



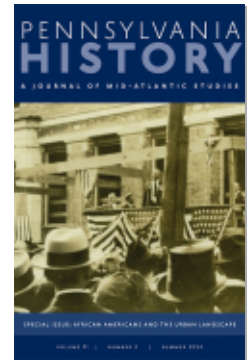
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*Sticks 'n Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* by Daisy

D. Myers (review)

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figures that carried the history and pain of Black life as well as the exuberance and determination in the struggle. These characters that framed his plays are revolutionary, they are Black Arts worthy to have a lasting impression on what we see as greatness.

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Daisy D. Myers. *Sticks 'n Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown*. 2d ed. York: York County History Center, 2021. Pp. 118. Illustrations. Paper, \$19.95.

*Sticks 'n Stones* is an absorbing firsthand account of housing discrimination and racism in Pennsylvania. The story follows the Myers family as they become the first black family to move to a predominantly white neighborhood in Levittown, Pennsylvania. The family matriarch, Daisy Myers, documented the ensuing discrimination, violence, and racism that they encountered and how they fought back simply by staying in their home.

The first chapter of *Sticks 'n Stones* begins with William “Bill” and Daisy Myers preparing to move their family to the Dogwood Hollow neighborhood in Levittown, Pennsylvania, thirty minutes from Philadelphia on August 13, 1957. Daisy Myers describes the move as peaceful until a curious mailman knocks at the door, and through his astonishment that the owners are Black, they realize that they may not be welcome in their own home. This chapter truly sets the stage for what’s to come.

In chapter 2, Daisy Myers writes of her upbringing in Richmond, Virginia, where she *knew* what racism looked like. The State of Virginia did not hide Jim Crow policies that governed all aspects of race. There was even legislation on the books that denied the right to interracial marriage.<sup>1</sup> Having lived in York and Philadelphia, where they seemed to have relative freedom, the Meyerses assumed the experience in Levittown would be quite the same. However, when mobs began to gather and a rock was thrown through their window, they knew that this experience was different. This experience would shape their family and their views of safety and security forever.

Writing three years after the major events unfolded, Daisy Myers details the harrowing circumstances her family was put in: being sent hate mail, having their property damaged, their neighbors threatened for assisting

the family, and crosses burned on their neighbor's lawn. However, she also highlights the support that the family received from neighbors, clergy, and multiracial organizations, and the letters of support the family received from all over the world as they wrestled with taking a stand for their right to be in their home. Myers also describes that even some of those who felt sympathetic to the family turned their backs when trouble touched their doorstep simply for associating with them. The central point: racism affects everyone, including the perpetrators. Those who are on the right side of history must persist.

The book uses newspapers from the author's personal newspaper clippings and newspaper articles from *The Delaware Valley Advocate* and the *Philadelphia Events Bulletin*. Per Myers, many of the events her family faced were publicized by the media to sensationalize their plight. The Northern states were certainly not the states that had a large media presence during the Civil Rights era; the stories just weren't there nor were there many instances where African Americans were met with the level of violence that was being displayed in the Southern States.

Aside from the main text of the book, there is a foreword from George M. Leader who served as the governor of Pennsylvania from 1956 to 1959, during the time when the events took place. Leader provides a succinct foreword that is pro-civil rights and almost a mirror image of how he is described by the Myers during the time. In addition, the introduction to the second edition was written by Governor Tom Wolf's Secretary of Administration Michelle Newsome. Newsome asks readers to view the book with introspection and pause to see if much has changed in the last sixty years since the Myers were forced to face down a mob who infringed on their rights and attempted to remove them from their rightfully earned home.

Daisy Myers died in 2011; however, she was able to provide a preface and acknowledgments in 2005. For her courage in the face of oppression and certain violence, she was given a formal apology from the City of York in 2005. While the apology was accepted, in just a few years the United States would see an explosion of the social justice movement. Daisy and Bill Myers's daughter, Linda P. Myers, reminds readers in the afterword that the same system that sought to deny her parents housing in the neighborhood they chose was also the system that caused the deaths of Freddie Gray, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. That system was the antithesis of what her parents Daisy and Bill Myers stood for.

Overall *Sticks 'n Stones* is an easy-to-follow story for those who are interested in learning about housing discrimination and the Civil Rights struggles north of the Mason–Dixon line. Its chapters are light, while still presenting the Myers’s personal experiences combined with archival photos. This gives the reader a broader sense of what many middle-class African American families were facing in the North when they attempted to pursue things that had been previously out of their reach. Though a quick read, and not containing the standard typeface of a book completed by a large publisher, it provides readers with the context necessary to understand the conjunction of redlining and racism. This book reminds us, as Daisy Myers put it so eloquently, “More liberties for minorities do not mean less freedom for others” (94).

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#### NOTES

1. *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) finally changed the law against interracial marriage in the State of Virginia after Mildred and Richard Loving successfully sued for their right to be recognized as a married couple.

Kathleen M. Brown. *Undoing Slavery: Bodies, Race, and Rights in the Age of Abolition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. Pp. 456. Illustrations, notes, index. Hardcover, \$39.95.

In *Undoing Slavery: Bodies, Race, and Rights in the Age of Abolition*, Kathleen M. Brown argues that “abolitionists advocated for the body’s care and autonomy not as the hoped-for consequence of rights bearing, but as a necessary condition for achieving it” (3). Through an examination of body politics, transatlantic slavery, and settler colonialism, Brown reveals a complex history of abolition that appears as a series of overlapping and transformative struggles propelled by acts of resistance, rebellion, and protest within a framework of English concepts of liberty distorted by racist medicine and the law of slavery. Brown’s deeply researched and meticulously documented narrative moves the reader