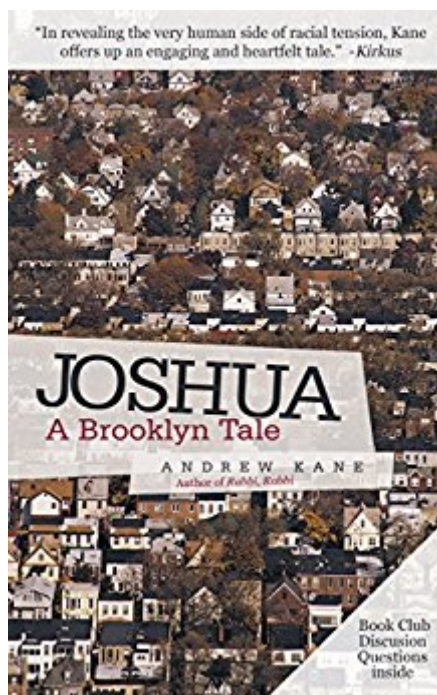


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Joshua: A Brooklyn Tale



Synopsis

Joshua Eubanks and Paul Sims moved to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, for very different reasons. Joshua, a young black man, came with his single mother to escape the crime and despair of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Paul left his life of privilege in Long Island to study Judaism with the Hasidic Lubavitch movement. They live in two different worlds separated by a few city blocks, but their hearts both yearn for Rachel Weissman, the daughter of a respected rabbi, who is torn between her aspiration to become a doctor and her obligation to obey the insular restrictions of her religion. As they establish lives in their respective communities, they are increasingly expected to take sides in growing tensions that would explode into the 1991 Crown Heights riots. *Joshua: A Brooklyn Tale* views four decades through three lives. Andrew Kane's novel is a love story about loneliness, a reflection on the value of community that acknowledges that it takes a village to raise a mob, a tale of public dysfunction and personal demons, and an image of the frail beauty of humanity that somehow survives.

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Customer Reviews

Andrew Kane's novel encompassing novel addresses racism, bigotry, race relations, community relations, personal responsibility and love. Kane's story, well paced and well plotted reveals the effects of deep seated hatreds and the injustices of mob mentality and rabble rousing. Kane, in the novel, allows no ethnic group a special place above another, as all men, of any color, any nationality or any religion, can harbor prejudice. The author hosts a various cast of characters, believable and realistic, from hard working Americans, to immigrants, to street thugs, who move through the novel with deliberation and ease. The story centers on the three primary characters, Joshua Eubanks, a young Black man, Rachel Weissman, daughter of a poor Hassidic Rabbi, and Paul Sims, a secular Jew who joins the Jewish religious community. The beautifully written novel flows quickly, and offers passionate, descriptive images of the racial tensions during the 1960s, 70s and 80s in New York.

Yes, I grew up not far from Crown Heights. And, I had Jewish friends there from high school and college. I got the giggles when Joshua goes to the Kingsway Movie Theatre....what happened to Flatbush Ave with the movie theaters? It seemed strange that he would go from Crown Heights to Kings Avenue. I am also a Brooklyn College alumni. Truth is, I don't remember reading a good sized novel like this from cover to cover in years. I loved every minute of it, stress and unhappiness and money and Jewish religious beliefs and love and killing and incest, and heart attacks, and cancer, and success, and Aids, and race riots, and a roller coaster ride through the Brooklyn I remember. Enjoy!!!

There are many reasons why I enjoyed this subway ride back to Brooklyn and beyond in the decades and worlds that dovetailed with my own life. As a writer (I am the author of Forgive Maximo Rothman) I am very impressed with Mr. Kane's ability to transverse a very substantial period of time without losing my interest. He seamlessly weaves actual historical events into the lives of his characters without losing the three dimensional aspect of their stories. They do not become flat against the backdrop of historical events as so often happens in novels of this type. Additionally I became attached to the characters and kept reading often late into the night to know what would happen to them. As a writer I can safely say getting your reader emotionally invested in your characters means you've done your job. Mr Kane has done his here.

This is a story of two people from very different worlds and the constraints it puts on their emotions. The story is told in straight forward language, which I like. The author paints an accurate picture of

the Chasidic community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Bed-Sty, Brooklyn. I could feel how it was to live in the two worlds. And I could feel the love of family that the author portrayed. I don't want to reveal any of the plot, but it is not a very complicated one. What the book has is a sense of family bonds, bonds for the community, and commitment for each other. It is a very good read, and it left me thinking for days to come.

I gave up on this book after the first third as I found it too difficult to believe and the early depiction of the characters seemed too stereotypical. Then a friend recommended I return to it and I am delighted that I did. Joshua is a Black boy growing up in Brooklyn. He has a strong hardworking mother and no father. His youth is spent getting into trouble with petty (and then major) crime and getting into an early sexual relationship. His misdeeds lead to his being assigned to work as a cleaner in a Synagogue and he meets and falls in love with the Rabbi's daughter. From that point on the book is hard to put down as the lives of Joshua and his beloved become entangled and the main characters in the book are fleshed out and become more real. The story of their love is told against the backdrop of anti-Jewish riots in the early 1990s as conflict between the Blacks and the Jewish population erupts.

I thought this book had great promise when I started it. Reading it became like watching the worst soap opera. Rachel had every known bad thing happen to her. The dialog was unbelievable and flat. I actually stopped reading it at 90% because I could not take anymore.

I grew up in Crown Heights during the late 40's and 50's. After that, came The Rebbe, thee dancing and the joy; the culture and the freedom to be a child without fear. To the Civil Rights Movement, diversity and HOPE! to the riots and on and on.' It was all so familiar. How I wish I could go back!

I have to admit, I found the descriptions of Jewish/Black relations in New York during the 70's the most interesting aspect of this book. I don't think I realized how adversarial these groups were during that time. This book describes the in-fighting between different Hasidic groups as well as capturing the strict cultural expectations on Hasidic men and women. Joshua's life is described in typical fashion...neighborhoods or drugs, sexual abuse, crime and the difficulty of black youth to escape this wretched situation. Through a strong bond with his mother, some financial and legal help from his "father", and mostly through education, Joshua elevates himself to become a lawyer

who, to his credit, stays in the old neighborhood to help his people. Unfortunately, I really didn't buy the love story of Joshua and Rachel...I didn't feel it had a very strong basis, but it worked in order to bring up the many subjects this book speaks to. This book would make a great Book Group choice because of the many topics it raises regarding relationships, religion, politics, race relations, marriage.

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