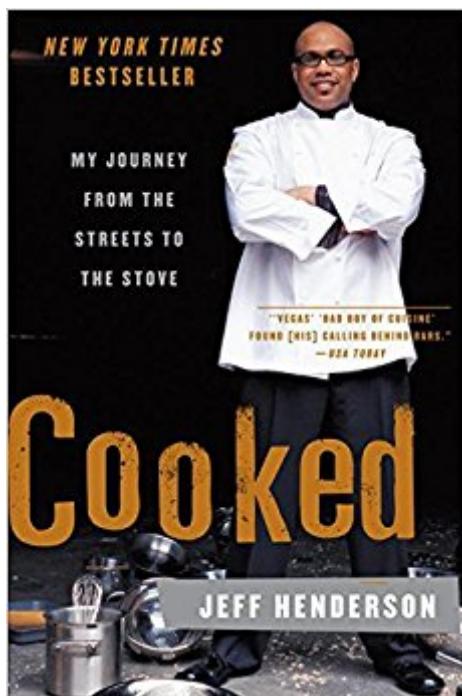


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# Cooked: My Journey From The Streets To The Stove



## Synopsis

By twenty-one, Jeff Henderson was making up to \$35,000 a week cooking and selling crack cocaine. By twenty-four, he had been sentenced to nineteen and a half years in prison on federal drug trafficking charges. It was an all-too-familiar story for a young man raised on the streets of South Central LA. But what happened next wasn't. Once inside prison, Jeff Henderson worked his way up from dishwasher to chief prison cook, and when he was released in 1996, he had found his passion and his dreamâ "he would become a professional chef. Barely five years out of federal prison, he was on his way to becoming an executive chef, as well as being a sought-after public speaker on human potential and a dedicated mentor to at-risk youth. A window into the streets and the fast-paced kitchens of world-renowned restaurants, Cooked is a very human story with a powerful message of commitment, redemption, and change.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How one of San Diego's most successful cocaine dealers became an award-winning chef [...] is the question that drives this sporadically inspired memoir. Henderson got his start dealing when his family moved to San Diego and he fell in with two street thugs. At age 25, after amassing a small fortune in drug money, Henderson was arrested, convicted and sentenced to 19 years in prison; once there, he discovered a love for cooking that gave him much-needed direction. After serving nine years, Henderson got an early release and began a series of grueling, occasionally demeaning jobs in kitchens, eventually working his way up to leading roles in Caesars Palace Hotel and elsewhere. Unfortunately, Henderson's story rings truest before he turns to the culinary; the

fascinating level of detail in his description of the drug trade dissipates when it comes to the intricacies of working in and running a kitchen, lending his redemption a hollow feel. In addition, Henderson's casual reference to methods and equipment particular to the industry may leave amateur foodies nonplussed. While Henderson's achievements deserve recognition, this rushed retelling makes it difficult to fully appreciate his hard work. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Juggling coarsest street talk with purest narrative prose, Henderson relates his near-miraculous transformation from a thuggish Los Angeles drug dealer to an acclaimed Las Vegas chef--the Food Network meets Trainspotting. Introduced to a world of crime by his larcenous grandfather, Henderson descends from petty theft to big-time drug dealing, generating a cash flow that nets him fast cars and fancy houses. The law finally catches up with him, and he finds himself facing a long term in grim federal prison. Almost inadvertently, he starts working in the prison kitchen and discovers both a talent and a passion for making good food. Early release lets him pursue his dream and reconnect with a loving family. This tale of hard-won redemption juxtaposes the worlds of haute cuisine and illicit drugs, slyly exploring the parallels between manufacturing a batch of crack cocaine and sauteing foie gras. Mark KnoblauchCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jeff Henderson's story of going from a crack dealer to a prisoner to a top-rated chef is a truly inspiring story. Amazing. I am giving this story a 5 just for Jeff's ability and willingness to overcome - But more than that, it offers insight into the problems that plague African American society, culture, and families, particularly the lack of parental love, parenting skills, and commitment to their families. It is inspiring to see how Jeff Henderson educated himself through reading and taking classes to improve himself, to eventually become a social activist, public speaker, talented chef, and a devoted husband and father who is doing his best to overcome the negative patterns he saw in his own home as a child.

It's clear to me now what Jeff Henderson's problem was, and it had nothing to do with drugs. His problem was that his father was a lousy role model, always preaching that his clients were stupid and he had the right to steal from them. Young Jeff learned that hard work was for suckers and real men helped themselves to whatever they wanted. The boy's mother was a

welder, and while you'd think that's a real macho job, you're right. Problem was that in Jeff's neighborhood, people were derided for doing real work. Worse, the men on her job site treated her like s\*\*\*. They didn't want a woman doing a man's job. Jeff's mother was the better role model, but thanks to sexist attitudes, his hustling father won. Jeff ended up losing. Cooked is not so much a book about a chef as it is about proving yourself in work. He goes to jail barely out of his teens, never had a real job, but he learns to cook in a restaurant kitchen. Fresh out of jail, he finds that his father has pilfered the money he'd given him for safekeeping and his tough black guy attitude won't work in a kitchen. The Mexican cooks, heavily represented in the culinary business, aren't about to take it from him. You can feel their hostility from the get go. But the Mexican cooks are only in it as a job to make money. Jeff Henderson intends to turn it into a career, so as you guessed, he quickly moves on to another restaurant. Cooking in restaurants is probably a great job for kids who can't sit still. Unfortunately the training has to be paid for and few public schools have a really good culinary program. Henderson got his for free, but unfortunately he had to be in jail first. Marcus Samuelson got his free of charge, because in Sweden there are great trade schools. Here in the USA, the trade high school got killed by political correctness. Tell a kid he should forego college to become a chef, and his parents will scream bloody murder. Something tells me that if Jeff Henderson had pursued a career in cooking while still in high school, he would never have gotten into drug dealing.

I do not believe there is an excessive amount of cursing in the book. To relate to these youngsters out here (those on the street and those not on the street) this is the language they use and/or hear every day. He has written an exceptional book; and he has shown that he is an exceptional man. I know that he will continue to thrive. We just all have to find our passion in life and thank God he found his albeit after being locked up. Let's expose our young people to all that we can so that they can find their passion before the street lays claim to them.

I first heard about Jeff Henderson from his television show The Chef Jeff Project in which Henderson, who spent 10 years in jail for drug trafficking, mentors troubled young adults in the area of fine cooking with the hope of steering them in the right direction and hooking them up for jobs. My expectations for the book were not high, as I feared this celebrity chef had simply "told his story" to a ghost writer who did a quick job to make a book for money. My presumption couldn't have been farther from the truth. As I later found out, Henderson began conceiving of the book, and writing it

himself, decades ago in prison, haunted by the guilt that selling drugs to people on the streets was not a victimless crime but one of such devastation that he someday wanted to redeem himself and atone for his wrongs by imparting a powerful story of his self-reinvention and ultimate redemption. His writing voice is powerful and authentic as he explains his rise as a drug dealer, his struggles in prison, and his excruciating post-prison growing pains as he uses all of his might to transform himself into a world-class chef (which he does), develop his personality into a leader, a mentor, and a statesman, disavowing his past criminal ways, and his dedication to his family and community. This book is free of cant and sanctimonious self-aggrandizement. Henderson tells the story straight with no affectations. He uses his real voice, street vernacular and all. For me, hearing his story was even more powerful because I listened to the audio version, which Henderson reads himself. His voice has all the power such a compelling tale of transformation deserves. Highly recommended.

When book arrived late, it was not in the described condition, otherwise a great read, It was autographed, which was a positive

I am a culinary teacher and all of my students are "AT RISK". we have a wonderful commercial kitchen and I work all year with students to get them ready for the world of work. I really do have students that are naturally talented and do an excellent job cooking. I will use your book and story to promote more excitement and interest in food industry. Josephine CastilloHarper Alternative High School Houston Texas

Well written and an interesting read. A positive example for anyone on their road to redemption!

Very interesting book to read. Check out Jeff's cooking shows on cable.

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