



# Shifting Through Neutral

*Bridgett M. Davis*

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## **Shifting Through Neutral** Bridgett M. Davis

For Rae Dodson, the early seventies are as hopeful and promising as the peace signs popping up everywhere. The signature sounds of Motown are filling Detroit's airwaves, and automobile factories are supporting a burgeoning black middle class, which works by day and plays bid whist by night. Rae's hip older sister, Kimmie, has moved home from New Orleans; her mother's nerves have calmed enough for her to stop taking her "vitamins"; her father has discovered new painkillers that ease his chronic migraines; and now, despite her parents' sleeping in separate rooms, the peace between them seems to be holding. All that shifts, however, when Rae's mother suddenly takes off with her lover down a stretch of highway.

Left to care for her ailing father, Rae grows up faster than any young girl should and is forced to admit that her mother may be incapable of love, that her father's love may be too all-consuming. What's most obvious is that neither seems fully capable of looking after Rae, who is searching not only for a way to make her family whole again but also for a way to make sense of her own budding sexuality.

With fully realized characters and an infinitely imaginative storyline, *Shifting Through Neutral* heralds the arrival of a promising new talent.

## **Shifting Through Neutral Details**

Date : Published May 4th 2004 by Amistad (first published 2004)

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Author : Bridgett M. Davis

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# From Reader Review Shifting Through Neutral for online ebook

## Columbus says

2.5 stars

Shifting into Neutral takes place entirely in Detroit in the 60's and 70's. The streets, stores, products etc...of my hometown are featured all throughout this book and it made me smile. I lived those years in Detroit and the author painted a perfect picture of what it was like for a lot of us during this period. I wanted to like this book for that reason alone. But, I did not. I didn't feel a real attachment with these characters. The story just meandered along and I was really uninterested in how it ended. Oh well, can't enjoy them all.

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## Kidada says

Reviews describing this as a coming of age story are on point. What resonated for me was the complexity of family dynamics and how much of an imprint whatever is going on with parents' lives has on their impressionable children. Rae desperately wants the emotional love and physical and mental presence of both parents. Their inability to give it to her on a consistent basis makes her an anxious child who is constantly on mental and physical alert for signs of parental departure, something that wears on the psyche. The author's writing is lovely and the characters were authentic but given the ending, I thought the novel was too long by 100 or so pages.

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## Lori says

Great writing. Interesting story. Would actually give this book 3 1/2 stars. Liked the portrayal of a Black father, who, though flawed, was not abusive. Was a bit disappointed by the ending.

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## Nakia says

A unique, complicated coming of age story about family and love and sacrifice in Detroit. Extremely slow to start but held my attention. When it got good, it got GOOD. It unfortunately, didn't know when to end and went on at least 100 pages too long, which prevented me from giving 4 stars (I can actually pinpoint where it should have ended). The ending threw me for a loop, but a good loop, nonetheless. The driving references were a little heavy handed, but it was somewhat understandable due to the 1970s Detroit setting. Still a good story for those who enjoy novels focused on non-traditional families, forbidden love, and difficult mother-daughter relationships.

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## Camille Russell says

I loved the maturity of Rae with all she has to endure as a young girl! It gives you more insight on what life was like in the 70s

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### **Tracy says**

Shifting Through Neutral provides a great lesson in both structure and cultural anthropology. The coming-of-age genre is enhanced by Davis' structure and seamless use of flashbacks - the "shifting". This is a beautiful, yet complex, and at times, uncomfortable story of a father/daughter relationship. What does it mean to be daddy's girl when everyone around you is in constant disconnect – especially daddy and his little girl? The author also explores this idea of stability in an extremely unstable environment. That instability is also represented in the structuring of the novel's chapters, allowing for the reader to experience Rae's uncertainty of what each day will bring her. During my time reading the novel, I could not help but notice and pay attention to fathers and daughters as I passed them on the streets, Rae and JD's relationship, a benchmark for my new-found curiosity. Each of the characters in Shifting Through Neutral were fully realized and developed, even those minor and secondary, illustrating the importance an extended community has on the coming-of-age of a young woman.

Novels that make effective use of cultural anthropology fascinate me. Not only does Davis transport us to the Detroit of 1967 to 1980 with its sights, sounds and smells, but she places these references in historical and cultural context which further enriches the understanding and enjoyment of the novels premise and themes. She reminds us just why music soothes a savage b[r]east – that beast being the complexity of family and love and desire. The author also reminds us that we come of age through nostalgia. That favorite candy we needed after a difficult day at school or home. The particular cereal, or breakfast meal, on those rare and special occasions. That outfit we wore because our crush finally noticed us. The games, and toys, and shows, that marked every occasion that meant something, but often times, meant just another day.

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### **Thea says**

Much as I wanted to like this book, I just couldn't. It reads like a movie script; a bad movie script. The dialogue was forced and unnatural sounding. The plot was predictable and the driving metaphor forced. It did have some redeeming qualities, hence the two instead of the one. The relationship between father and daughter was sweet but bordering on being warped. The sister relationships were loving but brief and the mother, daughter relationship warped and unnatural. Read at your own risk.

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### **Regina Franklin says**

This is coming-of-age story that immediately takes the reader to the 1970's in Detroit. It is a realistic story about the complexity of family relationships, loyalty, and self discovery. The author does a great job with the describing the clothing, cars, sounds, etc of the 70's. There are constant references to Stevie Wonder records, so much so that I could almost hear the music playing in the background as I read this book. This book is very "character" driven, and Davis does a fine job at developing the characters in the book. You will feel like you know them. You will identify with the joys and pains of growing up in a dysfunctional family. I would not call the book a fast read, but it is an enjoyable pace. A great summer vacation book. Highly recommend.

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## **Pam says**

I enjoyed it. I got it from a friend who had gotten it because it is on a list recommended for those who have lost a loved one. Its a very honest book, not sappy or anything.

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## **Laura says**

I reviewed this book ages and ages ago on another website, back when I was twenty-two and just finishing college and wondering what to do with my English degree. Even after eight years, this one is still a book that vividly comes to mind every now and then.

*Shifting Through Neutral* is the heartfelt story of a young girl's troubled family. Rae Dobson is a child of the seventies in Detroit, growing up too fast among race riots, Motown music, and newly minted cars. I fell in love with her quickly, becoming involved in her beautifully told desires and pains. She is a troubled, but strong young woman, longing for the love of her self-involved, cold mother who is "weak for men"; she idolizes her trendy and fun big sister Kimmie; and she vows that the only man she'll ever need is her Daddy. Each character is raw and damaged in their own way, so developed and real, as is Rae's relationship with them. Ms. Davis is exceptionally skilled here. You wont find better characterization than this.

The language is poetic and very descriptive, bringing to life a very real world - I grew up in south-eastern Michigan myself (not in the 70's, but later), and I relished in the familiar places and people I've known for most of my life, while also becoming absorbed by the history of a time I didn't get to live.

The "driving as a metaphor for life" thing has been done before, but this is cute. Each section is labeled and begun with a quote from the Michigan Secretary of State's *What Every Driver Must Know* manual. And all the more fitting because Detroit is the Motor City.

In all, this is a beautifully told story about wanting love, finding love, and losing love in so many ways. If you like heartfelt literary fiction about families so real you can feel them breathing, with a bonus touch of history, you'll adore this little gem!

\*(eight years ago) I received a review copy of this book in exchange for my honest review. \*

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## **Lulu Opio says**

The story could have been written in 20 pages instead of 300... Apart from the relationships in it, there is nothing much.

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## **Emily says**

I picked this up because I had just read & loved Into The Go-Slow, and it was hard not to mentally compare

the two - this one is quieter and narrower in focus, and it feels a little less polished, less tightly edited maybe. This frustrated me sometimes, when the chronological jumps got confusing or a section felt like it was dragging.

But by the middle I felt totally immersed in the 1970s Detroit she was describing - the details add up to such a vivid sense of place and time - and by the end I was getting a little teary-eyed and realized I'd really gotten pulled into this family and was going to miss them. And that the death that's mentioned briefly in the beginning was going to be heartbreaking to read about at the end.

Also, I was surprised to find myself getting into the car stuff (a subject that usually makes my eyes glaze over). Maybe it's just rare to see a female character depicted as being into and extremely competent with cars, at least in a thoughtful, individual way and not a Strong Female Character kind of way. I actually wish we'd gotten to know more about Rae's job (okay, comparing books again) like we got to know the racetrack job in *Go-Slow*. A job I've barely heard of, and one where the narrator must be one of very few if any young black women? Tell me more!

Anyway, there was plenty here I had mixed feelings about (that ending, hmm, I truly cannot decide if I love or hate it), but it's a lovely book that dives deep into the narrator's life and takes the reader along.

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### **Teaguem2005 says**

This was a very well crafted story. Rae is only 2 years older than me so It took me back to my early childhood. Story is not told in sequence but all of the pieces come together just the same. The music. is like another character in the story.

The author is a story teller, not just telling a story for the sake of it. Highly recommend

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### **Tayari Jones says**

This lovely coming of age by Bridgett M. Davis is one of my favorites. I love coming of age stories. This one is set in Detroit, so all you Michiganders should check it out. I was knocked out when I first read it a few years ago, and I decided to read it again. Rae is a character you will fall in love with. It's a great book club pick, but also a great read if you happen to be on a really long book tour and need to lose yourself in a terrific story.

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### **Jim Amos says**

Heartfelt, vivid, poignant, lyrical...this book is literary Motown. It's been sitting on our family bookshelf since my wife reviewed it years ago. I'm glad I finally picked it up. It's a very visceral book, giving me a glimpse into another world and another time in a way that feels authentic. These characters will haunt you for a while.

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