



Not Black and White: From The Very Windy City to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

G.A. Beller

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NOT BLACK AND WHITE is the fictional account of many of the events that led to the meteoric rise of a local charismatic street politician to become America's first African-American President, and the downfall and imprisonment of two consecutive governors of the State of Illinois.

NOT BLACK AND WHITE puts the reader inside the campaign offices and smoke-filled back rooms where political deals are made. Fiction is intertwined with fact as we meet a cast of characters who may appear familiar to anyone who ever read a headline or watched cable news and talk shows across the country.

Not Black and White: From The Very Windy City to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Details

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Author : G.A. Beller

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From Reader Review Not Black and White: From The Very Windy City to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for online ebook

Andres Ramirez says

A wonderfully gripping political story, it is hard to put down. The shenanigans going on in the thinly-veiled Illinois of Obama's meteoric political rise are so mind blowing I found myself constantly googling to see if the "fictional" events in the novel had a corresponding event in real life. Amazingly it always did. Wonderfully entertaining and horrifying at the same time.

Kelly Knapp says

Entertaining look at the corruption in Illinois. Power and politics weave a compelling story that is partly based on true events. A swift read.

Emily Nelson says

Thrilling and captivating from start to finish! Beller mixes fiction and inspiration from real-life political events to create his novel.

Lynn Mitchell says

This is a really great book. I could not put it down. Clearly, it should be made into a movie or a play. In general, it reminded me of another book that I couldn't put down -- Presumed Innocent by Scott Turow. If this book is made into a movie I wonder who would be best to play Mars. Let's all try to figure it out.

Charlie Vasquez says

4.5 stars

"Not Black and White" is a hard-hitting, evocative look at 'real-life' politics and Chicago-style corruption at its finest. G.A. Beller has the ability to keep the reader totally engaged throughout the entire story, and that is no small feat considering the various of multi layered plotlines, diverse set of characters that come and go, and wildly fluctuating scenery and events and time periods... You want to keep reading it but at the same time you have to stop to think about it all and let it sink in as it is intense in the subject matter at certain points, and heartwarming and charming at other times. The ending is nice and although not exactly what we hope would await each of the characters, it works well for the story. I'd love to read more from Mr. Beller someday. Great characters... great writing... great storylines. Fantastic!

Kyle Robertson says

I really enjoyed this book. It was like the "Primary Colors" of the current administration. The author's writing is very good, and the story flows well. This book exposes the scandals, back room deals, and glad handing that occurs all too often in the world of politics. I found myself turning to google to try and remember the actual people that the major players are based on. I would recommend this book to fans of political thrillers. I received this as a free ARC from G. Anton Publishing/Chicago on NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Cale says

4.5 stars

No lack of explosive drama here! Try and be bored reading this... just try. I dare ya! But seriously, this was one roller coaster ride that I was not expecting. It's a fast read, one I finished in just a few settings, and the brisk narrative is perfect tempo for a book of this genre. Mr. Beller uses great word economy and doesn't bore us with too many unnecessary details. Fast, focused, and to the point, "Not Black and White" is a frighteningly realistic look at what happens in our country and how corrupt and unethical many political entities and people can be. It's all just a big game, and one that is fascinating, and somewhat depressing to read because it is clear that much of this is all too real, even though this book is supposedly 'fiction'. Riveting and addicting, "Not Black and White" is sure to please fans of political thrillers and contemporary drama.

Kait says

I was given a copy of Not Black and White from a friend. The review stated the story was the "Primary Colors" of the Obama administration so this caught my interest. This book did not disappoint. It was a well told story. I found myself googling the characters I wasn't able to identify. The story added some spice about Chicago, which was entertaining. Highly recommend this book!

Nancy says

A Political Thriller Based on Chicago Corruption

A tragic accident takes the lives of six children. They are burned to death when an out-of-control tractor-trailer slams into the family van. This horrific accident begins the story of corruption and politics in the world of Chicago and Illinois. The political corruption emerges when the driver of the tractor-trailer confesses that he bought his license from the DMV for a contribution to a political fund-raiser and a bribe.

This view of the disastrous consequences of corruption begins the story of the rise to power of the first African American President. The details of corruption brought about by the quest for money and power come right out of the pages of the newspapers, if anyone is looking. I was fascinated by the detail the author brings to the story. He doesn't give any relief from the ugly facts of how politicians get into office, including the highest office.

This book is fiction, but in many cases thinly veils the actual happenings that you see on the news. Politics is a corrupt game. The people we elect are often not what they seem and their desire is not to do the best for the citizens of the country, but to get their share and enforce their will on the country.

This book is a page-turner. The author gives us characters, particularly Mars Gregory, a man close to, but not really part of events. He watches in disbelief as his partner and the other players do things to gain their ends that at the beginning of the novel he would have found unbelievable.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. If you're a political junkie, it's a must-read. If you want an education in the seamy underside of politics, this book will open your eyes and have you listening to the news more critically.

I received this book from Net Galley for the review.

Holly says

I received a copy of this book via Goodreads First Reads. This did not affect my rating in any way.

This book eh. I was a little bored at points, but maybe this is because I live in Indiana, right smack on the border of Illinois and so I've encountered Illinois politics on a daily basis. It was very accurate and depicted what things were and are really like in the political world and it really give the reader quite a bit to think about.

Catherine says

This book has not been officially published yet. It was well written and would be worth the read. A little predictable though. Reminded me somewhat of 'Primary Colors'.

Kathy Davie says

While it purports to be a thinly disguised memoir of Barack Obama's rise to the White House by one of the spectators, it is actually about high-flying, corrupt politicians, donors, movers-and-shakers, and fixers. It depressed the hell out of me.

I received this eARC from G. Anton Publishing for an honest review. And they got one.

My Take

Mars is taking a look back as he recalls what led to his eventual downfall. He comes across as both decent and a jerk who wants to live the highlife and get rich using shortcuts. The African American presidential candidate in this is peripheral to the story and functions mostly as one of the politicians who benefit from the political machine that is Chicago. It's obvious that he's meant to be Obama, and while I don't know much about Obama's background, it seems pretty thin with only a few bits and pieces to tie it together.

It's a crack-up to read about Sam's need to appear well, and how poorly he actually lives — a 10,000-square-foot mansion, and they live in two rooms. I know it's a truism that there are people out there who live this

badly and hire in the goods for parties, so I wasn't surprised. Just...boggled that someone would want to live like this...?? Sam's entire mindset is that he won't do it unless it will make him money.

"All the world's a stage..."

The initial scandal around which the story twines (and branches out) is illegal ticket selling to fundraisers. It certainly opens it up to how the system is manipulated and used. Depressingly so. But what is so odd is how very simplistic the writing is and the one-dimensionality of the so very smarmy characters. There's too little *show*, nothing beyond the networking and fixing to show that these characters have any life outside the office.

I'd expect the writing to be more intellectual instead of my having the sense of being written down to. It's almost as if Beller expects schoolkids to be reading this. Beller does sucker punch you with how incredibly venal both the Democratic and Republican politicians are...whatever happened to "by the people, for the people"???

Anyone who's dealt with the government knows how many hoops one has to jump through to get anything done, and Beller rams it home with all those boards that regulate every little detail of life...and want their money for your "license" along with the money you'll spend for the lawyers and consultants and contractors and... Then there are the bribes, oops, sorry, political "contributions" over the years that hide those little "favors".

"Politicians ... discover early on in life that it is easier to stand up in front of the class and talk about nothing than it is to be a member of the class that has to do all the hard work."

The initial scandal with the driver's licenses appears to have been merely the hook to yank us in. The big political "crisis" in the story is when it looks like the Combine is going to be out on its ear! What I consider much more of a crisis is Sam's speculation about "if the two-party system were just a front" ... allowing ... "a very select group of people to completely control the country..." It sure does seem as if that's how things really do operate here in the U.S.

The ending was a touch satisfying with some justice, even as the "combine" kept on rolling. I did get a kick out of Beller's, I mean, Mars' ending statement about how this book came about. The epilogue tidies it up with a who's where of the principal characters. And I still can't tell which way Beller swings, for or against Obam...er, Malik.

If you enjoy reading about the ins and outs of politics and shady deals and don't want to strain your brain, this one's for you.

The Story

A scheme of bribery and corruption, winning at any cost, no matter who it hurts. As long as you rise to the top.

In the back rooms where the deals are made. One in which "the meteoric rise of a local charismatic street politician to become America's first African-American president, and the downfall and imprisonment of two consecutive governors of the State of Illinois.

The Characters

Marston "Mars" Gregory is a lawyer, bored with the future he saw, who attempts to stay outside the inner circle. **Rochelle** is the nice Jewish girl he married. *Who doesn't like Sam.*

Sammar, LLC is...

...the real estate development company formed by Mars and **Saidah "Sam" Alsheriti**, a Syrian "billionaire" who has a degree in civil engineering and owns all the concession stands along Lake Michigan's north side. **Eloise** is his wife. **Bob Jacoby** is the CFO. **Carla** is the receptionist; **Lori** is Mars' secretary.

Claudia Wodecki Kowaleski will become Mars' paralegal; she had married **Stephen Kaye**, a commodity trader with issues. Her business partner is **Alana** and they operate **Trade Show Staffing**. **Jennifer**, **Allie**, Charlotte ("**Char**"), Catharina "**Smitti**" Smitts, **Maria**, and **Denise** are some of the female escorts they use. **Pano** is one of Claudia's favorite drivers.

The Politicians

Edward G. Parker starts the story as the Secretary of State for Illinois. In his past, he had been a U.S. Army officer and attorney general for the State of Illinois. **Lillian** is his wife. **Skylar Stillwell** is one of his brightest aides. **Lisa Gronkiewicz** works for the state and is having an affair with Stillwell. **Ray DeRossa** is chairman of the Zoning Committee. **Wes Neary** is the state treasurer. **Janet Andersen** becomes director of the Department of Planning and Development and will later become the new attorney general for the U.S.

Malik Alawi, an African-American Ivy League law graduate, has the face Sam wants for his community liaison. **Vicki** is Malik's wife who works at Corrigan & Sanders. Later, **Eli Steiner** will become Malik's chief of staff.

John McKenzie, a maverick Republican, is running for the U.S. Senate. **Bob** and **Katherine "Kate" Craig** are some of his aides. **Molly Brannigan**, a Democrat, will run for governor, which opens up an Illinois State senate seat. The mayor of Rosemont, **Joey D.**, is reported to be mobbed up. **Brad O'Neil** tried to run for office. **April** is his ex-wife.

The various lawyers include...

...**Dan Gallagher** who is a U.S. attorney based in Chicago who's been slowing down the investigation. **Monica Wicklund** is a mover-and-shaker at Wicklund, Brice, and Jackson. **Phil Angelino** is a brilliant, high-profile real estate attorney. **Ed Swinson** is a good lawyer and an old classmate of Mars'. **Charles Davies** is a highly experienced attorney and a former top assistant to Gallagher. **Jeremiah C. Marsh** is Parker's lawyer. **Judge Clifford Ashworth** is appealed to for warrants. **Enrique Cisneros** is the U.S. Attorney General.

The Republican Combine is...

...a political machine to "harvest money". **Vince "Ringmaster" Perino** is a businessman who became its mastermind and is only interested in making money. **Angie** is his secretary. **Johnny Jarzik** is a political operative in Illinois, a hired gun, a mechanic, a fixer available to the highest bidder. **Marvin Rosenthal** began as an insurance executive.

Mishka "**Mike**" **Kovach** is the son-in-law of **Walter Roche**, a powerful alderman and absolute boss of one of the most important wards in Chicago. Mike is being groomed as a reform candidate for governor. **Annie Kovach** is Roche's daughter and Mike's wife. **Terry Monahan** is his best friend. **Orenthal Mitchell** is special assistant to the president of the Cook County Board; **Martine** is his wife. **Tony Kinahan**'s father is a big contributor to the Kovach campaign. **Diane** and **Patrick** are part of the group that gets really involved in the campaign. **Chuck "Chip" Faldo** is an accountant who handles Mike's finances.

Bachman Brothers is...

...a New York investment banking firm. **Mario Russo** is one of the principals; **Stuart Golding** is his senior

vice president. **Olivia** is Russo's executive assistant.

Boston, Massachusetts is...

...where a crusading young prosecutor, **Franklin McKenzie**, won cases including that of Alderman Fiochhi. **Former Alderman Fiochhi**. McKenzie'll become the new U.S. attorney in Illinois. **Mary Margaret** is Franklin's wife. Once in Illinois, **Joshua Baker** is assigned as chief investigator to Franklin McKenzie. **N.J. Novak** is Baker's partner while **Kelly** and **Reed** are additional agents.

Neil was a partner in Mars' first law firm. **Carlton Fleming**, a travel agent, was a client of Neil's who kickstarted Mars' dreams. **Tony Bennet** is one of the perks. **Wesley Stone** is head of security at Ravinia, an outdoor music venue. **Wilfred Stodemeyer** (**Claire** is his wife) is a restless sleeper with a gun. **Dr. Kenneth Jensen** is accommodating. **Thomas Gazdik** is a *Chicago Tribune* reporter with dreams. **Abdul-Mataal Abaza** is one of the world's 100 wealthiest men and a friend of **Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani**, the Emir of the State of Qatar.

Some of the corruption involves...

...the scene of the 1994 tragic accident in Waterston, Illinois, that sets events off. **Juan Espinoza/Espinosa** is the commercial truck driver who thought he had done what he was supposed to. **Ajax Transport** is/was his employer. **Henry and Ruth Winters** were traveling home with their six kids. **Officer Joe Connor** was the first officer on scene, and **Officer Tim Moran** was one of the cadets. **Sergeant Robert Lewis** is Connor's supervisor. **Jimmy Dwyer** was the victim in a case Parker had prosecuted. **Emil Rodriguez** was even more of a victim. **Dexter Dunlevy** made a confession. **Elizabeth Schmitter** is the chief administrator and CEO at Naperville Sachs Hospital, wanting to report a shakedown. **Bart Reiner** is on the hospital board. **Don Knollwood** owns a construction company specializing in medical facilities.

The Cover and Title

I do like the cover with its "black" and "white" imagery separated by the equally sized gray rectangle through the middle. The *black* (at the top) is a stormy night sky over the Chicago skyline as seen from the lake while the *white* (at the bottom) is a bright summer day with its gorgeous blue sky over the White House. The text is all in white with that gray band as its background.

The title is a poser, and I see it as being symbolic of the gray area in which politicians seem to thrive, a gray area that is *Not Black and White: From the Very Windy City to 1600 Pennsylvania*.

Sue says

I received this book free from Good Reads.

I seldom read fiction, I simply do not have enough time. I have never read a political novel, nope, not even *Primary Colors*.

However, I decided to give this one a try. Much to my delight, from the first few pages until the end, I was captured! I finished the book in three days.

Loved the back room negotiating and wheeling and dealing. (Shades of the Republican forthcoming convention?)

Kristal Cooper says

3.5/5.0 stars -- A fictionalized account of the Chicago political scene that propelled Barack Obama to the White House.

As usual with this kind of story, I wonder how much is true and how much is fabricated. As someone who follows state-level politics only when they make national news, it was hard for me to judge. I did recognize Obama, Blogojevich, and Emanuel right away, but the true identity of the rest are a mystery to me.

The story is told from two perspectives -- an omniscient narrator alternates with "Mars Gregory", a mostly-innocent player in the financing schemes. The tale is well-crafted (especially for a first-time author) and moves at a good clip. However, Beller falls prey to two new-author mistakes, IMHO: he feels the need to give physical descriptions for all players (and ALL the women are sex-pots!) and the characters use each others' first names in conversation too much.

*** I won a copy of this book in a First Reads giveaway on Goodreads.com. This is my honest review. ***

Debbie Bryant says

As a life-long Chicago area resident, I was aware of everything that went on in the news regarding the scandals around the last two governors of Illinois. This book is a "fictionalized account" of those goings on. The names, of course, have been changed to protect the not so innocent. This is an interesting take on what went on throughout those two "empires." I wonder how much of the apparatus is still around. It's obvious that the state of Illinois is in severe financial straights due to the mismanagement of the past, and it doesn't look like there are any easy fixes.
