that question fully answered. It's very declarative but not gripping. I understand the plight of the Black man and how some of backgrounds strongly influence our paths. It felt a bit cliché and didn't deliver a message we haven't heard before. Her character development is strong, but some scenes seemed to be overcrowded with non-essential tertiary people.

There's a very good story in this book about the difficulty of growing up in the south even in this

modern age. I didn't care for the author's writing style, neither did I care for the reverse chronological order. Still, I'm glad I read it. The author has much to say about her own experience that illuminated for me the reason behind much of the tragedy in the southern African American community.

This is a book all white people should read. The author tells about young black men in her life who died way too early and pretty much sums up the reason why - born into poverty, not encouraged in school nor given a proper education, always put down by police and others, not given chances in life that white boys receive. Really, we should be ashamed of ourselves in the US for allowing this kind of discrimination to keep on happening. We haven't learned very much since the days of slavery. Something has to change for the good.

The Most Important Non-Fiction Book of 2013! Want to understand what it means to be caught in poverty and hopelessness, while still living a life full of family, friends, joy and sorrow? Jesmyn Ward got an education and could have gotten out, but chose to go home to investigate why her male siblings, cousins, and friends were dying. Hers is a distinctive and compelling voice, sharing, with us, the voices of the young and disconnected that you will not hear anywhere else. A remarkable view into the lives of Americans largely ignored. A wonderful young writer telling a story that needs to be told. Read this book, America. We need it. We need it bad!

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