



All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence

By Fox Butterfield

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A timely reissue of Fox Butterfield's masterpiece, *All God's Children*, a searing examination of the caustic cumulative effect of racism and violence over 5 generations of black Americans.

Willie Bosket is a brilliant, violent man who began his criminal career at age five; his slaying of two subway riders at fifteen led to the passage of the first law in the nation allowing teenagers to be tried as adults. Butterfield traces the Bosket family back to their days as South Carolina slaves and documents how Willie is the culmination of generations of neglect, cruelty, discrimination and brutality directed at black Americans. From the terrifying scourge of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction to the brutal streets of 1970s New York, this is an unforgettable examination of the painful roots of violence and racism in America.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Willie Bosket was charming, magnetic, and brilliant. He was also the most cold-blooded criminal the New York State penal system had ever seen. By the time he was in his teens, he had committed over two hundred armed robberies and twenty-five stabbings. Fox Butterfield examines the heritage of violence that followed Bosket's family from their days in slavery in South Carolina to the present.

From Publishers Weekly

Wide-ranging and somewhat unwieldy, this ambitious book tells a challenging, memorable story about race, violence and our American future. Investigating the case of Willie Bosket, whose crimes as a New York juvenile presaged a surge of youth violence and spurred much tougher prosecution of juveniles, New York Times correspondent Butterfield (*China: Alive in the Bitter Sea*) delved into the Bosket family background. He argues that the white Southern mentality of easily aggrieved honor has made its way through time and the descendants of slaves, transmuted into the similar hair-trigger ethos of inner-city streets. While Butterfield's thesis doesn't completely convince (what about the barrios or the wild west?), his reporting on the lives, crimes and prison experiences of Willie and his father, Butch, is painfully gripping. Finally released after reforming himself in prison, Butch couldn't handle freedom and killed himself as police pursued him. Willie, in prison for life, considers himself "a monster created by the system." In an epilogue, the author warns that building prisons won't solve our crime problem, and he proposes several policies?including intervention programs to help adolescent delinquents?to prevent future carnage. Photos not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

In his early 30s, Willie James Bosket Jr., viewed by many as New York's most violent criminal, is confined in tightly secured isolation in a Catskill prison. New York Times reporter Butterfield interviewed Willie and did extensive research on him, his forebears, and the historic use in this country of violence in defense of personal honor. A high I.Q. and often appealing demeanor have not mitigated Willie's unrepentant, violently aggressive behavior. "The boy no one could help," he has been mostly institutionalized since age nine. His family life was abysmal: he never met his criminal father, his mother was a negative influence, and he inherited a history of law-flouting male aggression. Butterfield delineates the complex elements of this young African American's life gone irretrievably awry. Highly recommended for college level and up.

-?Suzanne W. Wood, *SUNY Coll. of Technology, Alfred*

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