

The Full Matilda: A Novel

by David Haynes



About the Book

Matilda Housewright hails from a long line of venerable and well-respected African American retainers --- her family has been in "service" for generations, serving Washington, D.C., politicians and other upper-crust families. The daughter of the indispensable majordomo Jacob Housewright, Matilda grew up in the house of a powerful D.C. senator and learned how to be a hostess extraordinaire --- and has perfected the art of service. But after her father dies and she starts a catering business with her brother, Matilda begins to question who she is and what, exactly, she's serving. Told in the voices of the men in her life, with connecting interludes from Matilda, the reader indeed gets **The Full Matilda**, a glorious glimpse inside the intriguing life of a captivating woman in the midst of change as she maneuvers through a web of secrets, expectations, and worn-out social mores.

Discussion Guide

1. Matilda's father Jacob makes a virtue of being good at his job. Is it always a virtue?
2. Matilda often speaks wistfully of her life in the Georgetown mansion. How do you explain her hopeless romanticism?
3. Why can't Martin allow Matilda to continue as his business partner? Why can't they be close?
4. David and Matilda seem to connect in ways that she and his father are unable to. What does David see in his aunt that his father is unable to?
5. Matilda can't or won't forgive Roderick. Why not? What (if anything) are each of them unable to understand about the other?

6. In what ways is Jacob (the younger) every bit a Housewright?
7. Explain Matilda's preference to withhold herself from society.
8. Important milestones in the history of black America pass even as Matilda's life seems mostly static. Why would this be so? Is it so?
9. Matilda rejects your pity and surely your judgment of her life and her choices? Do you pity her? How do you judge the choices she made in her life?
10. Matilda passes forward a number of powerful legacies through generations of Housewrights. What legacies are worth preserving? Which are better consigned to the past?

Author Bio

David Haynes is an assistant professor of creative writing at the Southern Methodist University in Texas. Named one of America's best young novelists by *Granta*, Haynes has had his short stories recorded for National Public Radio's *Selected Shorts*. He is the author of several critically acclaimed novels, including **All American Dream Dolls**, **Live at Five**, and **Somebody Else's Mama**.

Critical Praise

"In this era of service with a snarl, **The Full Matilda** is a tribute to a period past, a time when the napkin was starched, Negroes' eyes were down turned, language was coded, and, nonetheless, progress was made. Fast forward to Afros, police brutality, and interracial relationships, all filtered through Matilda Housewright -- a remarkable maiden aunt with ramrod stiff posture -- and you have the basis for an absorbing read. David Haynes has done a masterful job of depicting the men in Matilda's life. Partly quaint, yet thoroughly contemporary, hilarious and poignant, this book is, throughout, a gem."--- Julianne Malveaux, Economist and Author **The Paradox of Loyalty: an African-American Response to the War on Terrorism**

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