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The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration, by Isabel Wilkerson, Vintage, 2010

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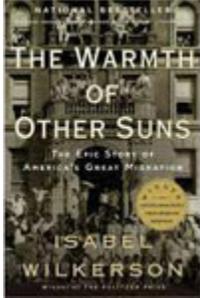
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Recommended Readings



The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration

by Isabel Wilkerson, Vintage, 2010

Reviewed by Mary Ramsbottom

If your reading habits tend to a few pages a night compensated by weekend sprints, you might wonder whether *The Warmth of Other Suns*, at 500+ pages, is worth the investment. Indeed, it is. In *Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson reconstructs the Great Migration of African-American families to urban centers of the northern and western states between World War I and the 1970's. Drawing on more than a thousand oral histories, *Suns'* narrative pull comes from three families whose choices, reflecting economic and social causes common to migrations everywhere, were lent special urgency by the brutalities of the Jim Crow south. Wilkerson resists the temptation to ask Ida Mae Gladney (Mississippi to South Side Chicago), George Starling (Florida to Harlem), and Robert Foster (Louisiana to Los Angeles) to carry too heavy a representative burden for a movement encompassing millions. These lives are richly resonant, but they also display varieties in individual experience inflected by gender, geography, educational background, personality, and opportunity. Wilkerson interweaves original research and recent scholarly interpretations into the narrative; for example, she provides a welcome corrective to the dominant late-twentieth-century lament that southern migrants imported cultural and family dysfunction to northern communities. While allowing her narrators pride of place throughout, Wilkerson thus satisfies the general non-fiction reader's desire for contextualization and assessment of historical consequence.

- Mary Ramsbottom is Associate Provost for Student Academic Affairs at Butler University.