

# IT WAS WRITTEN

A conversation with the woman whose pen has shaped Jay-Z's new book and the history of this very publication.

Interview by SHAYNA D



**No** other entity can preserve and curate *The Source's* legacy better than the brand itself. While we take great pride in having introduced some of today's top music artists (Eminem, Biggie, Common), we're equally as proud of being the starting point for some of today's top journalists. With that said, we had no choice but to salute the co-author of Jay-Z's new book *Decoded*—dream hampton—the very first female editor to work for *The Source*.

The 38-year-old pioneer began her *Source* era in ironic fashion. The self-described feminist penned a record review for Eazy-E's female version of N.W.A, H.W.A (Hoes With Attitudes). The review was not favorable. Eazy called dream and threatened her life—flattery for some journalists (unless you live in Russia). For two succeeding decades, hampton has subscribed to immersion journalism with historical results—it's become her signature style. She's befriended Hip-Hop legends. They trust her with their stories.



It's why Diddy hired dream to write his memoir. Why her good friend Shawn Carter allowed her to pen his autobiography, *The Black Book*—the read we had been most anticipating. That's a sore subject, though, and this space is to honor her latest work with Hov. Ms. dream hampton, please allow us to decode you.  
—*The Source*

**Did Jay come to you like, "I have an idea for this book breaking down my lyrics," or vice versa?**

When he didn't want to turn in *The Black Book* after I completed it, he said he had an idea for another book and it's called *Decoded*, where he'll break down his lyrics. The problem he had with an autobiography...he told *Rolling Stone*, "I almost passed out imagining someone having my life in their hands." So he

killed it. He paid me, but was like, "I want to do this other book, *Decoded*." Then that was it. I didn't hear [from him about it]. Then April of '09, he felt like it was the time. I got the deal for *The Black Book*, but he already had this [*Decoded* deal] in place. So we began that. He hit me in April

and we began last summer. People think that this book took a lot of years to write, but they're combining both books. We started *Decoded* the summer of '09 and finished it in the summer of 2010.

**So it wasn't like you had to come up with a completely new story. You guys already had the material: the lyrics.**

Right. He does tell some of the backstories, so some of the stuff from *The Black Book* was re-purposed. But he's telling stories that inspired the rhymes. Like the joint he did with Panjabi MC ["Beware of the Boys"]. He talks about being at a club in London and hearing it and thinking, "This is the best war music track I've ever heard." Then waking up the next day, finding Panjabi, and having this thing to say about the war.

**In some of your old NPR interviews—specifically, one dated 2007—you mentioned that you guys were working on turning *The Black Book* into a screenplay. Is that still a consideration?**

Yeah...uhhh, I don't want to talk about that. To this day I get bothered with *Black Book* questions. I don't consider the book a failure in any way. It was truly like that Buddhist saying: *It's about the journey, not the destination*. I had never written a book before. I thought it was a long-ass article and it friggin' wasn't; it's a book. Finishing that was an accomplishment for me. But as far as ego, yeah, I would want to be in Barnes & Noble and Borders [as] Jay is doing his thing. People aren't really looking at him. They're like, "Hmmm, I wonder what happened with dream hampton and that book." So I had those moments, like, "Yo, was it terrible? What the fuck?" He said it wasn't, and I believed him. But you know ego is tied to our insecurity.

**Instead of us talking about *The Black Book*, let's discuss the effect it being shelved had on you.**

*The Black Book*, see it was supposed to come out with *The*

**"DIDDY SCREWS EVERYTHING UP AND THEN COMES BACK FROM GREAT TRAGEDY. HE'S DONE THAT SEVERAL TIMES, WHEREAS JAY MAKES THE RIGHT MOVES."**

*Black Album* [but Jay's] publicity machine kicked in. So I learned from that. So much of the material from *The Black Book* is in *The Black Album*, which to me is one of his most

personal albums, and not just because of "December 4th," but the entire album. He couldn't have made that album without having worked on the book. We were doing stuff like interviewing his mom. When do you ever ask your parents about their marriage? You might ask your parents, "Where did you guys meet?" A lot of people don't even ask their parents that, let alone detailed questions about their marriage. So Jay learned a lot [too].

**Jay learned a lot about himself throughout this process, but is there anything you learned while writing *Decoded*?**

Of course. Like, Puff hired me to write his book during the trial in 2001, and we still have like four hours of stuff on tape, and this is 10 years later. Of course, Puff is gonna have amazing stories. Puff has the more classic hero's journey. He screws *everything* up and then comes back from great tragedy. He's done that several times, whereas Jay makes the right moves.

**Which is on full display with their public personas.**

Exactly. It's not like anyone ever knew who Jay was dating before Beyoncé, whereas we have this whole messy thing happening with Puff's love life. He just lives more dramatic. Also, Jay truly is, like, cool. It's cool, like he's a great guy and all that, but he's cool in that he's cold to the touch. Here really gets things done. He calls himself one of the most productive lazy people. 'Cause when he's not doing anything, he's not doing *anything*. But when he's in that "I'm focused, man"

mode, he gets really focused. He's like, "Come over for breakfast," and you get there, and breakfast is ready and he's ready to work. I haven't had that experience with other people. ☐

For an extended version of dream hampton's exclusive *Source* interview, go to [thesource.com](http://thesource.com).

