

Review of *Such a Fragile Peace*, by Mary Taylor Whitfield (Lizella, GA: Cathier Expressions, 2019). 246 pages, \$ 18.75.

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Whitfield's novel, *Such a Fragile Peace*, takes the reader on a journey down memory lane, especially if one lived in the South from the 60's to 90's. She emphasizes the importance of family, heritage, respect and values and showcases the effect these teachings have on familial generations and the community at large.

The novel is set in rural Georgia, more specifically Middle Georgia with references to Macon, Fort Valley, Warner Robins and Perry. Two families, the Cavendishes and the Barneses, are portrayed as mentors for others in the town of Ponce to follow and respect. The knowledge and values presented are expected to be carried forward by the grandson, Antonio Cavendish, a senior in high school.

Whitfield's plot examines the lifestyles and moral upbringings of black families in this small Southern town as people transition from the end of segregation through integration to the time of the 1990's. She focuses on their achievements, struggles and outcomes due to education, moral guidance, and economic mobility. In addition, it was taught that love, truth and compassion were also needed to help others move forward. Whitfield highlights the importance of education, knowing your heritage, and helping others by introducing the reader to Edwin and Erma Cavendish, Antonio's paternal grandparents, who went to Kenya, East Africa, after graduating from college, where they lived for many years working as missionaries while helping in other ways as necessary. Erma Cavendish had a degree in nursing, so her skills and knowledge were used to help Africans. This family is presented as a role model for others in the town of Ponce to follow in terms of helping others as well as yourself. It was unheard of for blacks to go to Africa during the 60's to work as missionaries; as a matter of fact, it was not the norm for many blacks to travel to Africa to work or to learn the cultural offerings of our ancestors. It was these individuals, the Cavendishes, who planted the seeds of Afrocentrism and respect for heritage into their children, grandchildren and other people in the community.

As the plot develops, it is shown that the Cavendishes were not satisfied with some of educational practices in the public schools where certain children were neglected. Thus, Grandma Erma Cavendish opened up a school to help those children who fell through the cracks due to a less than desirable home life and learning disabilities by focusing on students in the first and second grades who needed a good foundation to move forward in school. The school system focused on the talented tenth, and the others were left to keep up the best they could. The opening of the school exemplifies the Cavendishes' desire to give back to their own and show compassion and love for those in need.

The Cavendishes have a son Felix who is married to Agnes Barnes, and they are the parents of Antonio, the grandson who is destined to carry on the legacy and teachings from his family. Felix and Agnes are portrayed as parents who show great pride in their family heritage. Since Felix lived in Kenya until he was a teenager, he purchased lots of African art and artifacts to decorate their home and gladly educated people who came to his home. Felix was known for questioning ideas while his son Antonio didn't ask many questions, but he was a critical thinker.

Through the younger generation, the grandson, Antonio, is viewed as the upcoming model of success; he is an outstanding athlete and an exemplary student who is expected to carry on the respected name of Cavendish. He must represent his family well. However, he is not as outspoken as his grandfather Edwin nor does he challenge people like his father Felix. In addition, Antonio is well-liked by his peers even though his family is middle-class while most people in Ponce struggle to survive. Also, Antonio is an A student; his personality is described as laid back. To further highlight and contrast his laid-back attitude is his best friend Regina, who is a combination of his grandfather and father, for she will challenge anyone whose views she thinks are in opposition to the betterment of the black race. Regina is described as Afrocentric. She even takes Antonio to task for not speaking up to his supervisor for mistreating blacks in the store. Regina as a young person marches to her own drum and is able to move smoothly between the races and socioeconomic levels. Regina says "I am going to correct some of these problems" (168). For example, she questions the logic behind the school giving out twice as many trophies to athletes as they do to the academics. Regina's Afrocentric ideas and teachings are passed on to Shelia, Antonio's girlfriend who picks up the baton later in the novel.

The concept of knowing your history is passed on through the young voices of Regina, Antonio and Shelia. It is interesting to see how Whitfield integrates the need for education, historical knowledge, love and respect throughout her novel. The younger generation listened to their elders and are now becoming examples of what teaching can do for the future of a community. They are now able to navigate the struggles and issues of the present and the future, for they become college graduates with a mission to change the world.

Unfortunately, the novel, *Such a Fragile Peace*, ends with an unexpected outcome for certain people. I choose not to divulge certain aspects of the ending, but Antonio's early college career did not go as he had planned it. Because of an accident, he had to lean on all of his family's teachings to survive and overcome adversity. Even through adversity, distance and separation, Antonio and Shelia reconnect after college. They are living examples of how important it is for family to pass on love, knowledge, compassion, trust and respect. All of these characteristics enable people to improve their condition and become more economically stable as well as pass the baton to others who are in need.

Whitfield employs a strategy that allows the novel to end with letters written to family members before Antonio's graduation from high school and college. Antonio's mother, Agnes Cavendish, wrote to him just before his high school graduation expressing her love and respect for the young man that he has become as a high school senior and stating she knows he will go far in the future. Mother Agnes Cavendish tells Antonio that she has been aware of his troubling dreams and said, "I believe their meaning will unfold soon. Once it happens, you will find a new you" (245). This statement accurately alludes to how Antonio had to adjust and adapt to his new life after his accident. He continued to follow the teachings of his family and worked as a missionary in the Bahamas. Finally, it was surprising to learn that Antonio also wrote letters to his deceased father and to a former girlfriend, Shelia, before graduation from college. The letter to his father explained what Antonio had wanted to share with him about his future plans in life, which I will not indicate here. Because the father was deceased, this lengthy letter was Antonio's way of acknowledging some truths he had known as a teenager but was not ready to admit at that stage in his life.

Thus, Whitfield has cogently and aptly presented the importance of love, trust, education, heritage, and compassion that are needed if one wants to succeed in life. By showcasing what life was like for blacks from the late 60's to the late 90's, it was evident to the reader that hard work along with moral fortitude helped many blacks negotiate the struggles of segregation, civil rights laws, educational attainment and economic challenges to achieve the successes that are present in our society today. However, I do wish the novel would continue and give a glimpse into the future lives of Shelia, Antonio, Herman and Regina to show how they truly applied all of the love, knowledge, truth and compassion that was shared through the Barnes and Cavendish families.