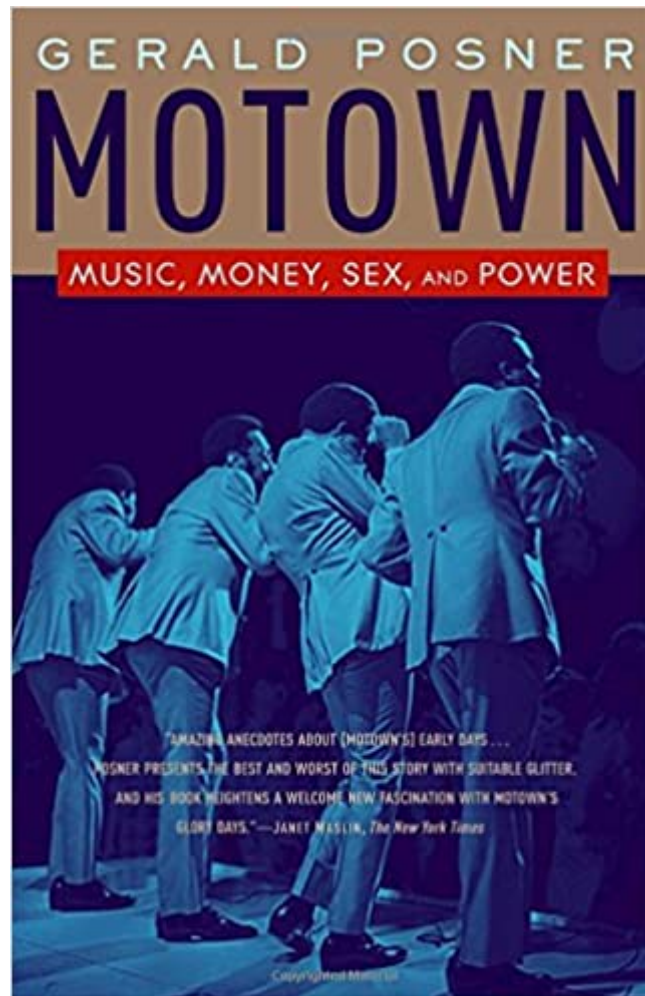




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# Motown: Music, Money, Sex, And Power



## 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

This useful but often flat history of legendary Motown Records is the first music-related work by Posner, who is best known for his books on the assassinations of John F. Kennedy (Case Closed) and Martin Luther King Jr. (Killing the Dream). As in his previous works, Posner is at his strongest demonstrating his meticulous research skills, most notably scouring court archives in Detroit to reveal details of how Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. often unfairly and unscrupulously dealt with artists whom he helped discover, like Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson and Stevie Wonder. For Posner, the history of Motown is the history of Gordy, who "was a manipulator who loved stoking competitive fires," according to Marvin Gaye. The book is probably the best single compendium of stories about Gordy and his business dealings with family and friends, although many of the stories have appeared in more restrained versions in autobiographies by Gordy, Gordy's ex-wife and Ross. Posner's wealth of detail will be of immense service to future writers on Motown. But while Posner is excellent at getting all the details down about the creation of many hit recordings, his writing doesn't convey the richness of the music itself in the same way as Nelson George's did in *Where Did Our Love Go? The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound*. And while Posner shows that Motown was not a mob-run company, as has been implied in other books, his interest in investigating all of Gordy's business dealings leads him to suppositions based on depositions by ex-employees that he admits no one "was able or willing to confirm." Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What? Another examination of Motown Records and "the great-grandson of a slave" and former

Ford assembly-line worker--that would be Berry Gordy--who founded it! Well, the oft-told Motown tale is quintessentially American, what with Gordy and his stars' storybook rise from poverty to fame and fortune. Of course, Dame F didn't smile equally on every character in the Motown saga, which is why much of Posner's attention goes to the label's tangled legal machinations, perhaps best illustrated by Gordy's convoluted dealings with the Jackson 5, who weren't the only Motowners who resorted to litigation to remedy arrangements with Motown's boss; Posner includes details and documentation about matters ranging from Florence Ballard's dismissal from the Supremes and how the egalitarianly named trio morphed into Diana Ross and the Supremes to lawsuits filed by such other Motown mainstays as the songwriting team of Holland, Dozier, and Holland. (Was Motown VP Smokey Robinson the only happy camper?) Most of what Posner presents has been aired before, though seldom as relentlessly and with as much documentation. Like other '60s icons, Motown turns out to have had a side seamy enough to rival that of the Kennedys' Camelot. Posner roasts Motown to a turn to feed pop-culture fans' taste for destroying the idols they once worshipped. Delicious. Mike Tribby

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Great Motown history! I am a Motown historian and still learn more behind the scenes stuff!

Excellent.

Interesting!

Havent finished it because there is no audio. But What Ive read I found interesting and informative in a 20 20 hi dsight sort of way

Knowing no history of Motown and it's beginning, it's interesting to hear the stories of Berry's very diligent family and their involvement in his company. It's a typical entrepreneurial story of a guy with an idea that sees a market that his unique talent can fill. Most aren't successful but with hard work, luck and talent, Motown is successful. It should be noted that his success is even more impressive in the civil rights environment of the late 50s/early 60s when Berry was starting his firm. The book does a great job of detailing Berry's techniques that lead to the success of Motown. In addition, individual artists, producers and writers are highlighted and their stories overlapped with the Motown story. If you like this music or grew up in this era, the names will all be recognizable. The final two

chapters deal with Motown's foray into movies and the ultimate demise. I was not aware of their movie involvement and it's comical how Berry backed into the business and then makes all the mistakes people with too much money make when they are touched by movie magic. Finally, the music magic has gone, Berry's interest has waned, and an exciting new company is consistently getting beaten in the marketplace probably due to poor management. I strongly recommend this book if you have any interest in music, the culture of the 60s, or any pop music stars who recorded in the 60s. As to others complaints, they may be more knowledgeable of the Motown experience but I'm glad I read this book to learn more.

Details from behind the scenes. Insight into the inter workings of the Motown business. I. Learn what drove the Supremes the breakup. Find out why Motown was so successful

I pretty much knew nothing about Motown going in other than the obvious (started in Detroit, home of The Supremes, etc.). This particular history of Motown is quite extensive starting with founder Berry Gordy's life before he founded Motown and going all the way to the present state of Motown. There are comments and interviews from all of the major players from Berry Gordy on down to the producers, songwriters and other staff of Motown. It isn't immediately clear whether these are firsthand interviews or comments from other sources (i.e. Marvin Gaye's comments are necessarily from older printed sources) but all are presented well in context. You really get a comprehensive view of how Motown worked from all sides of the equation, not just the artists. It's also an eye-opener to modern readers about just how tough a time Gordy had breaking African-American records into the mainstream. It seems a no-brainer these days but obviously, it wasn't always that way. Keep your iPhone or tablet handy because you'll want to listen to snippets of the songs as they're mentioned in the book. The author describes the singers and songs in such a way that you'll want to listen to them as you're reading for a kind of interactive experience.

Lots of great information about Berry Gordy and the empire he built! Warning: If you're a Diana Ross fan who thinks she is a saint, you may not want to read this one. The author isn't very kind in his portrayal of her. But I thought it was done very tastefully and objectively for the most part

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