



# Unsung Heart of Black America: A Middle-Class Church at Midcentury

*Dona L. Irvin*

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Most people are familiar with such African-Americans as Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, or Martin Luther King, Jr., at one end of the spectrum, and with sharecroppers, lynch victims, or underprivileged families at the other. Somewhere between the two is the unsung middle class that quietly makes a difference in the quality of life for individual communities and for all black Americans. In *The Unsung Heart of Black America*, Dona Irvin gives voice to this uncelebrated multitude with biographical glimpses into the lives of forty members of the Downs Memorial United Methodist Church in the post-World War II San Francisco Bay area. Strengthened by the bond of the church, these people struggled to make their world a better place through political campaigns, a tutorial program for public school students, and a counseling program wherein professionals offered service to less-fortunate members of the community. The forty people profiled here show a strongly developed sense of mission and a willingness to implement change. The group includes the first black mayor of a California city, the head of a social services department in a California county, an Alameda County Superior Court judge, and a woman who was superintendent of public schools in Oakland and Chicago. The experiences of the Downs community provide emphatic evidence of the importance of the black church in our society. *The Unsung Heart of Black America* shows the ambitions, successes, and frustrations of the forty members of Downs church as they strived to make a substantial contribution to the quality of American life.

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