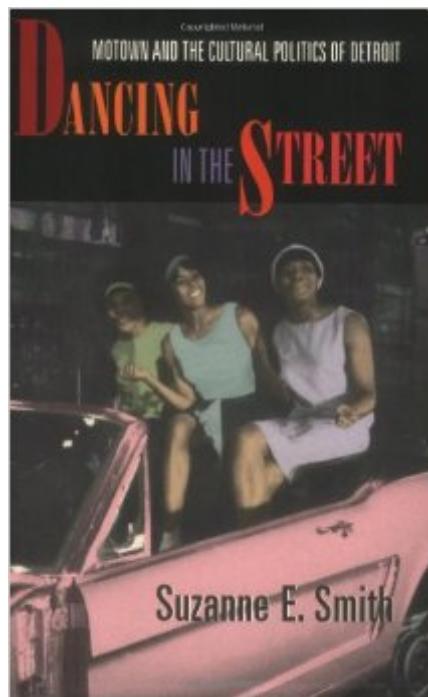


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Dancing In The Street: Motown And The Cultural Politics Of Detroit



Synopsis

Detroit in the 1960s was a city with a pulse: people were marching in step with Martin Luther King, Jr., dancing in the street with Martha and the Vandellas, and facing off with city police. Through it all, Motown provided the beat. This book tells the story of Motown--as both musical style and entrepreneurial phenomenon--and of its intrinsic relationship to the politics and culture of Motor Town, USA. As Suzanne Smith traces the evolution of Motown from a small record company firmly rooted in Detroit's black community to an international music industry giant, she gives us a clear look at cultural politics at the grassroots level. Here we see Motown's music not as the mere soundtrack for its historical moment but as an active agent in the politics of the time. In this story, Motown Records had a distinct role to play in the city's black community as that community articulated and promoted its own social, cultural, and political agendas. Smith shows how these local agendas, which reflected the unique concerns of African Americans living in the urban North, both responded to and reconfigured the national civil rights campaign. Against a background of events on the national scene--featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes, Nat King Cole, and Malcolm X--Dancing in the Street presents a vivid picture of the civil rights movement in Detroit, with Motown at its heart. This is a lively and vital history. It's peopled with a host of major and minor figures in black politics, culture, and the arts, and full of the passions of a momentous era. It offers a critical new perspective on the role of popular culture in the process of political change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An incisive combination of music journalism and pathbreaking social history about the city, people and circumstances that gave rise to, participated in, supported, and finally watched the physical exit from the Motor City in the early '70s of Motown Records. A vivid and unforgettable study of the roots of an important facet of American cultural history. Excellent.

Suzanne Smith deserves tremendous credit for transforming her love of Detroit, her home; her love of Motown, the soul music of her generation; and her love of historical analysis, the career she has chosen, into a remarkably readable and indeed breathtaking review of a city, a time, and a musical genre that is too often neglected. Sure, the most celebrated heirs of the Motown legend, the Jackson family, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, achieved fame and fortune. But Barry Gordy's Motown -- the Motown of European-Americans like Suzanne Smith, and the Motown of all of Detroit's people of color, needs to be remembered often and with affection. That Suzanne Smith can tell the story of Detroit in the turbulent 1960s with such style and grace, is a testament to her skill as an analyst of culture and her skill as one of the next generation of honored historians. Presently at George Mason University in Virginia, look for Professor Smith to soon teach from a tenured chair in Ann Arbor, Michigan; New Haven, Connecticut; or Cambridge, Massachusetts.

This is Motor City history from the inside outward, and if you know the REAL city, from the Graystone Ballroom to the Chit Chat Club to WJLB and the City Wide Dry Cleaners, then you KNOW what I'm gettin into. A beautiful job of history that moves like the music of Hitsville, U.S.A. did. You go, girl!

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