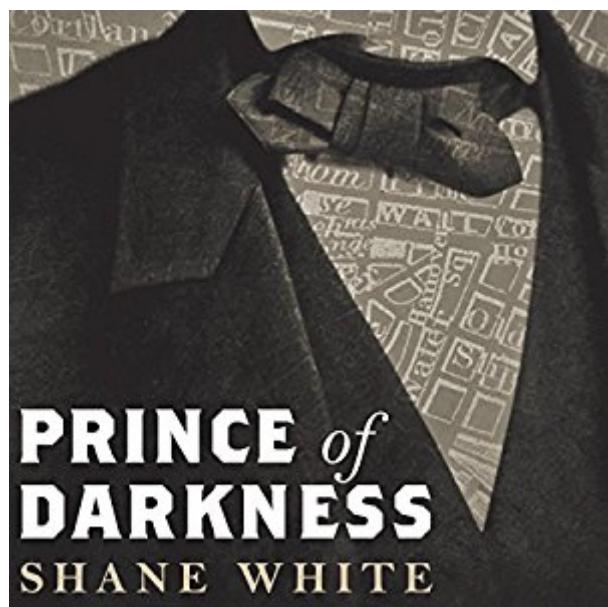


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Prince Of Darkness: The Untold Story Of Jeremiah G. Hamilton, Wall Street's First Black Millionaire



Synopsis

In the middle decades of the 19th century Jeremiah G. Hamilton was a well-known figure on Wall Street. He was reportedly the richest African American man in the United States, possessing a fortune of \$2 million, or in excess of \$250 million in today's currency. In Prince of Darkness, a groundbreaking and vivid account, eminent historian Shane White reveals the larger-than-life story of a man who defied every convention of his time. He wheeled and dealed in the lily white business world, he married a white woman, he bought a mansion in rural New Jersey, he owned railroad stock on trains he was not legally allowed to ride, and he generally set his white contemporaries' teeth on edge when he wasn't just plain outsmarting them. An important contribution to American history, Hamilton's life offers a way into considering, from the unusual perspective of a black man, subjects that are usually seen as being quintessentially white, totally segregated from the African American past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A must read ,very informative of historical on dates and issues, some similar to today.

Very informative.

Prince of Darkness describes a man who was a pure predatory animal, perfectly suited to be successful within the predatory environs of Wall Street; there are still such men who populate Wall

Street. The mantra of Wall Street is, and has always been, if you can neither help me nor hurt me, then what good are you to me, which explains why Hamilton felt no allegiance to other Blacks and was, for the most part, blind to the surrounding racism. Shane White fully captures the dynamics prevalent on Wall Street at that time (and which still exist today). The emotional and psychological detachment of Hamilton, from those around him explains, to some degree, why there's a paucity of any surviving documentation of him and his dealings, other than court records. Shane White does a fabulous job in revealing the core, as much as can be achieved, of this most remarkable man, Jeremiah Hamilton.

This book looks like new! The price was fabulous; this is why I buy most of my books as used. I wish every Black middle school/ high school child had access to this book. History has been very quiet about Blacks and finances. Information is very interesting. UPDATE: I am now halfway through book and realize this is more a history of the development of New York City's real estate and how African Americans were involved. Author needed a lot of filler information because there just is not enough information on J. Hamilton to fill a 317 page book.

This is a story about a fascinating and underappreciated character in history. Jeremiah Hamilton was Wall Street's first millionaire in the 1850s. That he could achieve this feat when slavery was still deeply ingrained in the country and where black people even when they were not enslaved were often discriminated against is almost a miracle. Shane White tells us the story of how Hamilton rose from an unlikely provenance as a black man in pre Civil War America. Even then he had shrewd entrepreneurial instincts and was caught shipping counterfeit coins to Haiti. Escaping punishment and rising through the hard-scrabble existence of a determined young man, Hamilton amassed a fortune of \$2 million (more than \$40 million in today's currency) through a variety of business ventures, ranging from railroads to insurance to real estate. White details well the meteoric rise of this unlikely character who charmed his way into the world of wealth white New Yorkers. However the author also does not ignore Hamilton's flaws, noting how he unscrupulously made money off the victims of fire. Perhaps his most monumental feud was with business tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt with whom he clashed over partial ownership of a rival railroad - ironically one on which black people could travel in parts of the country. The book is also full of fantastic stories, none more so than of the time when a lynch mob during the Draft Riots of the 1860s descended upon Hamilton's house. Hamilton's wife - a white women whose marriage to him raised eyebrows and kept him insulated only because of his wealth - somehow convinced the mob that her husband was not home

and who admirably sent the men away with trinkets and other valuable items in the form of appeasement. Jeremiah Hamilton was a very unlikely character in a time of great racial, social and economic upheaval and this book is the first full length biography of him that I have come across. I agree with the previous reviewer that the writing is a bit dry, especially relative to the unique nature of the story, but the story itself is so remarkable and unlikely that I believe the writing to be a relatively minor blemish. Worth reading.

This stunning portrayal of life in 1800s New York, and in particular the trials and tribulations of a black/mulatto broker, is a rude awakening. It is rude because New Yorkers see themselves as fair and evenhanded, part of an almost unique melting pot, where anyone can play if they pay. Not so in the 1800s, especially if your hair was "woolly" and your skin dark. New Yorkers compared unfavorably to southerners in their snotty mistreatment of other races. For an intelligent, hustling nonwhite, the battle in the financial marketplace was multiplied by the prejudice of the courts and threats in the streets. Jeremiah Hamilton overcame all of it to be the first American millionaire who wasn't white. He found the angles, timed his moves and leveraged everything and everyone. He made enemies by the carload. And money. Hamilton bullied his way onto Wall St. He was as clever, sharp and underhanded as any of his white counterparts. He made a living claiming insurance for losses, mostly at sea, and mostly in court. He battled prejudiced judges and juries, favoritism among whites, and a clearly uneven playing field. When attacked in person, in court or in print, he always hit back harder, which shocked white New York. He totally distanced himself from nonwhites, had his own circle of white friends, married a white woman, and disported himself as a wealthy white. Any one of which could have cost him his life. The great achievement of Prince of Darkness is Shane White's ceaseless digging. Reading the many daily newspapers of Hamilton's lifespan, the court records, government records, and following all kinds of slim leads, he draws in parallel characters and stories for context. His research stretches to the books on Hamilton's shelf, listed in his bankruptcy filing, and those on his library card, some 250 more. White paints a remarkable and memorable picture of someone who lived the moment and lived it large. White interjects himself from time to time, explaining the lengths he had to go, the assumptions and the choices he had to make along the way. The effect is to make the reader a partner, giving us the choices made of uncertainty, though White tells us which way he leans. What White never reveals is how on earth he ever even discovered the existence of Jeremiah Hamilton. An Australian history professor in Sydney is not the most likely to stumble across the obscure 19th century independent Wall Street broker.

This is a man who left no photos, no portraits, no documents or ledgers, and who was forgotten as soon as he left the scene in 1875. There are no books that profile him, no documentaries celebrating him, and no institutes honoring him. It makes this book a real achievement. David Wineberg

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