

Black Dynasty

Geoffrey Hindley

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Black Dynasty is a story of African-American life and ambition set in the first seventy years after the Civil War. It is a family saga about a black storekeeper in a remote company town in Kentucky, and how he exploits the business possibilities opened up by a modification in kerosene-lamp design, which he appropriates from his inventive young black shop assistant, to build a multi-million dollar family business, with repercussions far into the future.

The book's broad social and geographical sweep offers a mini history of post Civil War African American life, in-depth research means that the rounded, highly believable (sometimes controversial) characters play out their loves, ambitions, rivalries, triumphs and sufferings, against a credible and vivid background. Details of everyday life – artefacts, street scenes, characters and incidents from the historical record – pitch the reader into the dangerous realities of 1920s South Side Chicago, the horrors of Ku Klux Klan white 'justice' and the sometimes dubious politicking of evangelical religion. We crowd into Mott's Chicago Pekin Theater, for the running commentary by ticker tape from Reno Nevada on black heavy-weight Jack Johnson's championship triumph; cruise the Mississippi by river boat to the seedy nightlife violence of Natchez-under-the-Hill; tour Harlem's elegant nightclub scene with sensation seeking white socialites.

Through it all we see the ruthless commercial ambition of Willard Stone, creator of Stone's Kerosene Lamp Corporation, powerfully offset by the impassioned commitment and campaigning of Elsie 'Blaze' Marre, black women's rights activist, his childhood sweetheart turned remorseless critic. Meanwhile, music-crazy son and heir Willard Jnr, disowned by his father, is blowing his 'jass' horn all across Prohibition club-land.

Geoffrey Hindley worked in London publishing, then freelance as writer, lecturer and teacher in UK, Europe and the US. As visiting professor, he travelled pretty widely, seeing something of poorer neighbourhoods and riding railroad sleeping car from Chicago to New York.



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