



The Education of Kevin Powell : A Boy's Journey into Manhood

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In the spirit of Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, this powerful memoir by writer and activist Kevin Powell vividly recounts the horrific poverty of his youth, his struggles to overcome a legacy of anger, violence, and self-hatred, and his journey to be a man and a voice for others.

Driven by his single mother's dreams for his survival and success, Kevin Powell became the first in his family to attend a university, where he became a student leader keenly aware of widespread social injustice. But the struggle to define himself and break out of poverty continued into adulthood, with traumatic periods of homelessness and despair. As a young star journalist with *Vibe* magazine, Powell interviewed luminaries such as Tupac Shakur, writing influential chronicles of the evolution of hip-hop from his eyewitness view. Now, with searing honesty, Powell examines his troubled relationships, his appearance on MTV's first season of *The Real World*, his battles with alcohol and depression, his two campaigns for Congress, and the uplifting trip to Africa that renewed his sense of personal mission. Finally, Powell embarks on a search for the father he never really knew in a redemptive passage from abandonment to self-discovery.

A striking memoir by a child of post-Civil Rights America, *The Education of Kevin Powell* gives eloquent testimony to the power of the soul to heal.

The Education of Kevin Powell : A Boy's Journey into Manhood Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Kevin Powell

Format :

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Cultural, African American

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From Reader Review The Education of Kevin Powell : A Boy's Journey into Manhood for online ebook

Christine says

I went into this book expecting strong commentary on race dynamics in America. I felt Powell's account was just a bit narrow. He told his story, which is honorable, but I think failed to explain how his perspectives aligned or didn't align with the norms of society and the perspective of other young black men. The writing was not as passionate as I had anticipated.

David says

wasn't familiar with him before, but I guess some know him from The Real World cast, and some from features he wrote on Tupac and others for music magazines. Tough upbringing in Jersey City with a violent single Mom in a violent neighborhood and grinding poverty. Education looms as his way out, but his own violent tendencies short-circuit that to an extent [e.g., kicked out of Rutgers]. Financial and interpersonal misadventures follow.

Story jumps around a lot, as it's organized more thematically [my awakening about male/female relations and the horrors of domestic violence, e.g., as opposed to "age 21 to 25"] than chronologically. Comes off as someone making a persistent effort to get his act together, but at the same time highly prone to blame everybody else for setbacks. To take a simple concrete example, throughout the story he's forever failing to pay rent on time, squandering any money he comes by, stealing stuff, etc., but then his bankruptcy is all the fault of financial advisor who let him down.

Richie East says

Another Great read. After I read it, I had to reach out to Kevin. He wrote me back. Encouraged me. It was good. Another must read

Dimas says

If the name Kevin Powell rings a bell it's usually because of one of the three following reasons: they know him as the black guy from the original cast of MTV's the *Real World*; they read the infamous Tupac Rikers Island interview that *VIBE* published in 1995; or they know him as a failed politician who ran for congress in Brooklyn twice, decidedly losing both times.

I knew of him from the Tupac story and other music-based writing. (He's done countless amounts of *VIBE* and *Rolling Stones* profiles for acts like Naughty by Nature's Treach to Snoop Dogg.) I was not aware of how interesting his life story was. Actually, I'm not sure interesting is the correct word here. A better word would

be erratic.

In a lot of ways, Powell's story is a common tale that successful black Gen Xers tell. Powell grew up in a poor single-parent household, survived the crack era and, because of endurance, talent and some good luck, was able to become successful at a young age.

About half of *The Education of Kevin Powell*, Powell's memoir, is about those early struggles: about not having enough food; about trying to survive in dangerous neighborhoods in Jersey City and Harlem; about his sometimes strained relationship with his mother, who is a hard woman.

Powell made a readable book, but not necessarily a well-written one. And the weaknesses, which are mostly the writing and spotty storytelling, are really palpable in the first half of the book: There is the dialogue, which comes off as cartoonish and not very convincing or well executed. There's the fact that Powell tends to use the literary device of reputation a little too much and for too long. And a lot of times it seems like he's just chronicling life events, which is problematic because similar narratives have been told in ways that were more compelling and contained much more wisdom.

When we get to Powell's adult life is when I became much more rapt. And it's not just the *Real World* stuff-- which is brief and muted -- or the Tupac saga. But it's how honest he is when talking about what a train wreck he became after finding success. Powell comes off as being an extremely self-aware cat, and his growth, especially when dealing and talking about women or how he interacted with colleagues, was refreshing to read about. Because a mix of poor decisions and bad luck, Powell had a long stretch where he was radioactive, considered a dangerous has-been, and was hanging on barely by doing little gigs here and there.

His career struggles is how, ultimately, I became drawn to this book: it skirts the typical memoir template of person struggles, becomes successful, goes through some adversary, overcomes said adversary and then becomes successful again. No. By the end of this book it's pretty clear that Powell's life is still erratic, and he is still very much a work in progress. The book concludes with Powell locating his fathers' side of the family, but the story still hasn't ended.

A. Breeze Harper says

One of the best memoirs I have ever read. I could not put this book down.

Annette Balter says

He is right about many things, especially how important it is for young people, especially Americans, to study history.

Lisa Mcbroom says

When I first saw this book I said the following.... "COOL!!!! Kevin off The Real World!!!! This memoir however is more than that! Kevin Powell frightened child, intellectual, fighter of human rights... certainly more than the "angry young black man" MTV stereotypically portrayed him . Of course I was always on Kevin's side Juli Oliver was a phony with that fabricated Southern accent. What a life this man has led!

Kaitlyn says

238 pages of self-serving drivel. Kevin is constantly hitting bottom as a result of his own actions, then launching into a diatribe about his feelings of abandonment with no regard to those around him. Then he claims to turn his life around...until the next chapter when he hits a new low.

Bookworm says

I had never heard of Kevin Powell but came across an article or post about the book and saw it was easily available at my library. Great!

It's the story of Kevin Powell from his childhood in poverty, the struggles he faces growing up and into adulthood. Navigating the world, the troubles he got into, trying to find his place.

Honestly, I didn't get it. I had read memoirs like 'The Other Wes Moore' (which is what I thought of while reading this) or 'The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace' which I enjoyed a lot. This is more like Moore's book since it's told in the first person and in some ways the stories are similar. However, I couldn't get behind Powell's story in the sense that I wanted what would happen next.

Powell himself is a good writer and while reading the text I felt like he did an excellent job in putting the reader in his shoes and describing his time growing up, his family, his discovery of books and reading, etc. But I couldn't help but wonder what exactly this was leading to and what the reader was supposed to be getting out of it. Memoirs can be difficult to go through but unlike the other books I mentioned Powell doesn't seem to have that much of an arc. He does go through one, but 'Other' neatly draws its storylines and we know how 'Short' will end. Here it's just a memoir of some guy but I didn't feel compelled by his story.

However, as I wrote he is a good writer, so I thought this should get another star. Maybe it just isn't for me but it would speak to someone else.

I thought it would be a good follow-up to Michelle Alexander's 'The New Jim Crow' (even if the two books don't cover the exact same material). Instead this was a big letdown. Going back to the library! I'd recommend a borrow unless you really like or are familiar with him.

Dave says

I find myself deeply humbled after reading this book. It dawns on me, how little I truly know of other

people's lives,cultures,beliefs,etc-and how having judgments purely based on my reality misses the very point of being alive.

Thank you for writing this book.

I am shaken to the core-in a real good way.

And so it is.

Karen Hartvik says

The writing started out strong, with vivid details and Powell digging deep to give readers a glimpse into his tough childhood. As the book progressed, Powell tended to repeat himself, jump around and gloss over details. This was especially troubling when he was trying to own up to his misogyny and violence, but didn't apply the same analysis and insight he had earlier in the book.

Dave B. says

Kevin Powell wrote a truly honest and open memoir. I struggled with the book from the beginning because I wanted the older mature Powell to provide wise and sage commentary to accompany the misdirected and frustrated youthful Powell's journey through life. If you ever read a memoir or two you will find this is usually the case. The wiser version of the writer reflects on the mistakes of his youth and provides insight to the reader on how to live a better life by avoiding the writer's mistakes. Powell avoids this by writing directly to the experience without any judgement. This forces the reader to sit and watch a Powell that struggled through his educational process, made bad career choices and dealt with violent relationships. I wanted to shout at the young man to get his life together and get his head out of the sand. Then I read the final sections of the book and realized the author had me looking in the mirror. I realized as an African American male growing up in lower middle class life we are plagued by a long series of bad choices despite our supportive loving parents and educational opportunities. We often mistreat our women and take no account for our own actions. I learned a lot from Mr. Powell most important points are: greater love and respect for women (these are our mothers, sisters and daughters not objects of misogynistic sexual needs or the recipients of our violent low self-esteem) and an enduring love and respect for my own imperfections. Finally, I absolutely loved the conscience hip-hop era references and his experience growing up with me in the same generation. We now found ourselves raising kids that don't have the Civil Rights of the 60's, Black Power protest of the 70's or the Hip-Hop cultural explosion of the 80's so I worry about my son now and hope he reads books like these because "A tree without deep roots cannot stand when the storm blows" and our roots are rarely nourished these days.

African Americans on the Move Book Club says

Kevin Powell's self-dictated docu-novel is rich, colorful, and informative all at the same time. He connects the joys and sorrows of his own life, like growing up without a consistent father and being seen as different, than other blacks, with true conviction. Readers will get lost in his insightful and graphic storytelling mixed

with just enough tidbits of his memory to make the story stick, like Aunt Birdie who inspired him to not accept the environment of his surrounds.

Kevin Powell's life is descriptively told in a captivating way that urges the reader to perceive hip-hop and the black community in a different light. In this attempt Powell adds yet another complex story connected the greater story of African-Americans in America; nay, to African descendants all over the world. Kevin Powell, is not the only Kevin Powell for there are others with similar stories like his, all wanting to be heard. I do not know when, or why Kevin Powell sought after documenting his life's triumphs and defeats for the consumption of the world; but he has done it, and the world should be all the more thankful for it. His biopics on some of the most popular black icons of his generation can come off as crass at times, but I believe Kevin Powell assumed this to be necessary.

There is a change coming in the world. This feeling is felt all over the world. There is unrest and things are uneasy. The Education of Kevin Powell is not a guide for black life, but a story of black life that has been written to encourage interpretation of all kind. For only then can true communication about race and gender issues in America be openly discussed in a way that is both beneficial and critical to all of man-kind.

Jerrel Stills
AAMBC Reviewer

Rafael Suleiman says

A compelling autobiography of an African American author.

Erin Grasse says

Go read this book. Now.
