



One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life--A Story of Race and Family Secrets

By Bliss Broyard

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Ever since renowned literary critic Anatole Broyard's own parents, New Orleans Creoles, had moved to Brooklyn and began to "pass" in order to get work, he had learned to conceal his racial identity. As he grew older and entered the ranks of the New York literary elite, he maintained the façade. Now his daughter Bliss tries to make sense of his choices and the impact of this revelation on her own life. She searches out the family she never knew in New York and New Orleans, and considers the profound consequences of racial identity. With unsparing candor and nuanced insight, Broyard chronicles her evolution from sheltered WASP to a woman of mixed race ancestry.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For Broyard, who was raised as white in Connecticut, the discovery that her father, the writer and critic Anatole Broyard, wasn't exactly white raised the question of how black I was—a question that set her in search of the history of the most well-known defector from the black race in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the first section, Broyard weaves her privileged childhood together with later travels to New Orleans (her father's birthplace) and Los Angeles (where there is a determinedly white set of Broyards as well as a determinedly black set). Part two extends from the first Broyard, a Frenchman arriving in mid-18th century Louisiana territory, to six-year-old Anatole's 1927 arrival in Brooklyn. The last section is devoted to Anatole's life. Broyard's identity quest takes her on an odyssey through social, military, legal, Louisiana and general American history, as well as U.S. race relations and her family DNA, introducing innumerable relatives, classmates, friends and employers, and making for a rather overstuffed account. Fortunately, she's got an ear for dialogue, an eye for place and a storyteller's pacing. But the most compelling element is her ambivalent tenor: Was my father's choice rooted in self-preservation or in self-hatred?... Was he a hero or a cad? Part eulogy, part apologia, the answer is indirect: But he was my dad and we loved each other. (*Sept.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

A decade ago in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, noted black scholar Henry Louis Gates wrote an unflattering portrait of Anatole Broyard and his "passing." Critic Art Winslow suggests that Bliss Broyard's memoir may be "intended as a rejoinder to Gates." Author of the short story collection *My Father, Dancing* (2000; *New York Times* Notable Book), Broyard offers a passionate, lively narrative packed with hundreds of interviews with family members (both black and white), friends, lovers, and others who knew her father well. The result is not always seamless; the book's intent is not always clear; and Jonathan Yardley finds Broyard's "fretting about her racial identity" bothersome. Still, the author generally succeeds in offering an ambitious and personal perspective on issues relevant to her own family and anyone interested in race relations in America.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review How easy it is to keep secrets, even within a close-knit family. Bliss Broyard was 24 when she learned that her father, Anatole, for many years the daily book reviewer for the *New York Times*, had concealed his black heritage. With a mother of Norwegian and French descent (who carried her own burdens), Bliss and her brother never looked anything but white, yet as soon as Bliss was told about her father's lineage, all sorts of family traits suddenly made a new kind of sense. Still, the disclosure left Broyard reeling, uncertain of her identity or place in the world. At the same time, her jazz-loving, lady-killer father was dying. Determined to learn as much as possible about her heritage, Broyard embarked on an intrepid genealogical quest that yielded not only new relatives but also galvanizing insights into Creole culture, African American history, and the cold truth about "passing." Broyard's vivid, compassionate portrait of her complex father raises the question, What is the deep-down cost of living a lie? And her remarkably perceptive and well-wrought saga of blood ties denied and nurtured celebrates the grand diversity and true interconnectivity of the entire human family. Seaman, Donna

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Helen Woodyard:

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Nicholas Ko:

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Mary Adamczyk:

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