

Three Girls From Bronzeville – A uniquely American Memoir of Race, Fate, and Sisterhood

By Dawn Turner

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Interviews with Dawn Turner:

Interview with Dawn Turner by Terry Gross on NPR's Fresh Air: Aired Nov 15, 2021 - [https://ondemand.npr.org/anon.npr-mp3/npr/fa/2021/11/20211115\\_fa\\_01.mp3?d=2221&size=35546219&e=1055787497&t=progseg&seg=1&sc=siteplayer&aw\\_0\\_1st.playerid=siteplayer](https://ondemand.npr.org/anon.npr-mp3/npr/fa/2021/11/20211115_fa_01.mp3?d=2221&size=35546219&e=1055787497&t=progseg&seg=1&sc=siteplayer&aw_0_1st.playerid=siteplayer)

YouTube – Chicago Humanities Festival Oct 20,2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-OgnbgtNsQ>

Dawn Turner is an author and journalist, and who, for many years wrote a column in the Chicago Tribune about race-related issues. This memoir is about how her path and the paths of her sister and childhood best friend diverged. Her sister Kim died at age 24 of chronic alcoholism. Her best friend Debra was convicted of murder and served 20 years in prison.

They grew up in Bronzeville, the Chicago neighborhood which Turner describes as the narrow strip of land where the city forced the influx of new Black residents to live, people who had come to Chicago during the Great Migration.

Her grandparents arrived in 1916 as part of the first wave of the Great Migration, fleeing the ravages of the Jim Crow South. As more and more Blacks arrived, they were confined to a narrow strip of land on the Near South Side of the city. It was originally called the Black Belt. And as that belt expanded, the area would later affectionately be known as Bronzeville.

Turner describes her community as “very similar to Harlem in that it was the epicenter of culture and the arts and innovation, entrepreneurship. And so my family arrived there in search of the Promised Land, and it was that for a while. But soon, the white residents couldn't sell their homes, and so they chopped the homes up into what were called kitchenette apartments or cold-water flats. And the properties fell into horrible disrepair. The city neglected the area. And yet my grandmother would say that the new residents did what Black folks have always done - took a bunch of scraps and stitched together a world.”

Some of the country's most esteemed Black people lived in Bronzeville - Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black person to win the Pulitzer Prize; the novelist Richard Wright; Ida B. Wells, the anti-

lynching activist and journalist lived there; Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a Black man who was the first heart surgeon to perform the first successful heart surgery, lived there.

Turner also describes their inheritance as “a legacy of innovation and excellence. But the community was also deformed by a history of redlining and restrictive housing covenants. And this made some places simply unsafe and some dreams for a lot of people just unattainable.”

The strength of this memoir comes from Turner’s ability to deftly tell the story of their particular lives, bringing to life the specificity of her family’s story . “It is a celebration of sisterhood and friendship, a testimony to the struggles and triumphs of Black women, and a complex rendering of the interplay of race, class and opportunity—and how these forces affect our lives and capacity for resilience and redemption”.