



American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World

Anita Reynolds , George Hutchinson (Editor) , Howard Miller (With) , Patricia J. Williams (Foreword)

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This is the rollicking, never-before-published memoir of a fascinating woman with an uncanny knack for being in the right place in the most interesting times. Of racially mixed heritage, Anita Reynolds was proudly African American but often passed for Indian, Mexican, or Creole. Actress, dancer, model, literary critic, psychologist, but above all free-spirited provocateur, she was, as her Parisian friends nicknamed her, an "American cocktail."

One of the first black stars of the silent era, she appeared in Hollywood movies with Rudolph Valentino, attended Charlie Chaplin's anarchist meetings, and studied dance with Ruth St. Denis. She moved to New York in the 1920s and made a splash with both Harlem Renaissance elites and Greenwich Village bohemians. An emigre in Paris, she fell in with the Left Bank *avant garde*, befriending Antonin Artaud, Man Ray, and Pablo Picasso. Next, she took up residence as a journalist in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War and witnessed firsthand the growing menace of fascism. In 1940, as the Nazi panzers closed in on Paris, Reynolds spent the final days before the French capitulation as a Red Cross nurse, afterward making a mad dash for Lisbon to escape on the last ship departing Europe.

In prose that perfectly captures the globetrotting nonchalance of its author, *American Cocktail* presents a stimulating, unforgettable self-portrait of a truly extraordinary woman.

American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World Details

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From Reader Review American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World for online ebook

Caitlin says

This lady was some cookie and what makes her so fascinating also makes her memoir so frustrating. She lived in the middle of the most exciting times of the twentieth century - the birth of the movie industry in la, the New York of the Fitzgerald's, the Paris of Hemingway , Biarritz during the French surrender in 1939, and she did so as a mixed race independent woman. the events she describes are mind boggling - being offered a slave in Morocco, speaking to Man Ray before the fall of Paris, saving refugees from the Nazis, and all she seems to have to say about any of this was 'and then we had cocktails on the terrace, which was nice'. She seems like a very 'nice' person but one who had little ability to analyse what was going around her. She has a unique viewpoint and the opportunity to really say something interesting but she stops at describing slightly dull love affairs and the social standing of the hotels where she stayed. I was ultimately disappointed with her to the point of wishing to shake her by the shoulders and scream 'yes, but what was it actually like????'.

El says

The NYTimes talks about this book.

Richard says

First of all, I didn't think it was well written. After reading or slogging thru this my conclusion is that she is a whore. Seems like she had more lovers than Cassanova ? She certainly had the knack of associating or mingling with the rich and had dollar signs in her eyes in terms of associating with people and lovers. She always seem to play the "race card" and keeps professing about the inequalities of the negro. Shallow woman and story ...

Linda says

Best description: Anita "was a strong woman---though not in a muscular sense...she was manipulative, arch, calculating, and rather reminiscent of Scarlett O'Farrell in full curtains - into - evening - gown mode." That says it all.

Deb Grove says

A really interesting biography. Anita grew up in a well-to-do family with some relatives including a brother that could "pass". She didn't but it didn't seem to matter. She did leave the US and went to France where she could thrive and live the life that she wanted. She associated with artists and writers -- people like Man Ray, Gertrude STein, Hemingway, James Joyce. Coco Chanel gave her "castoffs." She worked as a nurse in WW2

but left Lisbon for the US in 1940. Another thing I took out of this book is that leaving where one grew up for a place where people have no pre-conceived ideas about you, can give acceptance and allow growth to one's potential. So true!

Mike says

High-spirited, enterprising woman.

Notes

165...When she was living with a retired captain in England she learned "Esq." was reserved for "educated men", those who had gone to a "public school", what we would call a private school.

166.."elevenes" ...late breakfast of kippers & bacon & toast & tea & fruit

250...Deep Purple

notes 320...a silly, superficial, supercilious, sentimental, sad-sack song

258..I drummed up a conversation.

Debby says

This book is about pre-WWII Anita Thompson's life. While it is extraordinary in the number of famous people she knew and associated with, and for an African-American woman it is amazing, it is simply a name dropping book. She used the Wellesley money her dad sent to hop off to France to attend Universite du Louvre. And from there, she was off to the races. So it's an adventure book as well. Did she add anything to our lives? No. Do I recommend this? Not really. There are lots better books with more to offer out there in the real world.

Historygirl says

American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World is a difficult book to assess. It is an historical document rather than a fully realized memoir. The forewords and introductions add context, but I recommend reading them afterwards, because they contain spoilers. Reynolds must have been a fascinating person and the book is fun to read. What is most interesting is how she seeks a stable identity as a light-skinned "colored girl." While never denying her identity, she wants to live in a world where skin color does not matter. Fifty years later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would deliver one of the most important speeches ever written with the same moving plea, and fifty years after that the U.S. still fails to deliver on its promise.

Anita Reynolds sought sexual freedom, but was not licentious. Fleeing the U.S. she fit in perfectly with the Bohemian Paris of the 1920s and 1930s. However, as the Germans invade France, she finds herself with crowds of Americans fleeing Europe. Her memoir ends there, although she went on to many other accomplishments in later life.

Her memoir is light and not terribly reflective, but what shines through is someone determined not to be politically correct and let others define her. She was one of the "talented tenth," well educated and well-to-do, but she wanted to be a chorus girl, not a teacher, and managed to get hired to dance. Her father sent her money to go to Wellesley College, but she used it to go to Paris. By and large she lived on her own terms, laughing and dancing and making friends everywhere. She represents an unusual window on the Jazz Age. She was happier and more successful than the tragic Zelda Fitzgerald. Not all the flappers ended their lives

badly, even those who faced the challenges of being women of color in a changing, modern world. It is a fascinating story, well worth reading.

Donna-Jo Webster says

Interesting memoir of a fascinating lady I'd never heard of before. Quick read of an incredible life!

Carmen Slaughter says

Fun and fascinating memoir.

Jay Leslie says

The fly-on-the-wall vibe would have made for a decent essay. It really didn't need to be a book.

Tanya Elder says

I have often wondered what I would do as a "American cocktail" during the interwar years myself... stay in racist America or head off to Europe to live as a "noble savage" among the cultural elite of France. Well, this little autobiography from Anita Thompson lets me know what that side of life was like for a strong-willed woman who left behind the color trappings of America and went off to live among the heroes of the age of Dada and the world of Surrealism, with a stopover in Morocco and England. Hers is an engaging story of someone who didn't care much about fascists or socialists or Hitler... but she did care about culture, art, fashion, and living a cultured life. It's a nice glimpse of life in the early 20th century, and while it's not the best of written books (she leaves a lot of facts out that need to be filled in with footnotes), she certainly captures the voice of the Roaring 20s and all those characters that you've ever read about during the Interwar years that you wish you could have hung out with at the local bistro.

Susan Emmet says

With an excellent forward by Patricia Williams, and hard research work by Howard Miller and George Hutchinson (both professors in upstate NY), Anita Reynolds' story (recorded over years and then transcribed) is brought to light.

Reared in an upper-middle class African-American family in various parts of the United States, she headed young to Harlem and Greenwich Village for dancing and dating and schooling and then headed off to Paris to do the same. She talks her way on tape through Paris, Spain, Tunisia, Italy, Portugal, England - all over - and had the chance to meet, sometimes bed or wed, but certainly to inhale a cocktail of artists, politicians and poseurs. She followed her heart, sometimes her head, into a melange of adventure. Focused on 1920-1960 and a bit beyond in the end, she tripped the light fantastic with the likes of Picasso, Tonny, Man Ray,

Valentino, Louise Bryant - the list is nearly endless.

Of "mixed blood" (as we all are), she recognized race and racism and anti-Semitism and all kinds of other "antis," but she didn't seem much taken by that beyond her own pleasure and desire.

In one sense, that's admirable. In another, it's unbelievable.

But what a life she lived as party girl, psychologist, professor, traveler-extraordinaire.
