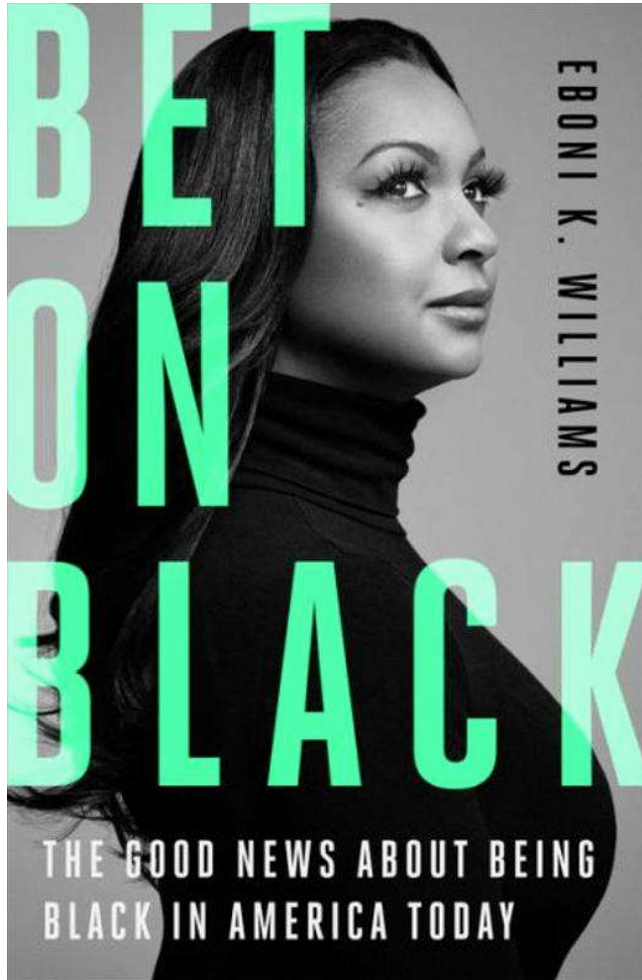


# Williams' 'Bet on Black' brings clarity about Black America

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*"Bet on Black: The Good News about Being Black in America Today"* by Eboni K. Williams. New York, NY: Legacy Lit (Hachette Book Group), 2023, 256 pages, \$29.00 (hardcover).



"We've long been aware that Blackness has been perceived by some as a threat, as an unacceptable breach of an American social contract that, for centuries, has proclaimed brown skin to be an inferior marker of identity," Eboni K. Williams explains near the beginning of *"Bet on Black: The Good News about Being Black in America Today,"* her new treatise on the role race continues to play in contemporary culture. "As seen with slavery and Jim Crow laws, this dehumanizing contract proclaims that our heritage should be downplayed and subcategorized, permanently positioned as an afterthought in the collective consciousness."

"Some might argue that we've moved past these notions of inferiority and become an egalitarian society, but as Black people we know that's ridiculously naïve and dishonest," she continues. "We know that a racist social contract still exists in the minds of many and continues to shape our society's institutions. Regardless of these realities, I wrote this book to unite us so that we can collectively refuse to have our futures dictated by anti-Black nonsense."

Wow. This manuscript was an eye-opener for me. Not having been raised with the same

influences and perspectives as Williams, much of what many readers can do doubt relate to in an effortless manner was a struggle for me. But, as Frederick Douglas once famously said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." In this case, the struggle was definitely worth the reward. *"Bet On Black"* is one of those rare volumes that has the capacity to change your entire worldview in a visceral and powerful way.

*"Bet On Black"* is comprised of an introduction ("Opening Statement"), nine chapters ("Accuracy," "Optics," "Disruption," "Counsel," "Entitled," "Ownership," "Process," "Everything," and "Summation") and concludes with a list of "Resources" for those who would like to follow-up on the ideas Williams presents within the narrative. Being a "quote" person, I appreciated how Williams included a profound thought by one of her heroes and/or mentors at the beginning of each chapter. For example, "Optics," the second chapter that deals with the way pop culture shapes perceptions, opens with the following insight from Malcolm X: "The media is the most powerful

entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent. They control the minds of the masses.”

Reflect on that (you know, when you can break away from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for a moment) and tell me it isn't true.

Williams' writing style is conversational, witty, engaging and innately compelling. While I was unable to relate directly to some of what she is trying to convey in such a superb manner, I was nonetheless captivated by her intriguing prose and the multiple subtexts that seem to permeate each page. “Bet On Black” was obviously written to help her target audience become more comfortable in their own skin and to inspire them to take pride in who they are individually as well as collectively. But her narrative also serves another purpose: to help people like me gain a greater understanding of - and empathy for - what it means to be “Black” in America in 2023 and what we should be doing in light of that enhanced awareness.

I am happy to report she succeeds on both counts.

The author spends much of the discourse dispelling the false ethos that has evolved regarding what it means to be Black in America; an ethos that – unfortunately – has seeped into the consciousness of many to whom this eloquent missive is directed. Consider the following from “Counsel,” the fourth chapter and one of the most instructional from my vantage point:

“Most of us make it through tough spots with the support and kindness of our community in one way or another. And I'm openly acknowledging this here and now because we need to abandon this notion of being perennially tough, high-achieving Black individuals who can do {stuff} on our own. White people love to give the example of Barack Obama as an all-time paragon of Black success who pulled himself up by his bootstraps to soaring heights of greatness, as if this is the best way to become somebody. In reality, this description of his rise is a myth. There were all kinds of people who supported Obama and helped him achieve his success, especially Black people. The Obama myth connects to this notion that we can only be successful as long as we bear society's challenges individually and keep it moving. Absolutely not. It's just another trifling example of how larger society gets Blackness all wrong, denying us the full range of our experiences as human beings. Part of Blackness is to make ourselves vulnerable, to allow ourselves to be supported and taken care of, to laugh, to play, to have experiences of life that have nothing to do with pushing something forward.”

I can actually relate to this characterization as I have heard several of my own relatives claim that we are in a post-racial world based solely on the rather naïve and simplistic notion that we've had a Black president.

An attorney and a frequent public speaker on Black culture and history, Williams is the host and executive producer of “Holding Court with Eboni K. Williams,” a podcast available through the Warner Music Group. In addition to starring on “The Real Housewives of New York” and guest hosting “The View,” she is also host of “The Grio with Eboni K. Williams,” which airs on cable television. Moreover, she hosts a true crime series, “Two T's Getting the Tea with Eboni K. Williams,” on iHeart Radio, which has been featured on the OWN and Investigation Discovery networks. This is her second book, the first being “Pretty Powerful: Appearance, Substance and Success,” which was released in 2017.

It did not escape my attention that much of what Williams says about Black culture should also resonate with other marginalized populations as well, especially the LGBTQIA community. In truth, many readers would find “Bet On Black” to be surprisingly inspirational. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*