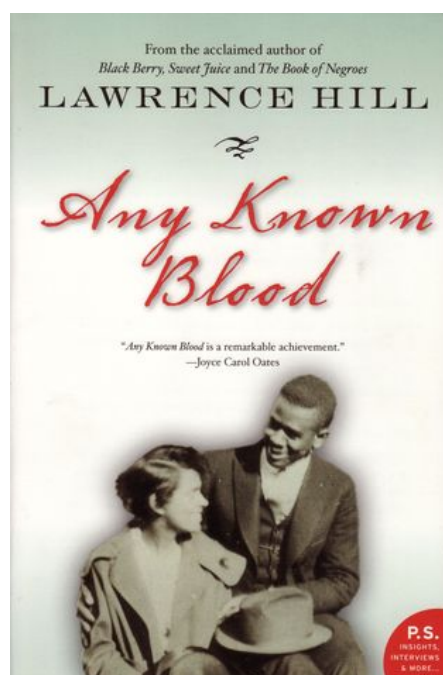




Any Known Blood

Lawrence Hill

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Langston Cand V is 38, divorced and working as a government speechwriter, until he's fired for sabotaging the minister's speech. It seems the perfect time for Langston, the eldest son of a white mother and prominent black father, to embark on a quest for his family's past - and his own sense of self.

Any Known Blood follows five generations of an African-Canadian-American family in a compelling story that slips effortlessly from the slave trade of 19th-century Virginia to the modern, predominantly white suburbs of Oakville, Ontario - once a final stop on the Underground Railroad. At once elegant and sensuous, wry and witty, *Any Known Blood* is an engrossing tale about one man's attempt to find himself through unearthing and giving voice to those who came before him.

Any Known Blood Details

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Author : Lawrence Hill

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From Reader Review Any Known Blood for online ebook

Marcia says

After reading *The Book of Negroes* and more recently *The Illegal*, I decided to give Lawrence Hill's older novel *Any Known Blood* a try.

Truly, Hill does not disappoint. I found *Book of Negroes* engrossing and just the right amount of uncomfortable to read. *The Illegal* was a completely different pace (a slow burn) but I also enjoyed it. Once again, *Any Known Blood* keeps the bar high.

The novel's protagonist Langston Cane the Fifth decides he is not tethered in this world because he knows nothing of his family's background. He travels from Oakville, ON to Baltimore, Maryland in an effort to dig into his family's past. He leaves behind a father who he feels is constantly disappointed in him.

Jumping through all the Langston Canes from 1 to 5, there isn't any predictability to the book in terms of form. Hill does not opt to write about the Canes down the family tree from senior to junior, but rather dances from one character to the next. We slowly discover all the choices that the Cane's have made that have bound them together and created their future.

To be honest, the novel isn't full a huge climax. There isn't one big AHA moment that is revealed. Rather, we watched as Langston Cane V slowly finds his way in the world as he unveils the secrets his family has hidden over time.

Hill writes about many deep rooted issues that African-Americans are facing today in a way that includes white people in the dialogue but in a non-accusatory manner. I assume this is partially Hill speaking from his own experience of being a mixed race. Either way, it was enlightening to read and understand why or how people feel a certain way.

4/5 for more excellent work from Hill and holding my breath for more.

(Incidentally, he lives in the same city I do and I once saw him shopping at our local grocery store. Must...not...stalk him.)

Shannon says

Any Known Blood was my second read of the year. The story begins in Canada, where speech writer Langston Cane V pulls a hilarious stunt with the Prime Minister's speech. It leads to the Prime Minister, and subsequently Langston, being "fired with cause." After viewing the incident as a chance to start anew, he sets out to reconstruct the lives of his ancestors, particularly the four generations of Cane men that preceded him.

This is an intricate story that delves into the lives of the Canes' paths to manhood beginning with Langston's great-great-grandfather's new start in Canada after his escape from slavery, though he never could call it home. He eventually returned to the US to participate in the raid on Harpers Ferry. Each of the five Cane men's stories are told and it is Lawrence Hill doing what he does beautifully - historical fiction.

The story weaves in the Civil Rights struggle in Canada. Until reading about Langston the third's encounters with the Ku Klux Klan in Ontario, I was clueless about the issues there that were similar to those in America's Deep South. One of the Canes makes a home in Baltimore, where violence was as present then as it is today. Part of the novel is set in Washington, DC, where colorism played a major role in the African American community at one time, even contributing to who a person could marry.

I read it following *The Book of Negroes* and it led me to go ahead and pick up Hill's first novel *Some Great Thing*.

Read In Colour says

Loved the story lines, loved the characters and loved the narration. At 15 1/2 hours, I thought it would take me at least a week or two to get through this, but it was so good that I listened at home, at work and on my commute.

Adira says

I tried to read this after having loved *The Book of Negroes*, but the character development in this book just wasn't there and the entitled attitude of the father didn't help either. Maybe one day, I'll finish it. I got 100 pages in and dnf-ed.

Shelly Sanders says

After reading *Any Known Blood* for the second time, I am quite comfortable saying that author Lawrence Hill focuses more on character than plot. I would say the same for his highly acclaimed *The Book of Negroes* with characters so real you can see their faces and hear their voices. It is the beauty of his prose, his attention to the finest of details, that bring his characters to life, as seen in the Prologue of *Any Known Blood*.

"They watched their shadows, and, to see them better, stood slightly apart. They saw his erection and one of her breasts profiled on the wall, they watched their own hands joining, and they noticed that the shadows revealed nothing of her whiteness, or his blackness."

This reference to skin color, in particular, the coming together of black and white, is the central theme of *Any Known Blood*, where a mixed-race writer heads to Baltimore to discover the secrets behind his family's past, to understand himself better.

"I have the rare distinction--a distinction that weighs like a wet life jacket, but that I sometimes float to great advantage--of not appearing to belong to any particular race, but of seeming like a contender for many," begins narrator Langston Cane V.

At once, Cane is likable for his ability to admit to his shortcomings, for his failures, for his universal flaws as a human being: "But it also takes something to fall from the treadmill of great accomplishments, to fail, even at the tasks of being a husband and a potential father and a writer, to march to the gates of middle age and look ahead and accept that you will not change the world."

Langston gets himself fired in order to begin a journey from Oakville, Ontario to Baltimore, land of his ancestors. (On a personal note, I live in Oakville, Ontario, so this novel provided a fascinating look back at

the town in the early eighteen hundreds.) This journey is, essentially, the plot. But it's the people he meets who bring the story to life and help Cane find the answers he wants.

Like Millicent Esmerelda Cane, the sister of Cane's father. Here's a few lines of Langston and Millicent's first conversation:

"I ain't got any white nephews. Not around here. So git off my--Wait!" She pulled the glasses down to the nub of her nose.

"I'm Langston Cane. The fifth."

"You Can men pass that name down the line like it was an antique table," Mill chortled.

"I don't know what you have to laugh about. with a name like Millicent Esmerelda."

"Oh my, he's lippy, just like his daddy. I guess I got no choice but to tell you to step on up, Langston Cane the Fifth. You're not in trouble, are you? Drugs? Guns? Police after you?"

"No."

"I shouldn't have asked. Look at you. You walk like a prep school boy. You ought to move your backside when you walk. Roll your butt and straighten your back. Around here, you have to look like a predator."

Lawrence's dialogue is exquisite, especially in exchanges between Langston and Millicent who play off one another like *The Odd Couple*.

Still, the plot is weak in points, and difficult to digest, when an illegal African man, Yoyo, makes an effortless jump from selling kebabs to journalism, and when Millicent and Cane's father, who haven't spoken in years, come together painlessly, as if the years of hostility had never occurred. In my experience, estrangements within families are among the hardest to repair.

Overall, I agree with Joyce Carol Oates, that *Any Known Blood* is "An immensely readable novel, populated with sympathetic yet realistic characters..."

Victoria says

What I liked most about Lawrence Hill's novel "Any Known Blood" was perhaps the one thing I also disliked about it. While this may sound like an oxymoron, Hill's use of time travel throughout the novel quickly became convoluted and difficult to follow. Despite this, the novel provides an adventure through the racial tensions of the past century and a half.

The story revolves around Langston Cane V, a somewhat angsty character who once worked as a government speechwriter in Toronto. The plot of the novel is based upon Langston attempting to discover the nature of his family history in order to help himself develop a personal identity. He travels from Toronto, to nearby Oakville, and then to Baltimore, Maryland in an attempt to retrace the steps of his ancestors: the four Langston Canes who came before him.

While the concept of the reader travelling back in time as Langston learns the stories of his predecessors is an interesting one, the execution is confusing. With all of the main characters named Langston Cane, and no particular order to their stories, keeping them and their separate plotlines straight proved a difficult task. With a plot-driven book such as this one, clarity is a vital component, and when it is lacking, the novel loses some of its appeal. However, the breadth of experiences and the contrasting stories of the five Langston Canes was undoubtedly my favourite part of the novel. Langston Cane I, for example, has an incredibly rich and interesting story, but one that is also very historically dense. In order to fully understand his significance, I found myself doing my own secondary research, and while I cannot speak to the accuracy of the history portrayed in the novel, his story was by far the most engaging.

The most prevalent theme in the novel is the search for identity. Langston Cane V, a man of mixed black and white heritage, struggles to determine where he belongs in society. Like Langston, Hill is also of mixed heritage, and the novel offers the unique perspective of one through the eyes of such a character. While most

of the novel revolves around the African American experience in Canada and the United States, it also deals with the challenges of those of mixed heritage who faced discrimination from whites and blacks alike. While the title of the novel is undoubtedly related to this theme, its true meaning was only vaguely brought up in conversation between two characters. The title is probably significant to the theme, and I wish there were a more concrete indication of its full meaning.

Like all Lawrence Hill novels, "Book of Negroes" included, "Any Known Blood" was eloquently written and full of detail. However, the confusing nature of the flashbacks detracted from this, making parts of the novel tangled and unclear. Nevertheless, with some extra vigilance and careful reading, "Any Known Blood" is thoroughly enjoyable and, at times, even educational.

Teresa Mills-clark says

A few years ago I read Hill's "The Book of Negroes" and found it to be excellent. A friend of mine loaned me this book a few months ago and I just kept putting off reading it. Why? I didn't want to read something weighty and the darn thing was thick.

Well. I opened it up yesterday and could not put it down!! What a gifted story teller Hill is! His prose flows (yep intentionally rhymes) and I was captivated immediately.

Thanks Christine for recommending and loaning me this book.

Bobbi says

If you've read Lawrence Hill's "Someone Knows My Name" you may be disappointed by this one. It involves a black Canadian who has decided to trace his family roots back to slavery. The story moves from his father, back to his great, great grandfather who was a slave. The problem is that the story does not move smoothly back and forth. Because all of them had the same name, Langston Cane, it's confusing. The first Langston Cane was thought to have taken part in John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. I must admit to feeling a bit disappointed overall.

Joanne-in-Canada says

With a simple, unadorned style, Canadian Lawrence Hill conjures up five generations of strong and resilient yet fallible black men, all named Langston Cane, deftly keeping them distinct with clear shifts between their stories. A highly recommended book by the author of "The Book of Negroes" (published as "Someone Knows My Name" in the States) and the brother of singer Dan Hill.

Kathleen says

This is an amazing story written by the awesome talented Lawrence Hill! A resounding 5+??!

Lawrence Hill is the Canadian author of ten books and a winner of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best Book. He is the first writer to win the Canada Reads Prize twice.

The ebook Any Known Blood that I borrowed from Fredericton Library through Overdrive on my iPhone contained a map, the family tree and extra contents such as insights, interviews and links to websites.

Any Known Blood is such an amazing, fabulous, wonderful novel that I feel unqualified to write a review. So, here are some quotes to express my sentiments about this book and author.

"Lawrence Hill's hugely impressive historical work is completely engrossing and deserves a wide, international readership."
The Washington Post

"Hill is a wonderful storyteller, never a reformer or a preacher...the narrative is clear and purposeful and translucent..."
The Montreal Gazette

Lawrence Hill masterful threads the history of the five generations of men...into an engaging commentary of times... Colourful dialogue and rich flashes of subtle humour abound."
The Toronto Star

"The novel, based on actual events and real people, is filled with humour, insight and intelligence."
The London Free Press

"Outstanding - Hill's narrative is consistently compelling and readable, and his characters are wonderfully drawn."
Quill and Quire

"Any Known Blood is a witty, wry, well-crafted story told on a Dickensian scale."
Winnipeg Free Press

"A considerable achievement in which an intelligent, compassionate writer manages to achieve what American feminist poet Adrienne Rich calls the 'imaginative transformation of reality.' That he manages to do so with such grace and humour is a tribute to Hill's maturity and as both a writer and a human being."
The Ottawa Citizen

In the Interview included in my copy of Any Known Blood, Lawrence Hill stated,

"I believe that fiction, well done, is a fabulous way to introduce people to history."

"Part of my job as a novelist is to write the colour - and by that I mean human drama and struggle - back into history."

Below is a quote from the book Any Known Blood.

"I'm not stepping out of this house with the KKK there. Those men are looking for coloured blood. They're looking for any known blood they can find."

I highly recommend this book. You really should read it! 5+stars!

Ruthie says

I really loved Hill's Book of Negroes - Someone Knows My Name, in the USA, and this book is almost as good! I felt there were some story threads that could have been omitted as they added nothing to the story, and there was a lot of repetition, especially with the speechifying the father did, but otherwise it was an engrossing, entertaining and important read. Hill certainly creates vibrant and distinct characters, and he obviously did a lot of research. I loved learning about the history of Blacks in Oakville (who would have ever imagined?!!) and Toronto.

Martha? says

This is a book that grows on you the deeper you get into it. For the beginning third, I was a bit confused as to where the true plot was leading. I think it would be helpful to know in advance that Lawrence Hill uses Langston Cane the fifth, the key narrator, to research and uncover the life stories of the previous four Langston Canes while, at the same time, allowing LC the 5 some time for self-discovery. LC the 5 is the thread that holds the other four narratives together.

The movement through the five generations shows the progression from slavery to freedom to education. It delves into topics such as the Underground Railway, the anti-slavery movement, being free but not equal, interracial love and marriage, inability to meet other's expectations and the importance of skin colour, even within the black race. Historical references to Harper's Ferry, John Brown and General Lee anchor the novel in history, making it seem that this is an accurate history but Hill reminds us that this is a novel, not a biography.

The novel is so well-written and so fluid that you suddenly find yourself on page 400 without any effort at all. Hill has a way with expressing the underlying feelings of his characters in a realistic way. His characters are strong and memorable and each of them is still striving to find a place to belong.

Deborah Stevenson says

Loved this book. As an amateur genealogist it engaged me in family history and as a reader I cared about the Cane family of all generations.
Highly recommend.

Lollita says

Was a little slow, but I enjoyed it.

Gail Williamson says

If you haven't read Lawrence Hill, you must! Another of his masterpieces which encompass the important lives of the Cane family through the centuries. A historical journey through a family's daily struggles to earn "freedom" as a black person. The unapologetic use of 'nigger' (I painfully struggle with using this word), and 'colored' person lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the migration of this family from the United States into Canada. I learned some valuable pieces of the settlement in Oakville, Ontario and how fundamental the assistance of folks along the way (black and white) was to black migration into Canada. Don't miss this book. Lawrence Hill (also Book of Negroes, Blood, The Illegal) continues to be one of my most favourite authors.

Linda says

Langston Cane the fifth is a mid thirties fellow who is divorced and has just been fired from his job as a speech writer for a politician. He comes from mixed race parents, his father being a doctor in Oakville Ontario. Some of his ancestors came from Baltimore and Langston has always been curious about his family history. He has an aunt living in Baltimore who he has never met. He embarks on a project to research and study the history of his family.

After giving up his apartment he buys a Jetta and starts on his journey to Baltimore. He discovers that his aunt never throws out anything and in her boxes she has a world of information and details of such interest to him that he immerses himself completely in the project.

This is the most wonderful book that I have read in a very long time. You find yourself completely absorbed in five generations of Canes. I dare anyone who starts this book to try to put it down for longer than it takes to walk the dog.

A fantastic read.

Cam Waller says

I just finished a dense, 630 page novel in under a week... bruh, English degrees are no joke.

I had the pleasure of hearing Lawrence Hill speak in a small setting at my university last year. This was after I had just finished reading his best-known novel, *The Book of Negroes*. I was inspired by a lot of what he said about blending facts and fiction in his writing, and it helped me a lot when it came time to write my term paper. So for that alone, I will always hold a special place in my heart for Hill.

Overall, I find Hill to be a very enthralling writer, who crafts sentences and chapters that are easy flowing. His books deal with difficult subjects, yet they are also incredibly readable. This novel, however, missed the mark.

A few vignettes in this novel were worth the read, but, as a whole, the packaging of this narrative is weak, confused, and jumbled. The story casts several lines for the readers to follow, but does not catch anything for its efforts. Strong characterization is not to be found, and much of the dialogue is clunky and cliché.

Any Known Blood is unfortunately a disappointing read from an otherwise talented author.

Tjacks says

I'm struggling y'all to finish this one. At chapter 14 and can't muster the interest to finish. Ironically I got on good reads again to see what others were saying as I finished chapter 13. I loved loved someone knows my name and remember not attending family events to sit on my front porch and experience the heart throbbing moments. This one just isn't cutting it. There are a few chapters that draw you in, then you're in a daze for the next few. Great characters but the plot is nonexistent. So if you just want to read to read then this might do. I personally like a connection and this didn't do it.

Bonnie says

I thought I had already added this book to my shelves. I think it was one of the first books I read by Larry prior to signing on to Booming Ground (UBC), and mentoring with him for 4 months (ending Winter 2007, when The Book of Negroes was being released). In a way, I think this book may have been a lead-up to the latter, not that it is the same story, but in that it covers 150 years re: black experience both in the U.S. and Canada...Recommended.

Sylvia Duckworth says

Loved this book. Fascinating history of a black family with Canadian roots throughout 5 generations. Definitely worth while reading.
