

Students 101 years
old, and is much



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Students were assigned this essay as an inside look at oppression and racism from the last one hundred years, told by two elderly ladies in the book, *Having Our Say*.

100 Years of Degradation There are several books that have to be read in English 095. *Having Our Say* is one of them. My advice is to read this book while you are still in 090 or 094, just to get the advantage.

These are some things that you will discover in this extraordinary biography.

This book is tough to take as humorous, because it's heart-wrenching to look at racism in America, but *Having Our Say*, manages to pull off the feat.

Having Our Say really makes you think and tries to somehow reflect on the past as if you were actually there. As a white male, I am amazed at how these two African American sisters were able to live through over one hundred years of racism and discrimination, and then be able to write about their experience in a humorous, yet very interesting way. *Having Our Say* chronicles the lives of Sadie and Bessie Delany, two elderly colored sisters (they prefer the term colored to African-American, black, and negro), who are finally having their say. Now that everyone who ever kept them down is long dead, Sadie and Bessie tell the stories of their intriguing lives, from their Southern Methodist school upbringing to their involvement in the civil rights movement in New York City. Sadie is the older, 103 years old, and sweeter of the sisters.

The first colored high school teacher in the New York Public School System, Sadie considers herself to be the Booker T. Washington of the sisters, always shying away from conflict and looking at both sides of the issue. Bessie is the

younger sister, 101 years old, and is much more aggressive. A self-made dentist who was the only colored female at Columbia University when she attended dentistry school there, Bessie is the W.

E. B. Dubois of the sisters, never backing down from any type of confrontation. As the sisters tell the stories of their ancestors and then of themselves, and how they have endured over 150 years of racism in America, they tend to focus mainly on the struggles that they encountered as colored women. Bessie brings laughter to the book with her honest, frank, and sometimes, confrontational take on life. Much of the humor arises from the interactions between the sisters because of their opposite personalities. The Delany sisters were greatly influenced by their father. With their father being a minister, the Delanys learned excellent moral values.

These morals played an important part in their lives. They faced many hardships and trials in over one hundred years. Their father's influence played a major role in their survival. Other people in society did not know how to react to the Delany sisters. They were different from most other negro women of their day. They carried themselves with great pride, and they demanded respect everywhere they went, whether they got it or not. Although they were very different in many respects, they both possessed a zest for life. People showed many different reactions to that.

I believe that Sadie and Bessie can teach us all a lesson in life. They were confident, life filled women. They always tried to put forth a positive outlook on everything, as if even the struggles were a blessing. For this we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Having Our Say can be somewhat confusing to read at times, but I truly believe that it is worth the effort. This book will be part of my collection for a long time. Since we do a bit of research into the times and circumstances surrounding the books we read, I've discovered some interesting things about their early life environment that might contribute to their longevity. Harlem offered some amazing creativity in the early nineteen hundreds. Much of this creativity was referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. This period gave birth to such figures as Langston Hughes, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, renowned writers such as Zora Neile Hurston, and many others.

The Renaissance also gave way to organizations such as National Association