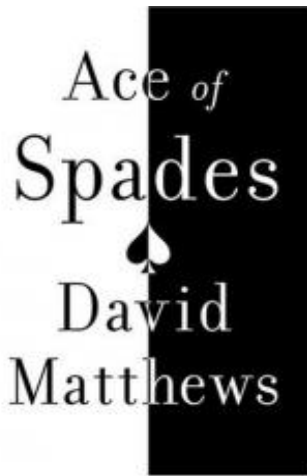


# Ace of Spades

by David Matthews

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## About the Book

When David Matthews's mother abandoned him as an infant, she left him with white skin and the rumor that he might be half Jewish. For the next twenty years, he would be torn between his actual life as a black boy in the ghetto of 1980s Baltimore and a largely imagined world of white privilege.

While his father, a black activist who counted Malcolm X among his friends, worked long hours as managing editor at the Baltimore Afro-American, David spent his early years escaping wicked-stepmother types and nursing an eleven-hour-a-day TV habit alongside his grandmother in her old-folks-home apartment. In Reagan-era America, there was no box marked "Other," no multiculturalism or self-serving political correctness, only a young boy's need to make it in a clearly segregated world where white meant "have" and black meant "have not." Without particular allegiance to either, David careened in and out of community college, dead-end jobs, his father's life, and girls' pants.

A bracing yet hilarious reinvention of the American story of passing, **Ace of Spades** marks the debut of an irresistible and fiercely original new voice.

## Discussion Guide

1. Why does David admire his friend Stefan so much? Why doesn't Stefan "out" David when he passes for white? And why is Stefan able to seem so self-confident while David is not?
2. Discuss the influence Grandma Mae had on David.
3. Why does David ignore his father, Ralph, in the park? Should he have done so?

4. How did the father and the son moving to different neighborhoods alter David's life and his sense of himself?
5. How does the fact that David is half Jewish shape his self-image?
6. Would it have made a difference to David's life if Ralph had spent more time educating David on his black heritage? Why did Ralph not do so?
7. Is David a racist? To whom and in what way? If so, when does David first become aware of his own racism?
8. After the cross-burning incident, David decides that he isn't a racist but a 'hater.' What is the difference?
9. David briefly becomes radicalized when he finally embraces his black identity. Why is that?
10. When David is passing, does he do so out of cowardice, necessity, or convenience?
11. In the last chapter of the book, we learn what happened to David's mother, Robin. Do these revelations answer any of David's questions about his life and identity?
12. Who decides who is black, white, Jewish, or any ethnicity? Each individual, or society? What if the individual and society disagree?
13. Does David write about an America that you recognize?

## Author Bio

David Matthews is a writer living in New York. He has appeared on The Tavis Smiley Show and the CBS Sunday Morning Show, and in *People* magazine.

## Critical Praise

"**Ace of Spades** by David Matthews is a memoir with lightning strikes of awareness and brilliant analyses of race in this country both as it was and is. The book is not possible to put down, a raging fire runs through it yet it is filled with pained humorous moments as this child of 'mixed' parentage makes his quivering yet always valiant way through his early years as child and young man."

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### **Ace of Spades**

by David Matthews

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