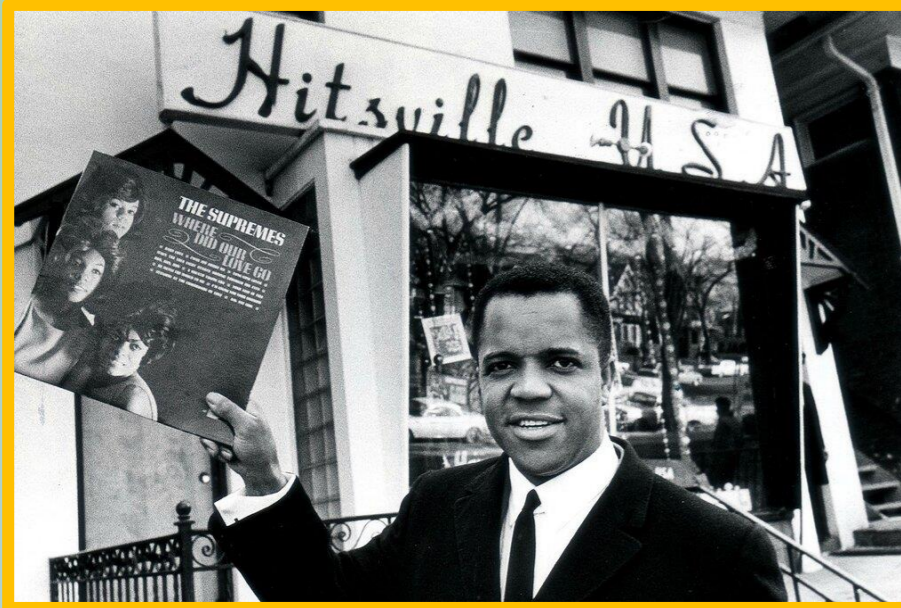


The Magic of Motown and the Soul of Stax: Did African American Soul and Rhythm & Blues Music Influence the Black Freedom Struggle of the 1960s?

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Introduction

To most, the mention of the black freedom struggle conjures up images of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and their leadership presence in the movement. Yet, what is less known is the story of community activism, black empowerment, and white and black Americans working together. Similarly, the story that African American soul and rhythm and blues music plays in the black freedom struggle is one of those less heard stories. Focusing on the creation of Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan and the creation of Stax Records, Memphis, Tennessee, this research is undertaking an exploration of that story; uncovering and exploring how African American soul and rhythm and blues music impacted the lives of black and white America and its race relations throughout the 1960s.



Berry Gordy Jr., founder of Motown records, outside of the Motown recording studio, Detroit, MI

Research Aims

- To prove that soul and rhythm and blues music played a major role in the black freedom struggle of the 1960s
- To prove how the development and acceptance of black music was a form of racial advancement and liberation
- To prove that despite differences both labels had impact on race relations in America
- To prove that the civil rights movement was more than a story of leaders and was mostly successful because of many unheard and unrecognised narratives



Estelle Axton, co-founder of Stax records outside the Stax recording studio, Memphis, TN

Sources and Methodology

This research will undertake a comparison of the two most popular soul and rhythm and blues record labels – Motown and Stax. Both have different stories, yet both impacted race relations and opinions of African Americans. Motown, created in the North, provides a story of black entrepreneurship and the erosion of racial barriers. Stax, created in the South, with its interracial work environment proved blacks and whites could partake in the American Dream together.

Over 100 primary sources including a range of magazines, photographs, biographies, newspapers, music and video footage will be used to prove how influential black music was to the black freedom struggle.

This research will also take knowledge from over 100 secondary readings surrounding soul, rhythm and blues, the civil rights movement, the black power movement, welfare and economics, gender, violence and memory.

Motown Stars Raise \$25,000 For Poor Campaign
The Poor People's Campaign was getting set to leave Atlanta, and march leaders, after huddling, became alarmed over the shortage of funds. Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr., who was recently elected to the board of directors of the march-sponsoring Southern Christian Leadership Conference, put in a hurry-up call to an old friend and supporter, dynamic Berry Gordy, president of the Detroit-based Motown Recording Co. As a result, in less than 24 hours, Gordy had canceled scheduled appearances of his stars—Diana Ross and The Supremes, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight and The Pips, Chuck Jackson and Yvonne Fair—to stage a huge benefit rally at the 10,000-seat New Atlanta Auditorium. More than 13,000—3,000 over the limit—jammed the auditorium and added more than \$25,000 to the Poor People's Campaign till. Gordy not only diverted some of his top stars to the benefit rally, but he flew in from New York with an 11-piece Motown band to accompany his stars. The Atlanta campaign was jointly sponsored by the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Congress and the SCLC. Earlier in the evening before the concert, Gordy, with Mrs. King and recording artists, unveiled a plaque marking Dr. King's birthplace in Atlanta just two blocks from Ebenezer Baptist Church. Dr. King co-pastored the church with his father, the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr.



Motown artists

'We found out that whites and blacks as entertainers and as musicians could work together... You have people who say 'it can't happen'... One of the biggest lies ever told.' Rufus Thomas

Further Reading

- Guralnick, P., *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (Edinburgh, 2002)
- Hughes, C. L., *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill, 2015)
- Smith, S.E., *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit (USA, 1999)*
- Ward, B., *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (London, 1998)
- Werner, C., *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* (Michigan, 2006)

Why This History Matters

- It is important for the wider story of one of the biggest revolutions in history to be heard. It is showing that the black freedom struggle of the 1960s can be defined as more than Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X and their leadership.
- It is not only enhancing the narrative around music's influence but showing how it effected race relations in the North and South of the United States.
- It is aiding racial pride and understanding, and presenting a history from below that proves to the modern generation determination and acceptance go a long way.



Booker T & The MG's – Stax's interracial house band