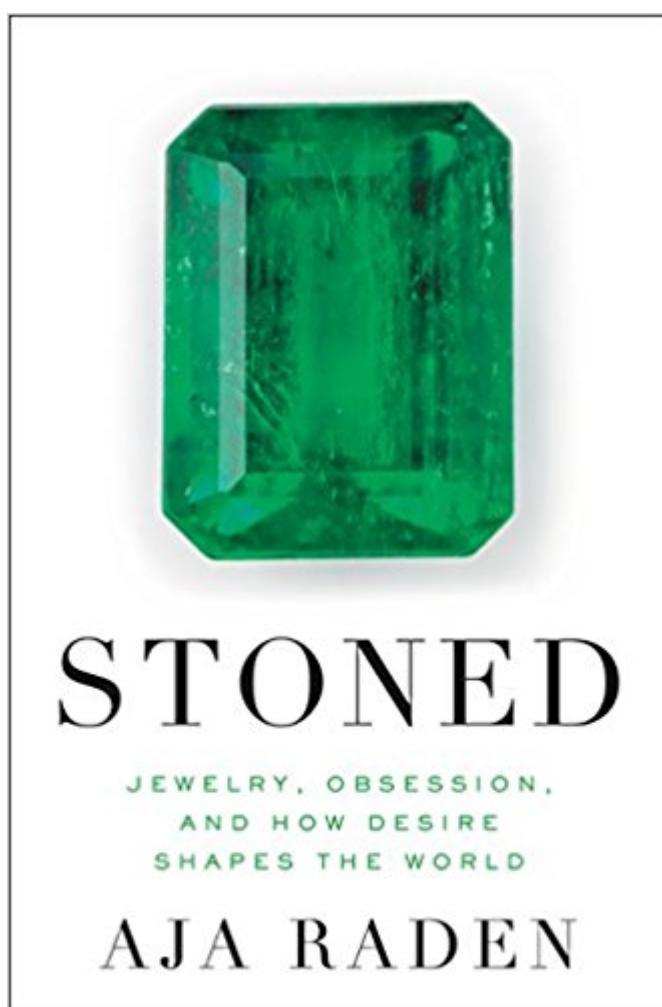


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Stoned: Jewelry, Obsession, And How Desire Shapes The World



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERAs entertaining as it is incisive, *Stoned* is a raucous journey through the history of human desire for what is rare, and therefore precious. What makes a stone a jewel? What makes a jewel priceless? And why do we covet beautiful things? In this brilliant account of how eight jewels shaped the course of history, jeweler and scientist Aja Raden tells an original and often startling story about our unshakeable addiction to beauty and the darker side of human desire. What moves the world is what moves each of us: desire. Jewelry— which has long served as a stand-in for wealth and power, glamor and success— has birthed cultural movements, launched political dynasties, and started wars. Masterfully weaving together pop science and history, *Stoned* breaks history into three categories— Want, Take, and Have— and explains what the diamond on your finger has to do with the GI Bill, why green-tinted jewelry has been exalted by so many cultures, why the glass beads that bought Manhattan for the Dutch were initially considered a fair trade, and how the French Revolution started over a coveted necklace. Studded with lively personalities and fascinating details, *Stoned* tells the remarkable story of our abiding desire for the rare and extraordinary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of December 2015: Most of us have probably heard the expression “diamonds are a girl’s best friend” but have we ever asked ourselves why? Yes, they are sparkly and beautiful, but so is cubic zirconia at a fraction of the price.

Indestructable? Yet another brilliant ad campaign has been telling us for years that “diamonds are forever.” But, in fact, at around 1,400 degrees Fahrenheit a diamond will literally vanish. So what is it really that makes a diamond, an emerald, a Fabergé egg, or even glass beads so desirable? In *Stoned*, Aja Raden sifts through the psychology, neuroscience, and mythos behind the human desire for beautiful things and why we treat some objects as more precious (and therefore valuable) than others. Lest you imagine this as some boring academic tome, fear not—Raden’s cheeky attitude and fascinating anecdotes about everything from Holland’s Tulipomania to various jewel-encrusted royal scandals and dazzling legends make *Stoned* a treasure trove of fun narrative history. --Seira Wilson

“[Stoned] romps through the stories of eight jewels.” (New York Times) “A lively, incisive cultural and social history.” (Kirkus) “History enthusiasts will be entertained by Raden’s knowledge of famous names as well as her narrative approach to the topic. Occasional injections of humor will keep readers interested.” (Library Journal) “Raden’s commentary on the often ugly side of human desire through the ages is consistently captivating, and her witty delivery makes the material shine.” (Publishers Weekly) “Riveting, erudite.” (MORE Magazine) “Raden brings impeccable credentials to the task at hand. She also writes with a blithe and breezy deftness, peppering her narrative with snarky but substantive footnotes that recall the insouciance of Mary Roach. A gem of a study into all that enchants and bewitches.” (Booklist) “Aja Raden must be a kick at dinner parties! She’s also an appealingly informal, effortless storyteller, fascinated by the stories she tells.” (Seattle Times) “a populist history told with humor and great relish. . . . Profanely funny.” (David Duchovny, author of *Holy Cow!*) “Money, power, sexual politics, and jewelry! Isn’t this what makes the world go ‘round? What more could I ask for in a book (Madonna).” “*Stoned* has its own special vitreous luster, just as any emerald worth its salt - an illumination into what makes us irrationally human.” (Minneapolis Star Tribune)

I picked up Aja Raden’s *Stoned* expecting a history of jewelry and was pleasantly surprised to find an in-depth social history of how human perceptions of value, desire and innovation have shaped the modern world. She starts with the beads that bought Manhattan (and in doing so makes a compelling case that it might not have been quite the con we think of it today) and ends with the

wristwatch and its role in making modern warfare, aviation, navigation and personal private time possible. Raden divides the book into three main sections; Want, Take and Have. As someone who, once upon a time, pre-marriage, pre-children, pre-mortgage, had quite the jewel fetish, the first section, in which she links the idea of perceived scarcity to value, was particularly interesting. She calls out the great long con the De Beers diamond cartel ran, the Manhattan beads and the boom and bust of New World emeralds. The next section, Take, covers jewels in the making of Queen Elizabeth I, the diamond necklace of the French revolution and an American's invaluable assistance in funding the fledgling USSR. Cultured Pearls and wristwatches make up the last section. The book is very, very well researched, Raden is a scientist as well a jeweler and scholar of ancient history, and while the book is well written, she uses toggles between a scholarly and colloquial tone quite a bit. She takes odd turns of language (almost whedonesque) which will date the book, or at least this edition. Things like calling the women of the court of Versailles' mean girls', or someone 'doing a solid' for someone else. The first 100 or so pages, I found this quite jarring but by the end of the book I found these phrases almost charming. If you are looking for a history of jewelry this book is probably not what you're looking for. It's first and foremost a social history, but if you want a book on how human nature shaped and is continuing to shape the modern era then I recommend 'Stoned'.

The deeper into this book I got, the more history I read. It wasn't quite what I expected but I liked the historical information and the anecdotes.

This was a delight. An exhilarating combination of gemology and history. Well written.

Informative and an easy read. Lots of reasons for events and a completely new and novel way of interpreting events. Yet it seems so logical that you wonder why you didn't see it before reading this book.

Very fascinating historical info and gave me a whole new perspective on jewels.

If you've read your history, you already know most of this. I consider the author as having highly questionable morals, or, most probably none at all. P. S. I have always hated diamonds, and never owned any. People's greed is always their own downfall, as is making money off the dead.

Well written, well researched. Says some important things about psychology, power, and greed.

I read all the time and this is one of the very best books I've read in years! Hard to believe but the author makes the history of jewels into a page turner. I hardly ever review any of my purchases but I couldn't let this book go without a rave review. I was so sorry when I finished it. It's a must read

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