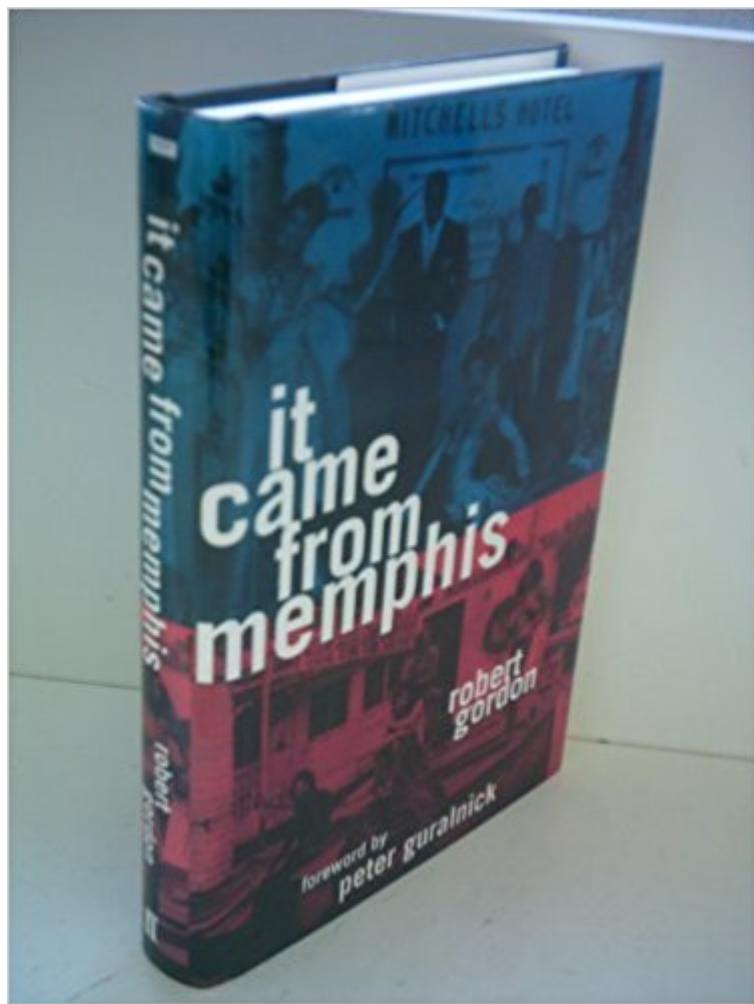


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It Came From Memphis



Synopsis

Exploring interwoven threads of personality, coincidence, progress, and taste--all essentially unrelated to music--a veteran journalist explains how popular culture and business intersected in Memphis to set the stage for rock and roll well before Elvis arrived.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Perhaps no other city in America has provided more grist for the music sociology mill than Memphis, Tennessee. While Memphis has been the muse for some truly classic books (Peter Guralnick's Sweet Soul Music, to name just one), the rhetoric surrounding "The Birthplace of Rock & Roll"--also "The Home of the Blues"--can be as daunting as a walk down the ravenously gentrified blues theme park that is Beale Street. Enter Robert Gordon, a Memphis native and keen chronicler of the city's secret history. Gordon's *It Came from Memphis* all but ignores the Bluff City's oft-cited musical hierarchy--B.B. King, Elvis, Al Green et al.--in favor of its great unheralded eccentrics. You might not be familiar with the Insect Trust or Mudboy and the Neutrons, but Gordon argues--with empathy and wit--that you should be. But music is only part of the story here. Whether it's Memphis's wrestling legend Sputnik Monroe, or the city's esoteric patron saint, artist-professor John McIntire, Gordon's shrewd eye sees the mojo in them all. In a way, Gordon's book is even more vital than the classic volumes on Memphis music that predate it. Where Guralnick interprets a musical tradition that is already firmly embedded in the American psyche, Gordon gives voice to a clandestine tradition that otherwise might go forgotten. --Matt Hanks --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition

of this title.

The New York Times Superb...The New Yorker An affectionate rumination. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This book is something of an anthropological excavation of the Memphis music scene in the second half of the twentieth century. Although Gordon focuses largely on the underbelly of unsung heroes, the reader implicitly learns how Memphis' most famous artists could never have exploded into the stratosphere without the lesser known, yet equally important personalities stoking the creative fires. That Memphis music (black or white, soul or rock, country or blues) shook the world is undeniable; but what Gordon does is introduce the reader to the milieu of largely unknown influential people who left their own mark. There are so many unforgettable characters in this book that one is reminded of Wolfe's Electric Koolaid Acid Test as we are shown a parade of unique scene makers, artists, and musicians who have disproportionately impacted society and popular culture.

A great book on all things Memphis in the 50-60s - both the good and bad.

Very thorough history of the blues.

This is a great book that tells the story of the less renowned musicians, albeit superb musicians, who influenced generations of listeners. Love the story of "Last Night", Steve Cropper, Packy Axton, Duck Dunn etc. If you are a musician and want to know how we got here from there, read this book.

A must have in everyone's collection!

Stories of so many Memphis personalities, including Dewey Phillips and wrestling stars, are in this book. At a certain point, when Gordon seemed to run out of people that I am familiar with, I got a little bored and haven't finished reading it yet.

The chief problem that I have with this book is that on almost every page, Gordon provides an example of how some phenomenon of Memphis was responsible for breaking down the barriers of racism in America. Yet all such examples that he provides are of white people and nowhere does he bother to interview a black person or point out that in actuality, black people were instrumental and

active in the fight for their own liberty. I stopped reading after page 70 so perhaps a black person does appear at some point. But should there really be an absence of anyone not white in a book claiming to celebrate racial harmony for 70 pages? It's this brand of liberal racism that I find so objectionable in both this book and Peter Guralnik's *Sweet Soul Music*. In Guralnik's book, he makes the heroes of that piece - Don Penn and others - white and yet Soul was something quintessentially African-American. In Gordon's book, he goes one step further and completely removes the people from the culture altogether. Basically, this book is little more than a racist white fantasy of how racism was conquered by the pioneering actions of some brave white folks while black people stood passively by. Presenting events in such a way is morally wrong as well as historically inaccurate. It is part of a disturbingly large "liberal" culture that not only seeks to enjoy black culture while removing the people from it but also by denying black peoples' own active participation in their own destiny.

I enjoyed the first half of this book the most. Gordon's descriptions of the 1950s and 60s music scene in Memphis are really vivid, insightful, and a lot of fun. The quirky qualities of the area, such as the wild on-air patter of Dewey Phillips, the professional wrestling of Sputnik Monroe, the wack-o-antics of Harry Fritzius (a deejay who appeared in public wearing a gorilla mask, hence the name "Harry"), and the stories about the Bitter Lemon Coffee Shop and Gallery are interesting, and often very funny, to read. For some reason, the description of the music scene from the late 70s to early 90s isn't quite as engaging. I don't think that's the fault of Gordon's fine writing. It's just a sense that recent history isn't quite the same, and I was left wondering if Memphis, or any American city, could ever develop such a vibrant, innovative, and eclectic music scene, even with the new variety of media and recording innovations of the digital age. Although Gordon maintains his enthusiasm for Memphis's music scene into the 1990s, there is a sense of well-grounded nostalgia for the early days of rockabilly and soul that forms an emotional core of this book. It feels like Gordon wants to move beyond this sense but that he can't quite reconcile his appreciation for the early days of rock-n-roll with his desire to keep up with the newest sound.

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