

Markus Smith. 2021. *Journey Through the Hoods: From Poverty to Ph.D. to Million-Dollar Real Estate Agent*. Mustang, OK: CLC Publishing.

Smith's book is perhaps the most important perspective on the practice of political science in Oklahoma ever published. It exemplifies the participant observation approach to research, what Richard Fenno described as "soaking and poking" (1978, pp. xiv and 249). From the perspectives of both student and professor, this memoir compares and contrasts the organizational cultures of several academic departments from across the state over time. The author's coverage of political science programs is informed through his other experiences with related disciplines such as criminal justice, education, leadership, public administration, religious studies, and sociology. He describes his experience taking classes (and sometimes teaching) at the University of Central Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City Community College, and Phillips Seminary in Tulsa. Smith even took some classes at Harvard.

In full disclosure, Markus was one of my first undergraduate students. Later, I was fortunate to have him around as a Graduate Assistant while he was working on his Masters. I had the privilege of writing one of his letters of recommendation to get into the University of Oklahoma Ph.D. in political science program.

Journey Through the Hoods is impossible to pigeonhole into a single genre. It's a nonfiction coming-of-age story, courtroom drama, family saga, gritty street-gang thriller, heroic adventure, how-to-succeed-in-business guide, martial arts disciplinary treatise, parenting handbook, personal memoir, romance novel, satisfying comeuppance, self-improvement book, and social critique. The book traces the many twisted paths and turns that one individual takes during a lifetime. It celebrates the many people who help along the way and lambastes those who make life difficult for others. It's also a spiritual book, filled with allusions to a higher

purpose and finding one's calling. Smith does not believe in coincidences in his quest for a career with meaning,

The author documents a period of history in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area that is often overlooked. Hobbes reverberates through Smith's writing when he paints "living on the east side 'hood of Oklahoma City" as "violent, poor, and bleak" (p. 21). But no "Leviathan" arrives to improve the situation. Smith describes how his childhood and early years are framed by constant eruptions of violence and the menace of rival gangs. Smith offers his personalized, but now all-too-familiar accounting of the many African American men in his life being killed in street violence or ending up in prison. Smith himself routinely dodged stray bullets. Because he is biracial (African American/Asian), Smith endures countless acts of racism. He speaks about how surviving on the city streets limited the vision of what one can hope and dream. Some of the pages echo S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*. Although Smith's book does have the flavor of literary flourish, it is a *personal* narrative describing very particular realities. Even so, the author finds it difficult to stray from his academic roots so that when he talks about his life among the street gangs, he cites an Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics task force report (p. 2) to support his characterization.

Later, Smith describes a "driving-while-black" encounter with the City of Moore police. When several other patrol cars arrived at the scene, he and his passenger were forced out of their car and "told to lay face down on the street" (p. 38). The officers then proceeded to search through their car where they all but destroyed his stereo system and CD collection. The officer in charge finally sent them on their way with a smirky goodbye that included a self-righteous use of the "N" word.

Almost everyone who enters into a doctoral program can relate their own nightmare story. Smith's description of the culture of the University of Oklahoma's political science department was partic-

ularly damning. His characterization confirms what I felt during my own doctoral work there which is an outright hostility to the nontraditional student. Smith charges that “there is a double standard for ‘traditional’ versus non-‘traditional’ students” (p. 202). He points to the absurdity of the department urging him to resign from his own full-time teaching job so that he can work as a graduate assistant in preparation for a full-time teaching job (p. 202).

The real theme of this book is rising above the petty people who seem to go out of their way to make life unbearable to others. Smith recounts the numerous indignities he faced in academic settings, social and familial relationships, and in his latest incarnation as a real estate professional. It’s very easy to suspect that the underlying cause of many of these horrible experiences is racism.

The phrase that best captures the sentiment conveyed by the book is, “Living well is the best revenge” (Herbert, 1640, #524). For example, Smith is constructively discharged from the OU’s political science doctoral program through administrative malice (or ineptitude). He immediately dusts himself off and within the year, earns a Ph.D. in another program at OU.

Likewise, Smith over the course of sixteen years working for Oklahoma City Community College “witnessed dozens of faculty, staff, and employees ... being targeted, harassed, and discriminated against by supervisors and administrators” (p. 175). Smith’s burgeoning career as an extremely successful real estate agent provided some measure of financial and professional protection so that he could push back directly, not just for himself but for others similarly situated at OCCC. He conducted a skillful social media campaign that caught the attention of local newspapers and TV news outlets about problems within the college. Smith believes the pressure ultimately forced the early retirement of the OCCC president and the institution of major administrative reforms at the college.

In sum, Smith offers a compelling and heartwarming story full of suspense, rich characterization, and an ultimately satisfying ending. At times, he is almost apologetic about boasting of his successes. But to be really fair, Smith is brutally honest about his failings as well. *Journey Through the Hoods* is inspirational to its core. I encourage all of my colleagues throughout this state to read this book. My only hope is that the life story of Dr. Markus Shintaro Smith is the exception to the rule that a prophet is never honored in his own hometown. Let me close with the prediction that this book will ultimately inspire a major motion picture or limited TV series.

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