

having our say the delany sisters first 100 years

having our say the delany sisters first 100 years is an insightful memoir that chronicles the extraordinary lives of Sadie and Bessie Delany, two African American sisters who each surpassed a century in age. This compelling narrative not only highlights their remarkable longevity but also delves into their experiences with race, family, education, and social change throughout the 20th century. The book offers a rare perspective on the challenges and triumphs faced by African American women during a transformative era in American history. Through candid conversations, the Delany sisters share wisdom, resilience, and a unique viewpoint on progress and perseverance. This article explores the key themes, historical context, and lasting impact of **having our say the delany sisters first 100 years**, providing a comprehensive understanding of this influential work.

- Background and Authors
- Summary of the Memoir
- Historical and Cultural Context
- Themes and Messages
- Legacy and Impact

Background and Authors

Having our say the delany sisters first 100 years was co-authored by Sarah Louise Delany (Sadie) and Annie Elizabeth Delany (Bessie), alongside writer Amy Hill Hearth. The Delany sisters were born in the late 19th century to a former slave father and a mother who was a teacher and civil rights pioneer. Sadie became the first African American woman to teach domestic science in New York City high schools, while Bessie was the second black female dentist licensed in New York State. Their combined life experiences span more than a century of American history, marked by profound social and racial changes.

The Delany Sisters' Early Life

Raised in Raleigh, North Carolina, the sisters grew up in a household that valued education, activism, and faith. Their father, Henry Beard Delany, was the first African American elected as a bishop in the Episcopal Church in the United States. Their upbringing was instrumental in shaping their characters

and commitment to social justice. Despite the pervasive racism and segregation of the Jim Crow South, the Delany family emphasized resilience and achievement.

Co-Author Amy Hill Hearth

Amy Hill Hearth played a crucial role in bringing the Delany sisters' story to a wider audience. As a journalist, Hearth conducted extensive interviews with Sadie and Bessie, compiling their narratives into the memoir published in 1993. The collaboration ensured that the sisters' voices were authentically represented, preserving their unique perspectives and experiences for future generations.

Summary of the Memoir

Having our say the delany sisters first 100 years is structured as a series of interviews and conversations with Sadie and Bessie Delany, capturing their reflections on life, family, and the social changes they witnessed. The memoir covers their childhood, professional accomplishments, family dynamics, and candid insights about race relations in America. It offers an intimate glimpse into their personal struggles and triumphs, as well as the broader African American experience during the 20th century.

Key Life Events

- Childhood in segregated North Carolina
- Educational achievements and professional careers
- Experiences with racism and discrimination
- Family relationships and support networks
- Reflections on civil rights movements

Narrative Style and Structure

The memoir is notable for its conversational tone, which creates an engaging and accessible reading experience. The sisters' anecdotes are interwoven with historical context, providing both personal and educational value. This approach enables readers to connect emotionally with the Delany sisters while understanding the societal challenges they confronted.

Historical and Cultural Context

The significance of having our say the Delany sisters first 100 years is heightened by its detailed portrayal of African American life across a century marked by segregation, the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and the civil rights era. The Delany sisters' experiences reflect broader themes of racial injustice, perseverance, and social progress in America.

Jim Crow and Segregation

The sisters grew up during the era of Jim Crow laws, which enforced racial segregation and inequality in the southern United States. Their accounts reveal the harsh realities of discrimination they faced, as well as strategies for coping and thriving within a hostile environment. These stories contribute valuable primary perspectives on this period.

Education and Professional Barriers

Despite systemic obstacles, Sadie and Bessie pursued higher education and broke racial and gender barriers in their respective professions. Their achievements underscore the importance of education and determination in overcoming societal limitations. Their careers as an educator and dentist respectively symbolize progress and the expanding opportunities for African American women in the 20th century.

Themes and Messages

Having our say the Delany sisters first 100 years conveys numerous themes that resonate with readers interested in history, social justice, and human resilience. Central themes include racial equality, the power of education, family bonds, and the importance of maintaining dignity in the face of adversity.

Racial and Social Justice

The memoir highlights the sisters' lifelong commitment to confronting racism and advocating for civil rights. Their candid discussions about discrimination, prejudice, and social change emphasize the ongoing struggle for equality in America. This theme remains relevant, inspiring awareness and dialogue about racial injustice.

Resilience and Longevity

The Delany sisters' longevity is not just a biological fact but symbolizes

their resilience and strength. Their ability to adapt and thrive over decades of social upheaval reflects an enduring spirit. Their story encourages readers to appreciate perseverance as a vital human quality.

Family and Faith

The memoir also explores the importance of family support and religious faith in the sisters' lives. Their close-knit family provided emotional sustenance and motivation, while their Episcopal faith offered guidance and hope. These elements are portrayed as foundational to their well-being and success.

Legacy and Impact

Since its publication, having our say the Delany sisters first 100 years has become a significant cultural and educational resource. It has inspired adaptations, academic studies, and discussions about African American history and women's roles in society. The memoir continues to influence readers and scholars alike, highlighting the value of oral history and personal narratives.

Influence on Literature and Media

The book's success led to a Broadway play and other media adaptations, broadening its reach. It has been used in educational settings to teach about race, history, and resilience. The sisters' voices remain powerful tools for understanding American social dynamics.

Educational and Social Contributions

The Delany sisters' story has contributed to ongoing conversations about diversity, inclusion, and civil rights education. Their legacy encourages the preservation of African American history through personal storytelling and highlights the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Key Takeaways from their Story

- The importance of education in overcoming adversity
- Strength drawn from family and community
- Persistence in the fight for racial equality
- The value of recording and sharing personal histories

- Inspiration derived from longevity and life experience

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years' about?

It is the autobiography of Sadie and Bessie Delany, two African American sisters who lived over 100 years, sharing their experiences with racism, family, and history in America.

Who are the Delany sisters featured in the book?

The Delany sisters, Sarah Louise "Sadie" Delany and Annie Elizabeth "Bessie" Delany, were African American siblings who both lived past 100 years and broke racial and gender barriers in their careers.

When was 'Having Our Say' first published?

The book was first published in 1993.

What themes are explored in 'Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years'?

The book explores themes of racial discrimination, resilience, family bonds, African American history, and the progress of civil rights in the 20th century.

How did the Delany sisters contribute to civil rights and society?

Sadie and Bessie broke racial barriers in their professions—Sadie as the first African American teacher at a white high school in New York, and Bessie as one of the first African American female dentists in New York City—while also advocating for equality and sharing their life stories.

Has 'Having Our Say' been adapted into other media?

Yes, 'Having Our Say' was adapted into a Broadway play in 1995 and later into a television film in 1999 starring Ruby Dee and Diahann Carroll.

Why is 'Having Our Say' considered an important work

in African American literature?

Because it provides a rare, firsthand account of African American life and history spanning more than a century, highlighting struggles and achievements through the eyes of two pioneering women.

Additional Resources

1. *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years*

This memoir by Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delany chronicles the extraordinary lives of two African American sisters who lived through a century of profound social change. They share personal stories of their experiences with racism, education, and family, offering a unique perspective on American history. The book highlights their resilience, achievements, and the strength of their bond.

2. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson

This historical narrative explores the migration of African Americans from the South to the North and West between 1915 and 1970. It complements the Delany sisters' story by providing broader context about the social and economic forces that shaped their lives. Wilkerson's work is deeply researched and richly told, capturing the struggles and hopes of millions.

3. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand

Though focusing on a different era and experience, this biography shares themes of resilience and overcoming adversity similar to those found in the Delany sisters' narrative. It tells the story of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner and WWII bombardier who survives incredible hardships. The book highlights human endurance and the power of hope.

4. *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* by Darlene Clark Hine

This scholarly work examines the challenges and achievements of African American women in nursing, paralleling the Delany sisters' career as pioneering professionals. It provides insight into the racial and gender barriers these women faced in the medical field. The book enriches understanding of African American women's contributions to healthcare.

5. *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race* by Margot Lee Shetterly

This inspiring narrative uncovers the lives of African American female mathematicians at NASA during the mid-20th century. Like the Delany sisters, these women broke racial and gender barriers through intellect and perseverance. The book celebrates their crucial but often overlooked contributions to science and history.

6. *Through the Eyes of the Storm: A Memoir* by Sarah L. Delany

Written by one of the Delany sisters herself, this memoir offers a more

personal and detailed account of her life and experiences. It delves into her career, family, and the historical events she lived through. The book is a valuable companion to *Having Our Say*, providing deeper insight into her perspective.

7. *Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music* by Burton W. Peretti

This book explores the development of African American music and its cultural significance throughout history. It complements the Delany sisters' story by highlighting the broader cultural context of African American life. The narrative covers genres from spirituals to jazz, illustrating music's role in social change.

8. *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois

A classic work of African American literature, this collection of essays addresses the challenges of race, identity, and social justice in America. It provides philosophical and sociological insights relevant to the experiences described by the Delany sisters. The book remains a foundational text for understanding African American history and culture.

9. *My Life on the Road* by Gloria Steinem

Steinem's memoir recounts her life as a feminist activist and traveler, championing social equality and civil rights. While differing in focus, her story shares themes of perseverance, advocacy, and breaking barriers like those in the Delany sisters' narrative. The book inspires readers to engage in social change and personal growth.

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