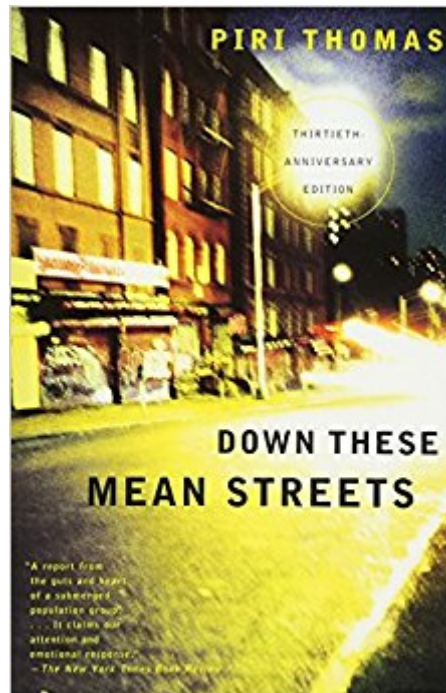




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Down These Mean Streets



Synopsis

Thirty years ago Piri Thomas made literary history with this lacerating, lyrical memoir of his coming of age on the streets of Spanish Harlem. Here was the testament of a born outsider: a Puerto Rican in English-speaking America; a dark-skinned morenito in a family that refused to acknowledge its African blood. Here was an unsparing document of Thomas's plunge into the deadly consolations of drugs, street fighting, and armed robbery--a descent that ended when the twenty-two-year-old Piri was sent to prison for shooting a cop. As he recounts the journey that took him from adolescence in El Barrio to a lock-up in Sing Sing to the freedom that comes of self-acceptance, faith, and inner confidence, Piri Thomas gives us a book that is as exultant as it is harrowing and whose every page bears the irrepressible rhythm of its author's voice. Thirty years after its first appearance, this classic of manhood, marginalization, survival, and transcendence is available in an anniversary edition with a new Introduction by the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The 30th anniversary edition of this classic memoir about growing up in Spanish Harlem includes an afterword reminding us that its streets are even meaner now, thanks to crack cocaine and the dismantling of government poverty programs. As a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, born in 1928, Piri Thomas faced with painful immediacy the absurd contradictions of America's racial attitudes (among people of all colors) in a time of wrenching social change. Three decades have not dimmed the luster of his jazzy prose, rich in Hispanic rhythms and beat-generation slang.

"Piri Thomas describes the passionate, painful search to validate his manhood...He has done it all in Harlem's mean streets and gone on from machismo to manhood, acquiring during the journey an understanding of man."--The Nation

Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas is a story of struggles, heart and identity. Speaking from his own experiences, Piri Thomas writes of his life as a teenager growing up in El Barrio--Spanish Harlem. He faces many battles as he fights to find his true identity and place in this racial society. Thomas explains the life of a lower-class Puerto Rican kid who tried to fit-in in a world where gang fighting, doing drugs, sex and stealing was as natural as breathing. In his fight to fit in, he loses his true personality. Piri Thomas creates the perfect picture of this kind of society for readers through this book. He tries to teach people about the Harlem community using his life alone to prove that no race was better than the rest. Although this book should not be recommended for people of all ages, it teaches its readers well-known morals in a different way. It opens people's minds to show them that the concept of being prejudice is shown in all races. Piri Thomas shows his view of the world by telling readers his life story, including everything from drug addictions to living on the mean streets of Harlem. Down These Mean Streets can be life-changing if it is appreciated in the right way.

Being Puerto Rican and raised in the Bronx this book described a lot of what I've felt growing up. The main character was described as a flawed man who made some poor choices in life and paid the price while he was in jail. An excellent read!

I read this book 25 years ago when a member of my family was about to enter a biracial marriage. Piri Thomas very well explains his experience as a biracial person living first in an all black community and then in a all white community. Recently my biracial granddaughter, now age 20, a college student at an elite white school, asked if she could interview me regarding my experiences growing up in a all white community. I am now 80 years old and am profoundly proud and happy this grandchild is one of mine. One of the highlights of my life is my relationships with this young lady ... that she felt free to ask me 10 very sensitive questions about my thoughts, my life, what prejudices existed. ... The Piri Thomas book was an insightful experience that helped me confront the complicated aspects of biracialism. A re-read of this book after 25 years was very insightful. Wouldn't it be interesting if she and I co-authored a book on our experiences?

This book is beyond words. This is a hard hitting account of the life of Piri Thomas growing up in Spanish Harlem. This really enlightens one to the fact that long before the popular "gangs and bad-boys" of the present day, even before the 1950's, it was a fight for position in many of the young boys lives. Excellent read.

Down These Mean StreetsEven though the language Piri Thomas uses throughout most of this book is dated, it doesn't matter. We know we're reading about a young gangster who grew up in Spanish Harlem in the 40's and 50's. He also grew up as a Morenito, a black Puerto Rican. He got his racial identity from his father, a Moreno, although all of his other siblings resembled their mother who was clearly a white Puerto Rican. Thus, the book tells a lot about racial prejudice, a young man whose parents seemed to have almost no control over him and who is looking for where he belongs in this country of his. The book is so powerful and it deals not only with the issues of race, but also drug addiction, infidelity, death, prison, and the gangster life. It also deals with redemption, great loss, and learning the hard way, but still learning. I wanted to write to Piri Thomas to let him know that I loved his book so much, but I was reading about him on and found out that he had passed away only a month before I finished his book. I cried throughout the book, but I also cried when I read that he had passed away after what was a very hard life. I ended up giving this book to one of my students who had fought with an alcohol addiction and a hard life for many years and is black and a recovering alcoholic now. I hope he gets something out of it. This book could easily be made into a movie and I think it should be and now is the time if ever.

its about real life in real time

I highly recommend this book, and the price could not be beat.

Piri Thomas is an icon in Literature. A must read for everyone in my opinion. I have bought this book a hundred times over and every time I lend it, I do not get it back. This 1st Edition made me cry when I received it. I thank the vendor for wrapping/sending it as they did. And "NO" I will not be lending this one out!! I will buy form this vendor again.

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