



Abrams, Dennis.

Jay-Z

Hip Hop Stars

New York: Chelsea House, 2008. Pp. 112. Paper. \$12.95.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

In *Jay-Z* Dennis Abrams offers a brief biographical sketch of rapper, entrepreneur, NBA team owner, and record executive Shawn Carter, aka, Jay-Z. The book opens with an introduction from Public Enemy front man Chuck D. about the history and impact of hip hop on the world scene. More than 30 years after its inception hip hop has proven to be more than just a fad and has influenced the world at large. For this reason it merits taking a look at some of the game's biggest names which is the intent of Chelsea House's Hip Hop Stars series.

The biography begins near the end of the story with Jay's retirement from rap in 2003. This is the kind of retirement that all entertainers and athletes dream of, the kind where they go out on top. From here Abrams takes us through Jay-Z's childhood as a kid from Brooklyn growing up in the Marcy projects to his teenage years as a drug dealer down through the unceasing hustle that made him the top recording artist that he is. Along the way we learn of his legal troubles, his beefs with other rappers, and at one point we get a more personal look into his reunion with his father who abandoned him more than twenty years earlier.

But rap wasn't enough for Jay, he also tried his hand at fashion and succeeded; he tried his hand at NBA team ownership and succeeded; and finally he tried his hand as a record executive and, you guessed it, succeeded. Yet with all of this success that transcended his rapping career he

simply couldn't stay away from his passion so in 2005 he returned to rapping and fans of the genre know what has happened from there.

Throughout the course of Abrams' writing we're treated to various quotations from Jake Brown's *Jay-Z...And the Roc-a-Fella Records Dynasty*, in fact the majority of direct Jay-Z quotations are derived from this book. There doesn't seem to be any direct interaction with Jay himself and this leads to some of my problems with this slim volume. Abrams relays mere facts, facts that any Jay-Z fan has long known. In other words, there's absolutely nothing new here. There's nothing that hasn't already been learned from listening to Jay-Z albums, listening to Jay-Z interviews, or watching music channels like MTV and BET.

There's also the problem of Abrams' book reading like a fluff piece. It's a rags to riches story where Jay-Z is depicted as this model human being who succeeded against all odds. He's an extremely smart child, a loving son, a shrewd businessman, a philanthropist, and so many other positive things that his faults are all swept under the rug and basically ignored. Is there an amazing story related to Jay-Z's success? Absolutely, but he's human, yet even with the accounts of the hardships he's overcome we never really get to the gooey human center in Abrams' recounting of the events. Jay-Z himself, in both song and interview, has acknowledged the many errors of his youth and urged kids to not be like he was and do what he did, and that doesn't come out in the book. Dare I say that Jay-Z is both idealized and idolized in this volume and for this reason it fails as a biography because such a depiction can never be the whole story.

I'll say this though—if you're unacquainted with Jay-Z and his achievements then this would be a decent introduction. It even comes rife with pictures of Jay and his colleagues along with some helpful back matter (an appendix listing Jay-Z's complete filmography and discography up until the point of publication; a chronology of Jay-Z's life, a glossary of terms, a subject index, bibliography, and suggestions for further reading). But if you've kept up with Jay's career over the years then you'll learn nothing new from Abrams' book and would do better to spend your money on something else.