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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

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## Customer Reviews

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 Difrango, 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.

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.

Marvellous stuff. Possibly the best book to be written about music and popular culture for quite some time. Determinedly in the tradition of Greil Marcus & Peter Guralnick, the book re-writes the now well-told tale of "rock" music's history, from what is perhaps the only true perspective - that is, race. Read it.

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

I got this book so that I could write a report on Sam Cooke but ended up reading the whole thing because the first few chapters were so engaging I couldn't put it down. Its well written and includes background information thats important to the story of music. Good choice.

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