



race-related bitterness that they read about and occasionally experience, they need to know what life was like in the United States in the 1950s and the 1960s. Crowe's book, along with Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (Delacorte, 1995), can help. These two books present the chapters of the Civil Rights movement that follow Mildred Taylor's more historical *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Dial, 1976) and William Armstrong's *Sounder* (HarperCollins, 1969).

Chris Crowe. 2002. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books/Penguin Putnam. 240 pp. ISBN 0-8037-2745-3. US\$17.99.

## The Bully

Reviewed by James Blasingame, Department of English, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA.

At 100 pounds Darrell Mercer is often mistaken for a normal 12-year-old, but he isn't 12; he is 15 and about to start high school and a new life 2,700 miles away from the only hometown he has ever known—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Without the advantage of lifelong friends to accept and protect him, Darrell fears he will be picked on by bullies and ignored by everyone else. When his fears turn out to be justified, Darrell finds life can be even more miserable than he imagined.

As a freshman at Guion Bluford High, named for the first African American astronaut, Darrell suffers through many humiliations, from eating lunch alone to being mocked in the locker room for his arrested physical development. Tyray, the neighborhood bully, extorts a weekly fee of US\$10 from him, money Darrell can obtain only by forfeiting lunch every day. Even paying the extortion money doesn't save Darrell from harassment at the hands of Tyray and his friends.

As time goes by, Darrell's life improves somewhat. He makes a few friends, does well in school, and even suspects that Amberlynn, one of the cheerleaders, may have a crush on him. The growth that eluded him comes suddenly, and he finds that he has gained 15 pounds by Christmas.

He even joins the wrestling team where he finds a group of advocates who give him a daily pounding but applaud his courage and effort. Happiness and peace of mind still elude him, however, as Tyray continues to dog his every move and make life miserable. Darrell can't go anywhere without the bully being there to humiliate him.

Ultimately, Tyray underestimates Darrell when he embarrasses him in front of the whole school. Although Darrell stands up to his tormentor for the first time, his newfound courage seems to be all for nothing when Tyray's gang steps up to make short work of him. To the surprise of both Tyray and Darrell, however, Darrell has a gang of his own, the wrestling team, and Tyray finds himself all alone and facing someone whose anger has overcome his fear.

Although the plot may sound like a cliché, Paul Langan makes it seem just as real as everyone who ever faced a high school bully knows it is. The author is a good storyteller who weaves in all the realistic details of daily life that make readers forget this is fiction and start to burn with humiliation every time Darrell does and to cheer when he wins his first wrestling match. The daily dramas of high school life—the cruelties, injustices, opportunities, and successes—still make a good story when well put together.

*The Bully* is the fifth of seven novels about the students at Bluford High School, a predominantly African American public school somewhere in California. Although the main characters are African American, most of their experiences are common to anyone who attended an American high school, and the appeal is universal. Admittedly, this book does not aspire to literary greatness; descriptions of neighborhoods, houses, and people are generic, and language and events would be rated PG-13 if this were a movie. Nonetheless, it's an enjoyable read, a simple story simply told that succeeds in its purpose and for its intended audience. It's described by the publisher as "high interest" reading for "sixth grade and up."

Paul Langan. 2002. West Berlin, NJ: Townsend Press. 190 pp. ISBN 0-944210-00-7. US\$4.95.