

## D. Donovan, Sr. Reviewer, Midwest Book Review

*Inmates in Charge: Top Level Leadership - Lacking Vision, Corrupt, & Couldn't Be Trusted* is a memoir that reveals the duties and experiences of an African American chaplain in the US Air Force Chaplaincy ... but to peg it as a military read alone would be to do it a grave disservice. *Inmates in Charge* actually holds invaluable lessons on racism, leadership, belief systems and control processes and imparts a healthy set of insights in all these arenas, which civilians and military minds alike will appreciate.

The “inmates in charge” Walter Beamon refers to don’t come from an insane asylum (though many of their repressive actions teeter on this brink). They represent engrained prejudice in leadership at the top levels of the Air Force Chaplaincy, and were referred to as such by not just the author, but fellow African-Americans in the military.

Memoir readers will find the usual chronological assessment of life changes from childhood to adulthood, but with a difference. With the focus on Walter Beamon’s life comes accompanying insights into faith, duty, and his efforts to cultivate a decisive, often controversial leadership against all odds. Beamon thus offers insights on military processes and structure which lend to a better understanding of the role of chaplains in the counseling and leadership routes.

Of particular interest is the way in which racism exhibits itself in missed opportunities, passed-over promotions, and other ways which mirror civilian business and political environments (but with a difference):

*“Chaplain Scott had achieved more than any other chaplain, African American or White by serving as Command Chaplain at three of the most important commands in the Air Force, but he never reached the status of general officer. As I pondered this information about the circumstances related to Chaplain Scott’s career, I decided that they were “unjust and unfair.” I wondered how a person could accomplish so much and yet be denied promotion to general officer rank! He never shattered the glass ceiling. I am compelled to believe that the reason he didn’t was because the “inmates” were in charge.”*

The lessons Beamon absorbs about the nature and solidity of the military network and its unacknowledged glass ceilings translates to a powerful survey that opens with personal encounters, but quickly moves to social, organizational, and political reflection.

There are also invaluable examples of shaking that tree of limitation and adversity, and the consequences of employing controversial attitudes and tactics within a structure cemented by racism:

*“In 1997, after four years serving as the Wing Chaplain, making the controversial decisions that I had made, I knew there would be some repercussions. The inmates would not allow me to move on in my career without some form of punishment. I did not know what it would be or how it would happen, but I prepared my heart and mind for “something” to come down.”*

Libraries and readers looking for exposés on leadership, racism, military processes, and engrained attitudes (especially collections appealing to Black patrons interested in military chaplain roles) will find *Inmates in Charge* a revealing, eye-opening experience.