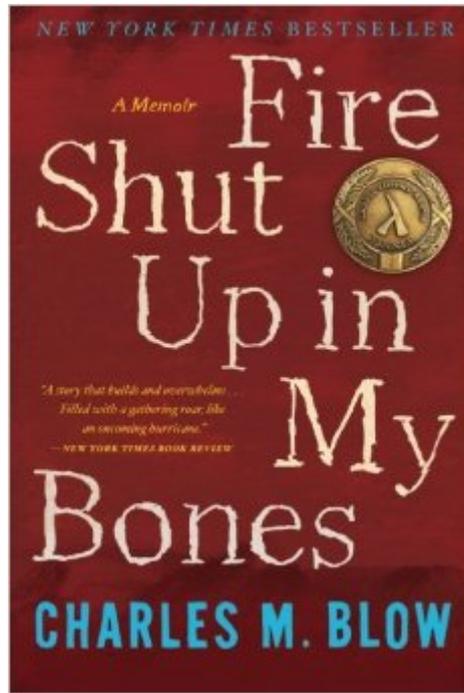


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# Fire Shut Up In My Bones



## Synopsis

“New York Times” Notable Book | Lambda Literary Award Winner | Long-listed for the PEN Open Book Award “Charles Blow is the James Baldwin of our age.” — Washington Blade “An exquisite memoir . . . Delicately wrought and arresting.” — “New York Times” Universally praised on its publication, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* is a pioneering journalist’s indelible coming-of-age tale. Charles M. Blow’s mother was a fiercely driven woman with five sons, brass knuckles in her glove box, and a job plucking poultry at a factory near their segregated Louisiana town, where slavery’s legacy felt close. When her philandering husband finally pushed her over the edge, she fired a pistol at his fleeing back, missing every shot, thanks to love that blurred her vision and bent the barrel. Charles was the baby of the family, fiercely attached to his “do-right” mother. Until one day that divided his life into Before and After—the day an older cousin took advantage of the young boy. The story of how Charles escaped that world to become one of America’s most innovative and respected public figures is a stirring, redemptive journey that works its way into the deepest chambers of the heart. “Stunning . . . Blow’s words grab hold of you . . . [and] lead you to a place of healing.” — *Essence* “The memoir of the year.” — A. V. Club

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A memoir’s job is to bring the lifestyle, upbringing and choices made by the author into stark focus for unfamiliar readers. Without melodrama or sentimentality, Charles Blow’s memoir succeeds - working as an anti-nostalgic look at the 1970s, and a look at how events in our youth make us the

adults we become. I read this book because of, not despite, a few negative reviews. I think those readers expected the light, maudlin nature that many memoirs fall victim to. I understand the desire for levity and laughs, but not all stories can contain them. Here, Blow gives a tour through Louisiana not-quite-full-poverty, with a family struggling along. It's hard and isolating, and when the young Blow is targeted by a predatory cousin, it's not funny at all. What I appreciated most was Blow's blunt, honest tone - he doesn't rely on frilly adjectives to try to force meaning, but lets the events do the job. His newspaper background is clearly the root of his strong writing. One of my peeves is melodrama, and I didn't find much of that here (except the first few pages, actually). Lots of dramatic events, but I never felt I was being preached to (except the very ending, but that works as a powerful conclusion). Even during the most brutal accounts of his fraternity hazing, he doesn't make any false stretches for overwrought "I felt my childhood fading away" conclusions. The scenes make the point all by themselves. Here's an example of what I mean. A lesser writer would have overwritten this until it lost all effect (though it may lack impact out of context): "All I knew was that in my heart, in my bones, I no longer believed. I figured that she had probably placed a safe bet after a bad one, and maybe after the fact she had thought better of it."

What a glorious memoir! It is as exquisitely beautiful as it is devastatingly raw in certain places. The vivid picture of life as it is lived in the rural south as painted by Mr. Blow is one that readers will at once recognize as universal and familiar in certain aspects, but also see as very distinct and unique in others. Those among us who, like Mr. Blow, were victimized as children, are certain to identify with the devastating trials and tribulations that follow sexual abuse. Charles methodically takes us through the stages of self-blame, shame, anger and social withdrawal. But then, Charles' unique combination of gifts, in the form of precocious wisdom, intellectual curiosity, and the drive to apply lessons learned pull him through life experiences that have devastated many a child. The reader is guided from stage to stage in Mr. Blow's path to self-discovery and healing. My first reading focused on the sexual abuse and hazing. The second reading was for the pure joy of Mr. Blow's exquisite writing, the vivid scenery and rich cultural tapestry of a Deep South I just didn't know. I will read this book at least twice more. As a long time fan of Mr. Blow's work at The New York Times, I've always appreciated his very nuanced approach to race and race relations and wondered about his experience as a person of color. His first person account on race relations in this memoir gives the reader a full appreciation of Mr. Blow's thoughtful nature, innate sense of fairness and generosity of spirit, as well as a very honest look at how segregation is practiced. I will read again for the purpose of discussing this book with my teen. We are reading Mr. Blow's memoir as a family and plan on

discussing it as a family.

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