



Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love, the Great Migration North (Dear America)

By Patricia C. McKissack

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Eleven-year-old Nellie Lee Love records in her diary the events of 1919, when her family moves from Tennessee to Chicago, hoping to leave the racism and hatred of the South behind.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"Some people are so color struck. They think being light-skinned is better than being dark! Mama says that's nonsense and I think so, too."

Nellie Lee Love is an 11-year-old African American girl living in the rural South at the end of World War I. In a year of tumultuous change, victory, and tragedy, she records her thoughts and feelings in a diary given her by her mother. After the white racism in their town becomes too brutally overt to ignore, Nellie and her family pack up and move to Chicago. Delighted with the seemingly endless opportunities in the big city, Nellie is blindsided by the more insidious forms of prejudice that northerners practice: hatred within their own race. But through family unity and integrity, and education by way of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey's writings, Nellie and her family gradually discover a place for themselves in their new circumstances, and ultimately find hope and triumph.

Newbery Honor and Coretta Scott King Award winner Patricia McKissack writes the kind of historical fiction that will have history students and even reluctant readers and clamoring for more. The dignity and courage of the Love family provides a model for all families, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The award-winning Dear America series is one of the most popular book series in America and includes another by McKissack, *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl.* (Ages 9 to 12) --Emilie Coulter

From School Library Journal

Grade 4-6-Although 11-year-old Nellie Lee takes after her Mama's folks and "could pass," she proudly says "color me dark." Through the child's diary entries, McKissack explores the racism that existed in post World War I Tennessee, where a lighter skin was considered "better" than a darker one. In fact, a major story line involves Nellie Lee's sister, Erma Jean, as she learns to treasure her darker color. When Uncle Pace, returning from the war, is found badly injured, the family suspects the worst but can't prove it, and Erma Jean suffers hysterical muteness. His death propels Nellie Lee's father to join the Great Migration north to Chicago in search of a better life. The family discovers that although they do not face the Klan there, racism still exists, even within the black community. McKissack deftly explores the social unrest between blacks and whites and the social stratification within the black community, where newly arrived southern blacks were looked down upon by the more affluent residents. The time period is well developed, and serves as a compelling backdrop to the Love family's struggle to find a place. Nellie is a feisty and loyal protagonist, and although her voice sounds a bit mature for an 11-year-old, her observations carry the story line and interpret the action in a believable way. Secondary characters are distinct and add a richness to the telling.

Jennifer Ralston, Harford County Public Library, Belcamp, MD

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From Booklist

From the Dear America series, this volume represents the fictional diary of Nellie Lee Love, who grew up surrounded by her extended family in Bradford Corners, Tennessee, and moved to Chicago as part of the great migration. Set in 1919, the book clearly shows the differences between life in the rural South and in the urban North, the reasons that persuaded many to go north, and some of the difficulties they faced in their new home. Nellie's personal story involves an uncle murdered by resentful rednecks; a sister who loses her power of speech, then regains it; a father who struggles to start a business without paying off city hall; a

neighbor killed in a Chicago race riot; the courtship between Nellie's preacher and her teacher; and Nellie's own struggle to deal with differing attitudes toward lighter and darker skin tones within the African American community. There's a lot of background to fill in, given most readers' ignorance of the period, and the story's points are sometimes repeatedly hammered home, but the strong narrative will keep children involved and give them a great deal of social history to absorb along the way. A solid addition to a popular series. *Carolyn Phelan*

Users Review

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