

## Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa

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## Book Reviews and Notices

*Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, by Charline J. Barnes. Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2001. 128 pp. Illustrations. \$19.99 paper.

Reviewer Katrina M. Sanders is assistant professor in the Division of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the University of Iowa. Her research focuses on the intersections of American race relations and education.

In *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, Charline J. Barnes presents 50 narratives that relate the life stories of 20 African Americans who have lived in Iowa for at least 25 years of their adult lives. Barnes presents these narratives back-to-back and uninterrupted. The participants ranged in age from their late 50s to early 90s when interviewed. Some are Iowa natives, and some can trace their family's presence in Iowa as far back as 1864. They represent various professions and places across Iowa. Three of the book's five chapters share stories of family, discrimination, aspiration, and success. The first chapter introduces the participants; the second tells how they came to live in Iowa; the third discusses hardships they faced in Iowa; the fourth discusses their dreams; and the fifth gives brief pointers to classroom teachers on conducting oral histories.

*Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa* is not a comprehensive historical work. It does not probe, analyze, or triangulate the people, places, or events mentioned in the narratives. It does not situate the experiences of African Americans in Iowa within the larger context of issues and events African Americans faced in other states or regions. But Barnes does accomplish her primary goals: to "capture . . . the voices of African Americans across the state of Iowa"; "recognize and honor the diversity of African-Americans living in Iowa"; "share the rich Black heritage from both rural and urban areas in Iowa"; and provide "insight into an ethnic culture that is not normally viewed as part of the Midwest heritage" (8).

*Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa* is rich with photos and the names of people, places, and events, making the book a useful resource for lay readers as well as researchers seeking to uncover not only the African American experience in Iowa, but also the contributions African Americans made to Iowa.

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