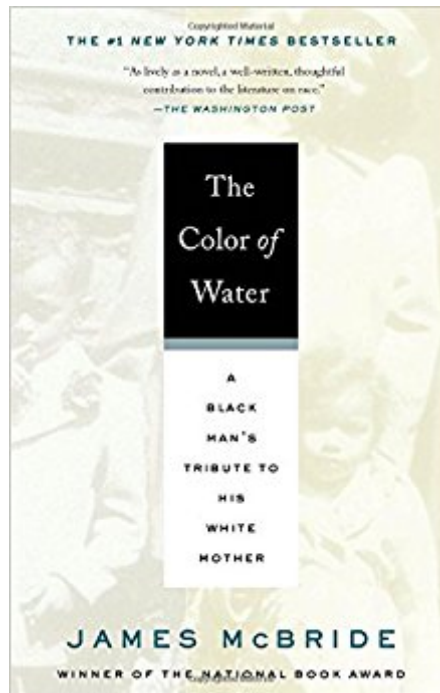




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# The Color Of Water: A Black Man's Tribute To His White Mother



## Synopsis

Look out for McBride's new book, *Five-Card Soul* From the New York Times bestselling author of *The Good Lord Bird*, winner of the 2013 National Book Award for Fiction, and *Kill 'Em and Leave*, a James Brown biography. The incredible modern classic that launched James McBride's literary career. Over two years on The New York Times bestseller list Who is Ruth McBride Jordan? A self-declared "light-skinned" woman evasive about her ethnicity, yet steadfast in her love for her twelve black children. James McBride, journalist, musician, and son, explores his mother's past, as well as his own upbringing and heritage, in a poignant and powerful debut, *The Color Of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. The son of a black minister and a woman who would not admit she was white, James McBride grew up in "orchestrated chaos" with his eleven siblings in the poor, all-black projects of Red Hook, Brooklyn. "Mommy," a fiercely protective woman with "dark eyes full of pep and fire," herded her brood to Manhattan's free cultural events, sent them off on buses to the best (and mainly Jewish) schools, demanded good grades, and commanded respect. As a young man, McBride saw his mother as a source of embarrassment, worry, and confusion—and reached thirty before he began to discover the truth about her early life and long-buried pain. In *The Color of Water*, McBride retraces his mother's footsteps and, through her searing and spirited voice, recreates her remarkable story. The daughter of a failed itinerant Orthodox rabbi, she was born Rachel Shilsky (actually Ruchel Dwara Zylska) in Poland on April 1, 1921. Fleeing pogroms, her family emigrated to America and ultimately settled in Suffolk, Virginia, a small town where anti-Semitism and racial tensions ran high. With candor and immediacy, Ruth describes her parents' loveless marriage; her fragile, handicapped mother; her cruel, sexually-abusive father; and the rest of the family and life she abandoned. At seventeen, after fleeing Virginia and settling in New York City, Ruth married a black minister and founded the all-black New Brown Memorial Baptist Church in her Red Hook living room. "God is the color of water," Ruth McBride taught her children, firmly convinced that life's blessings and life's values transcend race. Twice widowed, and continually confronting overwhelming adversity and racism, Ruth's determination, drive and discipline saw her dozen children through college—and most through graduate school. At age 65, she herself received a degree in social work from Temple University. Interspersed throughout his mother's compelling narrative, McBride shares candid recollections of his own experiences as a mixed-race child of poverty, his flirtations with drugs and violence, and his eventual self-realization and professional success. *The Color of Water* touches readers of all colors as a vivid portrait of growing up, a haunting meditation on race and identity, and a lyrical valentine to a mother from her son. Â

## Book Information

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Memoirs > Ethnic & National > African-American & Black

## Customer Reviews

Order this book ... and please don't be put off by its pallid subtitle, *A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*, which doesn't begin to do justice to the utterly unique and moving story contained within. *The Color of Water* tells the remarkable story of Ruth McBride Jordan, the two good men she married, and the 12 good children she raised. Jordan, born Rachel Shilsky, a Polish Jew, immigrated to America soon after birth; as an adult she moved to New York City, leaving her family and faith behind in Virginia. Jordan met and married a black man, making her isolation even more profound. The book is a success story, a testament to one woman's true heart, solid values, and indomitable will. Ruth Jordan battled not only racism but also poverty to raise her children and, despite being sorely tested, never wavered. In telling her story--along with her son's--*The Color of Water* addresses racial identity with compassion, insight, and realism. It is, in a word, inspiring, and you will finish it with unalloyed admiration for a flawed but remarkable individual. And, perhaps, a little more faith in us all. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

The need to clarify his racial identity prompted the author to penetrate his veiled and troubled family history. Ruth McBride Jordan concealed her former life as Rachel Deborah Shilsky, the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, from her children. Her grim upbringing in an abusive environment is left behind when she moves to Harlem, marries a black man, converts to Christianity, and cofounds a Baptist congregation with her husband. The courage and tenacity shown by this twice-widowed

mother who manages to raise 12 children, all of whom go on to successful careers, are remarkable. The intertwined accounts, told alternately by mother and son, are enhanced by the gifted voices of readers Andre Braugher and Lainie Kazan. Highly recommended for public libraries. Linda Bredengerd, Univ. of Pittsburgh Lib., Bradford, Pa. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

It is my favorite book I read it 21 years ago and picked it again for my book club pick. It is an easy read switching chapters from the writer's point of view on life, race, economic standing, love, compassion, tribulations, and his mother's point of view. It deals with life, religion, family, and most of all who we truly are both inside and out. I highly recommend this book.

One of the best books I have ever read. It had me interested, intrigued, laughing, and at the end in tears. A truly moving story about a very special woman. I also loved the author's book, "The Good Lord Bird" and will be reading his book about James Brown next year (all read for part of my book group).

Wow, this book really opened my eyes to see life from a different view. It was well written, simple yet profound. I have given copies to my daughter and granddaughter to read. Recommend highly.

This was a very interesting book. My 16-year-old granddaughter read it and said Papa you have to read this and I am glad that I did.

Great biography! Title made me buy it. I always said God was the color of water. (For water is a rainbow when light hits it.) Enjoyed this book.

Purchased for my grandson for school, and he likes the book.

Very interesting book! This read always kept me thinking about the next page even in between chapters. It is very informative & allows people understand the hardships of race & discrimination.

I enjoyed this book and its heartfelt message of family, faith, and identity. I read it along with my son who did so for a classroom assignment. We enjoyed discussing it before his written assignments and discussing the themes and pain through the passages. I felt invigorated at the end as well as

inspired by Ruth's story. I also am grateful to have been introduced to McBride as an author. I will enjoy reading his other works now as well.

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