


The Coming

Daniel Black

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Daniel Black is at the top of his literary game with *The Coming*, a novel that National Book Award-winning author Charles

Johnson (Middle Passage) calls "powerful and beautiful" and "a work to be proud of."

Lyrical, poetic, and hypnotizing, *The Coming* tells the story of a people's capture and sojourn from their homeland across the Middle Passage--a traumatic trip that exposed the strength and resolve of the African spirit. Extreme conditions produce extraordinary insight, and only after being stripped of everything do they discover the unspeakable beauty they once took for granted. This powerful, haunting novel will shake readers to their very souls.

The Coming Details

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James Payne says

Wow. As an African American I feel such a deep connection to this book. Each turn of the page was another spiritual step in my own journey to claim my personal inheritance. This book should be required reading for any person old enough to understand the seriousness its contents. 6/5 Stars Ashay Dr. Black Ashay.

Shannon says

"Then came disaster. With open arms, we embraced those who looked nothing like us, assuming all life honors life. We were wrong."

This book follows a group of Africans from the moment they are captured in their villages to the moment they are sold in America. In this emotionally draining undertaking, Black depicts the characters' trek to the ship, journey across the Atlantic, and complete loss of self. The latter was critical to the story as Black emphasizes the importance of names from cover to cover; whenever a character is named, the meaning of the name follows. The name of an individual became a predictor of their reaction to a situation. When a name was unknown, one was assigned based on how that individual behaved.

"For the first time in our lives, we questioned our worth. We'd never questioned this back home."

We come to understand that while "home," everyone knows their purpose. Nothing about one's being is accidental, coincidental. I sat with this notion for a moment because today's culture - or maybe it's American culture - teaches that Z was caused by X or Y. In "The Coming," you are who you are because that's who you were suppose to be. Nothing *caused* one to be a certain way. And "we" were all things, all personality types; captivity did not turn one into something they were not.

"Only the strong would survive. And children are never that strong."

The environment of the ship's holding quarters is beyond anything I can describe. Many of the captives were young and had not yet completed their passages into adulthood. They had so much more to learn. They did not know how to summon their gods. They did not know how to heal their illnesses. They did not know how to cope. They tried to live up to their names, but they were out of their element. Even though they spoke different languages, they were able to communicate well enough to plan a revolt; it's needless to say how that turned out. And the actions the captors took ensure there would not be another revolt attempt was just horrific.

As the reader is taking the journey with the characters, it's difficult stop reading without knowing the fate of

each of them. Though death and enslavement are the only two outcomes, there is significant variation in how each character comes to that end.

There are many references to African land, teachings, rituals, and names. I presume a substantial amount of research was conducted since *Black is American*. The book has great momentum in the beginning but does seem to get stuck and become repetitive just over half way through. It's an almost-but-not-quite type of read. But it's worth the read regardless. I give it 3.5 stars.

Jeanette says

Might be the same story but it was told in such a way, you could imagine the trauma of the journey from Africa to this unknown land. Its a horrific tale anyway you tell it.

Mona Grant-Holmes says

The Coming tells of the voyage of Africans crossing the Atlantic and their arrival in a new world. Black tells of their journey and experiences with eloquence and language rich in emotion, depth, and passionate prose. This is Daniel Black at his finest, this is the coming.

Barbara says

Great book
very well written

Andre says

This is an important novel. A historical novel. A work of art. It is a fictionalized telling of Africans journey from the motherland to what eventually becomes Charleston, USA. The story is told from the perspective of "we" and is delivered in story form. It's a haunting telling of what "we" experienced from a typical trans-Atlantic trip from Africa to the shores of America. It's just one trip that is used to describe what is supposed to be representative of all such journeys. He tells what "we" went through in the holds of these evil vessels. He tells the story over the course of crossing the Atlantic and then arriving on these shores and being held in stalls awaiting a buyer.

The way the book is arranged works very well. The prose is mostly poetic and is most necessary to deliver this tale of woe and devilment. If you ever asked the question, what did the enslavement process look like, feel like? What were "we" thinking? Daniel Black attempts to answer these questions. And although this is a work of fiction, many of the transgressions against the body and soul of Africans have been well documented. The book forces you to wonder what choices would you have made if you were stuffed like a sardine in the hold of a ship? How would you have handled being placed on an auction block, completely naked for all to see and being examined like an animal?

"But if we all died, wouldn't they be undisputed victors? How would we redeem ourselves if everyone went with Death? Our options were few and inglorious. We wrestled, on land and sea, with Life and Death, wanting neither completely but needing both inherently. We decided silently, in the stillness of the stall, that both choices carried honor. Both held the integrity of our people. The job of the living was to resurrect the dead; the job of the dead was to invigorate the living. They were complimentary existences. What elders had taught was true—Life and Death are twins of the same mother. Now we understood."

There are nuggets of information related to African culture and there are an abundance of pearls of wisdom, African proverbs. Daniel Black is trying to paint a picture of the impact the enslaving process had on an individual. What must they have been thinking? One day you're Ashanti or Yoruba and 90 days later, "We were no longer simply the Fon, the Ibo, the Hausa, the Yoruba, the Ewe. We were something other than the Ashanti, the Fante, The Fulani, the Serere, and the Mende. Something new, some combination of them all, some blending of culture and spirit our elders wouldn't have recognized. We were a different people now, with roots in every place we had trod. We were one tree, with branches reaching in every possible direction and leaves sprouting abundantly. We were one river, flowing together, yet having started as brooks and streams unnamed. In the midst of incomprehensible trauma, our specific identities had merged into a larger collective Self, and thus we survived what should've been our demise."

A story to be shared with all those who ever imagined the unimaginable.

Emma B says

Raw and gut wrenching, this short novel (117 pages) is mesmerizing. If a reader has never read/experienced Author Daniel Black, perhaps a reading of one of his other books would prepare you for this one. I can usually read about slavery objectively, but this drew me in in a disturbing manner. As I read I felt the suffering of the slaves, having been stolen from their homeland, bound and chained, in the belly of the ship on the voyage, to an unknown world. Told through the eyes of one of the slaves this is a fictionalized, detailed account of what our ancestors went through, including being brought into Charleston, South Carolina and held in slave pens, waiting to be taken to the auction block, and if not sold that day, being brought back to the pen; of bonds formed while shackled together, only to be broken when one is sold off, never to see one another again. I've had the privilege of experiencing Mr. Black's reading from his work, so I was eagerly waiting to read his new offering. Writers of American History textbooks who are trying to change the institution of slavery to "an event" for today's students should be required to read this book. I put this book in the category with Tony Morrison's *Beloved*.

Joanna says

Daniel Black's, *The Coming*, is one the most difficult books to read that I've ever read. It stands as a pivotal and unflinching look at *The Middle Passage* in a way that no other book, to my knowledge, ever has. Tom Feelings' book, *The Middle Passage*, comes close in pictorial depiction, but marry it to the narrative text of *The Coming*, and you have the unique and unsculpted horror that prefaced America's institution of slavery.

All that I already know about the horror of *The Middle Passage* was amplified exponentially within its pages. There are no words to describe the kidnap, degradation, assault and perversion that occurred on slave ships bound for America, all the while bearing the unluckiest of names--*The Hope*, *The Good Ship Jesus*...and so

many others. Irony is a bitch and nowhere is it on stage more than in the good Christian names borne by many slave ships.

Kidnapped, assaulted, nearly starved, abused, and raped, Africans were loaded onto ships and chained to overcrowded capacity because after all, between, disease, suicide, murder, and madness, perhaps only a third of them would survive the journey across the Atlantic.

Ripped from their homes and all they knew, both men, women and children were captured, raped, and subjected to dehumanization on a scale that is all but immeasurable and unequaled by any human atrocity since. On a whim, ship's crews could torture and kill. Most did not endure. But those who did we thank and honor because it is they who survived to live, grow and give birth to the African Americans who call America home today.

So many ships, so many dead and half-dead, tossed overboard. The migration patterns of the Great White Shark changed in the wake of them following slave ships. This is history. The historical record is rich with the narratives, maps, and texts detailing The Middle Passage.

Few want to discuss it. Fewer still want to know its particulars. Too bad. Daniel Black's book should be required reading for everyone. Too many African Americans hold a secret place of shame inside themselves for the events that brought their ancestors to American shores. There is no shame here. We did not do this to ourselves. We survived somehow and that is miracle in and of itself.

There remains a deep divide and a disconnect between ourselves and Africa. There are families, lineages, cousins, and relatives we can never know. For those who remained uncaptured in Africa, there were 'the disappeared', families and relatives who just disappeared off the face of the continent. They never knew what happened to brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers and others.

African Americans are the only American who did not come through Ellis Island. And no, Ben Carson, we weren't immigrants. As African Americans, it is imperative to remember, to know, to be guided by the survival song that mourned countless Africans across the Atlantic, and to the West Indies and Americas. This history needs to be enriched and recalled because their spirit is in us and in honoring them, we uncover the racial history of America that seeks to imprison to this day. So many young people do not know their history. I look at them and wonder, "Would you walk around the way you do, if you knew?"

If what was known was the story of heartbreak, suffering and survival that endured, would so many be punishing themselves psychically, emotionally, rabidly for terrorism they did not cause or seek and yet remains still as Dr. Joy states, as "post traumatic slavery syndrome" somewhere under the soul?

Each June I commemorate The Middle Passage in a day-long tribute to the Ancestors. The occasion is marked by drumming and poetry, song, dance and speeches. And as sunset comes on, all who are gathered trek to the oceans edge and deliver flowers and garlands to commemorate and honor the suffering of those who did not make it as much as those who did. To all we owe a tremendous debt.

This is a difficult book to read. With each new horror, I had to stop, pause, put the book down, and walk away. Yet each time I picked it up again, its importance rose up in my throat. It is not our choice to look away. Read it, and 'know'!

Taminika Washington says

Oh my goodness, this novel poetically paints a painful but powerful picture of the sufferings of our ancestors; their culture, their heritage and how it was all stripped from them. Yes we hear stories and see depicted visuals all the time but this story takes you throughout the land of Africa. Their rituals, foods, songs, dances, healings....

I occasionally found the urge to read certain passages aloud to others. Not just for validation, but I definitely wanted them to feel what I felt from the details of their pain. I wanted them to receive the knowledge I gained from the angle Daniel Black presented it. Maybe even carry the burden of having that knowledge with me. The captives wanted so much to be together and it was hard for them to watch their brother or sister be hurt, killed, suffer and sold. They wanted to carry the cross together versus watching another suffer alone. Also, our ancestors knew their value. Their names carried meaning that exemplified their individual strength. They were confident. "We were wonderful, but we're not flawless. We knew excellence because we knew failure."

This novel takes us through their Hope & Hopelessness, Joy & Sadness, Strength & Frailties, Life & Death. One of the many statements that stood out to me was, "They had captured us because we had been divided. That was our lesson." This speaks volumes because we have this same problem today. There is strength is unity. So much to be said, but I will save the rest for the readers.

kaythereader says

Beautiful passages throughout the book. Great imagery. Loved it.

RenishaRenewed says

I'm marking this as done because I don't really even want to finish it later. It had potential but, not enough.

Vivienne Neal says

A Masterpiece

An extraordinary, well-written, researched narrative. Written in a rhythmical style, the story explores the Middle Passage: the captured of African people from their so rich in traditions land, transported by sea to America, facing deplorable conditions and inhumane treatment, and where African people were bought and sold, creating a foundation that sustained a country, generating wealth, influence, and power for the captors, passing this legacy on to many generations. The author has brought us an important part of history, providing flashbacks of a great Continent before the attack and the devastation that captured men and women would face during their journey and after their arrival, which today is seen as trivial by many who have benefited and still do from this atrocity, but as citizens of the world we must never forget, misrepresent, or revise this horrendous past. The Coming should be required reading in all schools, and every parent should purchase this book and read it to their children, and every adult and teen should also read this story, because the lingering effects are still here today, and if we don't acknowledge and learn from this horrific past, we are doomed to repeat it.

Monica says

Really wanted this one to be more affecting and better. It feels a little bit like a thought experiment. Black is imagining what it would have felt like to have been kidnapped and brought to the United States as a slave. A huge undertaking with the different mix of tribes, gender, intelligence and body types. A common language would have been a comfort but many of the slave could not even speak to each other. Add to the mix different belief systems and the knowledge that many of their kinsman likely betrayed them. A fascinating concept. In my view, the execution was not as interesting as the idea.

I had two major issues with the storytelling (and quite a few smaller issues as well). First is with the narrator. (view spoiler)

My second issue is that the author seems to have a hard time separating his faith from that of the characters in the story. (view spoiler)

One doesn't necessarily have to know the history of West Africa to discern that different tribes had different beliefs and that some of the tribes were not monotheist in their beliefs. Some time later in the story the author refers to proverbs.

We mumbled regret for having ignored so many proverbs.

While not directly biblical, the use of the word summons Christian sensibilities. Words that could have been used instead of proverbs: lessons, signs, warnings, fables, wisdoms, adage, precepts etc. Also, later in the book, the author discusses marriage. His described concept of marriage within the tribes was very familiar and strangely similar to modern Christian concepts. Throughout the book, the author keeps going back and forth between the concept of many gods and one God. But it is quite apparent Black wants the general spirit of these "noble, worthy" people, even though they had no way of knowing the bible; to have known and worshiped the one true God. For me, a bridge too far. (hide spoiler)] I think the author's faith hindered his ability to completely immerse into this thought experiment and churn out a realistic and cohesive story.

Towards the end the book for me got to be a bit tedious and repetitive...and this is a short book. The overall concept is brilliant. This is a very difficult concept and a hugely daunting undertaking. From this novel, I begin to see some of the unspeakable horrors that these people endured. I just wish the idea had fallen into more skilled hands.

3 Stars

R L'Heureux says

A beautiful and powerful novel that moved me emotionally and spiritually. Black takes on the near impossible task of writing about the maafa (middle passage) and leaves the reader with a sense of deep understanding and hope. This is a small book and poetically written, but I warn you it's not an "easy" read. You'll turn pages and, if you're like me, in some moments be unable to continue without reflecting. Thankful this book exists and can't wait to share it with my students, mentees, and friends.

Hyacinth says

The powerful, almost musical writing of Daniel Black reduced me to tears in *The Coming*. This book was probably the most difficult to read because of the subject matter. Such a vivid portrayal of the plight of the once free African's voyage to the New World. I could almost feel the pain, the sights, the smells. There were times while reading that I was literally breathless. I had to put the book down at times and sit with the words. I dealt with conflict and a range of emotions while reading. This book is not for the faint of heart. I am most definitely a Daniel Black fan for life. He definitely has a gift.
