

Book Review of *The Warmth of Other Suns – The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson.

From 1915 to 1970 about six million African-Americans fled the South in search of a better life elsewhere in the United States. This massive exodus which dramatically changed the face of our country is vividly recounted in the excellent book, *The Warmth of Other Suns – The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* by Pulitzer Prize winning author Isabel Wilkerson.

The genius of Isabel Wilkerson is that she writes the exquisitely well-researched epic history of the migration of blacks out of the Jim Crow south to the north and west over a span of six decades in a riveting and immensely readable format. How does she do it? The reader is so engrossed in the journey of three fascinating individual’s lives that you will feel you are reading an exciting novel and you will forget you are reading a seminal work of stunningly detailed nonfiction history.

Wilkerson tells the story of three southern blacks who never knew one another, each from a different decade and southern state, and each traveling to a different destination to flee the tyranny of the south. First is Ida Mae Gladney, a sharecropper’s wife from Mississippi, who married at age 16 and fled pregnant together with her husband to Chicago. Next is sharp and courageous George Starling, the valedictorian of his “colored” high school class who organizes a strike among the Florida citrus pickers and flees his planned lynching to live in Harlem and work as a train porter helping other blacks fight for their civil rights as they board the trains bound north. Finally, Wilkerson describes the life of Robert Foster, a Morehouse college graduate and trained surgeon from Louisiana who marries the daughter of the black president of Atlanta University and eventually purchases an imposing home in California where his family attends cotillions and he becomes the personal physician to Ray Charles.

In telling the story of these three unique individual’s lives, Wilkerson vividly chronicles the horrifying violence of the segregationist south and the more subtle but still stultifying prejudice of the urban north and west to which they fled. “What binds these three stories together,” Wilkerson explains, “was the back-against-the wall, reluctant yet hopeful search for something better, any place but where they were. They did what human beings looking for freedom throughout history have often done. They left.”