



Yes I Can

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When Sammy Davis, Jr. published his autobiography in 1965, it was an immediate long-running bestseller as well as a revelation. *Yes I Can* describes Sammy Davis's personal conviction, the view of success that both propelled him to stardom from ghetto obscurity and served as his armor against racism.

Yes I Can Details

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Author : Sammy Davis Jr. , Burt Boyar , Jane Boyar

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Ermalisa says

"I have to be a star like another man has to breathe." ~ Sammy Davis Jr.

I really enjoyed this. It was honest, vulnerable, and covered a good deal of his life...Being raised in show business by his father and "uncle," his stint in the Army, his early career and breaks, the loss of his eye, his conversion to Judaism, his scandalous affairs, his first and second marriage, his friends in and out of show business, his debt, and much more.

But the theme threaded from cover to cover was racism and how he endured and survived it. He wanted nothing more than to be seen as the best performer; being the "best negro performer" was simply not good enough. He pushed his way through the bigotry and hate and was supported by people who loved me...but couldn't quite understand what he was going through because they had never walked in his skin. He stood up for what he believed in...but he often stood alone. He was so talented that doors did open for him eventually, but only after much heartache and humiliation.

"For me, hate held unknown quantity. It might take a different form, but essentially there was nothing they could do or say that hadn't already been done and said. And above all, I had the experience of surviving it." ~ Sammy Davis Jr.

Scott Fuchs says

Informative, very well written, and so damn moving. A terrific read! This is far from the typical celeb bio.

Kate says

I read this in 7th grade. Imagine that, a little white suburban girl in 1973 COMPLETELY INFATUATED with the 40- or 50-something black member of the rat pack. I still remember huge parts of Yes I Can, especially the part where Sammy gets into a car accident and helps the lady out of the other car, all the while his eyeball was dangling down onto his cheek. That's the sort of image sticks with you. It was very gallant of Sammy Davis Jr. to take care of the lady in the other car before looking out for his own eyeball, don't you think? Sammy Davis Jr. was so cool.

Unigami says

Very interesting and inspirational story of a truly talented entertainer. Recommended.

Gabrielle says

WHAT A BOOK

I am staggered by how this was published in the 60s while being such an indictment of American racism. Staggered.

****update****

After sleeping on it I now think it is a 5 star read. My criticism is that it is too long and needed a sympathetic edit. But honestly that may have also ruined the book and whitewashed it so five stars it is!

Joseph says

Read this when I was but 15 years old.
Found his story to be thought-provoking.
Was especially intrigued by his statement
that he would consider racism on the wane
when Blacks were depicted on TV and film as
ordinary respectable people with good jobs
and not just waiters, maids and flunkeys.

Bradley says

Sammy Davis Jr and racism. This is a good book, well worth reading.

Cammie says

Loved it loved it loved it! I knew OF Sammy Davis Jr but just decided to take this out of the library one day and could not put it down.

Aine says

Great read! Opens eyes into how black people were actually treated in the Hollywood scene back in the day. Without sounding like a sobstory! This is a man who DID!

James Roman says

What a powerful and insightful autobiography! Sammy Davis Jr. found success as America sorted through anguished incidents of violence and matter-of-fact racism. The chronicle of his life within that context, when civil rights was overtaking Jim Crow, makes this autobiography a real page-turner.

From his start as a child onstage in vaudeville, where back doors were the norm for "coloreds," to his success as an adult on Broadway, in films, television and in nightclubs, eventually gave him access front doors, but not without extraordinary effort. I remain in awe of the performer who could do it all, and do it so well, while facing constantly adverse conditions.

I read recently that actor Denzel Washington owns the film rights to Sammy's story, with an eye toward directing its film version. Let's hope the movie is as terrific as Sammy's own recollection and documentation of how it all looked and felt. Until then, it's great to have this book around!

Emilie Leming says

Read this when I was in 8th grade & loved it... it seemed to strike a chord about what a person can do with determination & faith in oneself. Great book, even 50+ years later.

June says

This was a pivotal book for me. So much heart here. I learned about Sammy Davis Jr.'s experience in the army, his rise to fame, and difficult experiences with discrimination. His childhood stories are engaging and fun too.

Sharon Beers says

This is an early biography of Sammy Davis, Jr. that well captures the events of his life in show business from his childhood on. It details the racism he experienced and the acclaim he achieved. He was an incredibly talented man who left a wonderful legacy of music.

Justin Cordes says

Holy schnikes. This book effin rocks! I bought this tattered used copy off a street vendor in NYC, let it sit on my bookshelf for a year and after reading just the first few pages it just blew my mind. It felt like I was reading an insanely well-crafted pot boiler and can't put the thing down. There was no moment of the book where I was bored.

On the other hand, I just started reading Rita Moreno's memoir and while interesting it's got a lot of fat and I found myself totally skimming through whole pages.

If you have any passing interest in Sammy or American vaudeville/nightclub showbiz than you won't be disappointed in this book AT ALL!

Another great related read is Jerry Lewis' memoir of his time with Dean Martin. A close second.

The book ends with the birth of his first child to May Britt and I'd love to read about the last half of his life. Can anybody recommend a proper biography on Sammy written by a good author?

Janis says

I still think of things that Sammy Davis talked about in his book.
