



# **Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence, A True Story in Black and White**

*Geoffrey Canada , Jamar Nicholas (Illustrator)*

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Long before President Barack Obama praised his work as “an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children,” and First Lady Michelle Obama called him “one of my heroes,” Geoffrey Canada was a small and scared boy growing up in the South Bronx. His childhood world was one where “sidewalk boys” learned the codes of the block and were ranked through the rituals of fist, stick, knife, and, finally, gun. In a stunning pairing, acclaimed comics creator Jamar Nicholas presents Canada’s raw and riveting account, one of the most authentic and important true stories of urban violence ever told.

## **Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence, A True Story in Black and White Details**

Date : Published September 14th 2010 by Beacon Press

ISBN : 9780807044490

Author : Geoffrey Canada , Jamar Nicholas (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 124 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Nonfiction, Comics, Autobiography, Memoir, Cultural, African American



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## **From Reader Review Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence, A True Story in Black and White for online ebook**

### **?LI?Δ says**

This book was an amazing non-fiction story fit into a comic. This book's genre had action, drama, and even comedy to it. Before I read this book I judged it by its cover thinking it was a childish book with no meaning because it was a comic, but by the time I got near the end of the book I noticed I was actually enjoying it because I wouldn't usually read a book without being forced to and that week I went straight to reading my book on my own. I would recommend this book to anyone that's looking for a book that teaches you a life lesson or to inspire you because this book definitely inspired me to know that it's never too late to change who you are because of the message to it "It's time to do something while we still have time."

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### **Kelly Moore says**

This was really amazing, eye opening, and scary. Although it is clearly meant to educate, the story avoids being preachy, and I was completely drawn in. Is it appropriate for middle schoolers? I think it would be a great book to read and discuss, because there is a lot to process. Ultimately I think everyone should read this at some point - maybe in eighth grade, maybe later, depending on the student and whether they have a chance to talk about it with an adult. Some people might be put off by the trash talking language, but the real story being told is too important to focus on the way people talk when they're trying to be tough. It's an inspiring story that I will definitely be curious to learn more about.

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### **Darius H says**

This book has a ya sticker. but it is awesome I couldn't put it down. It is about a boy that grows up setting a rank on union avenue he stolen from and held at gunpoint. He learns to be tough and stickup for himself.

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### **Raina says**

Geoffrey Canada's story is vivid. He remembers his childhood so well, describes it in great detail, and Jamar Nicholas' illustrations really bring it to life. This story, about Canada's integration into a violent urban life, is heartbreaking, but I couldn't stop reading. It's a great personal story of The Code of the Street.

I honestly think the epilogue does not serve the story well. It pushes the book into didactic, instead of letting Canada's experiences speak for themselves.

But I really appreciate Canada telling his story, and Nicholas does a fantastic job of adapting it to the graphic novel format.

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## **Giovanni Gelati says**

Hey, TGIF! I love to read graphic novels for many reasons, one of them is to chill and relax after a long, pleasant week of reading seriously good novels. One of my daughters told me about Jamar Nicholas, she has an interest in art, so I checked him out. This is one serious read about life and learning some hard lessons, no matter where you come from. Check out what is between the covers:

“Long before President Barack Obama praised his work as “an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children,” and First Lady Michelle Obama called him “one of my heroes,” Geoffrey Canada was a small and scared boy growing up in the South Bronx. His childhood world was one where “sidewalk boys” learned the codes of the block and were ranked through the rituals of fist, stick, knife, and, finally, gun. In a stunning pairing, acclaimed comics creator Jamar Nicholas presents Canada’s raw and riveting account, one of the most authentic and important true stories of urban violence ever told.”

I felt I got more than I bargained for in this one, but in a good way. I don’t think it matters where you grew up, one of these characters should be able to speak to you in some way. The artwork was a good marriage to the story and made it more believable and tangible for me. The colors were well chosen and the characters weren’t too sharply drawn, giving the story its due without being distracting or taking away from the direction of it. Looking for a challenge? Give this graphic a try and go back in time.

What are you reading today? Have you checked out our new blogtalk radio show The GZONE? Check us out and become our friend on Shelfari, The Novel Spot & Twitter. Go to Goodreads and become our friend there and suggest books for us to read and post on. Did you know you can shop directly on Amazon by clicking the Amazon Banner on our blog? Thanks for stopping by today; We will see you tomorrow. Have a great day. <http://www.gelatisscoop.blogspot.com>

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## **Sheherazahde says**

This is a graphic novel adaptation of an earlier more detailed, text only, book of the same name. I would call this an autobiography, but it is not as detailed as autobiographies usually are. This autobiography just focuses on violent episodes in the author's childhood and how they shaped him. Geoffrey Canada is the president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone. He tells his story to illustrate the condition poor inner city children live in. [return][return]This new edition includes the sub-subtitle "A True Story in Black and White" which emphasized that this is not fiction, but also led me to believe that it would address racism. There is actually very little about racism in this story, it is just illustrated in black and white. The only overt mention of racism is that his mother's low wages were "all they paid even the most competent black women in 1958". The violence is all what we call "black on black", and mostly "child on child". There is one incident where the police are called, and prove unhelpful. The officers are white but they don't do anything overtly racist. They just re-enforce the point that adults and people in power were failing to protect children from violence.

[return][return]The Table of Contents is a list of pictures instead of words which is a little bit obscure on first look. The first chapter is a jacket, representing an incident where his brother's jacket was stolen. The second chapter is a can of beans, representing the day he was robbed by another child on his way back from the grocery store. The third chapter is a building, representing the social dynamics of children on his block when they were out on the street. The forth chapter is a broken pencil, representing the failure of the public school

system to provide a safe learning environment. The fifth chapter is a basketball, representing his first experience with the possibility of life threatening violence. The sixth chapter is a heart, representing the necessity of being willing to fight even if you didn't want to. The seventh chapter is a shotgun, representing the first time someone pointed a gun at him. The eighth chapter is a knife, representing his first knife and how owning a weapon changed him. The ninth chapter is a hand gun, representing an incident with a gang of boys and a man with a gun. The last chapter is a book, representing how he decided to choose words over violence. [return][return]I'm not sure who this book is meant for. I would not recommend it for children or young adults. It is a bit grim. It should go on the list of anyone who likes adult graphic novels such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, or *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. It is a gripping story and I'm pleased to add it to my collection.

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### **Stephanie says**

I won this book in a first reads giveaway. It was maybe the only one I had also marked as "to-read" on my shelves. When reading my review please be aware that I have not read the original novel, so I have no further context to regard with this story.

I am becoming a fan of the auto-biographic graphic novel reads. I first read the *Persepolis* books, and now this one. Though quite short (119 pages) it was an entertaining read. It isn't at all a problem with the length, but with the rush of information towards the end. Chapters 9 and 10 felt very rushed to me. Aside from that, I thought it was a great telling of the fears and survival of kids in the ghetto. The narration is naive and honest. The artwork was great, though I must admit that (possibly due to my rush to read through the dialogue) characters started to physically melt together, and I had the tendency to skip the pictures. I think a possible improvement? might be to add some color to the picture.

I took the subtext on the cover "a true story in black and white" to indicate behavior and situation. Black and white, either or, right or wrong. But in the story, there were no absolutes, so I think that having color in the pictures would do the story more justice.

I found interesting, that how Mike was written, he was the hero to protect Geoffrey, despite the conflict that Mike is in fact instilling the same logic of violence and survival into the narrator that is hoped to be broken.

A good entertaining read, though I would have liked for them to just have added the extra pages and allowed more for the ending.

But it has intrigued me enough that I would like to read the novel proper.

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### **Sarah Silverman says**

I live, work, and teach in Harlem, and therefore have much love for Geoffrey Canada. Certainly, his story is a powerful one. This is a graphic novel aimed at young adults, a remake of his original memoir of the same title. It explores the idea of the social hierarchy of violence in the streets of Harlem and later the South Bronx, as experienced through Canada's POV. The key idea in the book is that young children living in poverty, especially children of color, are forcibly indoctrinated into the world of violence-- by their peers and adults-- and must participate in some kind of inner city arms race (fist --> stick --> knife --> gun) in order to survive and thrive.

The most powerful moment of the book is when GC, as an adolescent (10 or 11) finds a switchblade in the gutter. He practices opening and folding the knife over and over, but once he gets too careless and nearly cuts his finger off. He's bleeding badly and most likely cut a tendon, but he doesn't tell his mother. Not because he's afraid of her reaction, but because he knows if he tells her, he'll be forced to give up his switchblade, which is his ticket to safety and confidence in the streets. He tries to fix his finger with some tape and a popsicle stick, ends up re-aggravating the wound in a game of b-ball, and to this day still has a crooked finger.

It's definitely YA Lit with an R rating; there are lots of n-bombs and f-bombs, but they feel necessary to the overall themes of the book I described above. I really loved the graphic novel, but it feels incomplete somehow. When I finished it, I felt unsatisfied. While I certainly don't expect a happy ending to the story (although GC obviously overcame his obstacles to become a pioneer of education), more of Geoffrey's story could have been told. I'm also concerned that his message about the problems of violence and the community ills of these impoverished areas may be lost to some young readers-- this would be a better choice for a book club where students could chat about what they're reading, guided by someone who can help them find the deeper message.

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### **Dani Shuping says**

This review was written for LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

This book is a graphic novel adaptation of a book by the same title that was originally published in 1995. Jamar Nicholas, the artist, does a fantastic job of illustrating the words that Geoffrey Canada wrote. He captures the fear of young boys as they are forced to fight and the violence they witness growing up, and he captures the triumph they feel at overcoming an opponent or standing up for a friend. It is a compelling story and a good introduction to the varieties of lifestyles and neighborhoods seen while growing up.

I've not read the original book so I can't compare where the differences in story are between the two works, but there was one area that bothered me a bit. Translating a written memoir, such as the original book, into a graphic novel means that changes have to be made to ensure the story is told in a manner that makes sense. In a few places the text became overwhelming and causes the reader to shift mental gears in how they read the book (from graphic adaptation to straight story) and it makes it a bit difficult to transition back and forth.

Overall though the book is well worth the read and the illustrations really do make the story come alive.

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### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

Excellent adaptation of the book by Geoffrey Canada with art by Jamar Nicholas. As the title states there is a progressive escalation of violence...a history that too often repeats itself.

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### **Kendra says**

I know the heart of the book is Canada's personal experience on the battlefield of the South Bronx, an experience that informs his thorough and creative response(s) to the battlefield that is now young soldiers

with guns. But I was distracted, as others have mentioned, by the seeming contradiction between glorifying the fights in which he engaged as a youth and the peacemaking he endorses in his work with youth, particularly in Harlem today. Also, the book was organized in a confusing way and poorly edited (e.g. diffuse and defuse are two different verbs with two different meanings, yet are used interchangeably in the book). Perhaps newer editions have updated this (I was reading a paperback version purchased in 2003).

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### **James says**

Fist Stick Knife Gun is an amazing book and it is an interesting read. Fist Stick Knife Gun is a graphic novel but still portrays a powerful message. Fist Stick Knife Gun follows Geoffrey Canada through his life in the Bronx and it shows the well developed system of unwritten laws in place. Geoff is raised with three brothers and his mom in a bad neighborhood. This neighborhood has a system of fighting set up. The winners get to travel and play on the streets while the losers get to sit on the stairs or inside and watch others have fun. Geoff has to adapt to his situation and slowly rise through the ranks of his neighborhood. He rises from fist fights to stick and knife fights all the way to a handgun which he carried when he was in college. Fist Stick Knife Gun is an amazing novel that I really enjoyed reading.

. Fist Stick Knife Gun is a book that tackles very mature issues and shows a glimpse at life in the inner-city. Despite all the hardship the people seem to get along. The kids in the book have an unwritten system of laws in place which is very interesting. Geoff describes these laws throughout the book. My favorite part of these laws was the pecking order. This order had the big kids who arranged fights and traveled, the medium kids who would play on the sidewalk and had some say for themselves and lastly the kids on the steps or inside who had no respect. This system just fascinated me because it seems that all humans in all circumstances will sort themselves out into groups whether based on size or interests.

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The book was really exciting to read and it was interesting and fun to take a break from the novels I mainly read. I have been reading novels that take me about a month to finish but I was able to finish this book in two days which was nice to do. I am currently reading 1984 which is occasionally hard to understand while this book was very easy to read. Fist Stick Knife Gun was an exciting read and is a nice break in between books and also in between book chapters. I would recommend this to anyone over the age of 12.

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### **Shaun says**

This is one of those books that isn't doing anything profound formally. It doesn't need to be a comic. It doesn't leverage the comic medium to any great effect. But the substance of the book is profound and insightful. It's one man's experience with the nature of violence in the context of the increasing racial and economic divide in this country. And it's a perspective that many people (especially those in positions of civic responsibility) need to be aware of.

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## **Educating Drew says**

Mmmkay...I have to make a confession. My ears immediately perk up when I hear or see a book that lends itself to a 'full disclosure on my life whilst in the bleak caverns of violence'. In fact, that little gem of Truth right there is the reason why I read (and reviewed) *Gang Leader for a Day* last year.

But why, you might ask. Especially if you knew me. I mean, I'm no Pollyanna by any means, but I do like to think of myself as a "let's just give peace a chance" kinda gal. No really. I am. Which means, if that's Truth and the inclination for reading about gang like violence is O-Natural then something must be amiss, yes?

I consider it more about research. Ya'lls know I am a teacher. And so I teach at a Title I school, which IS NOT synonymous WITH violence, but I have my fair share of evidence that says poverty and violence as power is a common equation. Plus, the need for community and someone to look out for makes gang life appealing. Reading personal accounts helps me understand motivation and an opportunity for dialogue.

As you've perhaps gathered, *FSKG* is about the author (Geoffrey Canada)'s story about violence. Not unsurprisingly you might then assume that Canada grew up in a poor area of town where violence equates to power.

Canada's experience with violence is a journey. It begins when a bully steals his jacket. Canada and his older brothers return home hopeful that their mother would have a solution. Surprise unfolds when she matter-of-factly tells the boys that they must return to the scene of the crime and take back what is theirs. "My mother told us we had to stick together. That we couldn't let people know we were afraid." At four years old, young Canada knew that life in the Bronx had multiple layers to it.

I don't want to get to in depth with this story as it's a quick read (easily completed in one session) and the amount of innocence and depth in these characters are fleshed out both in words and sketches

I knew nothing about Geoffrey Canada's memoir that he wrote in 2005 and that which this graphic memoir is adapted from prior to opening up these pages. I'm intrigued enough to want to pick up the book as well. Canada now runs Harlem Children's Zone.

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## **Athira (Reading on a Rainy Day) says**

*Fist Stick Knife Gun* is yet another book on gang violence. I've been lately reading/watching stuff on this topic. It is totally unplanned, mostly coincidental, but I can't help but notice its recurrence. First it was *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* by G. Neri and then this book. Now, just last night, I watched the movie - *Freedom Writers* (which by the way is awesome).

*Fist Stick Knife Gun* was illustrated by Jamar Nicholas, based on Geoffrey Canada's memoir by the same title. This is the first time I'm reading a graphic version of a book and I'm kind of mixed about how I feel. Since this is the only so-so aspect I have to say, I want to get that out of the way. I haven't read the original book so I don't have a reference, but I felt the graphic book was too verbose, almost like any regular book. It had the total feel of a graphic novel, but there was a lot of background narration, so it felt wordy to me.

This memoir follows Geoffrey Canada's life in one of the many gang-operated New York streets, and the

lifestyle he led in such a climate. It takes a look at the kids who grow up in lawless streets and are forever defined by the crimes that happen around them and the survival tactics they learn there. While reading this book, many times I wondered why the color of the skin is usually enough for many as evidence of crime. And why when such people of color ask for police help, their complaints are treated as trivial.

When the book begins, Geoffrey is a four-year old staying with three other brothers and their mother. Their father wasn't much of a father and walked out of their lives early on. Geoffrey's mother is a strong woman. She never let her kids take any kind of crap from others. Once when someone stole a jacket belonging to one of Geoffrey's brothers, she threatened that he go back and get it. (I did think that was too intimidating and almost like sending a kid to slaughter, but to survive the kind of life the kids were inevitably going to lead, they needed to learn to stand up for themselves.) This ultimatum absolutely terrified the boys but they managed to get the jacket back somehow.

The real test for the kids begins when they all move to a different street. This street has a total different gameplay and power structure. Before anyone is considered a part of the street, he has to fight someone else so that they know their place in the street hierarchy. If they don't fight or do not show any kind of "stand up for themselves" characteristic, they get beaten up. As Geoffrey explains, the town's kids are actually being prepared for the crueler and harsher environments they will face in school and later on, in other streets.

I liked this book better than I expected to. The artwork shows the whole dynamics of street life better than what I gleaned off from any other book. The boys may be tough, violent and unreasonable sometimes, but I didn't, couldn't, look at them as just plain gangs. In fact, although this book provides a really good look at gang life, that phrase never really crossed my mind as I was reading it.

It really is amazing how much such a kid has to go through to survive. Darwin's *Survival of the Fittest* springs to mind immediately. There's no money in many of the homes there. No police protection, no education or welfare programs - in fact, no one cares about the people there. This could have been some isolated part of the world for all you know. And yet these kids devise their own mechanisms to survive - their own power structure and leaders, their own rules and punishments - in fact, each street is like its own separate country governed primarily by fist-fights, sticks, knives and guns, in that order.

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