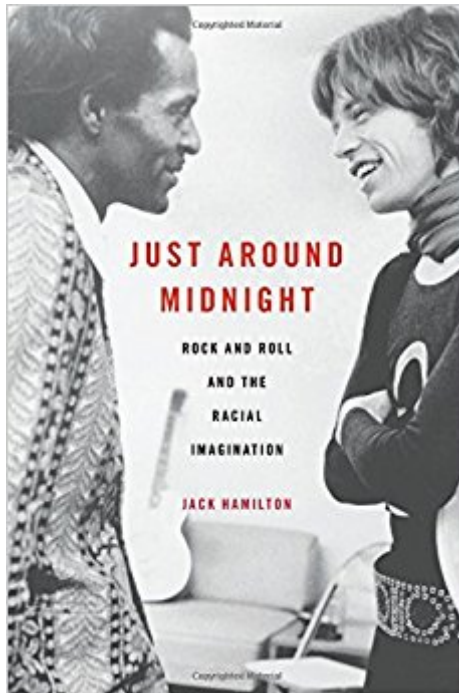


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Just Around Midnight: Rock And Roll And The Racial Imagination



Synopsis

By the time Jimi Hendrix died in 1970, the idea of a black man playing lead guitar in a rock band seemed exotic. Yet a mere ten years earlier, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley had stood among the most influential rock and roll performers. Why did rock and roll become “white”? Just around Midnight reveals the interplay of popular music and racial thought that was responsible for this shift within the music industry and in the minds of fans. Rooted in rhythm-and-blues pioneered by black musicians, 1950s rock and roll was racially inclusive and attracted listeners and performers across the color line. In the 1960s, however, rock and roll gave way to rock: a new musical ideal regarded as more serious, more artistic and the province of white musicians. Decoding the racial discourses that have distorted standard histories of rock music, Jack Hamilton underscores how ideas of “authenticity” have blinded us to rock’s inextricably interracial artistic enterprise. According to the standard storyline, the authentic white musician was guided by an individual creative vision, whereas black musicians were deemed authentic only when they stayed true to black tradition. Serious rock became white because only white musicians could be original without being accused of betraying their race. Juxtaposing Sam Cooke and Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin and Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones, and many others, Hamilton challenges the racial categories that oversimplified the sixties revolution and provides a deeper appreciation of the twists and turns that kept the music alive.

Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (September 26, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674416597

ISBN-13: 978-0674416598

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #134,397 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #49 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Ethnic & International > Ethnomusicology #338

in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > History & Criticism #346 in Books > Arts &

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Customer Reviews

From Little Richard and Chuck Berry to the Dominoes, Ike Turner, and Howlin' Wolf, rock and roll's founding figures were African American, yet rock as we know and hear it now is coded white. In some of his sharpest passages, Hamilton shows how much rock's whiteness depended on [the] confining ideas of blackness. He contributes a new and valuable piece to a larger and still contentious project: the struggle against the essentialization of racial and ethnic identity. (Colin Vanderburg Los Angeles Review of Books 2016-11-24) Ambitious and rewarding. Just around Midnight seeks to tell the story of [black] erasure [from rock 'n' roll], and it does so quite compellingly by bringing together artists and songs that our implicitly segregationist narratives have encouraged us to keep apart. (Kevin J. H. Dettmar Chronicle of Higher Education 2016-10-20) Extraordinary. Hamilton doesn't pretend to have all the answers in Just around Midnight but he asks all the right questions. It challenges so much of what we've taken for granted about rock and roll history that one reading won't do. Any future book that deals with the social and racial aspects of popular music in the 20th century will have to contend with Just around Midnight. The bar has been raised. (Adam Ellsworth Arts Fuse 2016-09-27) Brilliant. [A] valuable engagement with the unheard narrative of race in rock and roll. (Emma Rees Times Higher Education 2016-09-22) To the age-old cries that rock is dead, Jack Hamilton's book says, "Think again!" Just around Midnight considers the often-elided racial mythologies, cross-cultural intimacies, and racially-charged aesthetic obfuscations that haunt the foundations of American popular music culture. For anyone who remains easily seduced by the romance of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame canon-building, this book is a necessary read. (Daphne Brooks, Yale University) This new listening to the black-and-white racial politics of rock in the 1960s is full of rich insights, provocative thinking, and persuasive writing. As the revolutions of critical race and ethnic studies continue to reveal new generations of critics born in their wake, revisitations of rock history like this one will be crucial to rethinking the musical past. (Josh Kun, University of Southern California) As musically detailed as it is theoretically expansive, Just around Midnight reveals that popular music of the 1960s was defined by more vibrant interracial collaborations and more violent anti-black erasures than we could have imagined. This is a beautifully written and provocatively argued work of intellect, heart, and soul. (Emily Lordi, University of Massachusetts Amherst)

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So much of popular music in the US revolves around how listeners and musicians make sense of a defining conflict in American society: race. Hamilton shows how this played out in the production of some of the most memorable music in the country's recorded history. Fantastically written, with astounding new facts and insights about artists and songs you thought you knew. Made me listen to Gaye, Cooke, Dylan, and The Beatles, amongst others, as if for the first time.

This book did a great job of placing some of my favorite 1960's musicians in their own complicated and changing times. Even more, it helped me think more deeply about the most commonly accepted stories that music fans have told ourselves about the race and artistic decisions of these icons. It is full of provoking anecdotes that give insight into how the musicians themselves thought of themselves and their work, which often challenges how we came to imagine them and categorize them in the decades that followed. Most importantly though "Just Around Midnight" is a book about songs. Jack Hamilton looks bar-by-bar (often chord-by-chord) at some of our favorite songs including a breakdown of "Gimme Shelter" in the last chapter that I had to re-read after I dug up the track on my iPod and listened to it in its entirety. This is a book that will have you going back into your music library and hearing your old favorite songs in a new way! Even for the super fan who has already read the big biographies of the artists Jack Hamilton discusses (Cooke, Dylan, The Beatles, The Stones, Hendrix, Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin...), "Just Around Midnight" is a great companion book because it will reveal some of the assumptions we have been making about these artists, how we tell their stories, and, most importantly, how we experience their music.

This book exposes a very interesting aspect of cultural history -- how rock and roll went from black to white. It's well written, full of examples that indicate the author's deep knowledge of the music and the times. Would be of special interest to those aging Boomers who lived through it all!

A study in white appropriation of black music and, in turn, of African America's legacy in American popular music. A great read. Highly recommend!

Given the potent thesis Jack Hamilton gives himself in "Just Around Midnight" one wonders why he artificially limits his study of the racial imagination via popular music to the 1960s. There is far too much that Hamilton leaves out in his 10 year study,

but if he is limited to a decade, I wonder why 1965 to 1975 wasn't more appealing to him, given the extreme whiteness of prog rock, the extreme racism of southern rock, and the extreme innovations of funk, hip hop and R&B. To strictly cut himself off at 1970 denies the reader much of the fluidity of race and music that Hamilton spends his whole book trying to get us to see. Hamilton's background is as a pop culture writer for Slate, so I was ready for the very redundant double-standard arguments that make most of the book, arguments that anyone smart enough to choose this book already knows plenty about. The book's structure is composed of juxtapositions between popular black and white artists and their songs. This model feels rather prescriptive and works against the complex point he's trying to make about these artists' interracial and mutually inspiring backstories. For example, Hamilton justifies a chapter comparing Bob Dylan with Sam Cooke because of their "assaults on form and genre," "defections from the musical communities they came from," and their "artistic autonomy." These seem to be hallmarks of any great musician of the 60s. One wonders if Hamilton could've just as easily compared Ray Charles with Frank Zappa, or Aretha Franklin with David Bowie. Third, and most important, is the last thing any progressive academic wants to hear: Hamilton is employing the same myopia and narrow-mindedness his work is seeking to address. Why does he isolate the genius of Dylan in a racial context, yet cherry-pick the violence of Hendrix and race-centric Stones as more of an embodiment of race. I'd argue that Hendrix is far more the more exceptional and groundbreaking genius than Dylan was. Or why does Hamilton have a whole chapter on "rock criticism" and not devote a chapter to the African American intellectual culture at the time? Also, Hamilton is indeed cautious enough to not limit his book to the accusations of racial binary (i.e., only mentioning black and white contributions to rock music), so he tokenistically mentions Carlos Santana, but it's more to cover his bases than to paint the rainbow of rock. Speaking of rainbows, if you're looking for the deeper layers of white dominant culture pillaging other social groups, and the intersectional nature of such interactions, like with LGBT culture (Little Richard, Billy Preston, Bowie) and rural white culture (i.e. The Stones' interest in country, The Allman Brothers band) look elsewhere. This book plays the same binary tune for 270 pages. While confined white/black study might be Hamilton's interest, it unfortunately loses ours. In terms of the writing itself, it's dressed in the stuffy thinkpiece jargon that you've come to dread when reading Slate (e.g. "differentness,"

“indices,” “hegemonic white
masculinism”). Some sentences are so overwritten, you lose track of whether
he’s really proving what he’s trying to say. Also, Jack
Hamilton-the-Musician shines through in dozens of pages throughout the book in which he
discusses the chords and keys of songs, thus making large swaths of the book mean absolutely
nothing to the non-musician. Nevertheless, there are some interesting gems for those looking for
obscure facts for the next dinner party. You’ll surely impress with your new
knowledge of Motown’s influential bassist, James Jamerson. Or the
well-researched British subcultures leading up to the British Invasion in the book will fascinate. But if
you’re looking for a book that really offers diamond after diamond in
rock’s rough, you’ll have to look elsewhere. For such a powerful
topic, this is a rather pretentious and milquetoast book conjuring up the same tired devices, and
leaving the reader with “it was a lot more complex” without showing
us how.

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