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In *Knucklehead*, we meet Marcus Hayes, a brilliant black attorney who struggles, often unsuccessfully, with the impulse to confront everyday bad behavior with swift and antisocial action. The cause of this impulse is unknown to him. When he unexpectedly becomes involved with the kind, intelligent Amalia Stewart, her love and acceptance pacify his demons. But when his demons return, he is no longer inclined to contain them, and his life becomes a different thing entirely.

Set amid the racial violence of the 1990s, *Knucklehead* is hard-hitting, hilarious, and frank. The situations Marcus navigates are as familiar today as they were twenty years ago. And the similarity of our present-day climate is poignant and disturbing.

Knucklehead Details

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Author : Adam Smyer

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From Reader Review Knucklehead for online ebook

Julie says

Funny, gripping, dark, necessary, dripping with allegory. I don't want to say anything more specific because of spoilers, but also because his writing style, even during mundane descriptions of things, just shines and deserves to just speak for itself.

Andre says

A satirical new voice has arrived and he will be around a long time judging from this debut effort. Simply fascinating how the author, Adam Smyer uses the character Marcus Hayes, an African-American attorney, to traverse through nearly a decade from 1988-1997, all the while chronicling the days in the life of a young Black man with all the attendant worries, micro aggressions relationships loves, losses, doing so with unbridled hilarity. The book is written like we, the readers, are perusing through Marcus Hayes' journal, but it's still novelistic. The look we get is one that skillfully tackles various social issues, some as serious as cancer but all written with an easy humor-laden prose.

The challenge for Marcus Hayes is to have days that are conflict free. He actually keeps a Days Without Incident notepad, to count the number of days he consecutively goes without any incidents. He struggles to refrain from acting to these occurrences ,some easily avoidable, but the impetus of social justice drives him to respond. Things change for Marcus when he meets the lovely Amalia, a godsend of a woman, whom he is smart enough to marry, and his life shifts into a different gear. To say more would be spoiling what is sure to be one of the best books you will read this year. I'm certain that after reading this book and holding your sides from the laughter, you will want to share it with others and be glad you were there at the beginning of what promises to be a great career for Adam Smyer. His commentary is sharp, thoughtful and incisive. His writing calls to mind Ishmael Reed, Paul Beatty, Mat Johnson and other sardonic maestros. Can I do 6 stars? Big thank you to Edelweiss and Akashic Books for an advanced ebook. Book publishes February 13, 2018. Mark your calendar.

Addy says

This is basically a novel that you would expect from a affluent black conservative living in California. The author (erm protagonist) is honestly a new black and can really afford to be one because he's an attorney. The description of the book is very misleading. The black woman that calms his demons is like only 10% of the book (if that). The rest is him running around with a racist white woman (that's handled with kid gloves throughout the book) who in the ends does him dirty, but the author (erm, I mean protagonist) doesn't really notice. And it's only implied she's done him dirty and the white institutions of power are taking her side simply because she is white. But the author (erm, I mean the protagonist), never actually says this. Like it would truly burst his post-racial dream world bubble if it were actually said out loud.

Intertesting that White men are held in complete contempt. Even thought without them there wouldn't be any racist white women that the author (excuse me, I mean the protagonist) finds "cute".

Also, interesting that the black woman that's actually good for the protagonist ends up how she did, but the racist white woman ends up just fine. Better than fine actually. (view spoiler) He takes it in stride too, even though the woman is obviously crazy.

It's so insane to me, that no meaningful reflection on the part of the author/protagonist at all in regards to cali culture at all. From the law firm office culture to the bookstore scene, this author/protagonist doesn't seem to like himself, black people, or black culture which is why the black jokes fall flat. They are not jokes, or even witty observations. It's just how the author sees black people. And it's pathetically obvious too. Why no just admit that the protagonist (who is an obvious reflection of the author, let me stop being shady with the wise cracks) has race issues and having purely sexual relationships with white women is how he copes? There nothing they have to offer each other but that. Why despite knowing that your mom doesn't like her? Why considering her reaction to The O.J. Trial? You two clearly can't relate on a meaningful level. He admits (view spoiler) Lol, what? Just strange all around. The only thing that's missing that would have added true authenticity to this novel, is white woman saying the n-word and the author giggling it off.

Overall, the author's attempt pass off his diary for a novel is a huge fail.

Please author, wherever you are, get some counseling. I can't believe this is honestly being passed off as good literature.

Beverly says

Gathering my thoughts on this book.

Dianna says

This is the author's debut novel but I could not get into this one. Subject matter, characters, writing style - just not anything that appealed to me. Struggling to get to page 100, I finally decided to quit. I received this copy from LibraryThing Giveaway for an honest review.

Ronna says

I loved this book and think almost everyone with any emerging interest in how our identities and experiences inform our perceptions should read it. This is not a book about anger, rage, bad behavior or lurid language, though it does contain those things; it is a book about a man and his experience of the world. It is sincere and complex and speaks truth.

Michelle says

Marcus Hayes is young, gifted and Black. A promising attorney with an acerbic wit, he ushers the reader through 1990's America spotlighting the Black Male experience. Pivotal events like the Rodney King beating are described with such clarity that they evoke a visceral response. Micro-aggressions are illuminated

in such compelling fashion that they recall vivid memories of slights ignored, bitten tongues and offenses shoved so deep that they threaten to erupt at any moment. The difference with Marcus is that he does not stuff his emotions. His reactions are swift, resolute and often violent. Through his journal titled “*Days Without Incident*” our protagonist chronicles these offenses alongside his own transgressions in a manner that at times had me hysterically laughing.

Knucklehead is the brain child of Adam Smyer, who is himself an attorney. Filled with humor, Knucklehead is an examination of the injustices that African American men endure in today’s society and an honest depiction of the black male rage that ensues as a result of it. Not since George Schuyler’s Black No More have I read a satire as transfixing or encompassing of the black experience in America. Although this is his debut novel, I am certain we will be hearing more from this talented author.

Thanks to Akashic books, Adam Smyer and Edelweiss for an advanced copy of this book.

Lark Benobi says

The writing in this novel is very loose. There is a casualness about the prose that is both endearing and distancing--it's a style where you never know what the narrator is going to do or say next. In one scene after another the protagonist continues a debate with himself, the debate of his lifetime, about whether **this** is the time when he'll resort to deadly violence to solve his problems. From moment to moment he relies on some sign that will give him permission to unleash his rage, and you keep expecting him to do great harm to someone, and at the same time you are kind of rooting for him to go ahead and do it, actually, given the horrible things that happen to him, and given how dismissively he is treated even by those who supposedly love him.

The perpetual threat of violence, however justified in each scene, was a very uncomfortable place for me to be as a reader, but an instructive one. I finished the book with a terrific headache, and I felt it was exactly the right way to feel about what happens in the story, both in terms of the real historical events portrayed in the book, and in terms of the fictional journey the main character takes from beginning to end.

Now that I've written all of the above I also want to add that at times this is a very funny book. It's a remarkable book. You should go in open-eyed and open-minded and see what happens.

Ben says

A very promising and enjoyable debut. There have been several recent brilliant satirical novels about the ironies and futilities of African-American life, including Paul Beatty's "The Sellout" and James Hannaham's "Delicious Foods". "Knucklehead" is even better. It's a hard right hook to your forehead, with plenty of wit, simmering rage, love, grief, political incorrectness, and a trip down the 1990s' memory lane.

Edward Newman says

A Wondrous, Angry American Candide

Our due as Americans, we are told, are the rights, on equal footing, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What then, is the sane response when everyone seems bent on snatching it all away? And when they start succeeding? Marcus Hayes, the young African-American lawyer who is the protagonist of Adam Smyer's virtuoso debut novel tells us: there are only insane (and increasingly dangerous) responses to an insane America (which he senses never really wanted him where he has arrived anyway). As Hayes gains, then loses his career, his wife and his home, Smyer sets out the considered responses Hayes delivers. And they ARE considered. From early on, when Hayes and his girlfriend are appreciating the routine police beatings broadcast as entertainment on television, through the Simi Valley jury's acquittal of Rodney King's badged assailants, Hayes can rationalize every assault, insult or drawn weapon he provides, with incisive, lacerating humor.

"Knucklehead", like the best novels, gives us not only a compelling story, told with wit and bite, but a snapshot of the society engendering that story. Reading of Hayes' insane American times during our own is a balm, and a great ride at the same time. Highest recommendation.

NB: I am a friend of the author.

Lisa Scheff says

First things first, I could not put this book down once I started. I finished it in a blaze of binge-reading. The story is compelling, gut-wrenching, infuriating and--remarkably for all that--filled with laugh out loud moments in almost every chapter.

The protagonist and narrator Marcus Hayes is a young black attorney who has recently relocated to San Francisco from NY after being offered a job by a big law firm. The story takes place in the late 80s and early 90s and covers many of the iconic events of the era: The savage beating of Rodney King, the acquittal of the cops who were filmed doing it, and the riots that followed; the acquittal of OJ Simpson and the attendant agonizing over what it meant; The LIRR massacre; and more. I am old enough to have been aware of these events when they happened, but this book gave me a fresh perspective on subjects that have been written about exhaustively.

For all that it covers these major events, it is also a deeply personal novel. Marcus is a complex and flawed protagonist. He is brilliant and self-destructive, loves cats and guns in almost equal measure, a black belt in karate who provokes fights, a thoughtful and caring romantic partner and a self-absorbed asshole. Marcus uses humor to navigate much of the daily microaggressions and straight up aggression in his life--to his benefit and the readers'--but humor isn't enough and much of the driving force of the story is Marcus's struggle to figure out what IS an appropriate response to the sometimes merely (but inexcusably) insensitive and often overtly racist behavior he encounters on both coasts, and not only from white people. What is the appropriate response? Read the book and let's talk.

jo says

you should probably read this if you are a white person living in the USA, but warning that it will make you so angry you'll die of anger.

no, i exaggerate. it's also v. funny. i listened to the audiobook and the performer really, really performs it. it's brilliant.

but i couldn't take more than a little bit a day, cuz it's gripping and fierce and infuriating and it makes you want to kill all white people.*

* i am a white person living in the USA

Julia says

Marcus' future is golden: a young black man surging through law school in New York City with flying colors, all but guaranteed a position with a big-name law firm. Marcus' girlfriend Amalia, brilliant and beautiful fellow law student, successfully checks his lifelong compulsion to engage in voluntary verbal and physical altercations. After graduation, California and the good life beckon...

Like others, I had difficulties putting this book down -- often out of sheer fascination, and at other times in the manner of being unable to look away from a train wreck. Very eye-opening, and it reads so genuinely like a non-fictional autobiography that I had to remind myself (likely dozens of times) that it was a work of fiction. I loved the many clever turns of phrase and timeline of cultural events from the '80s and '90s.

I received this ARC via LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program.

Michael Ferro says

My full review will be published in the Michigan Quarterly Review later this year:

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/autho...>

Hermione says

Opera prima, autobiografica, non ancora tradotta in Italiano. La storia si svolge a partire dai primi anni '90 quando il protagonista è un promettente studente di legge e poi un giovane avvocato a San Francisco. Lavora tanto, fa tanti soldi, si sposa. Fa una vita normale, compreso il fatto di reagire, almeno all'inizio, con humour e ironia, a quel razzismo sotto traccia a cui ogni nero d'America è abituato. Poi accadono due eventi cruciali che danno alla sua vita e alla storia una svolta drammatica: la morte per cancro della moglie e l'uccisione di Rodney King da parte dei poliziotti di L.A. L'impatto di questi due eventi sarà molto forte: sul lato privato Marcus lascia il lavoro e inizia una relazione con Sarah, una hippie bianca che si rivelerà piuttosto pazzoide e razzista. Sul lato pubblico, l'omicidio di King apre la via ad un clima di uccisioni, aggressioni, episodi di razzismo aperto e conclamato, ad un clima d'odio e diffidenza che spingeranno Marcus ad acquistare un'arma per autodifesa, ma anche ad accettare ed assecondare le proprie pulsioni violente. Ben scritto, scorrevole, fa riflettere su temi molto di impatto e molto attuali.
