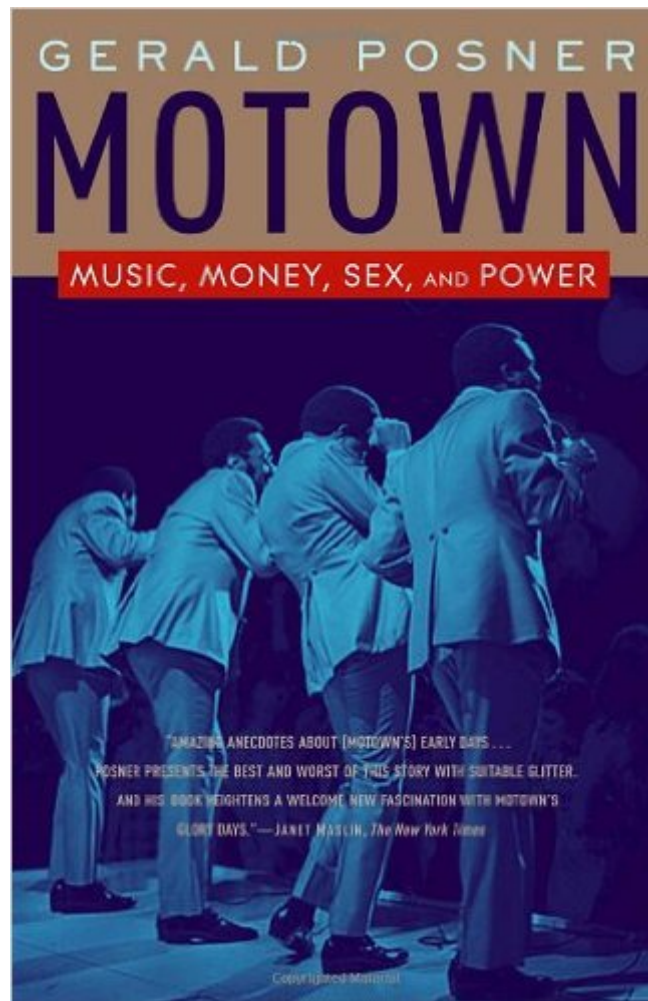


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Motown: Music, Money, Sex, And Power



Synopsis

In 1959, twenty-nine-year-old Berry Gordy, who had already given up on his dream to be a champion boxer, borrowed eight hundred dollars from his family and started a record company. A run-down bungalow sandwiched between a funeral home and a beauty shop in a poor Detroit neighborhood served as his headquarters. The building's entrance was adorned with a large sign that improbably boasted "Hitsville U.S.A." The kitchen served as the control room, the garage became the two-track studio, the living room was reserved for bookkeeping, and sales were handled in the dining room. Soon word spread that any youngster with a streak of talent should visit the only record label that Detroit had seen in years. The company's name was Motown. Motown cuts through decades of unsubstantiated rumors and speculation to tell the true behind-the-scenes narrative of America's most exciting musical dynasty. It follows the company and its amazing roster of stars from the tumultuous growth years in Detroit, to the drama and intrigue of Hollywood in the 1970s, to resurgence in 2002. Set against the civil rights movement, the decay of America's northern industrial cities, and the social upheaval of the 1960s, Motown is a tale of the incredible entrepreneurship of Berry Gordy. But it also features the moving stories of kids from Detroit's inner-city projects who achieved remarkable success and then, in many cases, found themselves fighting the demons that so often come with stardom—drugs, jealousy, sexual indulgence, greed, and uncontrollable ambition. Motown features an extraordinary cast of characters, including Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson, and Stevie Wonder. They are presented as they lived and worked: a clan of friends, lovers, competitors, and sometimes vicious foes. Motown reveals how the hopes and dreams of each affected the lives of the others and illustrates why this singular story is a made-in-America Greek tragedy, the rise and fall of a supremely talented yet completely dysfunctional extended family. Based on numerous original interviews and extensive documentation, Motown benefits particularly from the thousands of pages of files crammed into the basement of downtown Detroit's Wayne County Courthouse. Those court records provide the unofficial—and hitherto largely untold—history of Motown and its stars, since almost every relationship between departing singers, songwriters, producers, and the label ended up in litigation. From its peaks in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Motown controlled the pop charts and its stars were sought after even by the Beatles, through the inexorable slide caused by their failure to handle their stardom, Motown is a riveting and troubling look inside a music label that provided the unofficial soundtrack to an entire generation. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Motown Records is either a) a hallowed sanctuary of soul music best left to be adored from afar, or b) an empire built on dirty dealing and abuse (both emotional and monetary) best exposed as an example of exploitation. Or maybe it is both. Gerald Posner has a hard time making that decision, despite a well researched and historically well documented survey of Berry Gordy (and family's) legendary contribution to the music business. Posner has crafted a study of Motown that presents its founders, and stars as less-than-perfect (though most often well-likable) pioneers in business and entertainment, working together, though often butting heads with each other, in defining a company built on a legendary sound. Everyone is familiar with most of the players - The Gordy Family (this book delves into the family more so than most other Motown studies, and makes clear that Berry was the head, though not the sole talent of the family), Marvin Gaye (who is painted as a head case through much of the book), Diana Ross (Posner adds some new "legends" to this diva's conduct file, none of them pretty or flattering), Stevie Wonder (both respected and severely exploited, given his youth), Smokey Robinson (probably the smartest businessman in the Motown stable), and others. Posner shoots down the legendary "mob-connection" tale, but fills his book with court records, verified statements from insiders, and previously published facts to present a company where competition between artists fueled the hit pipeline, but with severe cost to artists (Florence Ballard's story is still painful to read) and creativity. This book is a great, enjoyable read in many parts, but it fails to capture any of the joy of Motown.

This book is the most intelligent and best-written opus on Motown currently available but why

couldn't the distinguished and experienced Gerald Posner get his FACTS right? I can't believe prominent authors working with prominent publishers and I assume capable editors are stumbling all over the place these days. "Georgeanna Dobbins Tillman" as she's referred to is TWO people, Mr. Posner. Georgeanna Dobbins was one of the five original Marvelettes and cowrote "Please, Mr. Postman." She was replaced by Wanda Young before the group began recording for Motown. Georgeanna Tillman was a different person, also one of the original five. Also: Gladys Horton was not replaced as lead singer in the Marvelettes by Anne Bogan. Well before Horton left Wanda Young has assumed the lead on records, though in person both ladies alternately led. Bogan came into the group as a background singer, only recording leads on two album tracks, one of which was pulled for a single. The final Marvelettes album was a Young solo project; Young never refused to move to L.A. nor did the Marvelettes ever make a decision to break up. They just found themselves in Detroit with no record company. Much worse: Martha Reeves not even being told the company had moved. Also: Lynda Laurence and Scherrie Payne were not in the Supremes the same time; Laurence sang with the Jean Terrell-led group, Payne replaced Terrell. Also: Diana Ross, Mary Wilson and Cindy Birdsong did not decide to do the "Return to Love" tour. Diana Ross got the original offer, then called Mary Wilson, who wasn't in the mood to get low pay, no profits from merchandise sales and work as an employee of Miss Ross, with all the attendant disrespect implied (when Ross complained that all Wilson would have had to do is "show up" that really inflamed Wilson.

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