

Decoded Reading List & Discussion Question Material

Part I: "One Eye Open": *pages 4-19 + lyrics & footnotes for "American Dreamin' " & "Early Morning"; *pages 38-42 + lyrics & footnotes for "Coming of Age" & "Coming of Age (Da Sequel)"; *pages 45-57 + lyrics & footnotes for "99 Problems."

Part II: "I Will Not Lose": *pages 70-79; 83-87; 90-95 + lyrics & footnotes for "Most Kings," "Renegade" & "Can I Live?" "Fallin' "; *pages 128-131 + lyrics & footnotes for "Operation Corporate Takeover"

Part III: "Politics As Usual": *pages 153-164; 175-177 + lyrics & footnotes for "Young Gifted And Black"; *pages 202-205 + lyrics & footnotes for "This Life Forever"; *pages 218-223 + lyrics & footnotes for "Minority Report."

Part IV: "Come And Get Me": *pages 235-236 (top); 239 (middle)-245; 247 (bottom)-251; 254-255; 278; 292-295 (top).

Pay special attention to the following:

- How does Jay-Z *rework* Braudy's theory of the divided self of Celebrity: i.e. what happens to the "talked of self" & "unexpressed self"? Where do we draw the line between the personal & the performative? Persona & person? "TOS" & "UES self"). When do they converge?
- How Jay-Z uses history, the past, & personal experience in the pursuit of "keepin' it real" in both the personal narrative sections of *Decoded* & the song lyrics examples. What happens to the "talked of self" and the "unexpressed self"?
- Does Jay-Z fit Martinez's definition of "Rappin' in Resistance"? Which songs? What issues?
- Where you see examples of life in the Marcy Projects, the street, the game, the hustle, poverty, racism, etc. that relate to or parallel O'Kane's descriptions and analysis about the plight of immigrants and the reasons they turned to the Crooked Ladder.
- Where you see examples that connect the experiences of ethnic immigrants and ethnic minorities being forced to take (O'Kane) or choosing to take (Lupsha) the Crooked Ladder.
- In what ways is Jay-Z an "invented gangster"? How has he invented himself using clothing, fashion, *braggadocia*, etc.
- Jay-Z's use of corporate/business language, allusions, metaphors, etc. related to "being in the game," "the hustle," & music business: what do his references mean & what is their significance?
- Allusions to historical, literary figures/works, the bible, musicians & artists, myth, early Rap/Rappers, etc. in the personal narrative & song lyrics. Parallels to Prohibition and/or contemporary gangsters, real and/or fictional gangsters.
- Why/how are other art forms (graffiti, painting, etc.), important? Why is Basquiat of important?