



When a Heart Turns Rock Solid: The Lives of Three Puerto Rican Brothers On and Off the Streets

Timothy Black

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A WASHINGTON POST BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR

This provocative and compelling book examines how jobs, schools, the streets, and prisons have shaped the lives and choices of a generation of Puerto Rican youth at the turn of the twenty-first century.

At the center of this riveting account—based on an unprecedented eighteen-year study—are three engaging, streetwise brothers from Springfield, Massachusetts: Fausto, incarcerated for seven years and in and out of drug treatment, an insightful and sensitive street warrior playing on the edges of self-destruction; Julio, the family patriarch, a former gang member turned truck driver, fiercely loyal to his family and friends; and Sammy, a street maven, recovering drug addict, father of four, straddling two realms—the everyday world of low-wage work and the allure of the drug economy—as he shuttles between recovery and relapse.

Timothy Black spent years with the brothers and their parents, wives and girlfriends, extended family, coworkers, criminal partners, friends, teachers, lawyers, and case workers. He closely observed street life in Springfield, including the drug trade; schools and GED programs; courtrooms, prisons, and drug treatment programs; and the young men's struggle for employment both on and off the books. The brothers, articulate and determined, speak for themselves, providing powerful testimony to the exigencies of life lived on the social and economic margins. The result is a singularly detailed and empathetic portrait of men who are often regarded with fear or simply rendered invisible by society.

With profound lessons regarding the intersection of social forces and individual choices, Black succeeds in putting a human face on some of the most important public policy issues of our time.

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