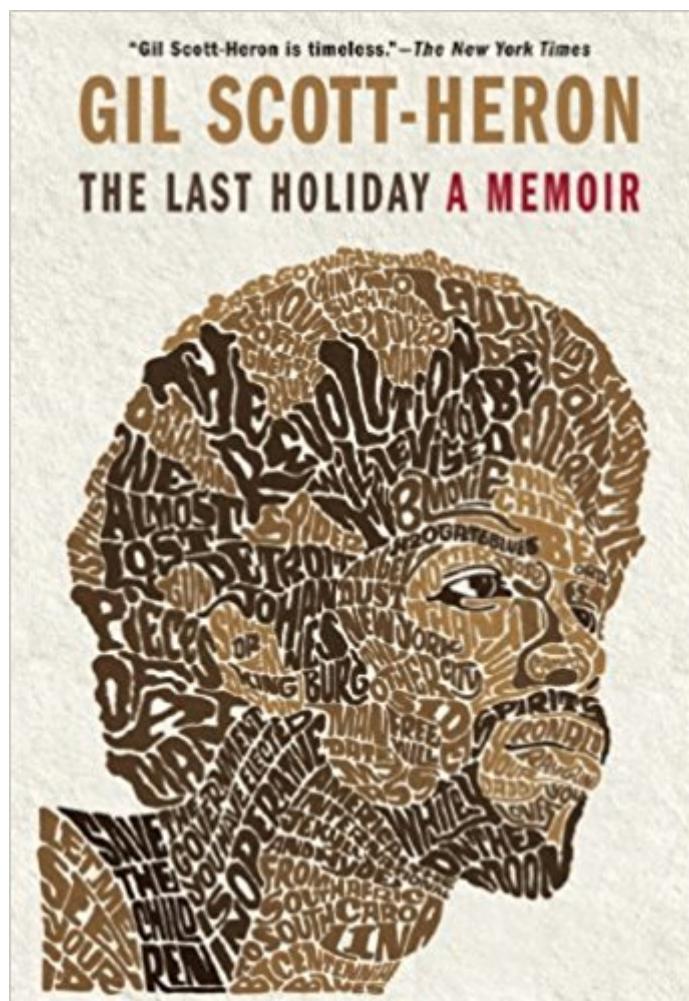


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The Last Holiday



Synopsis

The stunning memoir of Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner Gil Scott-Heron, *The Last Holiday* has been praised for bringing back to life one of the most important voices of the last fifty years. Now in paperback, *The Last Holiday* provides a remarkable glimpse into Scott-Heron's life and times, from his humble beginnings to becoming one of the most influential artists of his generation. The memoir climaxes with a historic concert tour in which Scott-Heron's band opened for Stevie Wonder. The Hotter than July tour traveled cross-country from late 1980 through early 1981, drumming up popular support for the creation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. King's birthday, January 15, was marked with a massive rally in Washington. A fitting testament to the achievements of an extraordinary man, *The Last Holiday* provides a moving portrait of Scott-Heron's relationship with his mother, personal recollections of Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, John Lennon, Michael Jackson, Clive Davis, and other musical figures, and a compelling narrative vehicle for Scott-Heron's insights into the music industry, the civil rights movement, governmental hypocrisy, and our wider place in the world. *The Last Holiday* confirms Scott-Heron as a fearless truth-teller, a powerful artist, and an inspiring observer of his times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The only word I could use to describe finishing this book was "bereft". I felt as though I had spent some wonderful quality time with an old friend. And he was. I grew up with "In the Bottle" and "Winter in America" and "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Gil Scott-Heron was a crazy good WordMeister. That's why I recommend you read this book slowly. In the same category as Dylan's

Chronicles, Patti Smith's Just Kids, now add the Last Holiday. Gil was probably too smart for his own well being. His loss will be long lamented.

The book is a must read for all Gil Scott Heron fans, activists, musicians and those who struggle to be human. Contrary to the book's title, it is really more of a memoir of his life and career than it is one of the music tour he did with Stevie Wonder to make MLK's birthday a national holiday. Though vivid, satirical and poetic as his rap and music was, he often leaves the reader hangin in spots- Like he expresses his annoyance with having to pay \$300 for a Lamaze class when his wife, Brenda is pregnant with their daughter Gia but then tells you nothing of the birth. He has the courage to disclose the perplexing encounter with his fiance, Lurma who disappeared and broke off the engagement without a word and then shows up with their son at his doorstep two years later insisting he promise not to tell anyone they have a son. He claims he ruminated about this after promising her but gives you no clue as to why he accepted this insane request or basically abandons his son Rumal til 10 years later. Although you admire the young, ambitious Gil in his support of his mother in the projects of the Bronx, his love for his proud grandmother who stood up to racists, his travels with the brothas on the road, his activist work at Lincoln U, and in his tenacious climb to creative and academic success, he neglects highlights of his work of the Jamaican Sunsplash Festival, the campaign to free Gary Tyler, the worldwide Freedom Fest in 1988 to free Mandela, and the success of demobilizing US nuke power through his work with Musicians for Safe Energy among others. With the exception of Stevie Wonder, and a bit on Brenda and Lurma, he barely touches on the impact of his relationships and the last 20 years of his life are barely mentioned including his bouts with cocaine and alcohol. Friendships growing up and in adulthood are given short shrift even for his best high school friend Fred Baron; there is no mention of his break with Brian, his relations with girlfriend, Monique in the late 90s, and his daughter, Raquiyah is not acknowledged at all. Only at the end does he seem to really get real in discussing the traumas of his stroke and death of his mother. You need to read between the lines to realize that his proclivity for touching the power of human emotion and overcoming the disunity in humanity in his music seems proportional to his difficulty managing his own emotional pain to overcome what appears to be a life long struggle against alienation that he feared to confront. As he said "I was always running". At least his latest album, I'm New Here, especially the touching song, My Cloud, suggests that near the end of his life, he may have realized that running by pushing people away was not worth it. The book also shows his shocking refusal to believe that he is a decent person up til the very end of the book and what may have tragically been for most or all of his life.

Unfortunately, even our most esteemed idols can fall hard and have feet of clay. But, overall the reader will not be disappointed with his vivid and poetic memoir in which he inspires us to carry on despite hard knocks and encourages us that the wheel of life will provide opportunities if we faithfully apply ourselves to our endeavors.

I have been a fan of Gil Scott-Heron for all of my adult life. So, just to have these remembrances of Gil is exhilarating. It is not really a memoir, but more of a look at events and times of his early career. The central event of this book is the tour he did with Stevie Wonder. There is discussion of his childhood, teen years, and the beginning of his musical journey. The missing parts are of his later life, it would have been interesting to hear Gil in his humorous poetic language explain his darker days. However, having said that, the poetic interludes and his use of language in this book highlights why he became such a favorite of people who loved messages in their music. I'm sure a biography of Gil is on the way, but I'm not sure it will surpass this collection of thoughts and writing from the man himself. I was listening to "Winter in America" as I was reading this book and that added to the magic that was Gil Scott-Heron. Kudos to the editors for putting this together. Well done! Readers take advantage and enjoy the journey.

I was looking forward to reading this very, very much. I've been a huge Gil Scott-Heron fan for decades, primarily for his amazing music, but I also enjoyed his two novels and some of his poetry. By the time I was 50 pages into this book I was mesmerized, awestruck, totally enraptured by Gil's writing. And then ... things started to unravel. Maybe that's not the right word, but events as described in the book started jumping around and I felt the narrative just wasn't flowing like it had in the early chapters. The murky, middle passages also felt less eloquent and moving, compared to what had first hooked me. I thought that the strongest parts were early in the book, when Gil describes growing up, being raised by his grandmother, working his first jobs, experiences in school, getting to know his mother again. Ironically, we don't get that much insight into the making of his music, and absolutely zero about the problems he later had dealing with drugs. Maybe those details were planned for another memoir. Ostensibly, as the title indicates, this book is mainly about "The Last Holiday," that being the campaign to get Martin Luther King's birthday declared a national holiday in the USA. Gil shines his light on that campaign, particularly the crucial role that Stevie Wonder played in getting this done. But even Stevie's "role" and what he did, other than organizing some concerts and writing a song on "Hotter Than July" about the idea, isn't fully explained or detailed in this book. We aren't told, for example, what exactly was the tipping point that caused the

holiday to finally become a reality. Also, there are too many inconsequential references to the band's road crew on tour, and inane details about sound and lighting problems that really aren't relevant to the rest of the story. So, those are some of the frustrating elements to this book. I realize that compiling and editing an unfinished work by a writer who passed away before everything was completed is a difficult, if not thankless task, but something struck me as missing in this book, something that could have connected the threads of the story more cohesively. All that criticism aside, Gil redeems himself in the final three chapters, when he shifts the focus once again to his family, and the flawed but intense relationships he has had with various people. He admits his imperfections in that profound and articulate way you have come to expect from him. And the last two pages are incredibly moving, forcing my tear ducts to work overtime. A flawed but important book.

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