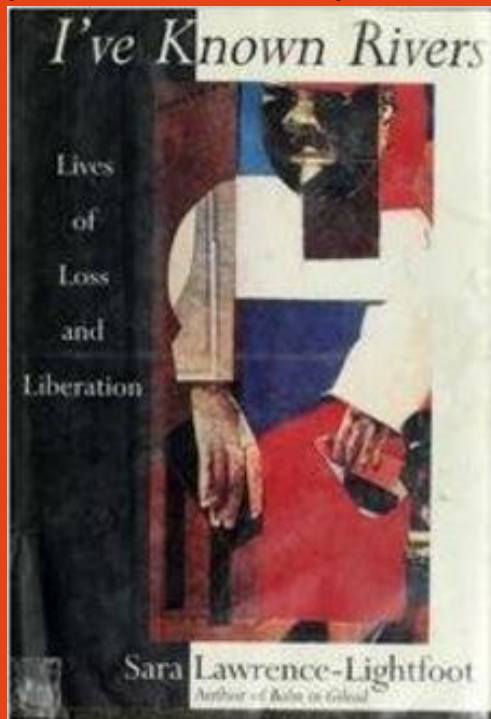


In *I've Known Rivers*, sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot practices her unique “human archaeology,” peeling back the



layers of six extraordinary lives. What she creates is a wholly original work, a penetrating portrait of the lives of middle-class African-Americans that has not been seen before. The six storytellers in Lightfoot's work are poised in midlife, the time we all look back as a way to anticipate the future. In dialogue with Lightfoot, they reconstruct their lives with heroic candor, reflecting on the “necessary losses,” the price of privilege. Any reader, regardless of race or gender, will identify with these lives, with the

ways these storytellers live with contradiction, change rage into love, and search for ways to “give forward.” Together these stories assume the power of a great novel, and through the mixture of losses and gains, despair and hope, trauma and recovery, ambivalence and ambition, Lightfoot presents a very all-American tale: the universal story of people moving up and out of their communities of origin toward some uncharted future. Lightfoot's subjects represent a vast range of experience: Katie Cannon, a tenured professor of theology, writes her illiterate father for the first time. Charles Ogletree, a renowned criminal defense lawyer teaching at Harvard Law School, is haunted by memories of a close friend, in jail for life. The rape of her mother and the pain of her illegitimacy open the story of Toni Schiesler, research chemist and former nun. Tony Earls, a psychiatrist studying the roots of violence, enjoys the way both science and jazz improvisation enrich his research. A balance between public acclaim and

intimate relationships is the enduring goal of Cheryle Wills, a glamorous and successful entrepreneur. In the final portrait, Orlando Bagwell, a documentary filmmaker, creates work that reveals the beautiful/ugly truths of history.