

The Best Non-Fiction Books by Black Authors, 2010

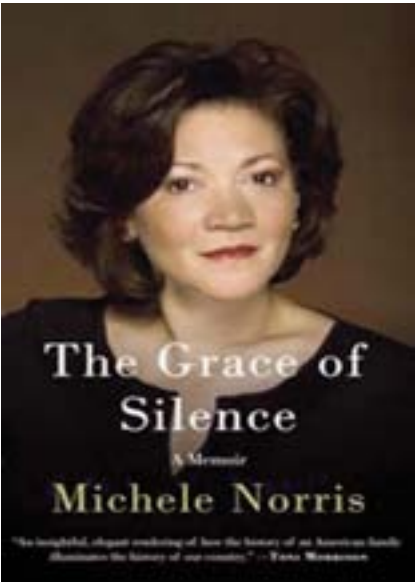
Kam Williams
Special To The Skanner News

1. The Grace of Silence: A Memoir by Michele Norris

Quite frankly, this heartbreaking memoir in which the author wistfully recounts her family’s quiet and dignified way of dealing with racism and discrimination, moved me to tears. NPR’s Michele Norris describes lives painfully limited by the color line, including a litany of humiliations endured by relatives well before she was born, such as the indignities suffered by her maternal grandmother while employed by Quaker Oats as a traveling Aunt Jemima. Particularly poignant is the painstaking lengths Michele goes to resurrect the besmirched name of her late father. For following his honorable discharge from the military after serving in World War II, he’d returned to his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, reasonably believing he’d earned the right to vote by fighting for his country. So he and other black veterans began making treks to the courthouse downtown to attempt to register. However, in an incident which was subsequently covered-up by a falsified police report full of lies, her father was shot while wearing his Navy uniform by a police officer who charged him with attempted robbery and resisting arrest. The truth just unearthed by his intrepid daughter during a recent return to Birmingham belatedly clears his name, even though his innocence had been impossible to prove back in the Jim Crow South. A very intimate, riveting and revealing cultural keepsake apt to resonate deeply with any African-American family inclined to reflect honestly on the oft-unspoken legacy of generation after generation of ancestors who had to cope in a world where bigoted whites could get away with anything.

2. Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority by Tom Burrell

Ever since the dawn of the nation when the Founding Fathers deliberately rationalized slavery by spreading the big lie that black people were inferior, African-Americans have suffered from serious self-esteem issues. But why has this phenomenon continued to persist so long past emancipation and the elimination of the Jim



Crow system of segregation? This is the nagging thought which inspired Tom Burrell to write Brainwashed. After all, as an advertising executive with 45 years in the business, he was well aware of the power of propaganda. So he knew that American society has done such a good job on the minds of blacks that they have not only internalized but have willingly participated in the perpetuation and further dissemination of nearly every negative stereotype propagated about them by the media. Mr. Burrell explores his subject-matter at considerable length and depth with the hope of helping to eradicate self-destructive behaviors. He believes that people have to heal from the inside-out, so his solutions start with each individual’s recognition that you’ve been brainwashed, and that you can

reprogram your mind because it is ultimately under your control. A potentially-transformative, seminal treatise provided readers are receptive to contemplating commonly-accepted cultural practices like the use of the N-word, corporal punishment and hair relaxers as possibly the vestiges of a deep-seated self-hatred implanted in the brain by white supremacist notions.

3. Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family by Condoleezza Rice

Given all that Condoleezza Rice went on to accomplish in life, it’s hard to believe that she was born in Birmingham, Alabama in the Fifties during the repressive reign of Jim Crow segregation. But somehow, despite spending her formative years in a city where state-sanctioned discrimination served to frustrate the aspirations of most other African-Americans, she miraculously managed to overachieve with the help of her doting parents. The former Secretary of State pays tribute to their herculean effort in this remarkably-revealing memoir by a very private, public figure who has until now played her cards pretty close to the vest. But you had a sense something might be up when she was spotted playing piano behind Aretha at a concert in Philadelphia last summer. And after reading this intimate autobiography it’s clear that underneath that seemingly-steely veneer beats the heart is an introspective sister yearning to recognize and return to her roots. An evocative opus fully humanizing a once-inscrutable Madam Secretary. I just have one question: May I call you Condi at the homecoming party?

4. The Next Big Story by Soledad O’Brien with Rose Marie Arce

In this engaging autobiography, CNN’s Soledad O’Brien revisits her challenging

formative years in order to illustrate how overcoming childhood adversity perhaps served to shape not only her personality but her compassionate approach to her career as an award-winning television journalist. Whether it was being asked “Are you black?” by a portrait photographer at the age of 11, being teased “If you’re a [N-word] why don’t you have big lips?” by an 8th grader in the hallway at school, or having to hear “Why do I have to sit next to the black girl?” coming from the sister of a friend, Soledad suffered a host of indignities on the path to the peak of her profession. Fortunately, once in a position to make a difference while covering disasters like the Great Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina or the Haitian Earthquake, this intrepid reporter has kept the pedal to the metal in an indefatigable quest to shed light on the plight of the least of her brethren. As for her private life, we learn that the freckle-faced, dedicated mother of four was an ugly duckling who never dated in high school before blossoming in Boston where she met her husband, Brad. A moving memoir which does justice to the effervescent spirit and unbridled intellectual curiosity of a truly empathetic soul my faithful readers already know just might be the brightest person I’ve had the privilege of interviewing.

5. Black Faces in White Places: 10 Game-Changing Strategies to Achieve Success and Find Greatness by Randal Pinkett and Jeffrey Robinson

As a journalist privileged to have access to many celebrities, a question I often like to ask in interviews with African-American captains of industry is how they managed to

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