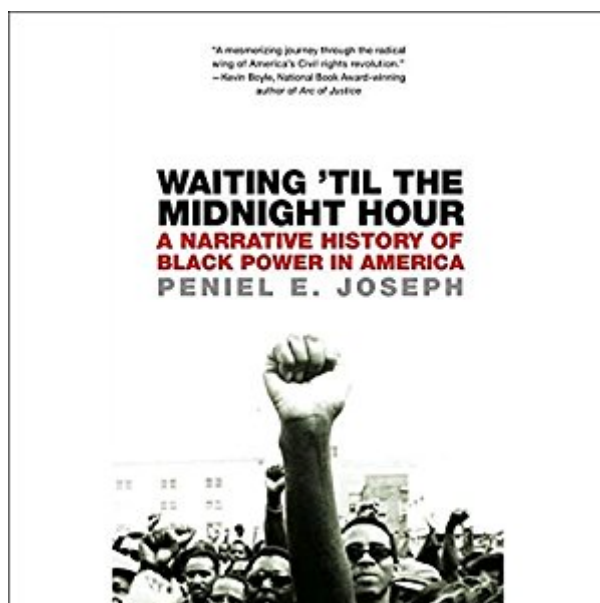


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# Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History Of Black Power In America



## Synopsis

"Once in a while a book comes along that projects the spirit of an era; this is one of them . . . Vibrant and expressive . . . A well-researched and well-written work." —The Philadelphia Inquirer

With the rallying cry of "Black Power!" in 1966, a group of black activists, including Stokely Carmichael and Huey P. Newton, turned their backs on Martin Luther King's pacifism and, building on Malcolm X's legacy, pioneered a radical new approach to the fight for equality. Drawing on original archival research and more than sixty original oral histories, Peniel E. Joseph vividly invokes the way in which Black Power redefined black identity and culture and in the process redrew the landscape of American race relations. In a series of character-driven chapters, we witness the rise of Black Power groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panthers, and with them, on both coasts of the country, a fundamental change in the way Americans understood the unfinished business of racial equality and integration. *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour* traces the history of the Black Power movement, that storied group of men and women who would become American icons of the struggle for racial equality. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is outstanding! I don't know what I was expecting. I thought, perhaps, that it was going to be an apologia regarding the Panthers. Or, if not that, it would be a polemic detailing how the Panthers "messed everything up". You see, there is a generally accepted narrative regarding the struggle for African-American equality in this country. The narrative goes like this: for a number of

complicated reasons, Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery through the Emancipation Proclamation. Eventually, this was followed by Jim Crow segregation and "separate but equal". Various African-Americans engaged in a heroic civil-rights struggle, and they were aided in this struggle by whites (Communist and otherwise) and other sympathetic ethnic groups. The Civil-Rights Era coincided with and/or encompassed an age of general period of civil disobedience which included Vietnam War protests, Labor Union unrest and a continuing feminism movement. A number of solid victories came from the Civil Rights Era, namely, *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Voting Rights Act. Also, a number of iconic figures, and moments, emerged from this era, namely, Rosa Parks (and the Montgomery Bus Boycott), and Martin Luther King Jr. (and the March on Washington). Then these craaaaaaaazy kids came along, toting guns in San Francisco and following around cops in Oakland. Stokely Carmichael shouted "Black Power!!" at a March Against Fear in Mississippi in 1966. Olympic Medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos gave Black Power salutes on the medal stand at the 1968 Olympics. In the 60 Minutes special, "The Hate That Hate Produced", Mike Wallace told America that a huge group of angry, angry, angry Muslims were proliferating in New York, and Malcolm X was the head nut. All of a sudden, crazy radicals replaced the politics of integration, non-violent protest and collaboration with that of aggressive "black self-esteem" and incendiary revolutionary rhetoric. As a result, these excesses dragged everything down, precipitating a Civil Rights decline. This, coupled with a conservative backlash, continues negatively to affect the lives of African-Americans today. That's the general narrative. What Dr. Joseph's book does is blow up this narrative by examining the Black Power Movement as a legitimate movement separate and distinct from the Civil Rights Movement. His book illuminates the import and continuing influence of Black Power, while remaining cognizant of the flaws of its leaders. The book places Black Power within a global context, showing that Black Power was about more than the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. (He writes about 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and Catros's trip to New York in 1960, when he made a point of meeting with Malcolm X.) Of course, the book DOES scrutinize the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam as well. Dr. Joseph highlights the stars of this period: Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton and Stokely Carmichael. In fact, this book makes clear that Stokely Carmichael is such a seminal figure that he's worthy of having a separate book devoted entirely to him. But Dr. Joseph also tells the stories of lesser known figures such as William Worthy, Robert Williams, Albert Cleage, Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez. He argues persuasively that Lorraine Hansberry's, "A Raisin In the Sun" is actually a radical play. He identifies the radical roots of King and he eloquently disseminates what Baraka meant in his essay, "Black Is A Country". When you look in the back of this book, you see that it has a 22-page

bibliography. Sources include interviews and oral histories, as well as extensive archival material. It's clear Dr. Joseph has done his homework. Yet, when you read it, the book does not come off as an inaccessible ivory tower product full of incomprehensible jargon. He presents the story of Black Power as a gripping narrative. He shows the reader that, in a nutshell, the Black Power Movement provides lessons for today's generation of activists. When I read this book, I couldn't believe that no one thought to write such a book before now- a book that treats Black Power as seriously as "Bearing The Cross", "Parting The Waters", "Pillar Of Fire" and "At Canaan's Edge" treat the Civil Rights Era. If you want insight into the humanity of iconic Black Power figures and a clearer picture of the struggle that continues today, this book is the place to start.

This book is about more than politics. It's about people, people who are indeed political creatures, but are red-blooded people, with loves, and creativity, and petty rivalries, and regional differences. Peniel Joseph has really served the public here. I hope this book is picked up by people (like myself) born after this narrative's conclusion. By moving beyond the waters of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, and looking into the arts, and cultural developments like Kwanzaa, and religion, he was actually able to bring focus to the narrative. It was very refreshing to see Martin Luther King as more than a teddy-bear on the one hand, and more than a broken record on the other. He was in the first instance a minister--meaning a person of faith who worked with people, in all their humanity. King changed his mind about realities, and grew, and related to people with a flexibility not shared by, say, philosophers. Joseph leaves us with the stories of men and women, not always heroes, and not too unlike ourselves in their daily lives. My only regret is the book's ending in 1974. It would have been nice to understand black power's interface with early hip hop, and such.

The mythology of the civil rights movement taught in school goes something like this. We had slaves, that was bad. We fought the civil war and Lincoln freed the slaves, but some bad people in the south still treated black people badly. One day Rosa Parks was tired after work, and refused to give up her seat. Martin Luther King gave a speech, and the problem was solved. But then blacks got greedy, and wanted lots of special privileges. The slightly more nuanced version adds that after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, during the 1950's lots of people marched, held sit-ins, and the Supreme Court ruled in their favor. There was a giant march on Washington, and Congress passed the Civil Rights Laws. But then blacks abandoned protest, and instead started shouting black power, carrying around guns, rioted--burning down the cities, and destroying great cities like Detroit and Chicago's westside. In addition, blacks began demanding special privileges, so now

reverse racism is as big a problem as racism used to be in the 50's. Joseph has done a superb job by removing "Black Power" from this cartoonish history, and instead placing it in context. He begins with a brief description of Marcus Garvey's black nationalism, and then traces the movement for black empowerment through history to the present day, focusing on Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Huey Newton. He notes that the relationship between the traditional civil rights movement as embodied by King, and the Black Power movement has always included elements of cooperation at the same time as there was competition. The Deacons for Defense provided armed protection to King and other leaders of non-violent protests; Carmichael started out in SNCC dedicated to non-violence. The Panthers believed in self defense, but also believed in running social service programs (e.g, breakfast for school kids). Joseph's bottom line is that both the traditional non-violent civil rights movement and the black power movement fractured because of the contradiction inherent in both movements--was the fundamental problem race or class. Neither ever fully answered that question, and ultimately the class conflicts inside the movements broke into the open, fracturing both movements. The struggle continues.

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