



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

By Isabel Wilkerson

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

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In this epic, beautifully written masterwork, Pulitzer Prize–winning author Isabel Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life.

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From 1915 to 1970, this exodus of almost six million people changed the face of America. Wilkerson compares this epic migration to the migrations of other peoples in history. She interviewed more than a thousand people, and gained access to new data and official records, to write this definitive and vividly dramatic account of how these American journeys unfolded, altering our cities, our country, and ourselves.

With stunning historical detail, Wilkerson tells this story through the lives of three unique individuals: Ida Mae Gladney, who in 1937 left sharecropping and prejudice in Mississippi for Chicago, where she achieved quiet blue-collar success and, in old age, voted for Barack Obama when he ran for an Illinois Senate seat; sharp and quick-tempered George Starling, who in 1945 fled Florida for Harlem, where he endangered his job fighting for civil rights, saw his family

fall, and finally found peace in God; and Robert Foster, who left Louisiana in 1953 to pursue a medical career, the personal physician to Ray Charles as part of a glitteringly successful medical career, which allowed him to purchase a grand home where he often threw exuberant parties.

Wilkerson brilliantly captures their first treacherous and exhausting cross-country trips by car and train and their new lives in colonies that grew into ghettos, as well as how they changed these cities with southern food, faith, and culture and improved them with discipline, drive, and hard work. Both a riveting microcosm and a major assessment, **The Warmth of Other Suns** is a bold, remarkable, and riveting work, a superb account of an “unrecognized immigration” within our own land. Through the breadth of its narrative, the beauty of the writing, the depth of its research, and the fullness of the people and lives portrayed herein, this book is destined to become a classic.

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## **The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration By Isabel Wilkerson Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #2277 in Books
- Brand: Wilkerson, Isabel
- Published on: 2011-10-04
- Released on: 2011-10-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.17" h x 1.71" w x 6.11" l, 2.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 640 pages



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, a sharecropper's wife, left Mississippi for Milwaukee in 1937, after her cousin was falsely accused of stealing a white man's turkeys and was almost beaten to death. In 1945, George Swanson Starling, a citrus picker, fled Florida for Harlem after learning of the grove owners' plans to give him a "necktie party" (a lynching). Robert Joseph Pershing Foster made his trek from Louisiana to California in 1953, embittered by "the absurdity that he was doing surgery for the United States Army and couldn't operate in his own home town." Anchored to these three stories is Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Wilkerson's magnificent, extensively researched study of the "great migration," the exodus of six million black Southerners out of the terror of Jim Crow to an "uncertain existence" in the North and Midwest. Wilkerson deftly incorporates sociological and historical studies into the novelistic narratives of Gladney, Starling, and Pershing settling in new lands, building anew, and often finding that they have not left racism behind. The drama, poignancy, and romance of a classic immigrant saga pervade this book, hold the reader in its grasp, and resonate long after the reading is done.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

In *The Warmth of Other Suns* Wilkerson has composed a masterpiece of narrative journalism on a subject vital to our national identity, as compelling as it is heartbreaking and hopeful. Critics, however, were less certain about whether Wilkerson has written a definitive history of the Great Migration. Several reviewers saw the book as an important corrective to previous scholarship on the Migration that too often grouped African Americans into a voiceless mass, that focused exclusively on the negative consequences of their move to Northern urban centers, and that often emphasized economic and sociological explanations at the expense of the personal. Other critics felt that Wilkerson could have taken advantage of more of this scholarship, even if it was sometimes flawed, and could have taken into account larger structural influences. But *The Warmth of Other Suns* is an impressive achievement--a fresh, rich look at an important chapter in American history.

From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* From the early twentieth century through its midpoint, some six million black southerners relocated themselves, their labor, and their lives, to the North, changing the course of civil, social, and economic life in the U.S. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Wilkerson offers a broad and penetrating look at the Great Migration, a movement without leaders or precedent. Drawing on interviews and archival research, Wilkerson focuses on three individuals with varying reasons for leaving the South--the relentless poverty of sharecropping with few other opportunities, escalating racial violence, and greater social and economic prospects in the North. She traces their particular life stories, the sometimes furtive leave-takings; the uncertainties they faced in Chicago, New York, and L.A.; and the excitement and longing for freer, more prosperous lives. She contrasts their hopes and aspirations with the realities of life in northern cities when the jobs eventually evaporated from the inner cities and new challenges arose. Wilkerson intersperses historical detail of the broader movement and the sparks that set off the civil rights era; challenging racial restrictions in the North and South; and the changing dynamics of race, class, geography, politics, and economics. A sweeping and stunning look at a watershed event in U.S. history. --Vanessa Bush

## **Users Review**

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#### **Kevin Loesch:**

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