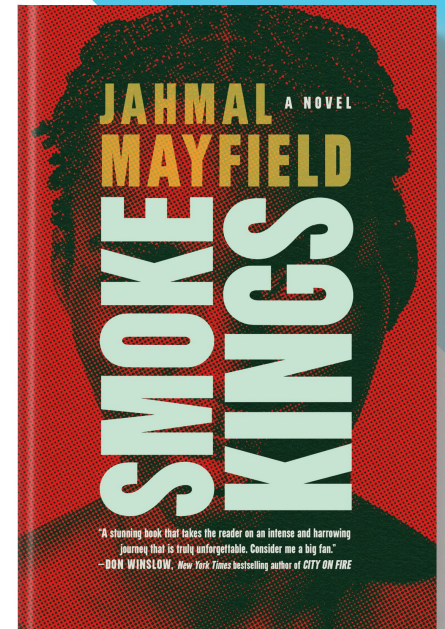


SMOKE KINGS

Jahmal Mayfield

Paperback 978-1-68589-111-4

eBook 978-1-68589-112-1



“ A fresh and fierce new voice to crime fiction...a stunning book that takes the reader on an intense and harrowing journey that is truly unforgettable. Consider me a big fan.”

— Don Winslow, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Cartel*, *The Force* and *City on Fire*

“ *Jahmal Mayfield roars to the top of the writer-to-watch list with this sizzling debut. Smoke Kings is straight fire. Every page simmers with an undercurrent of rage, each line a hard dose of smoldering truth. I can't wait to see what Mayfield does next.*”

—Eli Cranor, Edgar Award Winning Novelist of *Don't Know Tough*

INTRODUCTION

In the vein of *Get Out* and *Razorblade Tears*, a feast of noir fiction and probing social commentary that asks us to consider what would happen if reparations were finally charged and exacted.

Nate Evers, a young black political activist, struggles with rage as his people are still being killed in the streets 62 years after Emmett Till. When his little cousin is murdered, Nate shuns the graffiti murals, candlelight vigils, and Twitter hashtags that are commonplace after these senseless deaths. Instead, he leads 3 grief-stricken friends on a mission of retribution, kidnapping the descendants of long-ago perpetrators of hate crimes, confronting the targets with their racist lineages, and forcing them to pay reparations to a community fund. For 3 of the group members, the results mean justice; for Nate – pure revenge.

Not all targets go quietly into the night, though, and Nate and his friends' world spirals out of control when they confront the wrong man. Now the leader of a white supremacist group is hot on their tail as is a jaded lawman with some disturbingly racist views of his own. As the 4 vigilantes fight to thwart their ruthless pursuers, they're forced to accept an age-old truth: "Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves."

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. How does Bella and Mason's implicit bias against Black people manifest at the start of the novel? How do they rationalize their perspective? What makes their insidious racism so dangerous?
2. Fear and anger are driving forces of the plot. How do these emotions manifest in the characters (the vigilantes, the investigators, the Righteous Boys, and their respective families)? What do they reveal about the racial dynamics explored in the novel?
3. Rachel acts as bait several times throughout the novel. Is this empowering, a reclamation of violence perpetrated against women? Or, rather, does this shine a light on the insidious nature of objectification/sexualization explored in the novel?

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4. Isiah and Nate don't agree on whether their work should focus solely on seeking vengeance on behalf of the Black community or of all marginalized communities. How does this debate mirror the Black Lives Matter movement? Does broadening the scope dilute their message?
5. Nate almost kills Robinson, the only Black person they kidnap, in a clear moment of escalation. Why do you think the author chose to include this scene? Is Nate's need for vengeance blind, or is this demonstration of how society devalues Black bodies, even within the Black community?
6. How do violence and power operate within the novel? Consider the dynamics explored between men and women, the police and civilians, and white and Black people.
7. In what ways do Nate and Samuel act as foils to each other?
8. Consider Nate's rationale for targeting descendants of hate crime perpetrators explored on pages 322–323. What does the pattern he finds suggest about the cyclical nature of oppression?
9. Throughout *Smoke Kings*, the female characters are subjected to instances of violence—both physical and psychological. What do these scenes reveal about the nature of violence, power, and oppression against women?
10. How does Mason's character evolve throughout the novel? Do you feel as though he has shown any growth? Is it enough? Is he one of the “good guys?”
11. Why do you think the author chose to end the novel the way he did? What does this final scene reveal about the underlying message of *Smoke Kings*?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAHMAL MAYFIELD was born in Virginia but currently resides in New Jersey. In addition to writing crime fiction, he serves as the director of a nonprofit program that provides employment support to people with disabilities. *SMOKE KINGS* was inspired by Kimberly Jones' passionate viral video, “How can we win?”

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