

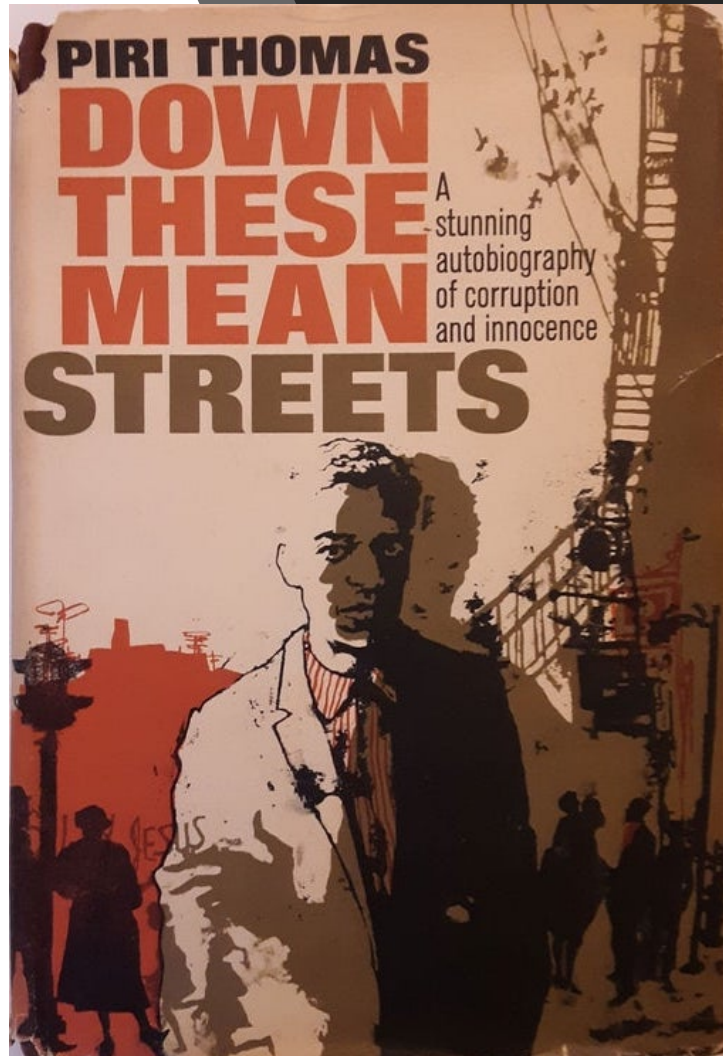


**SPAN322:  
“North of the Río Grande”  
US Latino/Chicano  
Literature**

*Down These Mean Streets IIa*  
February 25, 2020

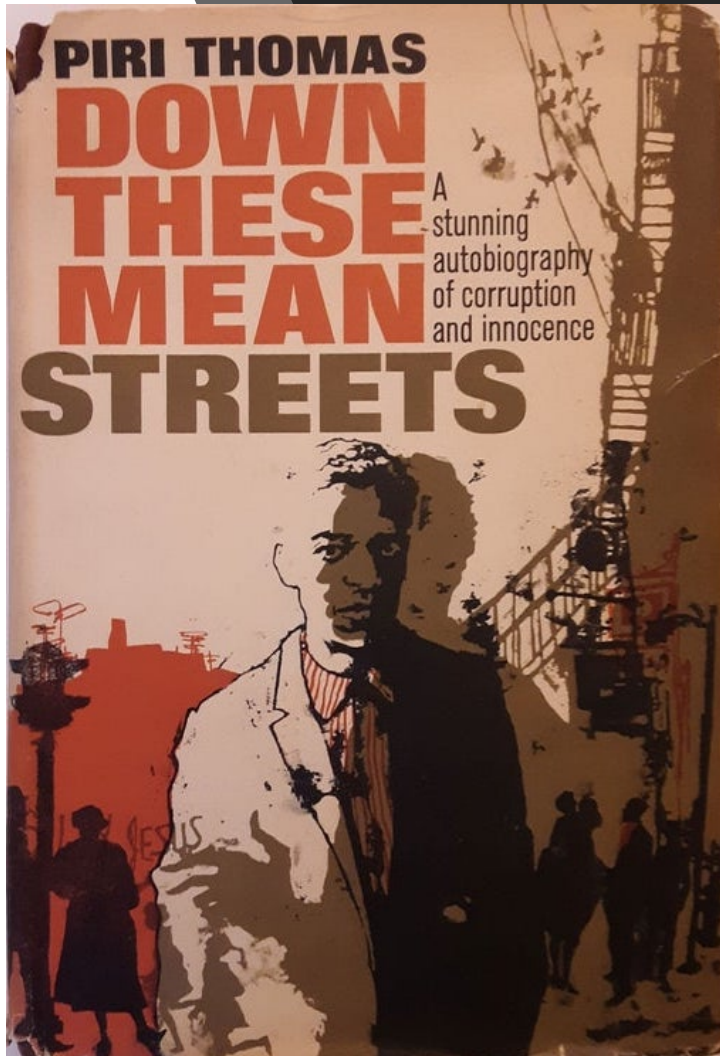
**DOWN THESE MEAN  
STREETS**

# *Down These Mean Streets*

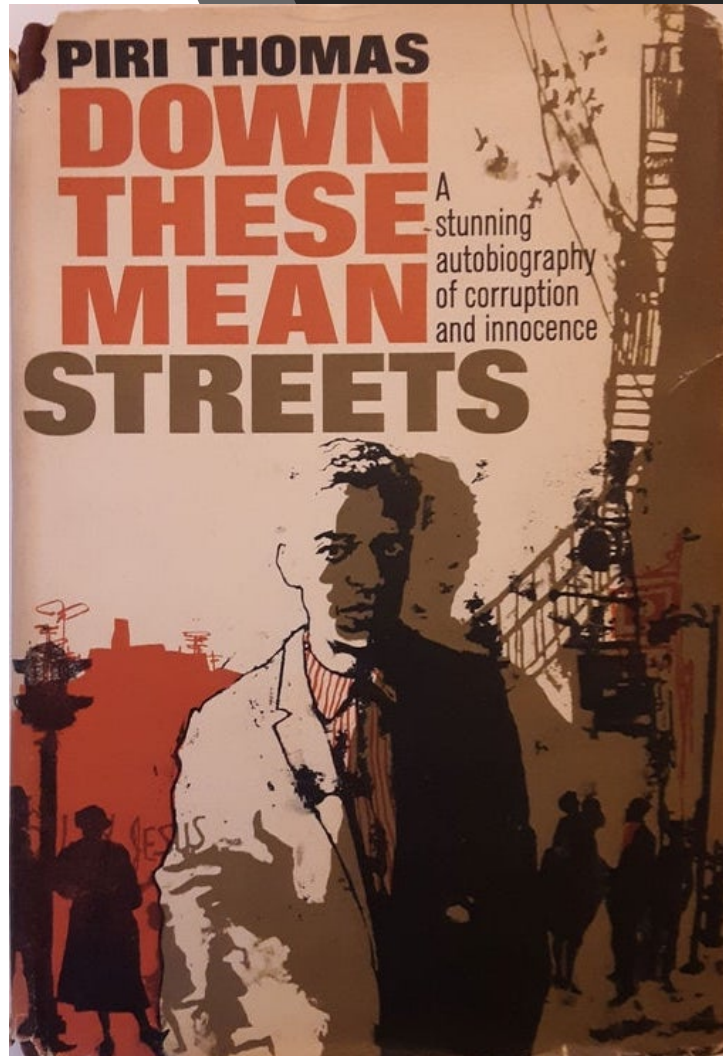


- By Piri Thomas (1928-2011), a key figure in the “Nuyorican” movements of 1960s and 1970s
- A memoir / autobiography, published 1967
- Deals, among other things, with Thomas’s racial ambiguity: perceived as black, he identifies as Latino
- “A classic portrait of ghetto life”

# *Down These Mean Streets*



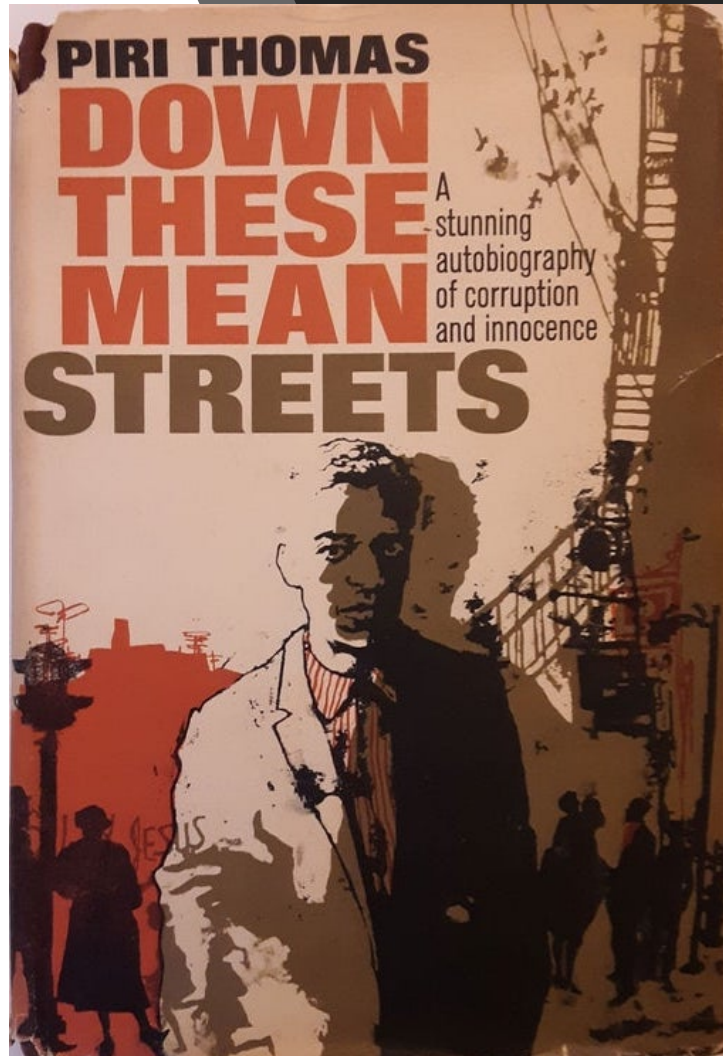
- What or who is the narrator? How does his sense of identity or belonging change?
- How does the urban setting affect the ways identity is produced and perceived?
- What is the relationship between different minorities? What conflicts or tensions does the book highlight?
- How does the law figure? What is Thomas's relationship to authority or the state?
- What is "heart"? How does affect play out in this book?



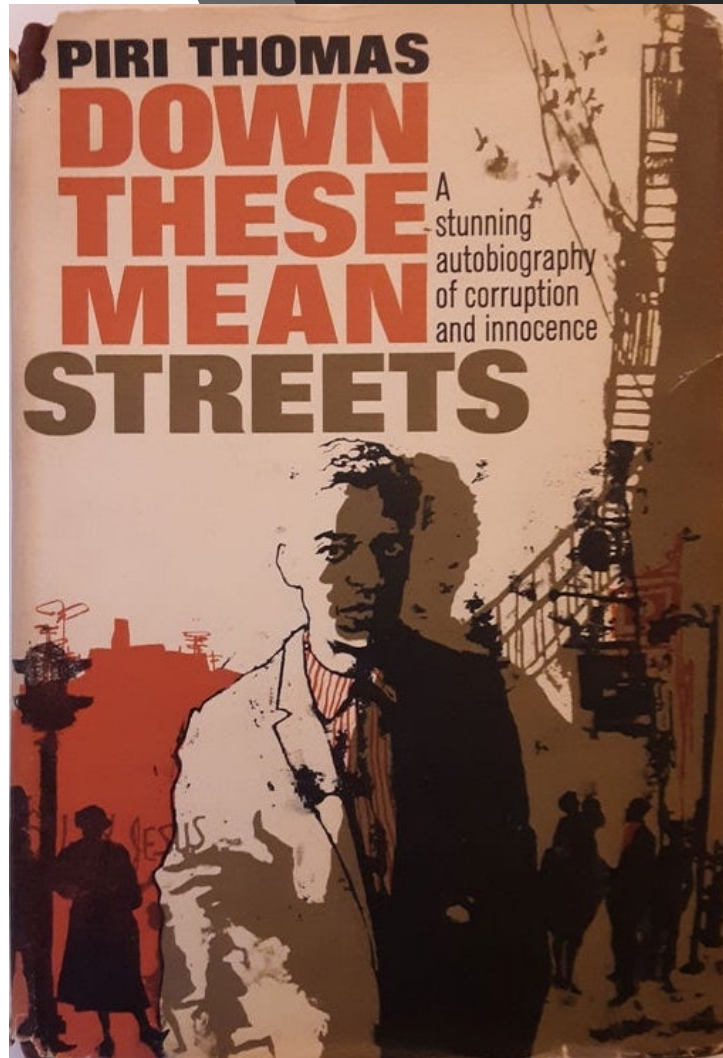
## *Down These Mean Streets*

- What kind of book is this? What expectations does it raise in the reader?
- Not a novel. Though it is a narrative.
- A memoir or autobiography: story of “I”
- A coming-of-age story; *Bildungsroman*.
- A quest narrative?
- What, if anything, does Piri learn?
- How, if at all, does he change?
- What, if anything, does not change?

# *Down These Mean Streets*

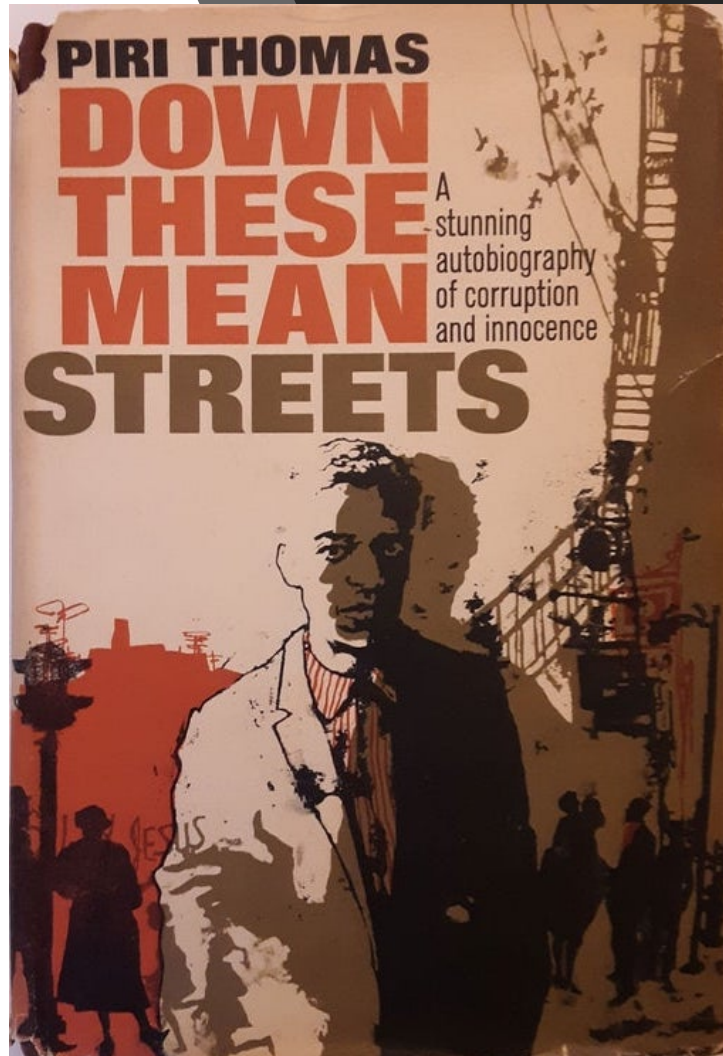


- Who or what is Piri?
- How does ethnicity relate to race here?
- How does gender figure?
- What about religion?
- To what extent is he the agent of his own downfall?
- To what extent is he an agent?



## *Down These Mean Streets*

“The world was getting tighter and tighter to wear. It was like I was outgrowing it. My God, the only thing I could do that the hacks couldn’t stop was think. And I wished I could stop thinking about the free side. *The free side—dig that!* In the beginning I’d said ‘outside’; now I said ‘free side,’ just like a con. Well, wasn’t I a con? I guessed I was.” (254)



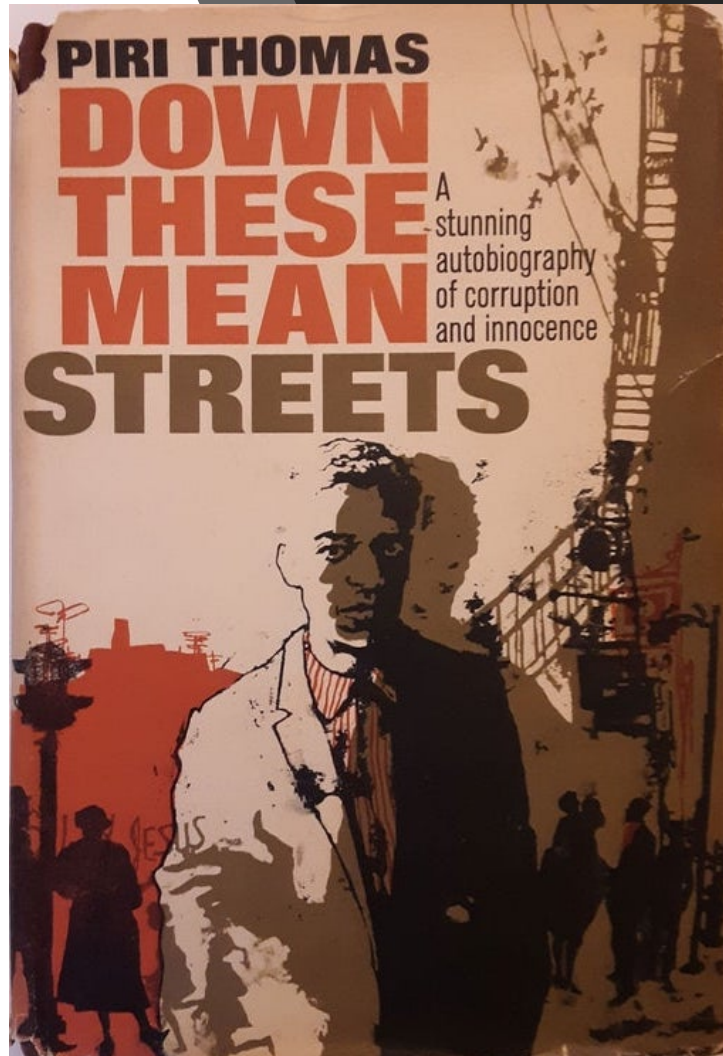
## *Down These Mean Streets*

“At the entrance to the big yard I met Young Turk. He searched my face, looking for anger and, finding none, he said [. . .]

‘Ow, but don’t let them fuckin’ things bug you. [. . .] You gotta get a break. Dig, man, you’ve been re-ha-bi-li-tated, like, uh, you’re a changed cat, a credit to the human race.’

I smiled at him and thought, *Jesus, buddy, you don’t know how right you are. I ain’t ever gonna be the same. I’m changed all right.*” (306)





## *Down These Mean Streets*

“I breathed in the air; it was the same air that I had breathed as a kid. The garbage-filled backyards were the same. Man, everything was the same; only I had changed. I wasn’t the grubby-faced Puerto Rican kid any more; I was a grubby-faced Puerto Rican man. I am an *hombre* that wants to be better. Man! I don’t want to be nuttin’. I want to be somebody. I want to laugh clean. I want to smile for real, not because I have to...” (322)

*“I should have known, nothing is run the same, nothing stays the same. You can’t make yesterday come back today.” (326)*

**MID-TERM**

# Mid-Term Concepts

- Community
- Language
- The Law
- Memory
- Territory

# Mid-Term

- In the exam, you will have a choice of three of these concepts, and pick one of them to write an essay about two or more of the texts you have read.
- E.g.: “Analyze the meaning and significance of ‘Community’ in two or more of the texts we have read so far.”
- You may bring in notes (a “cheat sheet”), maximum one side of Letter size paper.

**NEXT STEPS**

# For Thursday

- Bring laptop (if you have one) to class.
- Make two edits on Wikipedia.
- Write brief comments on two of your classmates' blog posts. Especially on Blogger, make sure you sign them.