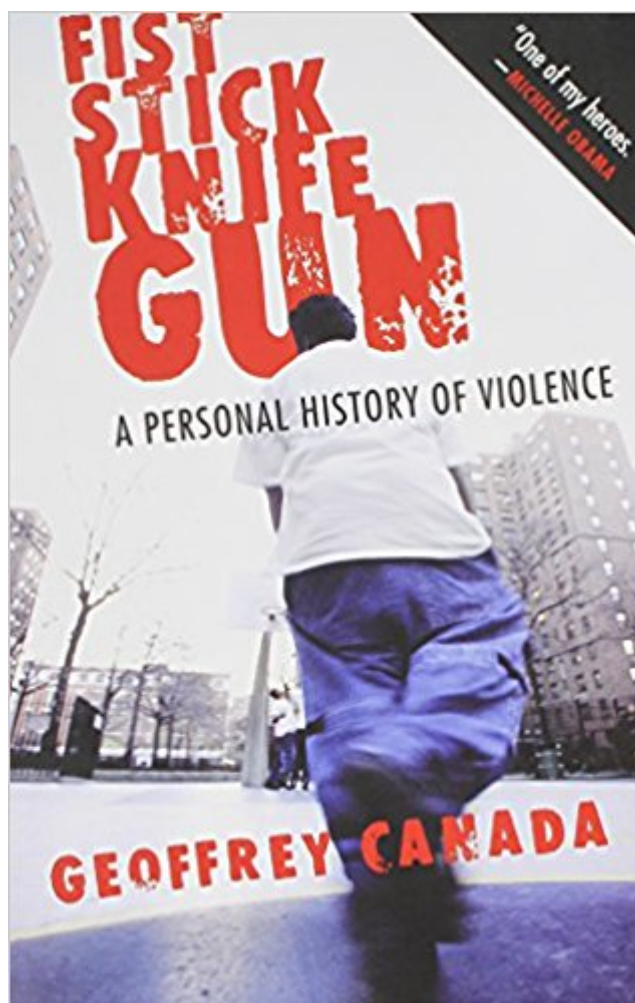




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# Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History Of Violence



## Synopsis

A new edition, including the story of the founding of the Harlem Children's Zone – Long before the avalanche of praise for his work – from Oprah Winfrey, from President Bill Clinton, from President Barack Obama – long before he became known for his talk show appearances, Members Project spots, and documentaries like *Waiting for Superman*, Geoffrey Canada was a small boy growing up scared on the mean streets of 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, and knife. Then the streets changed, and the stakes got even higher. In his candid and riveting memoir, Canada relives a childhood in which violence stalked every street corner.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A searing memoir . . . Canada's blunt observations are as refreshing as they are bold." – Paula Woods, *San Francisco Chronicle*  
"Geoffrey Canada is one of this country's genuine heroes. His personal meditation on America's culture of violence is a beacon of hope for our humanity." – Charles Johnson, author of *Middle Passage*  
"Canada has never lost touch with the child within himself or with the fears of the children around him struggling to reach adulthood in the violent streets of America." – Marian Wright Edelman, author of *The Measure of Our Success*  
"Canada takes us on a powerful journey. . . . He is a man of hope and a wonderful

storyteller. • Henry Hampton, executive producer, Eyes on the Prize"Among the reformers in "Superman," Canada emerges as the brightest star: His blend of intelligence, charisma, and moral urgency is impossible to resist. As the founder and the guiding hand of the Harlem Children's Zone, Canada is engaged in a vastly ambitious social-development project, an attempt to transform 97 hard-scrabble square blocks of the city with a comprehensive set of services for the poor, from a "baby college" for new and expectant parents to two charter schools—though he is no charter purist." • New York Magazine "One of the best books I've ever read in my life. I urge people to go and find it. It's fantastically insightful." • Steve Levitt, Freakonomics

Geoffrey Canada is the president and CEO of Harlem Children's Zone, a nonprofit, community-based organization deemed "one of the most ambitious social experiments of our time" by the New York Times Magazine. Jonathan Kozol called him, "One of the few authentic heroes of New York and one of the best friends children have, or ever will have, in our nation," and Oprah Winfrey simply refers to him as "an angel from God." Canada is featured in Davis Guggenheim's documentary Waiting for Superman.

Find this short read helped me understand how males and perhaps females, form their roles in the pecking order from alpha to subordinate. While this was based upon a story of growing up on the mean streets of New York, the experiences I had growing up in the Midwest were familiar on the school bus, the football field, or on the job.

After reading "Whatever It Takes" about the Harlem Children's Zone, I wanted to read more about its founder. This memoir explains how Canada's own experiences growing up poor, on a dangerous street in a NYC ghetto have helped shape his life and his approach to building HCZ. He describes his education - both in school and in the streets, and addresses the escalation of violence in these poverty-stricken communities. Though I think he'd love to get guns off the streets, he seems very realistic about the likelihood of that happening, pointing out that current gun control programs like buybacks won't work. He also describes the unintended consequences of "tough on crime" laws like mandatory sentencing. I was never shy about driving through bad neighborhoods in Chicago, and had my own strategies to deal with threats (stopping at red lights was optional for me, in some circumstances), but I now have a much better understanding of what he's dealing with in trying to lift families out of poverty and get their children safely through college. This book is essential reading

for anybody who wants to work in a field addressing these problems, from social workers to educators to politicians, and all would do well to examine carefully what Canada is finding works - and what doesn't.

If you want to know how to save our children, how to make our schools better, how to change, grow and heal our communities, read *Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence*. Then get out of your chair, get in your car or on your bike or even on your skates, go to the nearest school, step inside and volunteer to help change the children's worlds. Geoffrey Canada is the man behind the Harlem Project. His mind, his drive, his desire to help children, parents and the community made the Harlem project a reality. And Geoffrey Canada knows his audience; he lived in abject poverty, the son of a single mom in a neighborhood where value was assigned based on how well you fought. Geoffrey Canada's approach points the way to saving all the children who live in neighborhoods owned and operated by drug dealers, drug users, robbers, muggers, burglars and rapists -- killers of every description. My take on his core thesis is you cannot change children who live in these communities just by working inside the 4 walls of a school; you **MUST** change the community, reach out to the parents, help them where they are so they can reach out and change their own worlds, one step at a time, one day at a time.

After reading *Fist Stick Knife Gun* a personal history of violence I have a huge respect for Geoffrey Canada. It is quite obvious he has lived this life, knows the terminology, knows the fear, knows how "it all works". In my opinion when someone has lived this life, and try to help others in this life, they are successful because they have been there, done that. They not only know the "rules" they know the code, the feelings that go along with living in a bad situation and they know what they have to do to survive. I come from a similar background so this story was touching for me, to know that others feel the way you do, that they lived through what sometimes feels like something you will not live through. The pain of having to "be on your own", of having adults hurt you and not help you to make you realize that you are truly on your own. People who have not lived in fear do not understand and may never understand. For example, as a child I would always fight with the adults in my life about sleeping with my shoes on. I never wanted to take my shoes off because I wanted to always be ready to run, I always had a fear for my younger brothers, who I felt I had to protect, but then I had to realize that I had to protect myself first - not protecting them left a hole in my heart. When you grow up with fear and you can overcome it, you can help others. Geoffrey Canada is one of my heroes.

In light of recent headlines about gun control, I have been watching, and reading, articles with a renewed interest in the topic. \*Spoiler Alert: The author is for gun control. I disagree on several points with the author politically, but I can not argue with his experience, which I find drives most of the value in this book. It's his story, and told through his eyes, there is a growing problem with inner city violence. The author successfully pulls you into his world and you begin to get a real sense of a little piece of daily life of a young man growing up in a poor neighborhood. The narrative is well written, but don't expect any answers inside these pages. That's not the intent of the book. Instead you can expect to glean an additional perspective in a much larger issue, and on this point, it delivers.

Order as school assignment, did not read myself

Mr. Canada grew up in the 60's in the Bronx. In this book he talks about what it was like to live there. He talks about having to prove yourself or face the prospect of getting your ... kicked in the future. You get a VIVID description of what he was up against as a young person. I mean, I grew up a long way away in a much less dangerous place, and I knew exactly what he was getting at. That's a testament to his writing, and the universality of the subject. Mr. Canada recalls one episode where he is walking a few blocks out of his neighborhood, and you get a detailed view of how dangerous this was. Just walking down the street! All I can say against the book is that I would have liked even more of the authors autobiography. Later on in the book, he gets more polemical about what can be done. I agree with what he says, but as far as literary quality goes, that stuff isn't really in the same league as the earlier part of the book. Also, let me say, the author has an excellent, direct writing style, which makes what he has to say that much more powerful.

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