



How I Became the Most Hated Man in America: Prelude to The Most Hated Man in America

Xavier Richard Wright

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In the gritty debut from Xavier Richard Wright, *How I Became the Most Hated Man in America: Prelude to The Most Hated Man in America*, the author recounts the highs and lows of his childhood and adolescence living in the housing projects of West Hartford, Connecticut, from the 1970s through the 1980s. Although smart, charismatic, and talented, Wright suffers from feelings of worthlessness and fear drilled into him by his abusive father and siblings and equally vicious peers. Every time someone calls him ugly, a girl rejects him, or he fails to please his father, all of his accomplishments lose their meaning. While he eventually garners respect and friendship as an adult, beneath his successful façade lurks inadequacy.

Wright perfectly captures the lonely insecurity of someone who has internalized self-hatred; while he excels outwardly, he dies inwardly. Many readers will relate to the author's feelings of being an outsider. Even earning recognition for academic achievement and athleticism does little to lift his sense of worth. Every mishap he endures seems to prove his father's pronouncement that his son is ugly and stupid. Wright's mother, although loving, is schizophrenic, and provides little warmth. Any perfectionist with a high degree of self-doubt will recognize in the author's brutally honest prose the struggle for a sense of self.

The author movingly captures his discovery of racism. He proceeds from thinking all Caucasians at his preparatory school view him as an individual to the realization that he is treated differently due to his race. This detection of prejudice leaves Wright confused and angry. In harrowing passages, he frankly documents his conflicting feelings toward Caucasians.

Unsurprisingly, the author turns to drugs, gangs, and girls for solace. Using Wright's narrative as a powerful lens, readers learn how drugs and gang warfare leave marks on individuals and communities. Uninitiated readers will find themselves stunned as Wright is able to be a star student by day and an addict at night. However, burning the candle at both ends takes its toll; Wright is kicked out of several schools and even lands in jail. Yet, he always finds his way back to a place where he can be both an addict and an ace pupil. Wright's ability to rebound from hardships is impressive. His journey into sexual maturity, though, is far from easy. Having no one to guide him, he experiences both terror and thrill at masturbation. Although he yearns for a girlfriend, his low self-confidence hinders him. He contents himself with voyeurism, pornography, and fantasies until he finds a companion.

The graphic violence and foul language in *How I Became the Most Hated Man in America: Prelude to The Most Hated Man in America* are essential to Wright's story. The book's only flaw is its inaccurate title. The reader waits for Wright to achieve infamy on a national scale, but he never does. Nonetheless, most everyone will take away something from his poignant, gut-wrenching memoir.

JILL ALLEN (August 31, 2011)

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