



Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self

Rebecca Walker stakes her claim to writing not as the daughter of famed Alice Walker but as the author of a shocking autobiography. Her book, *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*, tells the story of a “Movement” child born to a white Jewish father and a black mother. He is a Civil Rights Lawyer and she is Writer. This story focuses on Rebecca’s struggle to fit into a society that is unwilling to accept her for who she is, half black, half white, and half Jewish.

After the divorce of her parents, Alice Walker and Mel Leventhal, Rebecca is torn between two families. She alternates homes every two years, growing up in Mississippi, San Francisco, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and suburban New York. This constant shifting and an ambiguous sense of identity, not being black and not being white, lead her to a life of sex and drugs. Rebecca struggles for an identity and family without any indications of who she is or where she belongs. She writes, “Now as I move from place to place, from Jewish to black, from D.C. to San Francisco, from status quo to middle class to radical artist bohemia, it is less like jumping from station to station on the same radio dial and more like moving from planet to planet between universes that never overlap” (114).

This story starts with her birth in November 1969, in Jackson, Mississippi and continues on throughout high school; eventually the reader gets a glimpse of her life now, as a mother, teacher, and lover. This book offers an insight into the life of a confused yet gifted child. She captures the innocence of youth not only through her naivet but also through her writing style. The complexity of her sentences, thoughts, and emotions grow as she becomes older. The only problem with this book is at times it’s hard to believe or comprehend how old Rebecca is.

Her age is strategically placed yet it’s hard to think of a 13-year-old having sex or a 15-year-old dating a man whose twenty-one. Rebecca is not a product of tragedy but rather a product of a whole generation. Tackling her own issues with race, Rebecca delivers first hand knowledge of the American construct of race and how one born of love cannot cross hateful boundaries. Her realistic perceptions of her parents neither vilify nor glorify them, but help one learn from their mistakes. In a beautifully written literary debut, Rebecca Walker grapples with the concept of “self.” *Black White and Jewish* is an autobiography of the times, illustrating the complications of growing up as a “movement baby.”