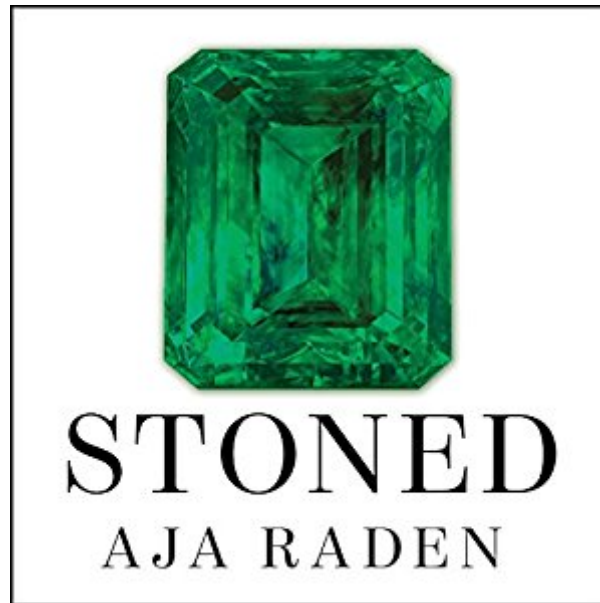


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# Stoned: Jewelry, Obsession, And How Desire Shapes The World



## Synopsis

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, glamour 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

This is a surprisingly interesting non-fiction book that will appeal to a lot of readers for many reasons. There is so very much to know about the fascinating world of Gemology ... from basic "stone hunting & collecting" to its historical roots. The author has done an excellent job of both researching and presenting the subject in a compelling way throughout this work. My Father's "hobby" was lapidary (cutting gemstones). His lifelong interest provoked my own from an early age

and it became a personal undertaking which I now devote many rewarding hours a week to in my own retirement. There is much more to this subject and book than most might imagine. If you ever have had a bit of curiosity about gems and valuable stones, this book will answer most questions as well as pique your interest in other intriguing ways.

This book will appeal to anyone who likes history and the behind the scenes history, too. I like the point made that value is perception. Though I'm not sure that the argument extends to pearls. The whole story of Mikimoto was entertaining. His goal was to make pearls available to every woman. But last time I checked pearls (and today they are all cultured) have retained their value, and I agree with the author, I most likely have never seen a real pearl. That said I used to know Ed Henderson, Head of Mineralogy at the Smithsonian (Natural History Museum). I had the privilege few have experienced in seeing some of the jewels he was assigned to collect. There are drawers and drawers of donations from those in power.. like a exquisite emerald and diamond bracelet donated by a Tzar, and of course the more recognizable Hope Diamond. . I remember he pulled out a crown made of tourquoise. Ed put it on my head... it was heavy. It was commissioned by the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. I mention her because she is a prominent historical figure in the story of Marie Antoinette. My interest waned a little when I got to the story of watches, but over all it was entertaining and well researched. A fun read.

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'.

Aja Raden is exactly my kind of writer -- you know you're in good hands. So smart, so witty, she might intimidate old-school stuffed shirts because she's not apologizing for her own style, a hoot and a holler if you like it. And I do. "Putting the ick in Catholic," she remarked about the Inquisition. I mean, she's memorable, brilliant, and an easy read. There's a touch of high academia mixed with People Magazine mixed with insider gossip mixed with serious thinking. You go, girl. They're gonna put you down because they've never seen anything like you. Oh well. It's hard to be a trailblazer.

It was well researched with extensive footnotes. But even better, it was an insightful, entertaining observation of how historic, world-class jewels influence economics, national economies, and how we value and view them over time in our lives. My husband and I found it intriguing.

Probably everything I have to say has been said already. For a non-history person I found myself instantly pulled into history, following the tortuous paths of some of the world's most elegant stones. Written in a concise but totally readable manner, presenting what might be very dry material handled by a less skilled writer, this book has rapidly become one of my favorites. Forget that I buy stones, or that I know very very little even so about them, this is a wonderfully written, extremely interesting book

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