



Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

By *Randall Kenan*

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"A meaningful panoramic view of what it means to be human...Cause for celebration." --*Times-Picayune*

From the author of the National Book Critics Circle Award finalist **Let the Dead Bury Their Dead** comes a moving, cliche-shattering group portrait of African Americans at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In a hypnotic blend of oral history and travel writing, Randall Kenan sets out to answer a question that has long fascinated him: What does it mean to be black in America today? To find the answers, Kenan traveled America--from Alaska to Louisiana, from Maine to Las Vegas--over the course of six years, interviewing nearly two hundred African Americans from every conceivable walk of life. We meet a Republican congressman and an AIDS activist; a Baptist minister in Mormon Utah and an ambitious public-relations major in North Dakota; militant activists in Atlanta and movie folks in Los Angeles. The result is a marvellously sharp, full picture of contemporary African American lives and experiences.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This delicious and diverse sampler of African American life culled from over 200 interviews by author Randall Kenan shows that the American idea of "blackness" is as vast as the United States itself and cannot be pinned down to simplistic sociological clichés. "More than a book of analysis," Kenan writes, "this is my book of soul searching. I am asking who we are." Crisscrossing North America, he visits some familiar settings--Oakland, New Orleans, and New York--and some unusual places (including Bangor, Maine, and Maidstone, Saskatchewan) to discover how everyday black folks deal with issues of race, identity, and nationality. From a black minister in Mormon Utah to a female judge in skinhead country to the state of blacks in the would-be utopia of Seattle, Kenan paints a revealing portrait of a people whose presence and perseverance may forge a better America in the 21st century. --*Eugene Holley Jr.*

From Publishers Weekly

Kenan styles himself as the heir of W.E.B. Du Bois and Gunnar Myrdal, but this massive collection of 200 interviews is ultimately not as enlightening as either *The Souls of Black Folk* or *An American Dilemma*. In his preface, Kenan (*The Visitation of Spirits*, a novel) puts his finger on the problem when he admits that the book is more of an attempt to answer questions about his own blackness than to figure out what it means to be black in the U.S. But his efforts on this score suffer from an apparent self-absorption born of his fear that he is "not black enough, inauthentic"?a fear that could conceivably anchor a short memoir but not a tome of this size. Kenan spoke with the young and the old, the middle and the working class (though rarely with professionals). Strong points include informative local histories (a passage about the Black American West Museum in Denver, which has archives on black cowboys, is particularly good). The book's fundamental flaw is that Kenan is determined to think about black culture as monolithic, but the form of the book itself, with its interviews of people from diverse places and backgrounds, shows readers that black American life is multifaceted, shaped as much by class and region as by race. Indeed, Kenan's own childhood in rural North Carolina speaks as much to rural Southern culture as to black culture. In the end, Kenan, faced with the diversity of black lives, finds very little of substance to say about black identity: "being black is a desire toward some spiritual connection with some larger whole, an existential construct: Who am I? Where do I belong?" How this differs from "being" anything else, Kenan doesn't say.

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From Library Journal

Chronicling a journey to self-identity, North Carolina-born writer Kenan?author of the novel *A Visitation of Spirits* (Grove, 1989) and the story collection *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* (LJ 2/15/92)?reports on four years of travel through North America to discern what it means to be black here and now. Testing stereotypical attitudes, Kenan explores perceptions of race, region, and more. His ostensible travelog inquires into his self and into the heart of the places and persons of his sojourn. He offers fertile commentary on contemporary America, ripe not simply with questions of what it means to be black but of what it means to be American and to be human. Recommended for collections on the contemporary United States and on black America.?Thomas J. Davis, Arizona State Univ., Tempe

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Evelyn White:

This *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* are usually reliable for you who want to become a successful person, why. The key reason why of this *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* can be on the list of great books you must have is actually giving you more than just simple studying food but feed anyone with information that probably will shock your earlier knowledge. This book is usually handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions in e-book and printed people. Beside that this *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* forcing you to have an enormous of experience like rich vocabulary, giving you trial run of critical thinking that we understand it useful in your day pastime. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

Christine Mata:

The guide untitled *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* is the reserve that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the guide content that will be shown to you. The language that writer use to explained their way of doing something is easily to understand. The article writer was did a lot of exploration when write the book, and so the information that they share for your requirements is absolutely accurate. You also can get the e-book of *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* from the publisher to make you a lot more enjoy free time.

Audrey Mack:

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