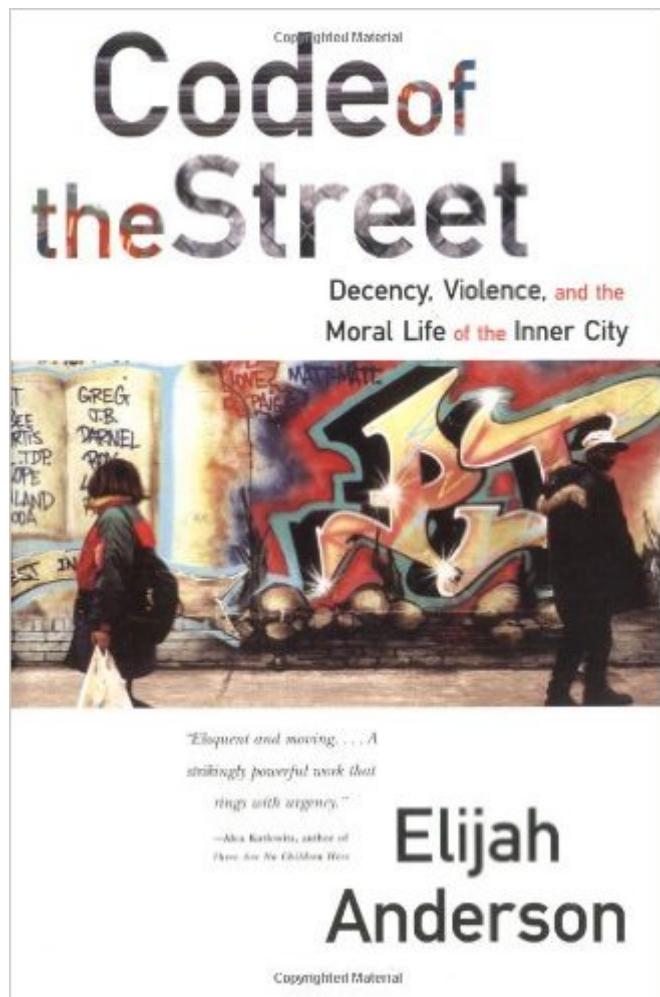


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Code Of The Street: Decency, Violence, And The Moral Life Of The Inner City



Synopsis

Unsparing and important. . . . An informative, clearheaded and sobering book. • Jonathan Yardley, Washington Post (1999 Critic's Choice) Inner-city black America is often stereotyped as a place of random violence, but in fact, violence in the inner city is regulated through an informal but well-known code of the street. This unwritten set of rules • based largely on an individual's ability to command respect • is a powerful and pervasive form of etiquette, governing the way in which people learn to negotiate public spaces. Elijah Anderson's incisive book delineates the code and examines it as a response to the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, to the stigma of race, to rampant drug use, to alienation and lack of hope.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm a black man just in case many of you did not know this. I enjoy being a black man and would not want to be anything else. Of course I also love being autistic so yeah I'm weird. Anyways I have many friends of different ethnic backgrounds and they ask me to explain the inner city codes of the street. You need to know I am clueless about the inner city urban life of today. The inner city West Side Baltimore neighborhood of Rosemont that I called home over 50 years ago is not the ravaged war torn Rosemont that exists today. My inner city Rosemont childhood home was a strong mesh of neighbors who watched out for each other, owned our homes, had nice cars and children that knew and practiced respect with every adult they encountered. Drugs were somthing bad kids used in nasty neighborhoods we were insulated from experiencing when I grew up. I grew up in nice places

to volunteer and nice hospitals that took our private insurance. I went to hospitals filled with people like me who were autistic nerds and geeks who were clueless about society in general. About inner city urban street thug life and the mentality that goes with it we knew nothing. Towards the time I became an adult drugs were only just beginning to destroy my childhood home turning it from a secluded enclave to a drug infested hell hole. In my day the code of the street was being a good person, respectful honest and hard working. I am no better than the thugs of the street but, I am indeed a different type of black man than those I see infesting urban ghettos. I regularly ride the horrible public transit bus system in Baltimore, Maryland. I earn a spectacular living but I am also unable to drive due to my autism and many other disabilities.

Anderson has several points to make in this somewhat dense and redundant book. These points are important enough, however, for it to be a must-read for everyone interested in understanding 'why "they" live like that.' The first point is that most people in the inner-city are 'decent' -- they adhere to the mainstream middle-class values of hard work and playing by the rules. The 'street' element, is in the minority. However, it is a situation in which the minority rules. Even people who are or strive to be 'decent' must know the code of the street, and in some situations be willing to abide by it, if they want to be able to survive. The second point is that most of society is unwilling or unable to distinguish the 'decent' from the 'street'. We put the entire community into the same negative category of 'street.' There are plenty of people -- especially young men -- who are, Anderson argues, 'going for bad' just as a defense posture. The problem is that once these people adopt the appearance, language, and demeanor of the 'street,' many outsiders no longer recognize or accept them as decent. They can't get a legitimate job, so they turn to drugs or other criminal activity to earn a living. They're damned if they do and damned if they don't. The third point is that the code of the street emerged because industry abandoned American cities, and people who could afford to move out to the suburbs did, leaving behind a wasteland where even law enforcement is seen as unresponsive and unhelpful. The inner city is like the Wild West, in which vigilante justice fills the void left by law and order. The code of the street is a necessary alternative -- if you can't count on the police to protect you, then you have to be able to protect yourself.

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