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The Biography Shelf

Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA

Ann B. Carlson

Ann Carlson Publishing

9780996288309, \$26.95, HC, 282pp, www.amazon.com

Synopsis: In the pages of "Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA", author Ann B. Carlson tells the inspiring true life-stories of four great African-American men (Dr. Willis N. Pitts, Robert B. Pitts, Dr. Raymond J. Pitts and Dr. Nathan A. Pitts), their wives, and their children. "Roberta's Boys" explores how these men were able to recover from childhood's tragic losses to succeed as accomplished professionals, despite the discrimination of the Jim Crow South, and how they contributed to the nation during the Civil Rights Era. They were four brothers, born in the early years of the 20th century to an educated and ambitious African-American couple of Macon, Georgia. Their parents, part of the emerging black middle class, gave them an affectionate family, a close community, and the best schooling available to blacks at that time. Then, a family tragedy took resources and security away and scattered the family to the four winds. In the years of the Great Depression, throughout World War II and beyond, these men would have to summon every ounce of the faith and fortitude they learned at their mother's knee: to survive, to finish college and graduate school, and to each make their own, notable contribution to the nation in government service or education. Each son gave his mother, Roberta ("Sis") Pitts, the credit for his success.

Critique: A deftly chronicled history of the triumph of the human spirit over incredible adversity, "Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA" is a compelling and ultimately inspiring read from beginning to end. "Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA" is an extraordinary and very highly recommended for personal reading lists, in addition to community and academic library American Biography and Black Studies collections.



Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA

Ann B. Carlson

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Roberta's Boys is a wonderfully inspirational story of a family determined to succeed despite every obstacle.

Meticulously researched by Ann B. Carlson for the Pitts Family Trust, *Roberta's Boys: Four Pitts Brothers of Macon, GA* is the true story of an African-American family determined to make its mark on the world. Those seeking inspiration would be hard-pressed not to find it here; every page is filled with the brothers' impressive achievements despite facing many hardships and prejudices.

Roberta (nicknamed "Sis") and her husband, Willis Sr., attended the renowned Tuskegee Institute. They married and had their four boys (Willis Jr., Bob, Ray, and Nathan) in the early 1900s, instilling in their sons the determination to overcome the many obstacles of the time period. Their life was comfortable at the beginning, but they soon faced harsh financial difficulty, and the brothers scattered across the country. However each finished college and graduate school, and their successes soon became too numerous to count; Sis was able to see her many dreams for her boys realized.

Not counting the prologue, epilogue, and appendixes, there are only six chapters in *Roberta's Boys*. However, most are a little too long; the brothers' chapters are especially heavy on details. For example, Willis Jr. was very involved in teaching drama, but listing every single production he directed seems excessive. As a result, the chapters feel padded, particularly Bob's chapter regarding his associations with urban housing initiatives. The book loses its momentum by including such minutia.

Some chapters are enthralling, though, particularly the one on the Pitts family history, which dates back to before the Civil War. From plantation owner Peyton Taylor Pitts to the introduction of Willis Sr., this comprehensive chapter sets the stage for the rest of the book. It's also wonderful to read the brothers' writings in their own words; Ray, especially, was a prolific writer whose words are used as much as possible in his chapter. By including his professional papers and letters, the story of his life is effectively told in the first person, providing a more meaningful context. *Roberta's Boys* also includes a huge assortment of family pictures after each chapter, and letters and poems at the end. These primary sources add a great deal to the overall effect of the book.

Roberta's Boys is a wonderfully inspirational story of a family that was determined to succeed despite every obstacle.

KELLY THUNSTROM (August 10, 2015)

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