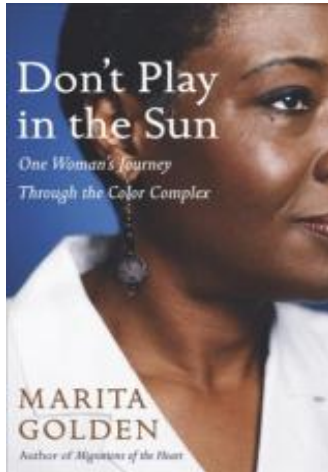

Don't Play In the Sun: One Woman's Journey Through the Color Complex

by Marita Golden



About the Book

In a hard-hitting meditation on the role that color plays among African Americans and in wider society, Marita Golden dares to put herself on the line, expressing her fears and rage about how she has navigated through the color complex.

To be sure, this book is not a pity party --- but, rather, a nuanced look at identity, and the irrepressible and graceful will of the human spirit. Peppering her narrative with "Postcards from the Color Complex," reminiscences of some of the author's most powerful experiences, Golden takes us inside her world, and inside her heart, to show what a half-century of intraracial and interracial personal politics looks like. We come to see the world through the eyes of the young Marita, and the dualism that existed in her own home: the ebony-hued father, who cherished her and taught her to be "black and proud," and the lighter-skinned mother, who one summer afternoon admonished Marita while she was outside, "Come on in the house, it's too hot to be playing out here. I've told you don't go playing in the sun, 'cause as it is, you gonna have to get a light-skinned husband for the sake of your children."

At every turn in her life --- in high school, her black-power college days, as a young married woman in Africa, as a college professor, as an accomplished author, and even today --- race and color are the inescapable veils through which Golden has been viewed.

In her most daring book to date, esteemed author Marita Golden has the courage to take on a topic others only talk about behind closed doors.

Discussion Guide

1. What are the different types of journeys that the author narrates and recounts as she explores the color complex?

2. The author asserts that the idea of Black beauty remains controversial. Do you agree?
3. Although the book is a memoir it touches on politics and history. How does the author frame the discussion in a political and historical context?
4. How does the author challenge and interrogate her own attitudes about color?
5. How do you challenge your own attitudes about color? Did the book challenge or change your views and beliefs about color?
6. The author has described this book as a "communal autobiography." Why do you think she describes the book this way? What does the addition of the interviews and experiences of others add to the recounting of the author's experiences with the color complex?
7. The author writes of her hesitance to re-examine the novel **Their Eyes Were Watching God** from a perspective that challenged its color representations. Are there books that you feel you might re-examine within this context?
8. What is the significance of the letter that concludes the book?
9. In what ways do Black men and women experience the color complex differently?
10. The author has said that writing the book allowed her to create a liberating way to think and write about the color complex. What evidence in the book supports this assertion?
11. In what ways is the color complex a universal experience crossing boundaries of race and Ethnicity? In what ways is the author's journey the journey of all women?
12. In what ways does the color complex affect relationships in your family or in your relations with others?

Author Bio

Marita Golden has distinguished herself as a writer, teacher, and literary institution builder. Born and raised in Washington, D.C., she grew up in a household where at the age of fourteen her mother told her she was going to write a book one day and her father, a raconteur and history buff, supplemented her formal education with his own in-depth knowledge of African and African American history.

In her first book, a memoir, **Migrations of the Heart**, she transformed her own experience of marrying a Nigerian and living in Nigeria for several years into a story that has resonated with a wide audience and has become a book used on college campuses around the country in women's studies programs. Her novels, **Long Distance Life, A Woman's Place, And Do Remember Me**, and **The Edge of Heaven**, have dramatized the intersection of the personal and the political, as well as the everyday tragedies and triumphs of contemporary African American life. In her nonfiction book **Saving Our Sons**, she explored the continuing contradictions and challenges faced by black parents raising male children in America today. She is also the editor of **Wild Women Don't Wear No Blues: Black Women Writers on Men, Love, and Sex** and the co-editor of **Skin Deep: Black Women and White Women Write about Race**. Her latest book is **A Miracle Every Day: Triumph and Transformation in the Lives of Single Mothers**.

In 1983, with Clyde McElevane, she formed the African American Writers Guild, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that offers workshops and support programs for black writers in the metropolitan D.C. area. An active member of the national literary community, Marita Golden has served as a member of the PEN Faulkner board and is currently on the advisory board of the Mobil Pegasus Prize. She is president of the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation, which presents a summer workshop for black writers and awards the nation's only national award for college fiction writers of African descent.

Critical Praise

"Marita Golden does a superb job here of providing an insider's view on the lasting impact of the color complex, which, after centuries, still governs the way blacks are treated, and even how we treat each other. As this book illustrates, our American obsession with hues and shades is a particularly stubborn evil that has not changed so much with time as it has taken on different, more subtle forms."--- Nathan McCall, author of **Makes Me Wanna Holler**"Marita Golden has written a brilliant, thought-provoking book. She voices the rage of brown and black girls who were taught to doubt their beauty . . . and she takes them with her on an emotional, transforming journey which celebrates self-love and self-acceptance. Ms. Golden is a healer, a griot attacking racism and self-hatred with wisdom, a lively spirit, and a generous heart. She encourages everyone to enjoy their days in the sun."--- Parker Rhodes, author of **Douglass' Women**"As a youth in the early 1940s, I wrote a poem describing what I considered an ideal girl, [which] contained the lines: 'Her hair is long, black, and silky, / and she is high, yellow, fair.' Truly, none of us are spared the marks of oppression. But some of us evolve. In *Don't Play in the Sun*, Marita Golden displays with candor and insight her marvelous evolvment in the racially splintered concepts of color."--- Derrick Bell, author of **Ethical Ambition: Living a Life of Meaning and Worth**In a thoughtful and provocative book, Marita Golden shows us how ludicrous is the notion of 'colorism' and the painful legacy it has created for us all. We travel from the girl child told to avoid the sun to stay light, to Nigerians using Nadinola to whiten their skin, to Cuba, where prisons --- like those in America --- are filled with 'black' people. And yet, the author sings a song of love for all the hues of brown and for the brown-skinned woman that girl child grew up to be."--- Patrice Gaines, author of **Laughing in the Dark**

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