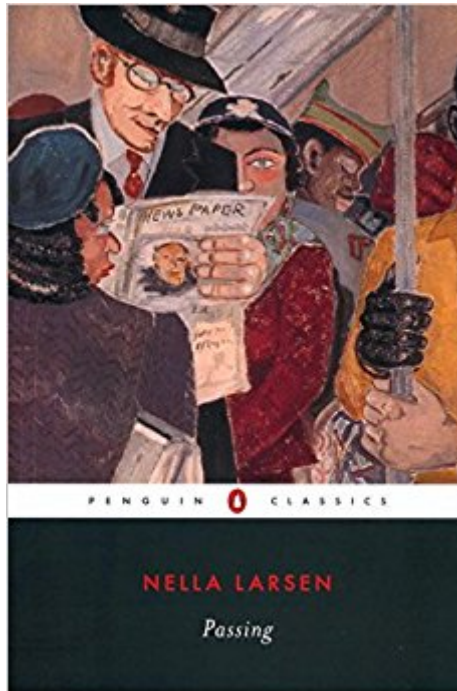




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Passing (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Nella Larsen's *Passing* is a remarkably candid exploration of shifting racial and sexual boundaries. Clare Kendry leads a dangerous life. Fair, elegant, and ambitious, she is married to a white man unaware of her African American heritage, and has severed all ties to her past. Clare's childhood friend, Irene Redfield, just as light-skinned, has chosen to remain within the African American community, but refuses to acknowledge the racism that continues to constrict her family's happiness. A chance encounter forces both women to confront the lies they have told others and the secret fears they have buried within themselves. This Penguin Classics edition features an introduction and notes by Larsen biographer Thadious M. Davis. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

The heroine of *Passing* takes an elevator from the infernal August Chicago streets to the breezy rooftop of the heavenly Drayton Hotel, "wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below." Irene is black, but like her author, the Danish-African American Nella Larsen (a star of the 1920s to mid-1930s Harlem

Renaissance and the first black woman to win a Guggenheim creative-writing award), she can "pass" in white society. Yet one woman in the tea room, "fair and golden, like a sunlit day," keeps staring at her, and eventually introduces herself as Irene's childhood friend Clare, who left their hometown 12 years before when her father died. Clare's father had been born "on the left hand"--he was the product of a legal marriage between a white man and a black woman and therefore cut off from his inheritance. So she was raised penniless by white racist relatives, and now she passes as white. Even Clare's violent white husband is in the dark about her past, though he teases her about her tan and affectionately calls her "Nig." He laughingly explains: "When we were first married, she was white as--as--well as white as a lily. But I declare she's getting darker and darker." As Larsen makes clear, Passing can also mean dying, and Clare is in peril of losing her identity and her life. The tale is simple on the surface--a few adventures in Chicago and New York's high life, with lots of real people and race-mixing events described (explicated by Thadious M. Davis's helpful introduction and footnotes). But underneath, it seethes with rage, guilt, sex, and complex deceptions. Irene fears losing her black husband to Clare, who seems increasingly predatory. Or is this all in Irene's mind? And is everyone wearing a mask? Larsen's book is a scary hall of mirrors, a murder mystery that can't resolve itself. It sticks with you. --Tim Appelo --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Another trailblazer, Larsen wrote this novel in 1929. It follows Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, two light-skinned black women who try to escape racism. Kendry chooses to sever all ties with her background and passes herself off as white, while Redfield simply denies that racism exists. Both, however, eventually are forced to face the awful truth. This edition contains a lengthy introduction and scholarly notes on the text. Essential for Black History Month. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Clare lived the life she thought she wanted, a life in the white world as her light skin allowed her to pass among whites. Larsen challenges racial divides, showing us the desire for Clare to assimilate in a white world, while constantly fearing her husband will discover the truth of her black heritage. We can sympathize, no matter what race we are, with the marriage and family challenges Irene (the POV this story is told from) faces as Clare attempts to maintain friendships in the black world.

While the writing is not as crisp or elegant as some of Larsen's contemporaries such as Langston Hughes or Zora Neale Hurston, it is still an interesting view into an early 20th century Harlem

woman's friendship with a woman who is passing as white and the tangled relationships that ensue. Feels a bit dated for the 21st century, but an interesting look at a different time and place.

The story itself was okay. Delving into the history behind it and analyzing the writing was what made this book so great. There are tons of supplemental materials in the back, and nearly all of them are interesting. Larsen's personal history, the subject matter, and the possibility of underlying meanings make this book extremely interesting. Larsen's grammar leaves something to be desired, and the twist ending was, in my opinion, weak.

This novel tells the story of two women with black and white genetic inheritance in the 1920s, both of whom spend their childhood in a black culture. One chooses to leave that culture behind (because it is so socioeconomically limiting to her); the other embraces the community as an adult. But this story is about much more than "passing" as white. It is also a story about what living in a certain economic class in the U.S. does to your possibilities for "success." Both these women are of mixed race and yet the U.S. society of that time placed anyone with any quantum of black heritage in the black culture group, denied equal rights and equal treatment. This disparity is made prominent in the character of one of these women's husband. It's a book that we can see reflected in some U.S. subcultures, even today. It is a timely book in 2014-2015.

I read quite a bit, being a literature major, but there were definitely some plot twists I didn't see coming. Overall, very well written, touches certain subjects (such as race, gender, family dynamics) in an interesting but tasteful manner. I don't mean to say that it's cookie cutter or doesn't properly touch on the subjects, rather it touches on the subject while doing an honest job of it. It doesn't touch on these subjects in order to grab your attention or keep you in the book, it does it in a natural way.

PASSING by Nella Larsen is astonishing on many levels. As a piece of imaginative writing, it succeeds as an assured, honest performance. Though its spine is comprised of ideas, it is vividly fleshed out in complex characters, nicely evoked settings and natural dialogue. At first its narrative style struck me as 19th century in style, but as I read I became more and more impressed with how well the descriptive passages used modern psychology. It is very sophisticated, offering a rare level of insight. As a record of the American experience, it is equally fine, throwing open the doors on the Harlem Renaissance of the early 20th century and race relations of that era. I have a better

understanding of the past and present of the African American experience and the implications of the act of passing for having read it. It deserves to be enjoyed as a good novel with wonderful characters. It deserves to be read as a living work of art and testimony, not as a historical curiosity. It should be on every American's syllabus.

"Passing" is a good story about a practice (That of mulatto Black women passing for Caucasian) that has gone on, in America, for as long as the races have mixed! Unfortunately, as "No" child is asked whether it wants to be here before it is born, in most of these cases (prior to the 1960s) the women were not asked if they wanted to bear the child (i.e. Raped!), and the child faced the personal dilemmas, between getting more out of life, and giving up some sense of racial pride! I enjoyed "Passing" very much, think it is a good read, and do suggest, stongly, that others read it! However, and quite personally, there is a "Depth" that I desire that it did not achieve, but it does not take away from the story. The "History" is the thing, and is the explanation for the practice. Ms. Larsen might have spent a bit of time bringing that out!

I like the premise and it kept my attention. I had a problem keeping up with the main characters (Irene & Claire). In some instances it was difficult to tell who was talking. There was also a constant reference to Rene. Not sure if that was a 3rd character or a nick name for Irene. If these aforementioned things had been more clear, I would have given it 5 stars!

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