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Posted on 10 April 2018 By John Howard Griffin

## #FREE ? Black Like Me ? eBook or E-pub free

Black Like Me follows author John Howard Griffin, a Texas born journalist, as he explores the very face of racism and prejudice in the Deep South in 1960s in blackface Far from a

punchline, it is the ethnographic method Griffin uses to infiltrate black neighborhoods that would be otherwise socially locked to him and elicit bigotry without guardedness and gentility from whites. At its best, Griffin's journey serves as an example of the courage and effort it requires to put aside privilege and face with empathy and an open heart the experiences of others who are oppressed. Griffin ably renders the microaggressions that many blacks face in the forms of assumptions, language, silence, etc. Most striking for me was an older white woman who assumed Griffin to be a porter and tipped him after his menial task was done. However, it is incredibly complicated to read a work like this in 2015. At its worst, Griffin can engage in racial tourism and oppression pornography. He freely uses certain epithets and assumes an air of ownership of his newly pigmented skin, and elides looking like, thinking like, acting like, and being black. His conclusions are underwhelming; indeed, the author's prescriptions for racial harmony seem to be borrowed from DuBois's concepts that precede him by generations. I'm positive this book was nothing short of momentous when it was published. It is a grand experiment in consciousness-raising that is flawed and worse, bound to its time. The Southern Negro will not tell the white man the truth. He long ago learned that if he speaks a truth unpleasing to the white, the white will make life miserable for him. In 1959, journalist John Howard Griffin decided to change his skin colour in order to see what life was really like for Blacks in the southern US. He took medication for vitiligo, a disease that causes loss of pigmentation in patches of the skin in order to add pigment to his skin, and also was exposed to high doses of UV radiation to further darken his skin. He then applied a dark stain all over. After he was sufficiently dark, he made his way to New Orleans where he felt for the first time what life was like for Blacks. He later travelled on to some other states, including Mississippi where a jury had recently refused to indict a group of white men for lynching a Black man. Mr Griffin put his life in danger and experienced many horrible things over the course of 2 months, from being denied service in restaurants, to being harassed by white bus drivers, to not being able to find a restroom he could use. He was often bullied and not a few times feared for his life. He found that the Black experience was much different than it was for whites even though most white people at the time as now ascertain that there is no racism in the United States. This book is written in journal format and I found it captivating. Mr Griffin describes so well the things he experienced and how it made him feel to be misjudged and hated for the colour of his skin. He talks about racism and discrimination, how it affects people. He discusses how people who think themselves good Christians can treat others they perceive as different in such abominable ways. In my opinion, I don't think Mr Griffin even looked like a Black man. Click here to see photos of John Howard Griffin as himself and in disguise. I do not get how people fell for it; he looks like a white man with a very weird deep tan. I understand how and why white people fell for it; they see dark skin and that's all they see. They did not see the person, the individual. They wouldn't have noticed his features. They saw black skin and were blinded by it. However, I'm really shocked that he was able to fool Black people too.

The only thing I can figure is that they, never dreaming that a white person would try to make themselves appear black, thought he was perhaps mixed race. I think the thing that disturbs me the most about this book is that, whilst it is no longer legal to treat Blacks or any minority in the ways they were treated in the past, there are many who cling to the prejudices that enable such treatment. There are many who would like to see a return to the 1950s. And of course, people of colour still have their lives deeply and horrifically affected by discrimination and racism, especially institutional racism. I recommend this book because it gives insight into the Black experience. I think it is preferable to read a book about the Black experience written by a Black person but unfortunately, many whites are still not open to hearing the voices of people of colour, especially those of Black people. Whilst he dealt with horrible things during his time disguised as a Black man, Mr Griffin did not suffer nearly as much as Blacks do because he knew that at the end of this experiment, he would return to life as a white man with all its privileges. He did not have to suffer the despair of knowing his situation would probably never change. Mr Griffin went on to work with Dr Martin Luther King and others in the Civil Rights movement, and urged white people to start listening to Black voices in order to bring about much needed change. Unfortunately, there are far too many similarities today we have not come nearly far enough. We can do better than this. We should do better than this. We must do better than this. The atmosphere of a place is entirely different for Negro and white. The Negro sees and reacts differently not because he is Negro, but because he is suppressed. Fear dims even the sunlight. April 2019 classic of the month #FREE ñ Black Like Me à In The Deep South Of The S, Journalist John Howard Griffin Decided To Cross The Color Line Using Medication That Darkened His Skin To Deep Brown, He Exchanged His Privileged Life As A Southern White Man For The Disenfranchised World Of An Unemployed Black Man His Audacious, Still Chillingly Relevant Eyewitness History Is A Work About Race And Humanity That In This New Millennium Still Has Something Important To Say To Every American. Although John Howard Griffin was known primarily for Black Like Me and it fully deserves all five stars I've awarded it, I'm hard pressed to say which impressed me the book itself or the brief biography of the author at the end. In only sixty years 1920-1980 Griffin managed to fight in the French Resistance, lose his eyesight as a result of a nearby explosion during a Japanese air raid, become Catholic, marry and have four children and ultimately go on to become a spokesman for the Civil Rights Movement. When his eyesight unexpectedly returned in the late 1950s, he was an established author with a strong sense of otherness, something he never lost even though now he could see again physically. More importantly to the man, John Griffin, he could see human beings and human life at a deeper level than many others around him could due to those years of not being able to see. What I liked best about Black Like Me was Griffin's plain style of writing. He didn't embellish. And yet he describes the Negro to use the book's own terminology men, women and children he met and befriended with befitting gentleness and grace. Although they lived in poverty and

endured much, they were without exception unfailingly kind, generous and helpful to Griffin, a total stranger. The hardest part of the book to endure was the blindness and cruelty of the whites he described I cringed I was ashamed I was deeply saddened But I also re learned some valuable lessons about otherness from Griffin s journey into obscurity First of all, I learned to look at people, really look at them Look them in the face Don t avoid looking at anyone, no matter who they are Often I have looked away out of something in me, shyness or fear but the other person doesn t know that and they may see it as something in them So have the courage to look at others in and with love. Second, a smile is the best gift you can give almost everyone So don t be stingy Smiles are free and they can mean the world to someone who is hurting give away as many as you can There are so many hurting people in need of kindness and love. And finally, black and white are only coverings on the outside and we have no control over them well most of us don t On the inside, that s another matter There we can be whatever color we make of the character God has given us. These aren t stunning revelations, I know They re just simple reminders of truths I m sure I heard a long time ago But reading Black Like Me revealed that it s the simple things like this that really do make all the difference. Fifty years young and as relevant as ever EXCELLENT My main qualm with this book is that for some reason it s on teacher s lists and reading lists etc, but why are we listening and pushing a book written by a white man who passed as black for a while rather than actual black people who can and do study, write and explain their experience constantly I get that perhaps some people won t be able to give credence to anyone but a white person, but isn t that a flaw of our culture Why are the books written by and about black scholars people not being disseminated so widely, taught and shared The whole premise of this book written and taught, I am sure, with good intentions is exactly that the road paved with good intentions Let s start listening and giving credence to real live black people who have lived their entire lives in black skin and then I won t have so much difficulty with the prominence of this one book Along the same lines, I think, as the food stamp challenge where people of means pretend they are living the lives of people on food stamps without giving up their cars and fancy cookware, warm beds homes, etc for the duration It s impossible to replicate the experience of life on assistance or in another person s skin without actually living it Just my opinion I m just another white person without any real experience. Let s just put this right up front the idea that it takes a white man posing as a black man to convince white America of the realities of racism smacks of patronizing racial tourism something only tone deaf Hollywood could conjure up except that not even Hollywood dreamed up Rachel Dolezal, who egregiously co opted a black identity to further her professional agenda and to block up holes in her own emotional dam But that is looking at John Griffin s extraordinary experiment through a 21st century lens, with all the cultural and political knowledge that hindsight affords In 1959, Griffin darkened his skin by taking pills and sitting under a sun lamp and rubbing stain into his skin, and then spent six weeks traveling through the American South That he was a black man was never questioned He

lived in black neighborhoods in New Orleans and travelled in fear into Mississippi, where the recent trial of white men accused of lynching and murdering a black man was an epic travesty of justice, like so many trials before it of those crimes actually brought to trial Griffin's actions became a catalyst in the Civil Rights era of the early 60s After the publication of his experiences, first in the magazine Sepia, then in this book, Black Like Me in 1961, Griffin and his family became targets of retribution for his betrayal and his insistence on racial justice In 1964, he was beaten with chains by a gang of white men in Mississippi and left for dead Eventually his family moved to Mexico to live in the safety of anonymity The irony of course is that the very segment of the American population Griffin tried to speak for, black America, could never pick up and move to a safer, just life in another place Black America could not wash its face, wait for its skin to lighten, and then capture the spotlight as a curiosity or social experiment and earn speaking fees or royalties no, black America is still waiting for so much of white America fifty five years after Griffin said to himself, The only way I could see to bridge the gap between us was to become a Negro to acknowledge that systemic racism is ground into our political and cultural institutions, that it can't be washed off like Griffin washed off the stain from his skin Black Like Me is a painful read I had a very hard time suspending disbelief that Griffin could so easily pass for black I struggled with extreme discomfort at Griffin speaking for people of color in the narrative This discomfort played out in Griffin's own life, when he admitted a few years after the publication of Black Like Me the terrible irony that people came to hear him speak, as if he were a circus side show, yet would not give the same attention to civil rights and social justice advocates of color who lived their lives in the world where he had only sojourned for six weeks But again, I must put my reactions and feelings in context What Griffin accomplished was revolutionary he provoked white America into a radical empathy and exposed the fallacy of colorblindness In his 1977 memoir, A Time To Be Human, he states, Surely one of the strangest experiences a person can have is suddenly to step out into the streets and find that the entire white society is convinced that individual possesses qualities and characteristics which that person knows he does not possess I am not speaking here only of myself This is the mind twisting experience of every black person I know That statement is at the heart of the why and the what of his actions in 1959 Black Like Me is a mind and heart twisting book It cannot be judged out of the cultural context in which it was written, but it can continue to be read for the profound relevance it still holds today, when we still have to explain why Black Lives Matter. This was so incredibly painful and terrifying. John Howard Griffin, a 39 year old white journalist of Sepia Magazine, changed his skin color and stayed for seven weeks in Deep South, USA among the black population The year was 1959 prior to the Washington March and passing of the major civil rights bill in 1964 When published in 1961, this book caused a major controversy Mr Griffin was persecuted by his whites by betraying their own race Remember that at that time, Deep South states, e.g., Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia were still in racial segregation The

discrimination worked both ways, blacks stay away from whites and vice versa I have read a number of books on this and still remember two To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou but this one, being a non fiction, brought a totally different impact That scene when Mr Griffin first looked at his face on the mirror as a black man brought a deep insight on the discrimination he did not know existed even inside himself He did not like the person staring back at him black and bald. This book sold a million copies in the 60 s and so far has been translated into 14 languages President Obama now lords in the White House but the call for social justice that this book purports still resounds up to the present time Racial discrimination still happens in all parts of the globe I travel every now and then and I had my share condescending side remarks of a Chinese waiter in a restaurant in Hong Kong, very late arrival of already cold food in Melbourne, petty crime done to my American officemates in Kuala Lumpur being blamed to illegal Filipino workers by Malaysia police, always being asked for a secondary inspection in LA airport, receiving a rain of F word from a Mexican lady in Walmart, San Diego, etc In all those cases, I just keep my cool Despite giving my apologies twice to the Mexican lady in San Diego a Filipino American guard told me in my way out Mabuti sir di na lang kayo sumagot, nasa America ho tayo .We need not go overseas In Metro Manila, we also have marginalized parts of population It may not be about skin color It can be about age, religion, social status, sexual orientation, etc Sometimes we are not aware of it just like the white Mr Griffin the first time he looked at himself on the mirror as a black man We may not be fully aware of the deep seated bias and prejudices that are lurking inside our minds until we are in a situation that brings those to the open Mr Griffin died in 1980 at the age of 60 He left a legacy that generations will be benefiting from the lessons from the astounding experiment culled in this truly beautiful classic book Black Like Me. I was ready to give this book a somewhat generous review for what may be obvious reasons, but then I read some other reviews and now I m annoyed It s ridiculous to cast John Howard Griffin as some kind of hero because he was brave enough to endure the black experience for less than 8 weeks Sorry, but read a book by a black American about the black American experience if that s what you want to learn about I suspect any would be holistic than to cast black men and women as purely agents of suffering with such despairing lives that poor Griffin should be exalted to sainthood for attempting to live as a Negro for 6 weeks And I should point out that with this reasoning, it would follow that every black man and woman born in the United States during our hundreds of years of terror against black people ought to be considered heroes yet Griffin is the one being celebrated Griffin is a white man his whole life, and readers think his slapping on some make up for six weeks would allow him to understand the black experience Bullshit It s such a ridiculous suggestion I am astonished this book is being described as a great piece of anthropology I m not criticizing the instances that his own racism shows through in his narrative, although those would be valid and useful critiques, but I m disturbed by some of the reactions to this book Though it s also clear that

the book is meaningful to whites Some of the reviews white people give say that it changed their world view and helped them think about racism personally, so it seems that the book is still useful for the purpose of teaching empathy to white people, and in a sort of round about way, one might even learn something about privilege I can see how it makes the issue of racism very personal for white people, forcing them us to imagine what it might be like to occupy a different place in the matrix of domination The book is also useful for analyzing the mentality of upper middle class whites who worked for racial justice in the South during the sixties Griffin was brave, yes, and at a time when nearly all white people were major assholes understatement he was at least one of the few trying to work for justice, which is interesting and causes one to wonder what stoked that desire in him Especially, his resilience in the face of lynch threats on his life is to be admired But let s not forget that his anthropological experiment also advanced his career and he was paid by magazines to print his journals What accolades did black men and women earn for enduring the terror of the Jim Crow south I would have liked to see self criticism in Griffin s account He evades what could have been the most powerful function of his text an analysis of the racism rooted in the very conception of the project.

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

"One of the deepest,  
most penetrating documents yet  
written on the racial question."  
—The Atlantic Journal-Constitution

# BLACK LIKE ME

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN

I can't say enough good things about this book. I thank men like John Howard Griffin who took a stand against racism despite the fact that their own people were vehemently against it. This entire book was a fantastic sociological and journalistic investigation of colour relations in the South in the 50s and 60s. It answered some questions I've always wanted to know, for example how did racist Christians justify their racism? Doesn't God teach us that we are all equal? The answer the author came up with was often racism hides under the guise of patriotism. The book also educates the reader on many key members of the civil rights movement including Martin Luther King, jr which I found to be very helpful. Another central point the author makes is that race has no scientifically proven bearing on intelligence or morality; it's the societal structure we are forced to live in, what we are given, what we are deprived of and how we are treated by others that makes us the person we are. I know that racism was a big problem in the South but I was still shocked to read how pervasive it was and what extreme forms it took. The fact that the White author could barely survive 6 weeks as a Black man shows how demoralizing it must have been to live as a Black person back then. This book is definitely something everybody should read. Racism isn't as prevalent as it was in the 1960s but it's still here. Our attitudes about people of different races need to change, people need to be given equal opportunities despite the colour of their skin.

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Wild Magic

The Rescuers

Bambi

The Sight  
Three Bags Full  
Time Cat  
Lirael  
The Story of Doctor Dolittle

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The Wind in the Willows  
Redwall  
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz  
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass  
The Jungle Book  
The Velveteen Rabbit  
Stuart Little  
Bunnicula  
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The 101 Dalmatians  
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The Mouse and the Motorcycle  
The Chronicles of Narnia  
The Tale of Peter Rabbit  
The Trumpet of the Swan  
The Little Prince  
Fire Bringer

