



**BLUE RAGE, BLACK REDEMPTION**

**A Memoir**

**Author: Williams, Stanley Tookie**

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**Category:** NONFICTION: Autobiography of the former gang leader and prison activist, executed in 2005.

**Williams, who spent a quarter-century on death row,** doesn't blame the whole of his criminal past on society, though he promptly identifies as contributing factors institutional racism and the absence of a father. ("My memories of him were so remote that I could not have recognized him in a jailhouse line-up," he writes.) A transplant from New Orleans to South Central Los Angeles, Williams spent his teenage years in what he calls a "blue rage" of maladjustment, rising in the ranks of the rapidly emerging Crips gang. One gateway to the criminal schoolyard, he writes in a moment that will resonate with those who follow the headlines, was dog-fighting. Williams's job was to feed, water and patch up the often-mauled contestants, who would be slaughtered when they could no longer fight. "At first the sight of the blood, gore, and loss of body parts was sickening, and I felt pity for the injured dogs," he writes. "But I became hardened to the gruesome scenes."

On to humans, from street-fighting to more deadly games, about which Williams writes matter-of-factly: "throughout the entire battle gunshots were fired, but our only goal was to beat them into submission"; "being viewed as maniacal or whacked out fed my ego."

Redemption comes with his arrival on San Quentin's death row following a murder conviction. "Though nobody believed me," he writes, "I proclaimed my innocence from the beginning, and I'll never stop doing so."

Believe Williams or not, his account of educating himself behind bars and enlisting prisoners and free citizens alike in the cause of keeping others out of gangs and jail is quite affecting. A particularly moving moment comes when he meets his own son passing through San Quentin on the way to another prison.

**A modern, inspiring companion to such works as Claude Browne's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.**