



Live Through This: Surviving the Intersections of Sexuality, God, and Race

Clay Cane

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Clay Cane can't forget the first time he was called a "faggot." Aged seven, he'd dressed up in his mother's clothes and makeup; her boyfriend called him gay. Cane's mother kicked the boyfriend out for good, and "that one moment of affirmation armored me for life," Cane recalls. In *Live through This*, a hard-hitting collection of autobiographical essays, he spotlights moments that cemented his identity as a gay black man and explains how he defines himself in relation to pop culture and the black church.

Thematic rather than chronological, these pieces keep circling back to turning points in the author's life, like the poverty and bullying he experienced in Washington with his mother, or finding his tribe of fellow LGBTQ+ teenagers when he joined his father in Philadelphia.

Dialogue and vocabulary are raw yet believable. One essay tells how Cane learned to debate from trans sex workers in Philly; in another he vividly recounts how a drug dealer boyfriend forced him to fellate a white client in a club. "I had to live through this to make it out on the other side," he remembers thinking.

Explicit scenes are only one source of controversy here. In his 2015 BET documentary, *Holler If You Hear Me*, the author accused closeted "church queens" like gospel singer Donnie McClurkin and the late Bishop Eddie Long of being complicit with homophobia. Cane also rejects "mixed" and "biracial" labels, preferring to think of himself as simply black, although his mother is white. His basic criterion is "'Do you or do you not have white privilege?' If you don't, then you are a black person in America."

The title's language of endurance in the face of persecution resonates widely: striving not to repeat family patterns of violence and misogyny, living with the fear of contracting HIV, and resisting the subtle homophobia kept alive by hip-hop music and celebrity culture. Whether competing at a drag queen ball or interviewing gay icons like Mary J. Blige in his role as a journalist, Cane's gaze is unflinching. "This is my manhood. My story," he declares.

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