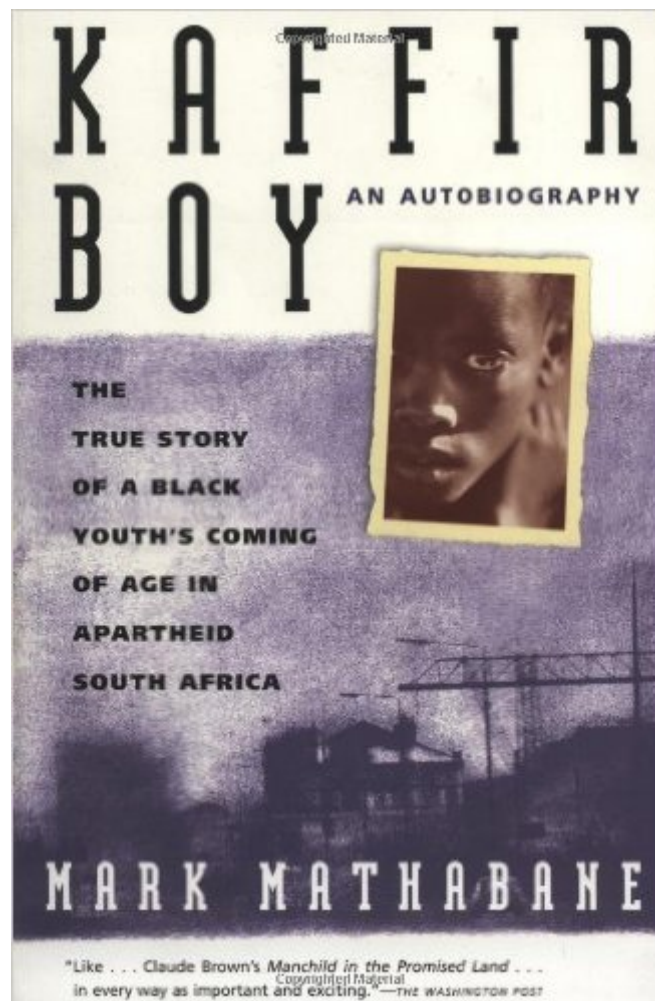


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Kaffir Boy: An Autobiography--The True Story Of A Black Youth's Coming Of Age In Apartheid South Africa



Synopsis

The classic story of life in Apartheid South Africa. Mark Mathabane was weaned on devastating poverty and schooled in the cruel streets of South Africa's most desperate ghetto, where bloody gang wars and midnight police raids were his rites of passage. Like every other child born in the hopelessness of apartheid, he learned to measure his life in days, not years. Yet Mark Mathabane, armed only with the courage of his family and a hard-won education, raised himself up from the squalor and humiliation to win a scholarship to an American university. This extraordinary memoir of life under apartheid is a triumph of the human spirit over hatred and unspeakable degradation. For Mark Mathabane did what no physically and psychologically battered "Kaffir" from the rat-infested alleys of Alexandra was supposed to do -- he escaped to tell about it.

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Customer Reviews

Not much of an introduction needed here: the full title of the book accurately sums up the subject. This was a book that I bought in used paperback not certain whether I'd finish it, and found myself deeply engrossed in the story and in reflection upon Mathabane's descriptions of life under apartheid. Mathabane shows a great many literary strengths here. His candid expression of his own feelings can't help but inspire the reader's respect and interest; the whole book feels 'spoken from the heart'. His prejudices, embarrassing moments, times of despair, moments of triumph, and peer relations are all here. Of particular interest to me (naturally, as a white non-South African) was the development of his views of white people--South Africans and foreigners--and how his understanding becomes broader as he meets a wider variety of people. I came away thinking that

I'd probably really like Mark Mathabane in person. His youth in fact makes a good story, one that builds nicely to a conclusion I won't spoil for you except to carefully mention that this is the story only of his youth, not of his whole life. And his descriptive talent, which painted such vivid and contrasting portraits of the life he led, is worthy of the great storytellers of the proud tribes of southern Africa from which he is descended. I would offer the caveat that the book contains explicit sexual and violent scenes that most people would consider inappropriate for children under 14 (and even then I'm assuming a pretty well-adjusted child). Mathabane is never himself vulgar, but some of his experiences certainly were, and he gets through them as quickly as possible but I see why he didn't omit them. If you ever wondered what life was like for South African blacks under apartheid, particularly for a highly gifted member of that group striving upward against every barrier that several cultures could place before him, this'll be a revelation.

I'm in 10th grade. our teacher is having us read this. Then some of the parents found out about the "sexual activities" for food. They flipped. Now i would have thought being parent they would be mature about this. it is a book of the past and and our teacher said when we read it we want to try to prevent past from repeating itself. Although it has some pretty discriminating and discusting parts it is a good book. We must not forget, this happened here. on this earth on which we live on. what happenes to one person(s) can gradually effect others and still grow. This was a life that had suffered all this, he knows the feeling of it. It's not an experience we want to know of, but the life of this child growing up help others realze, this stuff can go around on this earth all the time and anytime.

I never had the slightest idea of what "apartheid" was until I read this book. I had thought it might just be segregation. But it was so much more than just segregation. Mark Mathabane introduces us to the horrors of his childhood growing up in South Africa, from family problems, to gangs, and the unjust Pass Laws. He learns the value of education and shows just how hard it is to persevere when oppressed by whites who believe Africans to be inferior. Starting from the 1960's, it provided an in-depth look at the Apartheid from a victim's point of view. It amazed me that it was all real...all the killing and poverty. It was a very powerful novel. It gave me good sense of the meaning of "apartheid". I would suggest it for those who want to get a good idea of the type of thinking and enduring that went on in South Africa during apartheid. Because it doesn't quite focus on the events of history, but is a personal account of a youth's hardships, the book is very effective in evoking emotions, portraying hardships, rather than just stating the facts. I really was able to take away a lot

from this book. I finished it with a greater sense of the power of perseverance, hopes, and achieving goals.

I have read Mark's book three times and still come to one conclusion: it could have been better. It is a fine read indeed, but there are several things in the content of the book which I as a black South African, having lived in a South African ghetto during and after Apartheid, found Mr. Mathabane's book a bit too commercialized. I too come from the ghetto in SA. Despite the ills of Apartheid and oppression we suffered under the white minority. There were moments for happiness in our lives in the ghettos. Mr. Mathabane paints a picture in which he tells of his life as that of the worst among them all. It is troubling to see the way he distorts and disses our culture, food, and beliefs. His description of amasonja and murogo on page 63 is very disturbing to me. This is the food that kept us strong, we enjoyed this as young people or black families in our communities. True not everybody liked amasonja or murogo, but it wasn't filthy food. Also his description of eating blood (ubende), this is a delicacy among us Zulus, especially among children and families that value culture. It is also sad to see how he fails to give proper translations of things such as muhodu on page 30, he says is cattle's lungs--NO it's not; page 84 mfana is not a brat; page 6 pap is not porridge. These are just a few of the things that I found inaccurate. It just seems like the book had its intention of being a best seller, especially catering to the American society. Only for Mr. Mathabane to forget that one day us black South Africans will get hold of this book. I must say that at least ninety percent of the book is accurate, but the very elements of our cultures are not well represented in Kaffir Boy.

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