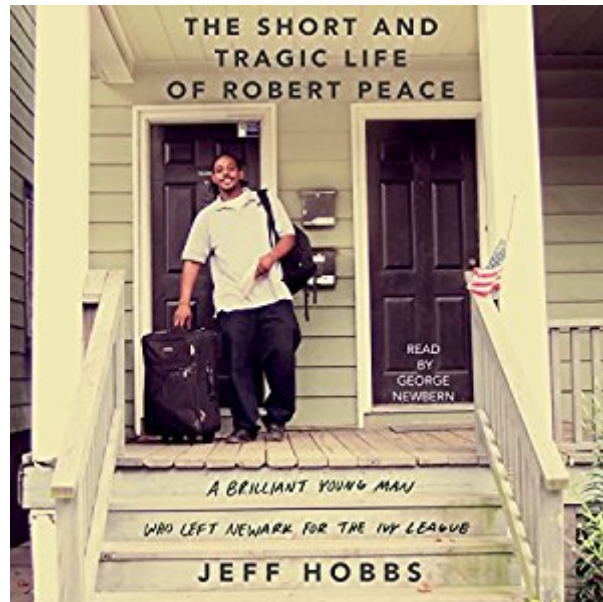


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The Short And Tragic Life Of Robert Peace: A Brilliant Young Man Who Left Newark For The Ivy League



Synopsis

A heartfelt, and riveting biography of the short life of a talented young African-American man who escapes the slums of Newark for Yale University only to succumb to the dangers of the streets - and of one's own nature - when he returns home. When author Jeff Hobbs arrived at Yale University, he became fast friends with the man who would be his college roommate for four years, Robert Peace. Robert's life was rough from the beginning in the crime-ridden streets of Newark in the 1980s, with his father in jail and his mother earning less than \$15,000 a year. But Robert was a brilliant student, and it was supposed to get easier when he was accepted to Yale, where he studied molecular biochemistry and biophysics. But it didn't get easier. Robert carried with him the difficult dual nature of his existence, "fronting" in Yale, and at home. Through an honest rendering of Robert's relationships - with his struggling mother, with his incarcerated father, with his teachers and friends and fellow drug dealers - *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace* encompasses the most enduring conflicts in America: race, class, drugs, community, imprisonment, education, family, friendship, and love. It's about the collision of two fiercely insular worlds - the ivy-covered campus of Yale University and Newark, New Jersey, and the difficulty of going from one to the other and then back again. It's about poverty, the challenges of single motherhood, and the struggle to find male role models in a community where a man is more likely to go to prison than to college. It's about reaching one's greatest potential and taking responsibility for your family no matter the cost. It's about trying to live a decent life in America. But most all the story is about the tragic life of one singular brilliant young man. His end, a violent one, is heartbreaking and powerful and unforgettable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just finished the book a few hours ago. The author of one of the dust-jacket blurbs got it exactly right: reading *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace* has changed me forever. I am going to be processing this book for a long time, and it is a measure of how profoundly transformative it was that I don't really want to talk to anybody about it yet. Usually when I have read something good, I seek out other people who have read it too, eager to do the de-brief together. This book was different: overwhelming and silencing. The only reason I gave it four stars instead of five was because the author seemed to completely miss something obvious: Robert Peace was clearly an addict and probably an alcoholic. The book describes his daily drinking and drug use and hangovers, noting the huge quantities he ingested, and the progressively greater quantities he required as time went on. And at one point, the author does mention, almost in passing, that Robert considered himself a "high functioning" addict. But that's not the kind of thing that merits just a passing mention. The inability to form a healthy intimate relationship, the emotional development stalled at the age (adolescence) that drug use began, the choice of menial work that you can do even when out-of-it, the grandiose plans coexisting with a profound fear of change: all of it is classic Addiction 101. In fairness to the author, who is still young, I can see how he would miss the obvious truth staring everyone in the face. A lot of people in Robert Peace's orbit -- the Yale set very much included -- drank alcoholically and abused drugs, too. So even though Robert's using stood out, the author perhaps mistook it as a difference of degree rather than kind.

A story so compelling that it pulled its author away from another project, *THE SHORT AND TRAGIC LIFE OF ROBERT PEACE* is frustrating, sad, perturbing and disturbing. A bright young man squanders his gifts, dies needlessly, and leaves a legacy of unanswered questions. The remarkable mind of little Rob --- raised in poverty, his mother a hospital worker and his father a smart-aleck drug dealer --- was evident by the time he was three, when his daycare minders dubbed him "Little Professor." When his father was imprisoned for a senseless murder, Rob remained a loyal son, though he rarely spoke of the circumstances that marred his childhood. Jackie soldiered on, determined to make the best possible life for her son. Admitted to a prestigious parochial school against the odds, Rob's luck didn't stop there: a multimillionaire, Charles Cawley, spontaneously decided to pay for Rob's entire college education. At Yale, Rob excelled not just

in academics but as a party animal who supplied drugs to his friends. Jeff Hobbs was his roommate. The trajectory for the African American boy who studied molecular biochemistry after rising from the slums, genial and incredibly gifted intellectually, should have been straight to the top. But somehow that never happened. Rob's unraveling from high-achieving academic to lowlife entrepreneur makes for a fascinating study that never lags. After fits and starts at respectability, he perversely utilized his knowledge of chemistry to perfect a new variety of marijuana in the secrecy of his basement, organizing a chain of distributors drawn off the streets on which he had grown up. The counterpoint to his downward spiral was his mother's unwavering strength; Jackie always encouraged and never disparaged.

Robert Peace and Jeff Hobbs came from vastly different backgrounds, but when Yale paired them as college roommates, a race- and class-bridging friendship emerged. When Robert passed away several years after they graduated, Jeff took on the task of chronicling his life in *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace: A Brilliant Young Man Who Left Newark for the Ivy League*. The story is not without its happy moments, but, ultimately, it's sad and discouraging. Robert grew up in Newark, poor, son of a single mother and a father who was in prison for a double murder. Even as a toddler, he showed signs of brilliance, so his mother made endless sacrifices to ensure that he got a good education. He was a stellar student, and graduated with accolades from a local Catholic prep school. Due to the generosity of the school's patron, he had his way paid to Yale, where he excelled in the molecular biology program. At every point in his education, Rob was well-liked by his peers and lauded by his teachers. He showed a remarkable selflessness, as he helped out his friends, many of whom would have struggled academically if not for his tutelage. He showed a great work ethic in his studies, on the water polo team, and in his outside work as a lifeguard, lab assistant, and other roles. Rob's story should have been a rags to riches tale, an inspiring story of a man who had everything going against him, but through hard work, a brilliant mind, and some great connections along the way, became a great leader in government, business, the community, or all of the above. Alas, Rob was a habitual pot smoker, as well as being a very active dealer.

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