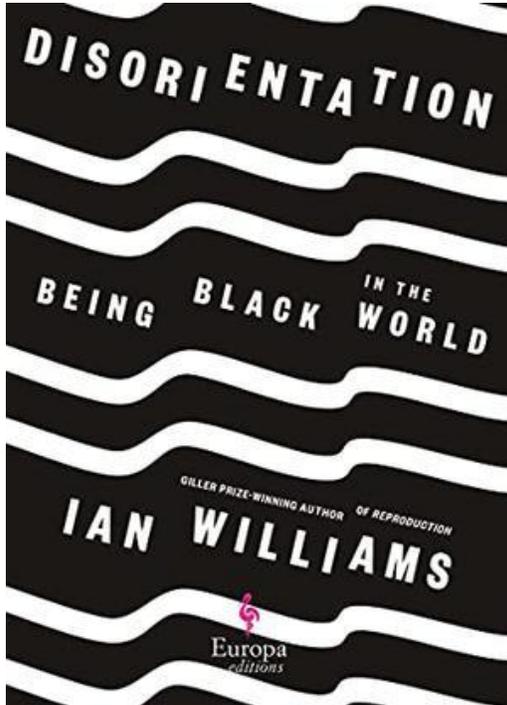


KIRKUS



A lyrical, closely observed contribution to the literature of race and social justice.

DISORIENTATION

BEING BLACK IN THE WORLD

BY IAN WILLIAMS · RELEASE DATE: NOV. 30, 2021

Toronto-based poet and short story writer Williams contemplates race and racism in this thoughtful narrative.

Even though Canadians are generally less confrontational than Americans, there are still plenty of issues to contend with. “In Canada,” writes the author, “there’s still a sense that a Black Canadian is from elsewhere—not Canada. Maybe the Caribbean or Africa. White Canadians keep looking for a source of that Blackness, whereas white Americans know that Black people are as much a historical part of their country as white people are.” As a Black man, he writes, “You’re not going to say *anything whatsoever* about race, because you’re not stupid.” The narrative is a potent thinking-aloud exercise that helps Williams sort out his thoughts on race and privilege, and he hits on many provocative points where in at least one sense he has the upper hand: “Race is one of the few places where white people actually defer to Black people without challenge.” Many of his lodestar points are literary, as when he dissects an exchange that David Foster Wallace once had with a Black student, demanding that she produce work in Standard Written—read White—English, which “is perceived as the dialect of education and intelligence.” Wallace’s position may have evolved—or not; in any event, Williams allows for that evolution since a person is entitled to exchange opinions. There are matters beyond opinion, though—e.g., the prevalence, still, of the N-word, the “ubiquity of evidence and cases

of violence against Black people,” and the fact that “both America and Canada are created on white power.” In every regard, sensitive to nuance and history, Williams writes searchingly of matters such as the murder of George Floyd, the travails of biracial children, and the daily injustices Black people face, no matter what side of the border they call home.

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