



Welcome to our September book, Historians!

Our first meeting for this Fall is on Tuesday, September 3 at 6:30 to discuss *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson published in 2010. This is the story of the six million African-Americans who left the South between 1915 and 1970 to find a new life in the North. Wilkerson is a journalist and the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in journalism. When *The Warmth of Other Suns* won the 2011 Lynton History Prize jointly conferred by Harvard and Columbia Universities, the judges praised Wilkerson's work: "in powerful, lyrical prose that combines the

historian's rigor with the novelist's empathy, Wilkerson's book changes our understanding of the Great Migration and indeed of the modern United States."

Wilkerson tells the stories of the millions of migrants through the stories of three people—Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, George Swanson Starling, and Dr. Robert Joseph Pershing Foster. Why select these three people to tell everybody's story? Wilkerson explains that this was a way to help us as readers to identify with the heart-breaking decisions that these three people made. It was a way for us to go on the journey with them from the Jim Crow South to the "silent code" North. Imagine, Wilkerson says, being in a cast system beyond your control and what it takes to make the decision to leave and then the courage it takes to actually make the journey. Wilkerson believes that these stories are emblematic of the journeys made by many peoples from old worlds to a new one, leaving all they knew for the hope of a better life. "Fortitude, forbearance, never ever giving up no matter what the circumstance" is their gift to us, Wilkerson said in an interview. And it was a privilege to save these oral histories before they were lost forever.

As you read, consider what the three protagonists were leaving behind. What did you learn about being black and living in the Jim Crow South and the "silent code" North? What did it mean to exchange the close family and community ties in the South for the anonymous cities of the North? What was gained and what was lost? How were both the North and the South changed as a result of the Great Migration? What about cultural changes? What cultural figures were the children of the Great Migration? And what does *The Warmth of Other Suns* ask us to think about in 2019?

As we share the stories that Wilkerson tells us in *The Warmth of Other Suns*, we will also be sharing the oral stories that often are not told by traditional historians, yet these stories give us a richer understanding of who we all are as Americans. So, join us on Tuesday, September 3 at 6:30 to tell these American stories of courage and resolve and an unshakeable belief that the United States can be the land of hope and dreams fulfilled.

Donna McBride