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Automatic Y'all: Weaver D's Guide to the Soul

Dexter Weaver
Hill Street Press (October 1999)
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In 1993, when R.E.M. named their new album *Automatic for the People* after the slogan of one of the band's favorite eateries, they catapulted its proprietor to international fame. Weaver D, as he is commonly called, was already well known around the Athens, Georgia, area as an extremely hard-working man who serves excellent soul food and who peppers his speech with the word "automatic." When one pays the bill at his restaurant he says, "Thank you. Automatic." His slogan, "Automatic for the People," is his promise to serve good food. In his memoir, Weaver D tells his story of growing up poor in Athens and Baltimore and how he came to own a series of businesses, culminating in Weaver D's Delicious Fine Foods (called such, according to its owner, "because I am and it is").

Weaver is quick to give his opinion on a variety of topics in this book, from the importance of religion in daily life to singer Michael Stipe's vegetarianism (a culinary preference that Weaver does not share, or as he says, "Weaver does not play that") to kids who try to live off mama for too long. In fact, much of the book feels as though it is directed toward kids who are growing up underprivileged. Weaver D has a message for them. There is nothing particularly profound in the bits of wisdom that Weaver dishes up in this book, but that is because he seldom strays from the commonsensical advice that we all know in our hearts to be true: work hard, remember your friends, try to have fun without hurting others, etc. Always, however, these bits of wisdom are delivered up Weaver D style, with a touch of attitude and a bowl of collard greens.

There are perhaps two flaws, one philosophical and the other culinary. First, while Weaver generally makes a good role model, he often comes across as being slightly too materialistic, a complaint shared by his ex-wife. Second, Weaver includes fifty of his recipes in the book, including that southern staple barbecue. Weaver D evidently cooks his barbecue in the oven—and any good southerner knows that if it ain't cooked over wood, preferably hickory, it ain't really barbecue. That's automatic. (December 1999)
ERIK BLEDSOE (December 16, 1999)

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