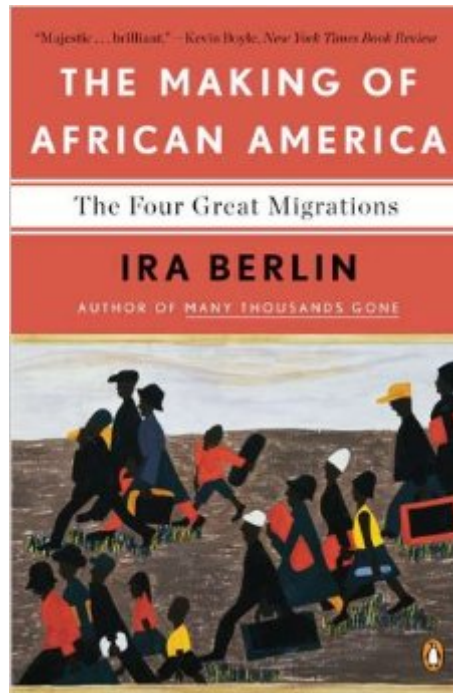


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The Making Of African America: The Four Great Migrations



Synopsis

An award-winning historian's sweeping new interpretation of the African American experience. In this masterful account, Ira Berlin, one of the nation's most distinguished historians, offers a revolutionary-and sure to be controversial-new view of African American history. In *The Making of African America*, Berlin challenges the traditional presentation of a linear, progressive history from slavery to freedom. Instead, he puts forth the idea that four great migrations, between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, lie at the heart of black American culture and its development. With an engrossing, accessible narrative, Berlin traces the transit from Africa to America, Virginia to Alabama, Biloxi to Chicago, Lagos to the Bronx, and in the process finds the essence of black American life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Adding to the extensive "bookshelf" of literature on the African-American experience in the United States, Dr Berlin goes to great lengths to chronicle, analyze and detail the four significant migrations of Afro Americans, beginning with the first slave ships of the 16th Century, ending the book with a commentary about our present state in this Fourth Migration, our new President Barak Obama, and the new minorities on these shores who are now claiming their place in this nation. And in-between these starting and stopping-off points, is a chronicle that brings the plight and the development of the slave trade, with its consequent effects on those African-Americans (and their descendants). Initially being torn from their countries, their tribes, their villages, cast on these shores with their ritual scarification, filed teeth and other body marks that were regarded with respect in

their countries, but which deemed them as savages and oddities in this country, these first African Americans became slaves, in the North and then the South, as this country grew. Manumitted and given their freedom after the Revolutionary War, many of these African Americans, now in their 2nd or third generations, lived in new-found freedom, which was short-lived for many.

Students of African American history have often seen it as linear in character, beginning in slavery and moving broadly forward to emancipation and freedom. In his new book, "The Making of African America: the Four Great Migrations", Ira Berlin modifies and deepens the linear view. Berlin describes African American history as showing a "contrapuntal interplay of movement and place." (p. 19) He also emphasizes the active role of African Americans in creating their own identities and characters rather than in simply responding passively to the many hardships and indignities they were forced to endure. Berlin is a Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland. He has written extensively on African American history, with a focus on the 200 years of slavery. Berlin's metaphor of a "contrapuntal" history is particularly telling because he emphasizes throughout the importance of music to the character of African American life. From the call and response patterns brought from Africa to the shouts and spirituals of the slaves, and through gospel, rock, jazz, and rap, African Americans have expressed themselves through music and enriched American life. Berlin is especially interested in the blues as a source of African American expression. In addition to music, Berlin sees family and religion as defining features of African American life over the centuries. The book is organized around what Berlin describes as the Four Great Migrations in African American life and the intervening periods of relative stasis. The movements and the stasis create the counterpoint. Thus, the first migration involved the infamous Middle Passage in which members of many different peoples in Africa were captured and crossed the Atlantic in foul and unspeakable ships to become slaves.

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