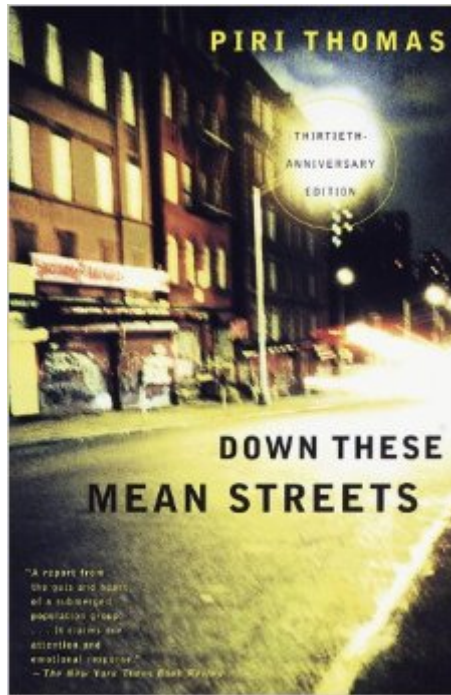


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# Down These Mean Streets



## 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

I first heard this man, Mr. Piri Thomas, speak in the spring of 1993 at Cal State University at Hayward. I was so moved (as a high school student) that I had our school (California High School) invite him to speak at our "Free Your Mind" day on June 4th, 1993. I loved his poetic 'realness' - and it was the first time I felt really empowered as a person of color living in a largely suburban environment. His experience and insight was so raw and so 'real'. In this autobiography, Mr. Thomas addresses issues of racial identity (he was dark skinned, but his brother was lighter skinned/more

white looking) and how racism affected him as a Puerto Rican. It describes him growing up in Spanish Harlem, NY, moving down the coast, meeting friends and some crazy situations. I remember him really hitting rock bottom, and then coming out in the end. I always looked forward to reading on. I read somewhere that R&B singer Brian McKnight considers this his favorite book. That's when I knew I just wasn't being easily impressed. This is an excellent life story, well written, and a must read for anyone interested in the topic of racial identity. Yes, we are all individuals, but we should never deny our heritage...thank you Mr. Piri Thomas. I feel nothing but the deepest respect for you...thanks for your vision, insight and generosity. Knyte (Trust Me) P.S. If I could give more than five stars...I would

"Down These Mean Streets," by Piri Thomas, tells a story of growing up as a dark-skinned Puerto Rican in New York City. First published in 1967, the book has been re-issued in a 30th anniversary edition with an afterword by the author. The book opens in 1941, with 12-year old Piri living in New York with his family. The narrative recounts his growth into manhood; we accompany Piri as he gets into fights, uses illegal drugs, becomes a violent criminal, spends time in prison, and experiences conflict within his own family. This is a raw, powerful book. Thomas has a vigorous, muscular prose style that incorporates many Spanish terms (readers may find the glossary at the end of the book useful). The book raises many questions about racial and ethnic identity as Piri has relationships with many different people of various colors and cultures. Thomas also explores the interconnections of race and religion, and vividly portrays the subculture of prison life. This is an essential book for anyone interested in the Puerto Rican experience on the U.S. mainland. The book has a lot in common with "The Autobiography of Malcolm X." Also recommended as a companion text: Miguel Pinero's play "Short Eyes."

I read this wonderful book over 15 years ago. Although most of its details have faded with time, its impact has not. As a Puerto Rican male growing up in the Bronx, I could certainly relate to much of what Piri Thomas was describing. But "Mean Streets" is so powerful and gripping, that anyone who reads it will be moved and mesmerized. This is truly a modern-day classic that will surely withstand the test of time. Its lessons are appropriate for all youth everywhere and always.

This is a remarkable book. Mr. Thomas you did your thang! This is the first real grown-up book I read back in 1995. I was sooo open I wanted to know everything that happened next. Piri was Wild! And knowing that this is an autobiography it's even more exciting. I love the way he represented the

areas I've lived in or even went to school in. Piri told life how it really was and how it took him to learn about it. Growing up in Spanish Harlem put me on to a lot of Hispanics denying their African culture. It's true how some parents like Piri had act the same way as they did. I had the pleasure of meeting Piri Thomas at my school in Spanish Harlem also it was remarkable to picture such a character then really see him face to face although he was much much older. But it was still amazing. This book is Raw and it an absolute page turner let me tell you from a young Black teenager in Harlem THIS IS A VERY GOOD BOOK, AN ABSOLUTE PAGE TURNER!

This is one of the first books I read, and it was very moving, touching and powerful for me. Being Boricua (Puerto Rican), born and raised in NYC's El Barrio, myself, and coming up on the same streets Piri lived on and wrote about made this book that much more special and personal for me. I was virtually able to re-live Piri's life through his book and eyes, albiet 50+ years later. Piri's writing style is icy clear, lucid, and sometimes pretty raw. He writes so artfully that the entire book becomes like an epic saga, one powerful movie in your mind! It's a story of unvarnished reality. Piri pulls no punches. (I'm imagining you should probably be 15+ or so to read this.) You'll laugh, cry, get angry and go on a roller coaster of emotions with DTMS. I was so moved and touched by Piri's work, that I read all of his other books, and developed a new outlook and perspective on everything from writing, to self identity, and dignity (one of Piri's faves). Buy Down These Mean Streets, in English or Spanish (Por Estas Calles Bravas), and pass it on. (I GUARANTEE you'll love it!) Piri is one of our first...and one of our best! The man's been p'al carajo and back, and tells it all in his unique Boricua style (often imitated, never duplicated). I developed a lot of affection and love for Brother Piri, and was even fortunate enough to meet the Living Legend and have him over our home for an unforgettable dinner as our guest, where my entire familia, friends and neighbors (who I all got to read his books) all had the pleasure of meeting the larger than life Piri! Much love, and respect to Brother Piri and and all of you, mi gente! (...)

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