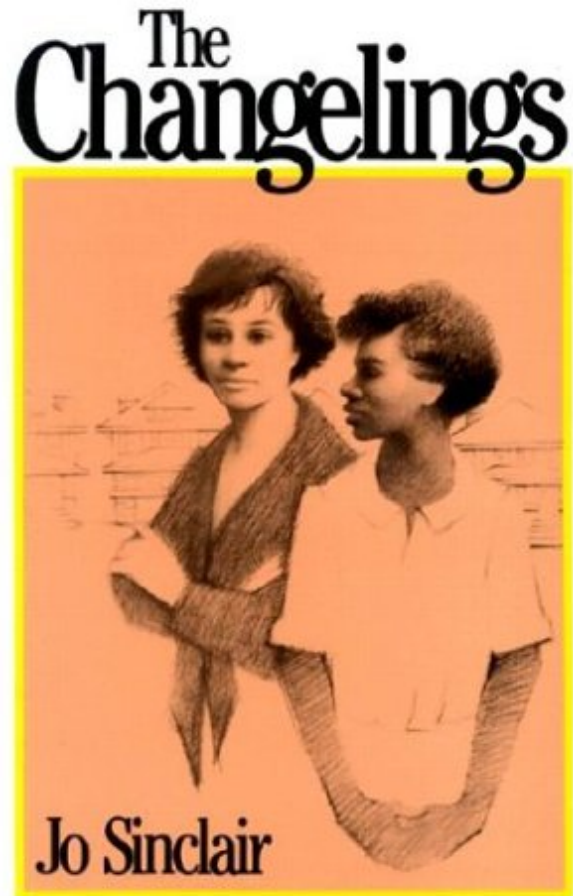


THE CHANGELINGS BY JO SINCLAIR



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Review

“With flowing narrative art, [Jo Sinclair] has explored one of today's major problems—the integration of different racial and cultural groups. . . The best thing in the novel is the power with which the author reveals the impact of this struggle on the new generation, whose survival lies in their power to love. . . In *Judith*, the author has created a portrait of a new kind of teen-age gang leader, so imaginatively realized that she transcends mere realism.”

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About the Author

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First published in 1955 and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, this novel revolves around a pair of stubborn adolescent girls who refuse to accept the racism and anti-Semitism of their respective communities. Their courage allows them to question and to cross over into the no-man's land of segregated urban neighborhoods, claimed most recently by Jews, but now, in the early fifties, increasingly by African-Americans. The New York Times praised "the power with which the author reveals the impact of [racial] struggle on the new generation, whose survival lies in their power to love."

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East European Jews clash with American blacks, Schwartz

By Mary McGreevey

I enjoyed this book, written originally in 1955 about a town in Ohio, on the brink of integration and civil rights. The Schwartz (the blacks) are about to start renting all over a formerly Jewish neighborhood. Many of these Jews got out of Europe in the nick of time to avoid the Holocaust, leaving their relatives to perish. They're a paranoid, anxious bunch, to say the least, and find all "goyim" (nonJews, gentiles) something to be wary of. Blacks they cannot abide, knowing full well what will happen to their property values. One by one, each family in the novel discusses whether they should do their "white flight" to the Crown Heights area, the new hip Jewish area, or stick out life in the old neighborhood as it integrates. Most decide to leave, or better yet, do the classic thing - set the house on fire and collect the insurance to put a down payment on the next house. What discussions these people have in Yiddish and English! Their fears override any joy in life, while their children, becoming Americanized, decry their parents' paranoia. One daughter, tomboy tough and pants-wearing, age 13, Judy Vincent, makes friends with a black girl, Clara. This is a forbidden friendship on both sides of the color line, but curiosity pulls them together in a middle area, a no-man's land of sand, a gully between two areas.

Meanwhile, another boy, 17, has heart trouble, is bedridden all day, and is doted on by his mother, Mrs. Golden, all day long. He will eventually die, but what he can see from his porch bed of the street activity, with blacks walking up and down ringing bells, asking if they can see the vacant apartments: this all enrages him, for the blacks are turned away. He cries out against being Jewish if it boils down to such fear and prejudice. Other characters in the novel fear that their businesses will decline, and that the synagogue will be sold. Sure enough, these fears are realized. Jewish white flight in 1955 Ohio is illustrated well in this book, from the internal Jewish point of view, almost from the children's confused and angry reactions.

One can tell that the author truly must have overheard and witnessed such events herself, probably while young.

Now that it is 50 years later in San Francisco, some of the book sounds outdated, as there is less fear of blacks than then. On the other hand, fear of loss of property values will never stop. It was just in the local Chronicle this morning that a newly-opened pot shop (selling medicinal marijuana at \$300-500/oz) has scandalized Pacific Heights, the rich part of town. They fear above all the drop in property values, they claimed. Not just that acrid odor! And what about the scum customers???

I think that these Jews, struggling to get into and stay in the middle class in post WWII America, were right to fear that their neighborhood would deteriorate. It's great to think that all people are equal, can get along, and wouldn't that be nice. But it doesn't work. Of all ethnic groups in the USA, the Jews were the biggest voices in the Civil Rights movement, right behind MLKjr all the way, programming his speeches, giving the Commie touch, driving the equality-myths.

Meanwhile, all over the big cities of America, people voted with their feet against school integration and the end of red-zoning. The true will of the people was ignored. NO matter! Minorities in these matters must be given priority. WHole neighborhoods sunk dramatically, became violent and dangerous. Public transit in the cities became a torture of verbal abuse and hate crime against whites (my own hard, horrible experience taking buses across town in the 1970's).

I had always wished my own parents had left SF and got us out, not let us be subjected to such hate crime for years on end.

I think that the young Jews in this novel were naive. History has born out the consequences of trying to integrate neighborhoods. But hats off to Jo Sinclair for giving her own Jewish view of an idealistic future! I daresay her neighbors, if not Jewish, are at least "white" today. Gentiles can be tolerated by Jews if they're not too dark, I've noticed. Check out Marin County, the hills of Oakland and Berkeley, etc. etc. There sure is some kind of redzoning going on!

Some of the paranoia of the Jews comes through in the dialogue of the book. The Jewish women accuse the gentiles on the street, mainly Italians, of not taking sides, of waiting and watching. They won't lead, say the Jews, because they don't need to, they can just follow and stay protected, because the Jews themselves are the loud and pushy ones who make things happen. They must be, one says, because they are always afraid, always about to be persecuted, so they are always on edge.

It is an interesting point of view to read first hand, 50 years back.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

outstanding

By Alan Winters

Fascinating personality development. A page turner.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Child's Eye View of Cultural Change

By Nomi Redding

The saving grace of Jo Sinclair (Ruth Seid)'s book *The Changelings* is the protagonist (based to some extent on her own life experience growing up in Cleveland) is a child. Sinclair paints vividly the angst of a neighborhood in transition: the unusual alignments that emerge in the face of the perception of a common threat and the differences in perception between racial and ethnic groups, genders, and generations. The author hammers the theme of her title throughout the book, but never develops the subtleties of what leads to the feeling of threat when neighborhoods turnover, no matter how misguided it may be. Instead, she firmly advocates for integration, commonalities among the disenfranchised, and the young leading the charge to a new way of living.

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