

Observations of an Immigrant from Africa: Making the Cut in the USA

Gideon Naudé

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Sincerity and humor add insight to these dialogues on the immigrant experience.

This sixty-four-year-old doctor and father certainly has seen life from a number of widely varying perspectives. Born in South Africa, Gideon Naudé made the difficult decision to relocate his professional career and family thousands of miles across the globe. *Observations of an Immigrant From Africa* is an absorbing and original tribute from an outside perspective, with a host of entertaining anecdotes and curmudgeonly charm. This risk-taking memoir-cum-commentary will linger in the memory while honestly conveying the mixture of lively intellect, the desire for a good life, and the determination to help others that drew the author to the medical profession.

Having sacrificed a prosperous lifestyle, a secure and rewarding work life, as well as networks of extended family and friends, Naudé nonetheless has found a lot to like in his adopted home and believes firmly (and gratefully) that America really is “the land of the free.” However, he finds it disheartening that so many who grew up here—his “American” children included—either don’t appreciate the benefits of living in the United States, have never grasped how many others yearn for a similar degree of freedom, or simply take it all for granted.

Rather than write a straightforward manifesto, Naudé presents a series of true-to-life dialogues, some actual, some simulated, some composite, that he has had with various individuals, ranging from a chat on gun control to an exchange about welfare and benefits. This stylistic device could be cumbersome and distracting in less skillful hands, but, overall, the author is deft at keeping the narrative flowing. Imagine, if you will, a South African James Herriot who made his way to America and found much to like in its political principles.

Some more progressive readers might flinch at the author’s perspective on how misguided kindness and woolly notions of inclusiveness can damage society overall—sometimes, he purports, as much as malice or greed. However, the author’s flinty integrity and on-the-level style never gets shrill or crosses into polemical mudslinging. Furthermore, it’s refreshing to hear a medical practitioner’s take on his patients and fellow doctors alike, acknowledging equally the heroes and the duds. This work demonstrates that the good doctor is an excellent humorist with a knack for telling a story.

Idiosyncratic, unpredictable, and highly entertaining, *Observations* may be overlong on occasion, especially in the author’s recounting of his early professional years. Some of the background may have been better communicated through flashbacks or brief asides.

Naudé’s sincerity and willingness to poke fun at himself mean his discourse on America as a society is by no means a dry screed, as it contains quite a few laughs along the way. Parents will especially appreciate the accurate portrayal of banter between generations.

SEAMUS MULLARKEY (March 18, 2014)

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