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Decoded



Synopsis

Decoded is a book like no other: a collection of lyrics and their meanings that together tell the story of a culture, an art form, a moment in history, and one of the most provocative and successful artists of our time. "Hip-hop's renaissance man drops a classic. . . . Heartfelt, passionate and slick." • Kirkus, starred review

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, November 2010: Like its multi-hyphenate author, Jay-Z, Decoded is many things at once. At its core, Decoded is an eloquent and candid memoir detailing the story of a man who was born in a Brooklyn housing project, spent his teen years dealing drugs on the streets of Trenton, New Jersey, and grew up to be one of his generation's most successful artists and businessmen. But Decoded is much more than a memoir: it is an intensely personal homage to hip-hop, as written by a man who so clearly adores the art form; it is a rare glimpse of the unexpectedly deep meanings behind the most recognizable rap lyrics of the last decade; and it is a truly moving collection of essays on topics ranging from Hurricane Katrina to the decline of the music industry. Unconventional type design, line drawings, and photographs visually emphasize the author's message that rap is a form that transcends and defies easy categorization. There's not much in the way of celebrity gossip here, but what we get, instead, is a gritty and enormously compelling look inside the cultural phenomenon of rap, from one of the men who contributed so much to its shape. --Juliet Disparte Jay-Z on Decoded When you're famous and say

you're writing a book, people assume that it's an autobiography--I was born here, raised there, suffered this, loved that, lost it all, got it back, the end. But that's not what this is. I've never been a linear thinker, which is something you can see in my rhymes. They follow the jumpy logic of poetry and emotion, not the straight line of careful prose. My book is like that, too. Decoded is first and foremost, a book of rhymes, which is ironic because I don't actually write my rhymes--they come to me in my head and I record them. The book is packed with the stories from my life that are the foundation of my lyrics--stories about coming up in the streets of Brooklyn in the 80's and 90's, stories about becoming an artist and entrepreneur and discovering worlds that I never dreamed existed when I was a kid. But it always comes back to the rhymes. There's poetry in hip-hop lyrics--not just mine, but in the work of all the great hip-hop artists, from KRS-One and Rakim to Biggie and Pac to a hundred emcees on a hundred corners all over the world that you've never heard of. The magic of rap is in the way it can take the most specific experience, from individual lives in unlikely places, and turn them into art that can be embraced by the whole world. Decoded is a book about one of those specific lives--mine--and will show you how the things I've experienced and observed have made their way into the art I've created. It's also about how my work is sometimes not about my life at all, but about pushing the boundaries of what I can express through the poetry of rap--trying to use words to find fresh angles into emotions that we all share, which is the hidden mission in even the hardest hip-hop. Decoded is a book about some of my favorite songs--songs that I unpack and explain and surround with narratives about what inspired them--but behind the rhymes is the truest story of my life.

“Compelling . . . provocative, evocative . . . Part autobiography, part lavishly illustrated commentary on the author’s own work, Decoded gives the reader a harrowing portrait of the rough worlds Jay-Z navigated in his youth, while at the same time deconstructing his lyrics.” • Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“One of a handful of books that just about any hip hop fan should own.” • *The New Yorker*

“Elegantly designed, incisively written . . . an impressive leap by a man who has never been known for small steps.” • *Los Angeles Times*

“A riveting exploration of Jay-Z’s journey . . . So thoroughly engrossing, it reads like a good piece of cultural journalism.” • *The Boston Globe*

“Shawn Carter’s most honest airing of the experiences he drew on to create the mythic figure of Jay-Z . . . The scenes he recounts along the way are fascinating.” • *Entertainment Weekly*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Jay-Z's contemporary rags-to-riches story is a more detailed, thorough, insightful, and powerful story than any kind of fiction you might read in an inspirational genre. This book is terrific reading for artists and entrepreneurs, especially, although anyone who wants to be inspired, as well as anyone with interest in his music, would enjoy it. The book consists of lyrics "decoded," where Jay-Z explains both where the song ideas came from and the way all the lyrics are connected to each other, as well as portions of his real-world story, rising from the Marcy Projects to a best-selling artist competitive with the Beatles in terms of how many #1 albums they've had. In particular interest to me were the chapters regarding his break-out crossover hit, "Hard Knock Life," and how Jay-Z had the realization that "Annie's story was my story." Jay-Z applies this knowledge to building a brand and identity for himself, which led to his pop crossover success on the charts. Those kinds of insights, from a man who self-transformed into a superstar, are crucial for artists, entrepreneurs, and anyone out struggling with personal identity and their own success struggles. I highly recommend this book. If I were a business professor or music teacher, I would make this required reading for students.

Ask anyone who was influenced by hip hop culture & music and Jay-Z has a place on their top 5 dead or alive rappers list. If not, then they deserve to be slapped. The same applies to this book as it is hands down the best hip hop book I've read to date. A very strong statement indeed. The beauty of Decoded lies in the way it is written. The main focus is the music. The main focus is the lyrics. Instead of chronologically detailing experiences from childhood to fame, Decoded approaches it differently. Each of the 14 chapters starts with a different personal life event. Jay-Z then identifies 3-4 songs he recorded (most often on different albums), which were inspired by this particular life event. He then goes through these songs line by line, stanza by stanza, lyric by lyric breaking down the specific meaning, inspiration and back story of each lyric. This process is nothing short of miraculous. Via this process, the reader inevitably picks up on meanings that you've completely missed out on for years. Being spoon fed all of the double entendre's, metaphors and overall witty word play changes your overall view on these songs. Songs you originally thought were "just okay" are transformed into classics. Songs you previously thought were "classics" into are transformed into timeless masterpieces. To enhance the experience, I strongly recommend listening to the music immediately before reading the lyrics. Pre-listening online (and for free) allows the reader to read the lyrics with rhythm and fully absorb and appreciate the complex rhyme patterns and the overall skill Jay-Z has. Jay-Z's music allows the listener to walk away feeling empowered. Decoded embodies this aspect. Decoded sheds new light on the music and is hands down the best hip hop

book I've read.

I happened to catch an episode of Oprah a few weeks ago when she was in Australia and Jay-Z was a guest on her show. They talked about his book, Decoded, and how it changed the way she thought about Jay-Z and rap in general. A Jay-Z fan, I was intrigued and purchased Decoded for my Kindle. Decoded was the perfect title and conveys multiple meanings. Jay-Z has the lyrics to many of his songs "decoded". The lyrics are seen in corresponding chapters with an extensive footnote section where he explains why he wrote some of the more cryptic lines. But more than just decoding his song lyrics, Jay-Z decoded many more issues for me: his early life, the drug culture, his business dealings, his philosophies on the music biz, politics, and why rap is so misunderstood by so many. I came away from this book with a new appreciation for Jay-Z...his frankness and lack of apologies for his thug past, the affect of his father's abandonment, the intricacies of his lyrics, his business-savvy attitude and his apparent understanding of the world around him. But perhaps the biggest thing I came away with is a respect for Jay-Z the man. He's intelligent, articulate, and talented as well as paranoid (self described) and private. Rather than writing raps, he would speak them and transcribe them. In 6th grade, he was reading at a 12th grade level. He has a photographic memory. And whether it was by dealing drugs or having a rap career, Jay-Z strove to be the best at his game. For people expecting a tell-all memoir, you will be disappointed in the book. Beyonce's name doesn't even appear. There are also many, many pages of song lyrics throughout the book that probably appeal to the most diehard fans but I skipped a lot of them. Decoded is a great read, and a book I expect will expand some people's minds (at least a little).

I had listened to one of my former preaching professor's lecture talking about being real in preaching on You-tube. Dr. Frank Thomas said during the lecture that he had read this book and has it on his required readings for his preaching class. And, he said that I'd you could not see how preaching related to the poetic form and storytelling of rap then, you aren't a preacher. I loved the fact that this was very educational for me. I'm a baby boomer and for the most part didn't like rap. However, after reading THIS book, it opened my eyes, mind and heart to an entirely different way of viewing rap and the hip-hop culture. AWESOME!!!

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