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## Book Review: The School on 103rd Street

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## Books

### The School on 103rd Street

By Roland S. Jefferson, M.D.

Vintage Press, New York  
203 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by Peola Spurlock

If you are brave of heart and strong of mind, you will read *The School on 103rd Street* as a necessity for Black awareness, even though the book is a fictional analysis of the extent to which white society will go to maintain its racial superiority.

Specifically, the book is a love story between a Black physician and his medicine, his cars, his other material possessions, his woman and his people—but not necessarily in that order. It is also a book about murder, intrigue, high speed car racing along the Pacific Coast, sex, danger, and even martyrdom.

As the story unfolds, one discovers that the physician's love for his people overshadows his love for everything else.

The narrative begins with a group of high school youths in Los Angeles planning an early morning meeting with one of their street partners who had promised to reveal the discovery he made during a break-in of an elementary school in Watts. But upon arriving at the designated spot, the group finds the partner's mutilated body instead. In fear, the youths confide in a Black physician who works in a community health center and who goes by the name of Dr. Elwin Carter. Carter is young, wears dashikis from Africa, \$65 platform shoes by Rossi, suits by Petrocelli, sweaters by Michelangelo, owns a Ferrari and a VW, lives with his woman in an exclusive all-Black neighborhood whose residents project the essence of "having arrived."

all the top pop artists. He parks his car in the "heart of the ghetto" and wants to become involved in the lives of the street dudes in a positive manner. He exhibits a positive self concept.

Sable, the woman in his life, remains an enigma to him throughout their relationship. A widow, she attends civil rights meetings and comes and goes as she pleases. When they are together, their time is spent "talking, making love, and enjoying each other." She is 34 and attractive. During her college days she became involved in sit-ins and confinement in jails which left her bitter, angry, confused and disillusioned. Unknown to Carter, she carries a pistol and a knife in her purse.

Carter's friends, for the most part, are physicians. On Wednesdays, Carter spends part of his off-day driving up and down the highway in his Ferrari to relax; at noon he lunches at the Playbody Club with some of his colleagues—among them a surgeon, who despite his complexion feels white for all practical purposes (he drives a Mark IV which he describes as "white on white, in white" and loves white women); a heavy-drinking pediatrician who looks white but resents being goaded about his complexion, an internist who is rumored to be a homosexual but who has been married four times; an unscrupulous obstetrician who has become wealthy and has lost respect among his friends; a radiologist who is married to an obese white woman of whom he is ashamed, and a general practitioner with many artistic-type friends.

There is some similarity between Sam Yette's *The Choice* and this book. In *The Choice*, there was proposed legislation to make Black neighborhoods concentration camps. In *The School on 103rd Street*, a secret jail has been discovered under a Watts elementary school replete with

psychosurgical equipment and tunnel to process Black people back into the streets. Carter and a Black Vietnam veteran with expertise in demolition go into the school to check it out. What happens thereafter reminds one of Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by The Door*.

Carter and one of his wealthy friends finance an investigation to determine whether these "concentration camps" have been established throughout the country. And upon finding these same facilities in all of the major cities, the group devises a plan to destroy them simultaneously; bombs are installed to detonate at 6 a.m. on a given day. But there was a tragic flaw—the time difference between coast to coast. The outcome leaves the reader with an anticlimactic fear.

All of the facilities in the East explode. The demolition expert flies to Los Angeles from the East to destroy the Watts facility. While on the plane, he sets his watch up three hours; in the school—forgetting that he has already set his watch—sets it up three more hours.

Meanwhile, Carter and Sable, after having driven away for two and a half hours, discover the mistake. At 6:30 a.m. they realize that the charge will go off at 9 a.m. while classes are in session. In a frantic attempt to save the children, they try to make it back to the city in rush-hour traffic. Their car is running out of gas. They stop at a service station. And while waiting to be serviced, a patrol car carrying two white officers approaches the station. One of the policemen begins to interrogate Carter in a Southern drawl. Carter becomes angry. This compounds the tension and anxiety of the situation. The policeman informs him that there is a warrant for his arrest for an unpaid ticket. Carter whispers to Sable: in case he is arrested, she should drive to the

school to warn them of the impending explosion, but . . . Sable cannot handle a stick-shift.

The second officer leaves the cruiser and makes an improper advance toward Sable. When she rebuffs him, he begins to call her names and grabs her. She pulls a knife from her purse and fatally stabs him. The other officer, by now in the cruiser, is not in a position to see what is happening. Carter and Sable jump into the Ferrari and take off. The officer in the cruiser radios for an ambulance and sends an all points bulletin—then begins a high speed chase after the Ferrari.

Sable, sensing the hopelessness of the situation, takes a gun from her purse and fires two shots at the cruiser. One of the shots hits the policeman in the temple, the cruiser collides head-on into a tractor-trailer. The time is 7:55 a.m.

Carter and Sable abandon the Ferrari at a motel parking lot and proceed to Watts in a stolen car. Upon arriving at the school, Carter tries to persuade the principal to clear the building. No deal. At 8:50 a.m., on Sable's suggestion, Carter pulls the fire alarm. He asks Sable to move the children to safety while he prepares to disengage the bomb. At 9 a.m. the school goes up in smoke. And Sable, realizing that Carter has not survived, leaves for the airport. As she is riding up a ramp to the boarding gate, she is fatally shot in the back of the neck. (The author leaves it to the imagination of the reader to decide who shot her and what happens to the others who assisted in the project).

This book is replete with profanity, most of it against the Black female. However, the author's descriptive technique is poignantly felt when one glimpses the centuries-old mis-

the Black male and female and their inability to perceive that the system has divided and conquered them.

Overall, the author has a mesmerizing fictional document that breathes life into its characters. The author does an excellent job of instilling fear in the reader by his analysis of the complicity that exists between federal, state and local governments in their efforts to keep the Black race in its place.

The author of this novel is a 1965 graduate of the Howard University School of Medicine. He specializes in psychiatry and is currently in private practice in Los Angeles. His writing style demonstrates the internalization of Black values predicated upon the riots of the Sixties and the profound impact that period had upon him. □

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### **The Black Parents' Handbook: A Guide to Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Child Care**

By Clara J. McLaughlin, with Donald R. Frisby, M.D., Richard A. McLaughlin, M.D., and Melvin W. Williams, M.D.  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York  
220 pp., \$10 (paperback \$3.95)

*Reviewed by Judith S. Andrews*

Are Black infants different from white infants? Author Clara J. McLaughlin in her new book, *The Black Parents' Handbook*, says they are. "The average Black infant develops mentally and physically at a faster rate than that indicated by the standard development scales," she writes. Further, she says, because of this, Black parents will find most child-care books wanting. McLaughlin's handbook, written in collaboration with three medical doctors—one of them her spouse—does not have all the answers—but it is a start. Hailed by its publisher as a "Doctor Spock" for Black parents, the book deals with a wide range of issues,

including folk medicine, genetic and medical problems, and Black pride. In addition to the discussion on special problems involving Black child-rearing, McLaughlin also gives practical advice on general child-care—from how to take temperature to toilet-training.

One of the book's interesting chapters is a discussion on voodooism and superstition, which according to the author still persist in some segments of the Black community. For example, she talks about the belief by some that a pregnant woman should rub her stomach daily with dirty dishwater in order to insure an easy delivery; the fear that a pregnant woman should not cross her legs because the umbilical cord will wrap around the baby's head and cause choking. While many of the remedies and natural herbs used by African witch doctors have become part of modern medicine, the author warns that many folk-cures can be harmful and should be carefully considered before use.

Pervasive throughout the book is the author's concern that Black children get a "special" kind of preparation to cope in society as adults. She contends that the nature of the American society makes it incumbent upon Black parents to instill in their children a strong sense of self-esteem and pride. Parents, she says, must first discover the level of their own self-esteem. She lists several questions Black parents can ask themselves to determine if they really believe "Black is beautiful." Some of the questions are:

"Do you think a baby who is born dark is not attractive? Have you ever felt envy toward a person with long, straight hair? Do you feel superior to other Blacks when you have close white friends? Are you guilty of looking at a newborn baby's fingertips or ears to see how dark the child will eventually be? Do you find it easier to accept the 2