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A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race & The Soul Of America



Synopsis

". . . extraordinarily far-reaching. . . highly accessible."-Notes
"No one has written this way about music in a long, long time. Lucid, insightful, with real spiritual, political, intellectual, and emotional grasp of the whole picture. A book about why music matters, and how, and to whom."-Dave Marsh, author of *Louie, Louie* and *Born to Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story*
"This book is urgently needed: a comprehensive look at the various forms of black popular music, both as music and as seen in a larger social context. No one can do this better than Craig Werner."-Henry Louis Gates, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University
"[Werner has] mastered the extremely difficult art of writing about music as both an aesthetic and social force that conveys, implies, symbolizes, and represents ideas as well as emotion, but without reducing its complexities and ambiguities to merely didactic categories."-African American Review
A Change Is Gonna Come is the story of more than four decades of enormously influential black music, from the hopeful, angry refrains of the Freedom movement, to the slick pop of Motown; from the disco inferno to the Million Man March; from Woodstock's "Summer of Love" to the war in Vietnam and the race riots that inspired Marvin Gaye to write "What's Going On." Originally published in 1998, A Change Is Gonna Come drew the attention of scholars and general readers alike. This new edition, featuring four new and updated chapters, will reintroduce Werner's seminal study of black music to a new generation of readers. Craig Werner is Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, and author of many books, including *Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse* and *Up Around the Bend: An Oral History of Creedence Clearwater Revival*. His most recent book is *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and the Rise and Fall of American Soul*.

Book Information

Paperback: 488 pages

Publisher: University of Michigan Press; Revised Edition edition (January 9, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0472031473

ISBN-13: 978-0472031474

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #219,657 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Gospel #35 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Ethnic & International > Ethnic #42 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Soul

Customer Reviews

An ambitious and comprehensive look at the deep connection between race and music in America, Werner's book is filled with provocative insights. Why, for instance, did "funkateers and feminists, progressives and puritans, rockers and reactionaries" band together in an "unholy alliance" against disco, destroying "the last remaining musical scene that was in any sense racially mixed"? A scene that made crossover stars of women, African-Americans and gay men? Werner (Up Around the Bend), a professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, is enlightening without being overwhelming. Tracing the gospel, blues and jazz "impulses" through American, English and Jamaican music, he shows how the threads of music spun under the oppression of slavery and inequality have been woven into all types of popular and innovative music. One of the high notes of the book is his vivid description of how, as disco petered out, hip-hop and rap emerged in the burnt-out, battle-scarred terrain of the South Bronx. Cut off from the increasingly "upwardly mobile" Studio 54 scene, the locals developed their own dance music, drawing on snippets from the history of popular music and particularly on the techniques of Jamaican street-party DJs. Werner's breadth of knowledge is impressive. He writes with equal clarity about and respect for a gospel icon Mahalia Jackson (who "placed black women and their voices at the center of the freedom struggle") and Public Enemy (who expressed a "combination of political intelligence and street realism"). In America, where most people live in spaces rigidly defined by race and ethnicity, Werner shows how music still has the power to bring people together. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Werner (Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse, Univ. of Illinois, 1994) charts the integrative influence of African American-based music on race relations in the United States from the 1950s to the present. Generally following a chronological approach, he divides the book into 65 brief chapters that loosely relate to three major musical themes: a redemptive gospel strain, jazz innovation, and blues realism. Werner most clearly explores the link between music and race in chapters on soul, disco, funk, house, and rap, explaining the connections between Motown and the dream of Martin Luther King Jr., Public Enemy's rap against a Reaganized America, and

Aretha Franklin's place in the late 1960s black power movement. At his worst, Werner drifts into academic overintellectualizations of straightforward artists and their songs and overambitiously tries to deal with the scope of African American music while ignoring most of postwar jazz. Although it sometimes resembles an uneven, disjointed series of lectures revolving around opinion rather than research, this book still offers academics and lay readers a provocative, passionate glimpse at the core meaning and effects of postwar American popular music. David P. Szatmary, Univ. of Washington, Seattle Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Good for history class.

This book actually is quite good. The only problem is the author fixates on certain artists. Since the book is in chronological order it plays like a movie starting with blues performers and also jazz. It jumps into the 60's rapidly and this is by far the most interesting section. Motown, Stax and the Philly Sound are defined well by the author. Each sub genre of black music seems to be tied to the equal rights movement. Not to sure there. Motown was highly polished music made for enjoyment and profit. Profit and capitalism per the author is what leaves the black man behind. Motown being the exception. Stax certainly let us hear the cry of the unequal black. The Philly Sound also aided equal rights. "Aint No Stopping Us Now" sure did a lot for the equal rights cause. Not. But, the redeeming chapters featured Sly Stone, Gil Scott-Heron and Curtis Mayfield. All three are unique in the history of black music. Sly used an Integrated band and sang of solutions. Gil is my favorite in your face black singer. But Curtis Mayfield somehow ties hope with faith undertones. The fixation artists include Elvis Presley and Bruce Springsteen. Too much time is spent on both. Paragraph after paragraph tells us that artist A hated Elvis and artist B didn't. And the overdone chapters with Springsteen being the emancipation man just don't totally add up. I thoroughly enjoyed the rap and hip hop chapters as I really found these genres unlistenable. The author helped me to understand the message and truly defined every major artist and background. I still find the music vulgar, but must admit I get the message. From the rich kids Run- DMC to Tupac and the ghetto this author made reading this part fun. My favorite black artist has always been Curtis Mayfield. He touches my soul with every song. His final album Brave New World was recorded as Curtis laid paralyzed from an accident. Read this book and then listen to the album. They should be sold together. I am white and lived in all white neighborhoods growing up. A black man was an oddity for me. But, I eventually met many new people of all races as I moved to Philadelphia in my teens. The music I grew up with

was what this book reveals. The author expanded my knowledge of already loved artists. Sadly today blacks still have trouble in our world. This shouldn't be. Music touches many a hard soul and softens the heart. One of my favorite lines in the book was when Paul Simon won a Grammy award in 1975 and thanked Stevie Wonder for not releasing an album that year. *Innervisions*, *Talking Book* and *Songs in The Key of Life* are also nice albums that compliment this book. May the music we hear help us to treat other with love and respect

Talk about a breath of fresh air. Unfortunately, the popular music literature out there seems to fall into two camps. The first populates journalism school dropouts who, because of their love for the music, feel the need to share their passion with the whole wide world. Their writings are usually superficial and they're the crowd Dylan complained about when he said (paraphrase), "they're a bunch of 40 year olds writing for a bunch of 10 year olds." The other group is made up of academics who, though often having brilliant insights, are more often impenetrable to the masses of popular music listeners. Indeed, this ilk is just as likely to write *about* listeners rather than for them. Craig Werner skillfully accomplishes what only a handful have done before him: marrying the insights of a well read, thoughtful academic with a down-to-earth (way far away from any ivory tower), yet passionate style of writing. Using the "calls" and "responses" found in black music (and communities) and the "impulses" of gospel, blues and jazz, Werner seamlessly connects such varied artists as Mahalia Jackson, Bob Marley, Bruce Springsteen, Public Enemy, Madonna, Prince, Duke Ellington, Ani Difranco, and seemingly hundreds more. Though the "huh?" factor may be high at times (the jazz impulse includes Neil Young's "Arc"), through fresh, direct insights an "oh yeah" factor always neutralizes it (usually within a page or two). The subtitle of the book suggests this is an explanation of "music, race and the soul of America." Well, it's not. This is merely Werner's "response," based on the many "calls" he writes of in his book. This is now my "response" to Werner's "call" - Wow, you gotta read this book.

A newly revised, expanded, and updated edition, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, And The Soul Of America* by Craig Werner (Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin) is an informative and "reader friendly" survey of forty years worth of music and events in African-American history which played such an influential role in shaping the path of the American popular culture. Professor Werner manages to present an engaging and knowledgeable perspective of Afro-American music's intimate connection with its composers, performers, and audiences, while carving a vivid picture of the political credit it deserves. Very strongly recommended for Black

Studies, Music History, and American Popular Culture library collections, *A Change Is Gonna Come* is both the perfect scholarly reference and an ideal nostalgic documentation of the history of African-American influence upon their own ethnic musical traditions.

Craig Werner takes us on a lively guided tour of American popular music over the past several decades, focusing on how this music reflects--and promises, in a certain sense, to heal--the enduring racial chasm in American life. It is funny, tragic, and always engaging. The writing is often brilliant and always to the point. This is probably the best book about American music that I have ever read. Werner does such an excellent job, not only writing about the music itself, which he does with remarkable clarity and intelligence, but in placing the music in the historical context from which it emerged. This would be a great book for 20th century American history courses, courses about the 1960s, courses about African American history and culture. This is a book about the soundtrack of our lives, and how it speaks to the lasting dilemmas of race.

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