

The Pact • book • book

****The Pact**, with Lisa Frazier Page. Published by Riverhead Books, a member of Penguin Putnam, Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y. 10014. Hardcover, 248 pages, \$24.95. ISBN: 1-57322-216-X.

"Through the strength of their friendship, together these three young men defied the odds. They are an inspiration to young people everywhere, and their message is one that can transform the world."
—Bill Cosby

From the book jacket:

Three boys made a promise...and realized a dream. "There were no doctors or lawyers walking the streets of our communities. But one of us in childhood latched on to a dream of becoming a dentist, steered clear of trouble, and in his senior year of high school persuaded his two best friends to apply to a college program for minority students interested in becoming doctors.

We never knew we'd never survive if we went to it alone. And so we made a pact: We'd help each other through, no matter what.

We studied together. We worked summer jobs together. We parted together. And we learned to solve our problems together. We are doctors today because of the positive influence our friendship had on us.

It wasn't always easy. There were times when one of us was ready to give up, and times when we made bad decisions. Some of what we went through is ugly and difficult to admit, and we suffered the consequences. But we have laid it all out here nonetheless.

We did this because we hope our story will inspire others, so that even those young people who feel trapped by their circumstances, or pulled by peer pressure in the wrong direction, might look for a way out, not through drugs, alcohol, crime, or dares but through the power of friendship.

Three boys made a promise...and realized a dream. All too often, we hear about the dangers of male friendships in which peer pressure prevails over common sense. But for George Jenkins, Sampson Davis, and Rameck Hunt, strong and supportive male friendship was a powerful antidote to the temptations and pitfalls of street life in Newark, New Jersey, where they grew up. It led three boys to make a vow to be there for one another, to encourage one another every step of the way, until they overcame the odds — and became doctors.

In *The Pact*, the three share the account of their struggle to keep the pledge they made — a pledge that would alter the course of their lives and lead them to success they could barely imagine. The story of their extraordinary friendship is filled with drama, courage, peril, and ultimately triumph. Many times, each came close to failure and was ready to give up, but every time, the other two convinced the one in danger that the constant sacrifices, daunting work load, and dizzying challenges would be worth the eventual reward, especially if they stuck it out together.

Today Davis and Hunt are doctors, and Jenkins is a dentist. They embrace their roles as leaders in their community, helping inner-city kids overcome obstacles through education, and spreading the message that all people can rise to reach their dreams. Their story is already an inspiration to those boys and young men who have asked them how to form "pacts" of their own, and it will resonate with parents and educators, who play such important roles in the lives of youngsters. The success of the three doctors is proof that young men can bring out the best in one another — and themselves — instead of pulling one another down, and it demonstrates that when we "stand on the solid rock of brotherhood," as Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, remarkable things can happen.

About the author:

Lisa Frazier Page is a winner of the National Association of Black Journalists Award for features. She has been a writer for *The Washington Post* since 1995, and was an award-winning reporter and columnist for New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* for nearly a decade. Page, who is married and the mother of three children, lives in the Washington, D.C. area.

****Leaving** by Richard Dry. Published March 2002 by St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010. Hardcover, 448 pages plus bibliography. \$24.95. ISBN: 0-312-28331-8.

"With Leaving, Richard Dry has actually accomplished what many authors have unsuccessfully attempted and some inaccurately claimed: he has captured the African American story from slavery time to the present, both in its panoramic scope and in its immediate and human detail."
—Madison Smartt Bell

"Compelling in its description of this milieu...Dry has a convincing feel for period and a seasoned eye for detail...the characters themselves (are) haunting and well-drawn. A strong debut."
—Kirkus Review

About the book:

Leaving, a first novel from Richard Dry is at once epic in scope and intimate in detail as it describes the lives of an African American family who journey from South Carolina to a new life in Oakland, California during the early 1960s. *Leaving* won the

Joseph Henry Jackson Award from the San Francisco Foundation and Intersection for the Arts and was nominated for the Pushcart Editors Prize.

In the novel, Dry goes back and forth in time as he tells the story of Ruby, her half-brother Easton, her daughter Lida, and grandsons Love and Li'l Pit — reflecting the fractured nature of their lives. As the civil rights movement and the passage of time changes the mood of the country and their home on Cranston Avenue starts to mirror the deterioration of the neighborhood, what Ruby's family leaves behind becomes increasingly clear.

The author's prose is lyrical one minute, clear-eyed and gritty the next. The images he creates are powerful and lasting. His capacity to empathize with his characters is uniquely strong.

The author's message to readers:

A number of journalists have asked me why I, a white man, have written a novel with black characters — a family saga no less — interweaving historical events and slave narratives. Behind the reporters' fascination, I sense a reasonable concern: there are real ethical issues to consider and a potential for exploitation, but to be honest, these issues were not my concern when writing the book. Instead, I was consumed by a desire to understand the experiences of other people by living their stories through my imagination.

For two years, I'd worked in a facility for severely emotionally disturbed adolescents. These kids had been released from Juvenile Hall and mental institutions, or were rapidly working their way toward such facilities. We, the Mental Health Assistants, were taught to restrain the children and put them in padded cells, but essentially we were there to teach them academics and acceptable social behavior. Regularly, we were punched, kicked, and spat upon — even shot and peed upon in some cases. Six months into the job, I had my nose broken, an event I recount in chapter 3. For my own healing I needed to understand the circumstances and historical forces that had come to forge these angry and frightened children. Despite the violence, I came to care about the kids I worked with, who unfaithfully had one thing in common: a family history of abuse or neglect. As a result of my interactions with the kids and my study of their personal histories, I began to see their lives unfolding and the lives of their parents and grandparents. I became fascinated with the legacy of history as it manifested itself in living individuals with everyday choices and relationships.

I chimed what I learned at the mental health facility with my experiences working with the homeless, as a teacher and a shelter assistant. Many of the people in the shelters shared their stories with me, often while they beat me at chess. Later, as a college English instructor, I taught African American literature to classes of entirely African American students, from which I absorbed a diversity of experiences and perspectives. Many of my white students would tell me that inequality ended in the '60s, that there was no excuse for the level of crime and poverty that still existed in the black community. They often resented Affirmative Action and felt alienated by segregation. Students, of all races, wanted to leave the past behind. They would ask me, and I in turn would ask myself, where does history end and personal responsibility begin? How much is anyone a product of history, and what does it take to escape our perceptions of who we are and what we must be?

To find out, I wrote *Leaving*.

I hope you come to care for the people in my book as I have.

Richard Dry

About the author:

RICHARD DRY is an English instructor and a former mental health assistant who worked with emotionally disturbed youth. He lives in El Cerrito, California.

Historic Hampton Neighborhood Nationally Recognized as "Neighborhood of the Year"

HAMPTON, VA — Hampton's Aberdeen Gardens, a historic neighborhood build for and by African Americans in 1935 as part of F.D.R.'s New Deal Settlement, was awarded the prestigious "Neighborhood of the Year" award at the 27th Annual Neighborhoods USA conference held in Houston, Texas.

The award recognized the community's grass-roots effort to restore a neighborhood property and establish it as a museum. The Aberdeen Gardens Museum preserves the neighborhood's rich heritage and honors the original residents. Scheduled to open on a limited

basis in September, the museum project was accomplished through cooperative partnerships and a \$100,000 matching grant from the state of Virginia.

The national recognition furthers the mission of the Aberdeen Gardens Historic and Civic Association: "To enhance the quality of life for all citizens in Historic Aberdeen Gardens and adjacent neighborhoods, with an emphasis on heritage, to become the most livable community in the U.S."

The neighborhood was established to provide African American shipping workers with clean, modern homes. The (Continued On Page 6)