

*Prepped: Coming of Age in Black and White America: a Memoir* by D. Veda Pendleton. KOI Publishing Group, 2019. 319 pp. \$18.00, paperback; \$9.99, Kindle.

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*Prepped: Coming of Age in Black and White America: A Memoir* examines the life experiences of an economically disadvantaged gifted Black girl from the deep South embarking upon a high school educational journey that is hundreds of miles from her home. Dr. D. Veda Pendleton beautifully captures the tradeoff in choosing better opportunities and, as a result, leaving a supportive home in Arkansas for a less inclusive and equitable one in the New England region. Earning herself a seat in prestige and privilege, she steps into a different world that becomes her new reality at The Ethel Walker Boarding School in Connecticut. This book allows us to peek into the phenomenon of Black life during the 1970s. It illuminates how resilience, courage, and grit envelop to prepare Pendleton to learn with others who operate with privilege and an invisible knapsack of promises (McIntosh, 1990). This book shares with readers Pendleton's journey to "become" the excellence that our Black community represents and the potential that exists amongst young Black Lives that Matter.

The first section of this book opens with a poem that serves as the introductory prelude entitled "I Am From" and states,

I am from a Sizzling hot comb and curling iron, a back porch, and wringer washer. I'm from Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day speeches and church meetings with pressed hair, under slips, petticoats, white lace socks, and patent leather shoes; I'm from the truth-telling, the faith-filled, and the strong-willed, from Always do your best and let God do the rest (Pendleton, 2019, p. xvii).

Chapter 1 presents *The Letter* that Pendleton receives in the year 2007. This correspondence is from one of her former high school teachers at the Ethel Walker School, a letter that evokes mixed emotions for the more mature, professional, and accomplished Pendleton. *The Letter* sends signals of bad news mixed with good, and it arouses a feeling of redemption. After viewing Pendleton's employment application for Walker's Head of School, the writer disclosed that as a retired teacher and member of the selection committee, she felt it "only appropriate" to reach out to her to reconnect. Pendleton viewed this gesture with a sigh as: a) this message serves as a letter of regret as she did not obtain any feedback on her employment application nor an invitation to interview; b) the writer, her former high school teacher, continually referred to her as "my Veda" as some sign of endearment which Pendleton mentions she never felt; and c) *The Letter* awakened mixed emotions as the teacher seemed to deliver fondness and a heartfelt gesture through her written communication. In the end, this action became hurtful for Pendleton. The weight of *The Letter* becomes heavy as it reinitiates the author's intersectional plight as a Black woman in America some 38 years later.

Chapters 2-3 aligns with the life portrayal of Pendleton as a young child where the rent of her family's home was \$25 a month, and a lawn service usually costs \$0.25. "We were a poor family, in terms of dollar and cents, but our lives were enriched in many ways" (Pendleton, 2019, p. 8). After analyzing the weight of her mothers' sacrifice to work a decent job and earn meager pay, Pendleton shares her vow to work hard in school and dedicate her efforts toward reading, writing, and learning in order to change the trajectory of her economic situation. After school integration occurred, she soon realized that the educational systems in her community held biases

and discriminatory undertones that proved their brokenness beyond immediate repair. Willing to “risk it all” to learn, Pendleton sought ways to make her bid for a better education.

Chapters 11-20 illuminates the magnificence of Black culture and heritage as a source of pride prevalent in the 1970s. Being “young, gifted, and Black” stood as a reality for Pendleton, a common theme brought about by the songstress Nina Simone. Systemic injustices were more commonplace for Black students during this time, and schooling in the South became more of a burden than an opportunity for the young Pendleton. With planning and support from her family and community advocates, Pendleton gained acceptance into The Ethel Walker Preparatory School. Stepping into Walker’s Prep School for her was like walking into a whole new world of privilege and opportunity, just what Pendleton desired so that she may engage in what Michelle Obama calls “becoming.”

Section three includes chapters 21-30 and opens with a focus on the soulful music and trendy clothing, which serves as a cultural influence. Both were sources of pride for the young Pendleton and the “Family,” a small, diverse group at the school. The “Family” represents the collective of every beautiful Black girl enrolled at Walker’s and their automatic association through inherent tradition at the preparatory school. Tradition and ritual represent a common thread at Walker’s, and one that rings true was the expectation for every member of the community to uphold wholesome values, including the honor code. One contradiction that Pendleton pinpoints was Walker’s blatant hypocrisy of institutionalized racism or bias, given their rigorous admission requirements held for the young Pendleton and how these prerequisites became relaxed for others who engaged in purchasing their acceptances. She mentions, “My admission to Walker’s was clearly through the front door, but there were other doors through which admission was gained for some of the white girls” (p. 136). Pendleton yields her experiences to what W.E.B. DuBois coins the “double consciousness.” DuBois examines the biases, stigmas, and stereotypes that Blacks endure in America. Given this superior divide of the have and have-nots, Pendleton recognizes during that time, many of her white classmates held a mindset that Black students enrolled at Walker’s to learn from them with no connection to the wealth of knowledge that they (the white girls) could gain from “the Family.”

In chapters 31-40, Pendleton’s academic and social life at Walker’s all-girls school continues with a heavy heart, eager spirit, and a sense of empowerment. She finds comfort in athletic sports, close friends, and great music by artists such as Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye. With a witty and comical narrative, the book’s fourth section begins with the chronicles of drivers’ education and how mama’s rules override those of others, especially when her rear-view mirror is involved. Bonnie MacDougall sashays onto the campus of Walker’s in chapters 41-50. She is a sassy, nice white lady who sought avenues to get to know Pendleton personally. In the following chapter entitled, *Reparations*, Pendleton reflects on the school’s *Slave Trade* fundraiser that occurs before the Christmas break. This event allows students to bid on faculty and staff so that they may become their “slave for a day.” Pendleton writes that she acknowledges the radical message that persists due to the undertones of racism for such an event.

The final moments at Walker’s end with the exciting details of Pendleton’s college acceptances and her family’s first visit to the preparatory school for her graduation. The last chapters and afterword examine Pendleton’s return to Walker’s as an accomplished author, scholar, equity advocate, and educational leader. She returns to her experiences and reminisces with a different perspective. Thinking deeply, she reflects on the visible attributes of her high school and the hidden opportunities that she now sees clearly as an added benefit to her journey

to “becoming.” Learning at the Northern Prep school, while it was isolating and often discouraging, provides Pendleton with a better education than what she would have gotten in the South. A commitment to educational excellence was the difference that she obtains as a result of traveling over 1,300 miles to attend school in New England. Her growth at Walker’s Preparatory School equips her academically to compete. Educational attainment is an invaluable attribute in a society with growth potential in the areas of equity and inclusion in removing barriers that jeopardize marginalized groups.

Pendleton shares *Prepped: Coming of Age in Black and White America: A Memoir*, a detailed and insightful journey at a beautiful and bustling boarding school where nice white ladies taught, and white, rich girls learned, and everyone hoped that “the Family” would find avenues to become successful in an exclusive environment with a lack of support for that attainment. Along the journey, the author found that her family successfully equipped her with just the right tools to not only survive but to thrive while coming of age in Black and White America. The traveling and courageous Pendleton eventually embrace Maya Angelou’s words, “You alone are enough. You have nothing to prove to anybody” (Salters, 2014). The support from her loving family back home and the faith in her God was all she ever really needed to succeed in a foreign land and learning environment. Resiliency, equity, self-image, and developing a sense of belonging were just a few of the themes that came out of her experiences. This book is a memoir and historical narrative that is very entertaining and compelling, given the context that explores the challenges that still ring true today in American schools and systems of learning. These messages speak volumes and are ideal for middle & high school students, preparatory and independent school communities, social justice advocates, adults of all ages, and a must-have novel for scholars in the field of education.

## REFERENCES

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