

BOOK REVIEW

Book's stories offer ideas for ending violence and injustice

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER FOR THE CHRONICLE

Bang. That's all it takes to snuff out a life. One bang, though there are usually more before someone is dead: Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Tamar Rice, Jonathan Ferrell, how did we get to this point? Better yet, as D. Watkins ponders in his new book "The Beast Side," how do we get out of it?

The list of the dead literally grows every day: statistically, an African-American citizen is murdered by white cops, black cops, or neighbors every 28 hours. It's war out there for Black America, says D. Watkins, and he's tired of it.

His idea for ending violence and injustice is unique, but meaningful.

Watkins says that read-

ing absolutely changed his life by teaching him to think critically, and it saved him. Literacy, he says, opens lines of communication, while sharing individual stories can educate and can make people eager to read. "The Beast Side" is, therefore, a book of stories.

How does it happen, for example, that a black writer from Baltimore — a city that's sixty percent black — finds himself speaking at a large event where there are few black people? The reason: there are two Baltimores and the split is sharp. Before college, Watkins had little contact with whites. Do white people know what's happening in east Baltimore? Not many do, he says and when folks learn, they're usually surprised.

It's almost hard to grasp how many of Watkins' friends and family have

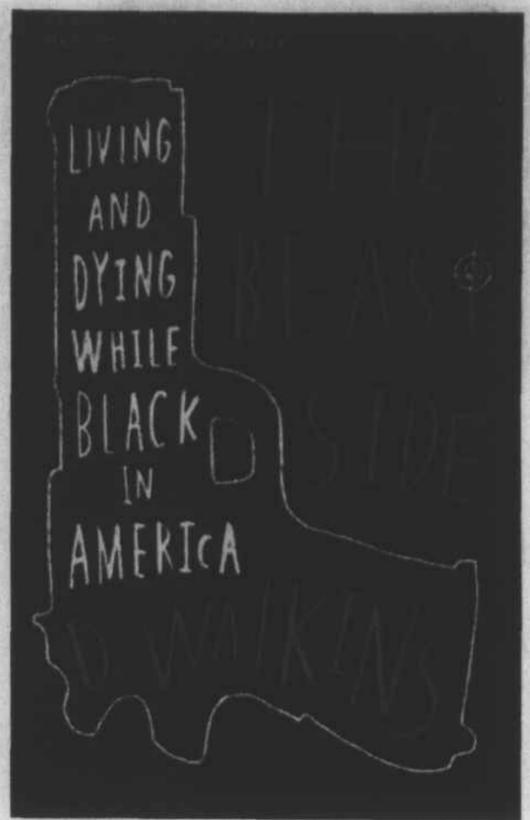
died by violence. He was only a boy when he witnessed a murder; crime was that common. He watched people on his street do anything to make a buck (they're the hardest working people in the nation, he says); he sold drugs, hustled, and carried a gun (mandatory, he claims), but his brother wanted him off the streets.

Watkins went to college to become a professor and a teacher. His stories help black men understand why they should respect black women more; they explain why Watkins doesn't recite the Pledge of Allegiance, how black people are left out of pop culture, why reading is essential, and how eating poorly could be Black America's worst habit. And they show how, deeply and despite the rift in this country, we really aren't so different after all. Is that such a surprise?

At the risk of sounding Pollyanna-ish, no. But can that hope change the way things are, as reported in "The Beast Side"?

That, I think, will depend on your point of view: author D. Watkins says things that many people don't want to hear and his words fairly seethe with anger — yet, pages later, those stories seem almost warm before abruptly turning to outrage and anger again. Hope followed by persistent reality is what you get, then, along with a lingering sense of rightful unease, inability to stop pondering, and a need to become much, much more educated.

Though its subject matter can be harsh, I think "The Beast Side" is appropriate for older-teens-to-adults, particularly if recent news stories disturb you greatly. If that's the case, then aim to read it.



"The Beast Side: Living (and Dying) While Black in America" by D. Watkins. 2015, Hot Books \$21.99 / \$27.99 Canada 176 pages



Photo by Tevin Stinson

The remains of Army PFC Frank Worley arrive at Russell Funeral Home on Friday, Nov. 4. Worley was a Korean War veteran.

Korean War

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Worley currently resides. Jack Worley of Chula Vista, California, is another surviving brother of the war veteran.

When Russell Funeral home director and general manager Cedric L. Russell got the word that Worley's remains would be delivered to his establishment, he was at a loss of for words.

"When I first got the news I was amazed," he continued. "I'm 62 years old and this war happened before I was even born. That in its self was pretty

amazing."

Members of the Patriot Guard Riders (PGR), a motorcycle club of only military veterans, ushered the hearse carrying Worley through the busy streets of the city. The group of veterans got word of PFC Worley's return home from the casualty assistance officer in Fort Bragg.

The club's state captain, Rick Rohme, said coming out to honor Worley is the least they could do.

"PFC Worley made the ultimate sacrifice," he said. "Because of his sacrifice, me and you are free to do what we want today."

First Class Arin Van Denmark was assigned the duty of escorting Worley back home to the Carolinas. He said it was an honor.

"This is my first time escorting a fallen soldier home," he continued. "When I first got the news, I felt honored that I was chosen to carry out such a important mission."

Van Denmark is stationed in Hawaii and said he volunteered to be Worley's personal escort.

"I felt like it was my duty to see that Private First Class Worley made it home to his final resting place safely."

Winston-Salem Again Ranked as a Top 10 Digital City

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

For the 14th year in a row Winston-Salem has been ranked as one of the top 10 most technology-advanced cities of its size in America by the e.Republic Center for Digital Government.

Winston-Salem tied with Salt Lake City for fifth in the center's 2015 Digital Cities Survey of cities with a population of 125,000 to 249,999. The annual study ranks the use of information technology by local governments.

The 2015 survey ranked cities for their use of digital technology in the areas of citizen engagement, policy, operations, and technology and data, said Todd Sander, the center's executive director. "The top-ranked digital city governments in this year's survey are using cloud services, data analytics and mobile apps—among other technologies—to help citizens interact with government more easily than ever before," Sander said.



The city's wide-ranging use of digital technology includes a webpage that allows citizens to track the progress of bond projects; a mobile application for Utilities that uses GIS for locating infrastructure, receiving service requests, and accessing data in the field; a Transportation mobile application that allows employees to use GIS to grade street surfaces while performing other duties in the field; automatic vehicle locator technology to track the location and operation of all city vehicles; a mobile CityLink 311 application; and NextBus, a mobile application that allows bus riders to determine when the bus will arrive at their stop. Other initiatives

include recently combining city and county GIS operations into a single department to serve both agencies, and city participation in the N.C. Next Generation Network, a consortium of cities and universities that resulted in AT&T installing an all-fiber gigabit network in Winston-Salem.

Winston-Salem has ranked in the top 10 of the center's annual survey every year since 2002, the first year the city participated. This includes a first-place ranking in 2014 and second-place rankings in 2003, 2008 and 2011.

The rankings were compiled by the e.Republic Center for Digital Government, a national research and advisory institute. Four other North Carolina cities were also ranked: Fayetteville tied for fourth and Durham for eighth among cities with a population of 125,000 to 249,999, and Charlotte and Greensboro tied for ninth among cities with a population of 250,000 or more.

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