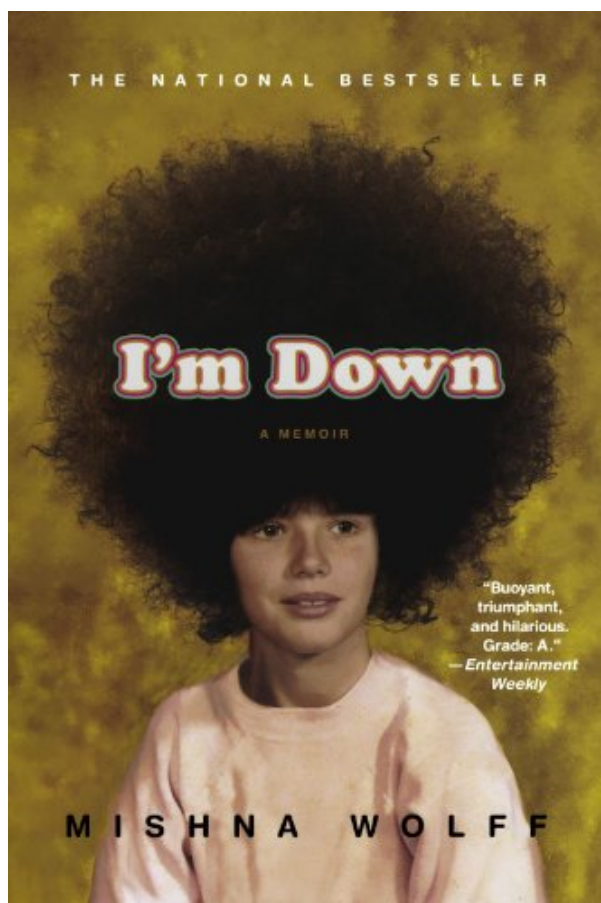
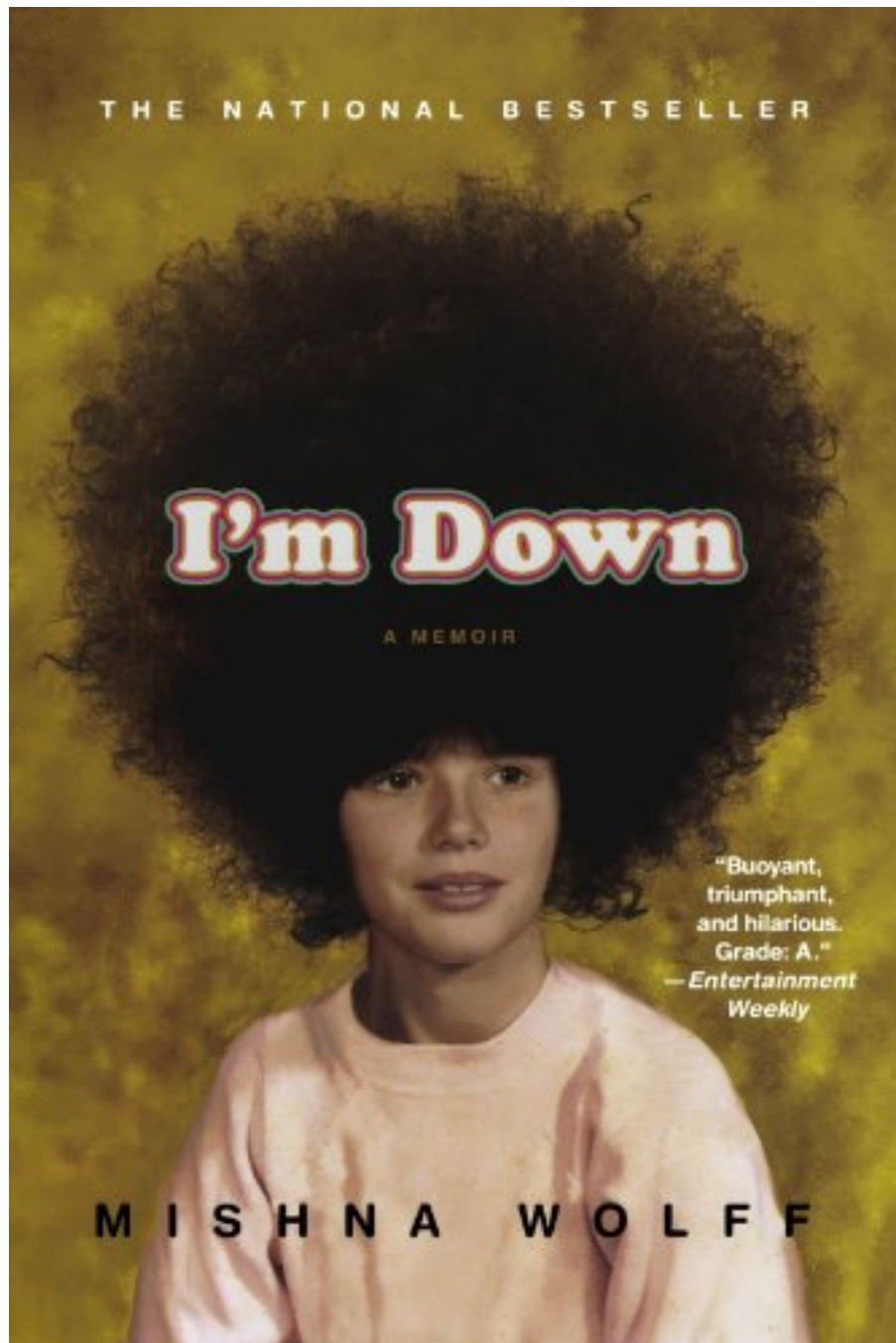


I'M DOWN: A MEMOIR BY MISHNA WOLFF



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Mishna Wolff grew up in a poor black neighborhood with her single father, a white man who truly believed he was black. "He strutted around with a short perm, a Cosby-esque sweater, gold chains and a Kangol?telling jokes like Redd Fox, and giving advice like Jesse Jackson. You couldn't tell my father he was white. Believe me, I tried," writes Wolff. And so from early childhood on, her father began his crusade to make his white daughter down.

Unfortunately, Mishna didn't quite fit in with the neighborhood kids: she couldn't dance, she couldn't sing, she couldn't double Dutch and she was the worst player on her all-black basketball team. She was shy, uncool, and painfully white. And yet when she was suddenly sent to a rich white school, she found she was too "black" to fit in with her white classmates.

I'm Down is a hip, hysterical and at the same time beautiful memoir that will have you howling with laughter, recommending it to friends and questioning what it means to be black and white in America.

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Best Memoir I've Read Since "Liar's Club"

By Beldini

What a great book! Fun, moving, and with a really unexpected ending. Though the promo material highlights her childhood as a white girl in a black neighborhood, this memoir is a more sophisticated story--and more universal story -- of a child who can't find her place in her family. And the most moving aspect of this book is her success in finding a place in the world, and what it ultimately costs her. Yes, it's heartbreaking in places, but it's hysterical in others and most importantly -- the story is compelling. I literally couldn't put this book down and I have the circles under my eyes to prove it.

27 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

This semi-autobiographical memoir is really great airplane food!

By Zenticant Pangolin

Wow, apart from a bird identification book, this is the very first amazon vine product that I might have purchased in 'real life' and I'm happy to say that this is definitely a worthwhile acquisition.

Before we begin let's establish what this book is not: It is not hilarious or tragic as a cover blurb indicates. It is also not, strictly speaking, truly autobiographical as the author declaims up front something to the effect that many of the things in the book might never have happened and that she uses composites of characters to represent distinct personalities in her story.

What this book is is a very charming, often poignant, quite incisive, well-told story based on the remembrances of a caucasian woman whose childhood was spent living in a deteriorating Seattle neighborhood with a father who chose to 'go black.'

Interestingly, it is also a real testimonial to the quality and effectiveness of the the Seattle public school system and civic organizations in their efforts to provide opportunities to its most promising albeit less privileged (read wealthy) children.

The story revolves around a white girl who, along with her younger sister remain in the custody of her ne'er do well father who has fashioned himself a black man in a white man's body. They live in an urban Seattle neighborhood which has become predominantly black; a change that the girls' father revels in.

The author does a wonderful job of describing the struggles and triumphs she experiences as she struggles with the multiple challenges of adolescence; parental divorce; racial comity, difference and divide; and familial and peer group strife.

A really great thing about the book is that the author is able to give insightful analysis of the dynamics of the unfolding tale as if she was fully cognizant of them as a little girl. Of course the picture only became clear to her later, in adulthood, which is undoubtedly why she makes her disclaimer about the events depicted in the book.

Ms. Wolff knows how to spin a story and once you begin this book I doubt that you will want to put it down until you have finished it.

I began reading it on a flight from the West Coast to the East coast and found the book to be the perfect length for this journey as I got through the first third on the first leg and finished up the rest just as we were making the approach to land on the second leg: Brilliant!

You will definitely become emotionally invested in this book and I recommend it as a very satisfying entertainment that is better than mere candy or a popcorn movie.

17 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

A Hard Book to Rate

By Legend of a Cowgirl

This book is hard to rate because although I am African-American I had similar experiences as Mishna Wolff. The insult some of the reviewers feel is that the author is a white woman who experienced what many of us wish were "stereotypes"; however, in reality they do exist in the African-American community. I guess I can relate to the author's experiences because I was a child who not only had no athletic ability, liked to read encyclopedias, had no rhythm (a no-no), couldn't jump rope (that no rhythm curse) and hated fighting. I spent many days wanting to play with children my own age, but didn't want to be drawn into a fight or insulted. As a child, I did begin to befriend white children who did not like to fight and insult, but I received

much flack about their friendships from my family. They actually preferred me to have friends who were black, even if they were mean.

I believe the author tried to soften the story with the impression that her experiences had more to do with economics. She wrote about her father's girlfriend, who was a nurse, who the author seems to feel was the most positive role model. She was much different than the other girlfriends and even the author's mother. She also tried to soften her impressions of African-Americans by giving examples of her white classmates who had very dysfunctional lives despite their luxurious lives.

The problems with the book are the following:

- a. The author doesn't have any experiences (which she cared to divulge) with poor white people. Actually she doesn't have experiences with any white people besides her class and sports team mates, teachers, coaches, her parents and a brief mention of her uncle during a wedding. White people are mysteriously absent during her life,
- b. The author ends the book abruptly during her junior high school years. We have no idea what her high school experience was and what happened during her hormone-induced teenage years,
- c. We don't know how her sister fared. Her sister was comfortable with the neighborhood children and went to school within the community.

The oddest part of the book was not the community where she was raised but her parents. I don't care what a person's socio-economic status happens to be, parents still want the best for their children. Her father seemed intent on interfering with any attempt the author made to better her life. I also believe there was more to the dissolution of her parent's marriage since her father, who was obviously neglectful, to receive custody. There are some skeletons in the closet that the author doesn't seem to want to divulge or doesn't know.

Overall, I guess the author exposes the angst of being helpless in a dysfunctional family and not fitting, which is not that uncommon with children. Her excuse for her oddness was that she just was in the wrong neighborhood. It was hard to accept that a white woman was exposing a few of the bad aspects of growing up in the African-American community. However, I had to put my ego aside and be non-judgmental because she was only writing about her experiences and perceptions. I guess the objection to this book is that many blacks don't fit the stereotypes. Rather than be upset, we should be happy that we have transcended those behaviors and teach the positive behaviors to our children.

I can only give it three stars because the ending was abrupt and didn't describe her high school and college years.

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