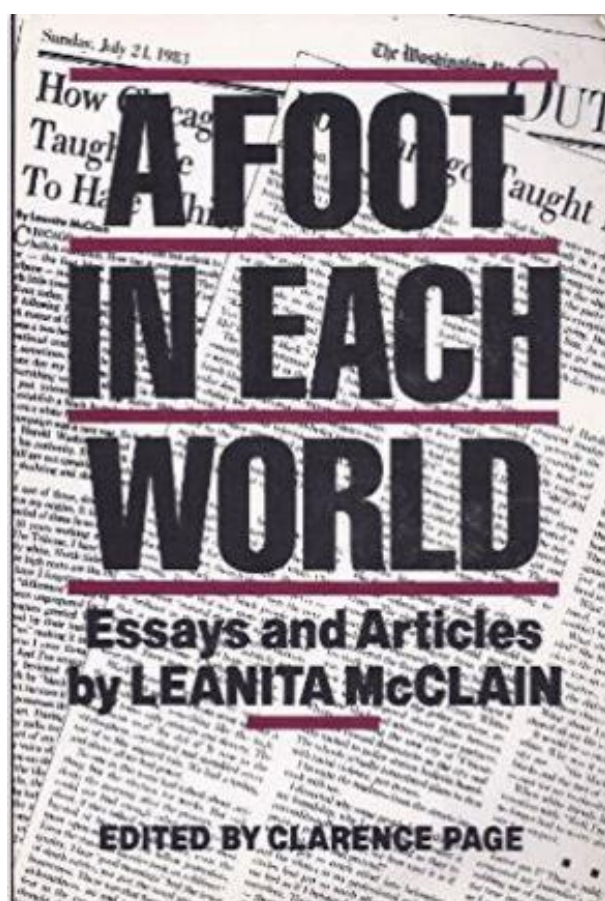


Talented, female, and black, Chicago Tribune columnist McClain killed herself at age 32 in the summer of 1984. This collection,



ushered in with a thoughtful introduction by her former husband, reprints several dozen of her acerbic yet idealistic columns, a couple of longer essays, and a smattering of poems. McClain came to public notice in 1980 when Newsweek published "'The Middle-Class Black's Burden,'" a forceful lament (reprinted here) from a woman who had "'had it with being patted on the head by white hands and slapped in the face by black hands.'" Offered the Tribune column on the strength of this caustic essay, she proceeded to generate

heartfelt, tough-minded pieces at a rapid clip--and at an accelerating rate of excellence. Although the columns included here are grouped, rather arbitrarily, into categories--Race, Politics, Crime and Punishment, Home and Family, and Schools--an acute and pained awareness of racism and its victims figures in all, and is McClain's concern and obsession. In columns ranging from "'Jesse Jackson and the Jews'" to "'Standing Square on Dope'" and "'Who Will Save Our Schools,'" she bores into racism in all its guises with plain talk, wit, and an extraordinary courage--a courage fueled by a moral outrage that, regrettably, more than once veers into self-pity and bitterness. Because many of these columns deal with Chicago politics of

several years ago, they often lack general appeal, appearing dated and parochial. But as an example of the columnist's craft, this collection excels.