

## Heads of the Colored People

*Nafissa Thompson-Spires*

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## **Heads of the Colored People** Nafissa Thompson-Spires

Calling to mind the best works of Paul Beatty and Junot Díaz, this collection of moving, timely, and darkly funny stories examines the concept of black identity in this so-called post-racial era.

A stunning new talent in literary fiction, Nafissa Thompson-Spires grapples with black identity and the contemporary middle class in these compelling, boundary-pushing vignettes.

Each captivating story plunges headfirst into the lives of new, utterly original characters. Some are darkly humorous—from two mothers exchanging snide remarks through notes in their kids' backpacks, to the young girl contemplating how best to notify her Facebook friends of her impending suicide—while others are devastatingly poignant—a new mother and funeral singer who is driven to madness with grief for the young black boys who have fallen victim to gun violence, or the teen who struggles between her upper middle class upbringing and her desire to fully connect with black culture.

Thompson-Spires fearlessly shines a light on the simmering tensions and precariousness of black citizenship. Her stories are exquisitely rendered, satirical, and captivating in turn, engaging in the ongoing conversations about race and identity politics, as well as the vulnerability of the black body. Boldly resisting categorization and easy answers, Nafissa Thompson-Spires is an original and necessary voice in contemporary fiction.

## **Heads of the Colored People Details**


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Author : Nafissa Thompson-Spires

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## From Reader Review Heads of the Colored People for online ebook

### Nicole O says

The characters within these stories are varied, flawed, and VERY human (for lack of a better description), and it makes for a fairly enjoyable read. I can't say that I necessarily relate to most of the characters in this book, but it's refreshing to see people of color portrayed in ways outside of the stereotypical "sidekick" or "servant" tropes that tend to permeate books with AA characters. While some of the stories did intersect, I appreciated the many different perspectives and personalities we were introduced to within the text. This is a collection I can see myself reading again.

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### S. says

A couple of the stories fell flat but I hadn't seen such a sharp dissection of black people in academia before. Thompson-Spires writing has a wicked humor but tenderness for all of her characters, which she builds by showing us the characters over a long period of time. Belles Lettres had me \*dying.\* A really powerful collection that explores what's really in our "heads"—what demons, ghosts, hopes, failure, and loves reside there.

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### Gabrielle says

4.5 stars. I love short story collections, but they often disappoint me - until now. Heads of the Colored People is an excellent debut collection and offers thought provoking commentary on contemporary culture. So many of the stories made me laugh uncontrollably while others made me sit and think for a while. Thompson-Spires is a creative: her stories address race, class, mental health, ableism, and more but she writes about them with subtlety. This may have easily been the best short story collection I have read in years and I would strongly recommend it to a friend.

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### Amaka says

I am a huge fan of Nafissa's storytelling! I laughed out loud, literally; struggled to understand some of the characters irrational decisions, ultimately realizing that's the beauty of these people's stories. Everyone is going through something and I realized early on that I really do love each and every character. Randolph's feud with Isabela over the office lights had me cracking up. Jilly's story struck a nerve; knowing that her death could've been prevented if she would've just remembered to take her cellphone out of the microwave hurt me (and yes I know it's just a book, but man my emotions were at an all time high). Overall, I'm so glad I picked this book up when I did. I've never read anything like it before- 5 stars!!

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### Monica Kim says

America has had its first black baseball player, its first black astronaut, its first black president — but after

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the firsts, the world is still full of onlies. Sometimes the only-ness is existential — like the only black student in a private school. Sometimes it's incidental — the only black woman in an hour-long yoga class — because you are sort of a representative of what people see as black, by virtue of them not having had much exposure to it, there are all these additional pressures on top of the standard pressures of being black in a white world. — Nafissa Thompson-Spires

Nafissa Thompson-Spires' "Heads of the Colored People" is an exceptional debut novel of short story collection by a brilliant writer. We're not worthy of her brilliance. It's not often (almost rare) that every story in a collection is good, this is the rarest of gem in which each & every story is GOOD, and all characters & stories are well-crafted & stood out to me. And it ends beautifully all stories being cohesive. This novel shines with her razor-sharp observations, psychological insights, captivating stories, and interesting characters, it's bold, moving, timely, and darkly funny. It's an essential reading for everyone! I'd really love for her to write a single-story novel next.

Before I go on about the book, I want to say something about the author that I've picked up from reading. I really, really like her! Yes, I don't know her well enough as this is her first novel, but to me, her experiences & personality really shined throughout the book. There is no doubt in mind that most, if not, all of these stories are inspired by her own life. I wish I can articulate my thoughts better in writing, but when you read this novel, you'll know exactly what I mean as I can't point out all the things that made me believe that. Also, each characters are all so real & authentic with its own unique quirks & personalities, all these nuances that author created, I believe there is parts of author in each characters. If my observations & thoughts are correct, I can tell that the author has a great personality. I feel like I befriended her through these characters. It's also not often that we get to feel this way about an author, especially with a fiction. Of course, it's bit more possible because it's a short story collection. I hope this make sense, went little bit of of tangent there.

Back to the novel. ? In this brilliant short story collection, Nafissa introduces us to wide range of interesting black characters grappling with their identity, class (mostly middle class & educated), and how they fit into the society where they're often preconceived notions about them or grouped into narrow narrative. Through these characters, author touches on many of the issues that concern the lives of black people from police brutality, racism, onlies, micro-aggressions, and so on. These books gives you a refreshing look inside the identities and lives of black people we don't typically see represented in novels.

It's an utterly original, solid collection that entertains as it illuminates. You'll go through wide range of emotions as you get to know each characters. Each story is thoughtfully written & thought provoking...Just as other short story collection, my only complain is that I was left with wanting more. However, I look forward to her bright future in the literary world!

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### **Angelia Menchan says**

This book is entertaining and thought provoking. At turns dry, acerbic and oddly sweet. They stories linger in the readers mind, long after reading.

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### **Desiree says**

Pretty good collection of stories centered around mostly black women that tackles a whole bunch of issues like race, class, identity, suicide, mental health, grief etc. Belles Lettres was hilarious. I could not stop

laughing throughout that letter exchange. The next few stories after that ended up being a continued narrative focused on one of the daughters (referenced in the letters). Overall, I like that Thompson-Spires handles her characters with a subtle touch and a dash of satire that still end up being engaging.

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## Kimberley says

There are books that leave me wondering “what the heck did I just read?” **Heads of the Colored People** is most certainly that type of book.

It’s a collection of short stories centering on the black experience, as it relates to the individual, with environmental and social factors acting as the intrusion, as opposed to the catalyst, to their overall well-being.

I finished it, with mixed emotions, and then almost gave it a much lower rating.

However, after thinking on it a bit, and *really* digesting the themes behind each story, I saw this collection for the brilliance it truly is.

For example, *Belles Lettres* reads like a Master’s class in being outrageously petty. In it, two moms try to socially assassinate each other, via letters passed through their respective daughter’s book bags, because of what was likely a misunderstanding.

However, on a deeper level, you have two well-educated black women, trying their best not to have their respective daughters stand out negatively, in a predominately “white space”.

It’s a decision that ultimately leads to one of the girls having lifelong social and emotional struggles—which we find out via another short story—and further highlights how difficult it is to be the “only one”.

The story about Raina—a YouTuber—seems like one about a girl with a need for attention. However, she’s had a traumatic experience, unbeknownst to those around her, and doesn’t feel comfortable telling anyone. Yet, she finds a degree of solace in helping others, through the videos she creates.

Then there’s the funeral singer, Alma.

She is so distraught over the senseless deaths, of so many young black boys, she wonders if she wouldn’t be better off saving her son the trouble of growing up at all.

Each story offers something to ponder. Each has countless layers.

It’s social commentary, wrapped heavily in satire, with a lot of meat to gnaw on for later.

A worthy read, but one you need to be prepared for when/if you decide to pick it up.

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## Hannah says

I knew I would enjoy this pretty much from the first page on. Nafissa Thompson-Spires has a wonderful tone and an even better command of her stories. I found the stories uncomfortable and biting and so very very

clever. Her characters feel real if often difficult and the situations they find themselves in are frustrating and perfectly rendered.

Some stories feature the same people again, which is something I always enjoy. I do like how this gave the stories more depth without them being incomplete without the added context – this is something that I assume is difficult to achieve but oh so satisfying when it works.

My favourite story is Belle Lettres: told in a series of letters two mothers write to each other about their daughters who hate each other. I made me laugh so very hard while also making me feel sorry for their daughters. I found it clever and mean and funny and so very well-constructed: the escalation was brilliant to observe, from tiny little things such as the signatures to the change in language. Another favourite was Suicide, Watch – again beautiful but very sad. The way Thompson-Spires characterizes Julie, the focus of this story, made me impatient – and broke my heart at the same time.

I received an arc of this book courtesy of NetGalley and Vintage Publishing in exchange for an honest review.

You can find this review and other thoughts on books on my blog.

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### **Vnunez-Ms\_luv2read says**

Outstanding read!!! Wonderful stories. I loved how some of the stories weaved together from one to the other. My favorites were the letter written between two women about their daughters, and then the stories about the daughters themselves. This section read like a mini novel and I would not mind reading a full novel about the moms, Fatima and Christina. These stories are titled: "Belles Letters", "Fatima, the Bioquist: A Transformation Story" and "The Body's Defenses Against Itself". "Wash Clean the Bones" is poignant. This book is a masterpiece. Thanks to NetGally, the author and the publisher for the ARC of this deeply moving book in return for my honest review.

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### **Andre says**

Although my initial reaction to this collection of stories was blasé, upon further contemplation I went to four stars. The collection is centered on Black identity and the heaping of satire is heavy here and the humor is plentiful. The story Belles Lettres, which has two mothers exchanging notes through their daughters backpacks is side-splitting funny. Be careful reading in public, lest folks think you a little off for laughing loud alone with a book or tablet. That story for me was the highlight of the book, and another strong story was, The Necessary Changes Have Been Made dealing with the office politics at an HBCU. Nafissa Thompson-Spires keeps her stories humor filled but avoids silliness.

Even the story of a young lady contemplating suicide is infused with humor removing some of the sadness from that story, Suicide, Watch. Nafissa Thompson-Spires has done a good job of looking and laughing at ways of Black expression, ways of identifying and defining Blackness that often know no bounds, or at least the bounds are not always recognizable to all claiming Blackness. In that way, she makes you pause from holding your side and really meditate on what is being read. This is often difficult to achieve in short stories due to the nature of the genre. She seemingly has no fear or worry about 'going there.' Nafissa is announcing her arrival with this book of stories and judging from the boldness and fearlessness of her prose she will be around for quite some time. And that is a very good thing. This book will be available Apr. 10, 2018. Thanks

to Netgalley and Atria Books for an advanced ebook.

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### **Gabriella says**

I'm pretty sure this book is 4.5-5 stars, but we all know how I like to change my ratings from week to week. :) In just under 200 pages, Heads of the Colored People microscopes the inner workings of some hilarious and troubled black characters. I think my favorite stories are in the middle of the collection, an interconnected set of tales about grating Jack & Jill mothers, and the insecure daughters they produce. These women are self-absorbed, vegan, mundane, vapid, and about ten other traits black women aren't supposed to be, and I read about them with a leisure I usually don't feel able to employ.

Another writer would've made these stories much more bleak, but Nafissa Thompson-Spires has a personal humor that keeps all of these feeling not too deep, or at least ironic, by their ends.

I don't know about y'all, but my spring news feed has seemed chock full of stories about the dire systemic experiences of black people, so much so that it's nice to spend some time with an author who sees her subjects as much more than "black bodies" or numbing research statistics. These stories are insular, biting, and compassionate reflections on black life, and just what many of us need to read right now.

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### **Rod-Kelly Hines says**

What an utterly original collection! This may be the best short story collection I've ever read, it spoke directly to me, about things I've never seen represented in literature, as it concerns the lives of Black people in America.

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### **Ifeyinwa says**

While I recognize the author's talent, I had a hard time emotionally connecting & resonating with the characters. I was more in awe of the uniqueness of the stories than engaged with the writing. There were a few stories that I loved, but most felt detached.

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### **Julia says**

I really enjoyed this collection of stories. I was hooked by the first story and moved by so many. I loved the diversity of the characters and their stories. The topics tackled were original, well written and educational. I laughed out loud, clenched my fists and found my eyes watering at times. Great book.

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