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The Rap Year Book takes readers on a journey that begins in 1979, widely regarded as the moment rap became recognized as part of the cultural and musical landscape, and comes right up to the present. Shea Serrano deftly pays homage to the most important song of each year. Serrano also examines the most important moments that surround the history and culture of rap music—from artists' backgrounds to issues of race, the rise of hip-hop, and the struggles among its major players—both personal and professional. Covering East Coast and West Coast, famous rapper feuds, chart toppers, and show stoppers, *The Rap Year Book* is an in-depth look at the most influential genre of music to come out of the last generation.

Complete with infographics, lyric maps, hilarious and informative footnotes, portraits of the artists, and short essays by other prominent music writers, *The Rap Year Book* is both a narrative and illustrated guide to the most iconic and influential rap songs ever created.

The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song From Every Year Since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed Details

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Author : Shea Serrano

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Neel Amin says

While it was a great read, it wasn't exactly what I was expecting. Ended up being more of a history of Rap rather than a discussion/debate on why certain songs were picked over others as the most influential song of each year. Would have appreciated a list of which songs were in consideration for each individual year.

Katie Florida says

I was completely enthralled throughout. Serrano's writing is hilarious, witty, and amazing.

Marc says

This started out as such a great and fascinating book. In the early years, it talked about the history of a song and its importance. Yet as the years went on, it would talk about that less about that instead being filled with antidotes from the author or pop culture references that had nothing to do with the song. When that happened, the book started to lose my interest.

I feel like this happened because the author wasn't born in the early years or didn't grow up with the songs. We're about the same age and while I don't hold that against him, he should have been more focused.

That said, I still think it was a good read and worth it. However, I feel this book would have been better as the basis of a VH1 documentary perhaps hosted by Ice-T or various influence people in the rap game. In fact, they could have started a whole series.

Time to go make a playlist involving with these songs.

Brandon Forsyth says

I've always been confused that there's not a greater crossover between my literary friends and my hip-hop friends. Both rely on a love of language, the way words can twist and stretch and hit, and both are about storytelling, about immersion and experience and emotion. Also: puns.

And I have longed for the day where a writer talented enough to bridge those worlds could write the book that explains the joyful mischief and soulful depths of great hip hop to an audience that hasn't got it yet. Shea Serrano hasn't quite taken us there. But I do think he's found the blueprint (ahem) with this book, which is billed as a chronological look at how hip hop grew and mutated and evolved, year-by-year, from 1979 to the present. It's a great structure, and if it was a bit more fleshed out than it is here, it would be a truly elegant solution. The problem lies in Serrano's style: he's the kind of writer who will tell you an extended metaphor

or personal anecdote to highlight a point but tell you to trust him, guys, he's getting to it and when he does it will be hilarious and if any of you are getting antsy then just calm down because that's the type of book this is, get it? And that's fine, I even enjoy it in pieces, but to tell a whole book like this while trying to be authoritative cuts two ways. It undercuts the importance of the thing you've selected as being worthy of talking about (although Serrano is definitely on to something with his rebuttal section in each chapter, where another writer lays out an alternate choice for that year's most important song), and it's also guaranteed to turn off people who don't already know what he's talking about. So, no, this isn't the great "hip hop is art" book that I've been hoping for. But the illustrations are amazing and are all-time top-5 good, and the song selections are remarkably on point, and Serrano's explanation of the evolution of hip-hop reminds me of when I was 16 and my co-worker made me a 'Hip Hop History' mixtape and basically my life hasn't been the same since, and really isn't that all I was looking for?

Shenanitims says

Ugg, I was gifted this over Christmas by a buddy who already had a copy. (He wrote one of the rebuttals.) It's an interesting book in theory (picking the best rap song by year since 1979) and one I should've loved considering how often I reference EgoTrip's list of greatest rap singles found in their Book of Rap Lists. Unfortunately it falls apart in execution.

It loses points right off the bat for having "Style Maps." Basically clip art used by Serrano to pad out the length of his book. Is reading too tough for you? Well now you have pictures to do the lifting for you!

Next, Shea Serrano is a pretty poor author. Here's a quote of him breaking one of the most elementary rules of composition: "Let me tell you quickly about the beginning of Native Tongues, because that's important, but let me be as cursory as possible without being detrimental." There's so much wrong that I don't even know where to begin here.

I guess my biggest complaint is how needlessly includes himself into every story. Here, instead of "The Native Tongues was an important and polarizing rap movement during this period that..." he's instead framed the discussion around himself. Again. This comes after he decides that he's had enough of this "researching thing" and recounts a pointless story from his childhood rather than discuss Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." I guess he felt two "Style Maps" in one chapter would be gauche. decided to be cursory so he can fit in an aforementioned clip art "Style Map."

Don't get me wrong, I know it's tough nowadays for journalists to make a living. So kudos to Serrano for creating a shtick and sticking with it, no matter how frustrating it is to read. I appluad his ingenuity, and give one star just because it's fun to get reacquainted with (most of) these songs.

Kady says

I loved this so much. I've always been a fan of the Grantland style: definitively ranking subjective things in such specific ways. So detailed, so funny. I laughed out loud and also cried at one point (during the chapter about "Same Love"). Bummed that the only woman really highlighted was Nicki (her verse on "Monster" IS iconic), like where's Kim? Queen Latifah? Salt 'n Pepa? MISSY?! But again, subjective. Super fun read. Highly recommended.

Benoit Lelièvre says

This book raised as many questions as it taught me things, but in a good way.

Now that I know which song was most important every year since hip-hop became a music genre in collective consciousness, I want to know: who were its most important artists? There are none nominated more than two times, but West-Coast hip-hop had an eleven years run where it was at the forefront of the genre's innovation, so what does that mean? Is Dr. Dre the most important rapper of all-time, at least statistically. He was nominated by Serrano in 1988 with NWA, in 1992 for "Ain't Nutin' but a G Thang" and for his iconic collaboration (and personal favorite of mine) California Love in 1996. THIS NEEDS TO BE DISCUSSED.

What's a little more clear to me after reading THE RAP YEAR BOOK is how much the genre evolved over the years, found its place in mainstream music with an image it wanted to project and evolved past it over the last decade, thanks to self-conscious artists like Kanye West and Kendrick Lamar. Fun book. I could've read two hundred more pages on the subject. Looking forward to Serrano's basketball tome in October.

Frank says

As the title says, not necessarily the best song from each year but the most important--what song changed the game, made a statement, or announced a major new voice. Overall, real solid choices and excellent perspective on the evolution and lasting impact of the genre.

Okay, here's one I would have picked differently: 1995 ("Shook Ones Pt. II" over "Dear Mama").

Annie says

First book I finished in 2016, what a great start to the year.

Marcella says

Like all good music writing, it is very funny, overflowing with love for rap music, history, and culture, and imbued with a healthy and sensible fear of and love for DMX.

Mickey Kowaleski says

if you don't like this book FOH

David Ranney says

SPIN: Do you consider yourselves prophets?

CHUCK D: I guess so. We're bringing a message that's the same shit that all the other guys that I mentioned in the song have either been killed or deported: Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, all the way up to Farrakhan and Malcolm X.

What is a prophet? One that comes with a message from God to try to free people. My people are enslaved within their own minds.

Rap serves as the communication that they don't get for themselves to make them feel good about themselves. Rap is black America's TV station. It gives a whole perspective of what exists and what black life is about. And black life doesn't get the total spectrum of information through anything else. They don't get it through print because kids won't pick up no magazines or no books, really, unless it got pictures of rap stars. They don't see themselves on TV. Number two, black radio stations have neglected giving out information.

SPIN: On what?

CHUCK D: On anything. They give out information that white America gives out. Black radio does not challenge information coming from the structure into the black community, does not interpret what's happening around the world in the benefit of us. It interprets it the same way that Channel 7 would. Where it should be, the black station interprets information from Channel 7 and says, "This is what Channel 7 was talking about. Now as far as we're concerned . . ." We don't have that. The only thing that gives the straight-up facts on how the black youth feels is a rap record. It's the number one communicator, force, and source, in America right now. Black kids are listening to rap records right now more than anything, and they're taking it word for word.

The writing is more conversational than compelling. The author gets in his own way with banal stories and a sarcastic tone that undercuts any passion he may have for the subject.

Still, by hitting most of rap's inflection points, it does piece together a memorable history. The book's success comes from its limited scope, making digestible what was, to me, an unfamiliar subject.

Enjoyable.

Maria Lewis says

One of the best pieces of pop culture writing from one of the best pop culture writers currently working.

Shea's work is like creative fuel because it makes you want to be better, funnier, wittier, smarter, more insightful. This was a gorgeous combination of hip hop history lessons and deeeeep fangirl/boy rantings, which is precisely what I would want a Rap Year Book to be. Also, the illustrations and charts are GORGEOUS. Would kill for a few wall-sized posters of these.

Raphael Harel says

The Rap Year Book by Shea Serrano was, as an authoritative read on the history of rap, a decent read until 1998, until it completely fizzles out of control when Serrano starts to require forming his own opinion.

Major themes, and driving forces were unforgivably omitted - notably the role of the female rapper as an antithesis to the flamboyance and brutality of gangster rap (see- The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill), picking Lifestyle (?!?) as best song over Kendrick Lamar's ode to breaking free from the hardships of the hood in "i", or any real explanation of the effect of the internet on rap - be it through pop culture or the creation of bedroom rappers (bar Serrano's vague reference with In Da Club).

Yet I kept reading it, playing the songs in the background trying to find a justifiable explanation to many of his fair opinions. Instead? We are served a conversation from Serrano you'd expect in a college dorm, where he himself doubts the vast majority of what he's saying, ideas flowing off tangents, and lines do an injustice to one of the most poetic forms of music.

But looking beyond his major thematic omissions of rap history, his disappointing deliverance of initially good ideas of songs- and even missing the whole plot of Kanye's rap-game-shunning "Monster". I respect Serrano for being one of the first authors to do this. He manages to create humour at times, provides some of the most stunning pop artwork, and has the humility and wisdom to admit the inevitable difficulty (if not impossibility) of creating such a yearbook.

Much like the MCs of the past who tried styles knowing they'd be in the wrong quite often, Serrano does the same hoping to extend our world's view on music's rebellious darling child- Rap music.

Ethan Scholl says

Quintessential example of why I wish Goodreads had a 3.5 star rating. Excellent primer to hip-hop for the casual fan, introduces the reader to most of the major players and narratives in the genre's history which tends to seem more like the world presented in comic books or action movies than real life. Serrano's writing is specific and sporadic in the best ways, jumping around between objective history, personal opinion and a smattering of other details from his subjects' lives and his own.

The prose is at times infuriating, though- he repeats the same turns of phrase over and over and constantly introduces sections using the format of: "This is a thing, and it may not be an important thing, but it's definitely a thing that happened, so here it is." (One who has read the book may mistake that quote I made up off the top of my head for an actual quote from the book). It's cute at first but gets grating chapter after chapter. I mean, imagine every four pages reading that sentence... "This is not a perfect analogy, but it's not a bad analogy, and I like it, so I decided to make it."

Chose a four over a three because it is a book I'd recommend almost anyone reading despite some minor flaws due to it's overwhelming warmth and enthusiasm and its masterful simplification of the breadth of an entire history of an artist and their song down to a couple pages, and because the illustrations are gorgeous.
