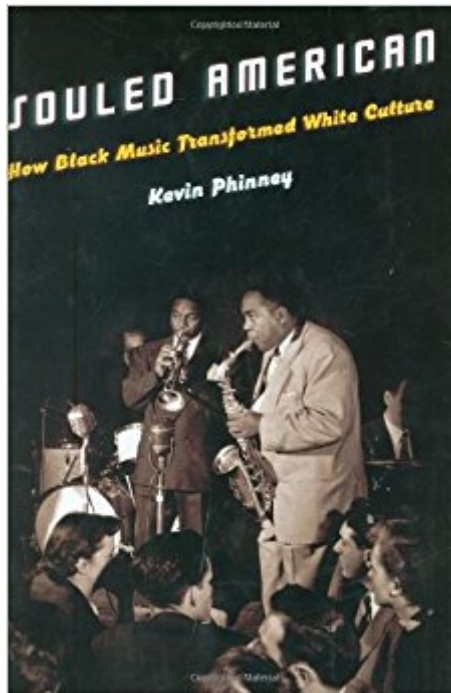




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Souled American: How Black Music Transformed White Culture



Synopsis

From Jim Crow to Eminem, white culture has been transformed by black music. To be so influenced by the boundless imagination of a race brought to America in chains sets up a fascinating irony, and *Souled American*, an ambitious and comprehensive look at race relations as seen through the prism of music, examines that irony fearlessly with illuminating results. Tracing a direct line from plantation fieldhollers to gangsta rap, author Kevin Phinney explains how blacks and whites exist in a constant tug-of-war as they create, re-create, and claim each phase of popular music. Meticulously researched, the book includes dozens of exclusive celebrity interviews that reveal the day-to-day struggles and triumphs of sharing the limelight. Unique, intriguing, *Souled American* should be required reading for every American interested in music, in history, or in healing our country's troubled race relations. • Combines social history and pop culture to reveal how jazz, blues, soul, country, and hip-hop have developed • Includes interviews with Ray Charles, Willie Nelson, B. B. King, David Byrne, Sly Stone, Donna Summer, Bonnie Raitt, and dozens more • Confronts questions of race and finds meaningful answers • Ideal for Black History Month

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Texas journalist Phinney's first book traces the history of race relations as seen through commingling musical crossovers and a parade of personalities: from Al Jolson to Louis Jordan, Billie Holiday to Bonnie Raitt, Zip Coon to Pat Boone. This comprehensive coverage spans all genres, including blues, country, gospel, jazz, R&B, ragtime, rock and rap. With blackface minstrelsy,

"whites opened a portal to their own hidden creative impulses," and Phinney explores this theme as he covers "white men in transparent blackface" (Eminem), "multi-culti chanteuses" (Mariah Carey) and "sepia Sinatras" (Johnny Mathis). Anecdotes abound, and many music history milestones punctuate Phinney's probing critical commentary. Analyzing Nat King Cole's singing style and how it made him "one of the first modern artists to 'cross over' from black to white popularity," Phinney recounts how Cole, only months before the premiere of his 1956 "1957 NBC television show, was assaulted onstage in Birmingham, Ala., by five white men. Phinney writes with verve and vitality, articulately charting hundreds of black and white intersections in this definitive roadmap to racial rhythms. 45 b&w photos. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Kevin Phinney, an entertainment journalist based in Austin, has written for the Austin American-Statesman, Premiere magazine, and the Hollywood Reporter. Currently, he is cohost of KGSR FM's morning drive-time program, Kevin & Kevin.

After a passing acquaintance with the author Kevin Phinney, I picked up his book, "Souled American". I thought the subject of how black music transformed white culture was intriguing, and was curious to see how Phinney made his argument. While I began as a casual reader, I quickly became riveted by the scope and detail of the book. It's scholarly style, informative yet stimulating and accessible, managed to beckon the dormant music lover in me. To more fully understand the history of black music, I began to collecting songs from the many eras and genres Phinney chronicles, from gospel, ragtime, and jazz, to swing, blues, rock & roll, rap and hip-hop. I found that this combination made the book roar to life, and made the study of black music completely absorbing. Phinney, a professional music critic and journalist, reports the history of black music in a concise style and provides impressive detail, yet manages to entertain with pertinent stories and fascinating interviews. Names, dates, and places are plentiful, but so are aspirations, emotions, and hard truths. Black artists, at times withstanding tremendous hardships, at times achieving awesome heights, are afforded great respect by the author. He waxes neither over-sentimental when relating sad stories, nor sycophantic when describing victories. Phinney, deftly and bravely, dons many hats writing this book. In a country where relations between races is so often that dreaded third rail, he manages to ride that rail for the whole book. He includes distasteful, sometimes horrendous words and images when he must, never taking the easy way out. His reporting, truthful and sincere, tells of the theft of many black artists innovations and creations by a largely corporate, largely white,

America. Phinney never dwells on disparities or injustices, but illustrates these conditions with the book's most passionate, most fiery prose, and champions fair play. Phinney also appears to take on roles as historian, sociologist, musicologist, tour-guide, and educator in "Souled American". While presenting an impressive overview of African-American music, of artists and their works, he provides context, tells of an ever-changing America through more than three turbulent centuries. Phinney is a master at setting a scene, introducing the players, and then telling an amazing, moving true story. Sharing center stage with the people is their music. The crafting and evolution of song is paramount in this book. The songs are the heart of "Souled American", and the author introduces them by the hundreds. Crafted by experts with rare talent and passion, the profusion of black music in America is awe-inspiring, as is the breadth of Phinney's cross-sample. This is wherein the real magic of the book lies. Reading of the history of a musician, and the genesis of a particular song, makes listening to that song a powerful, extraordinary experience. I managed to collect several hundred songs while reading this incredible guide. Always with my ipod or laptop at hand (I heartily recommend Rhapsody's comprehensive online music service), I would stop to listen to the most important songs. Many I'd nearly forgotten, many were old favorites, and many became new favorites. Some songs I didn't care for but I gave them a fair shot. This made the going slow, but oh so wonderful. I picked up "Souled American" as a casual reader, with only passing interest in the subject of African-American music. I was delighted to find myself transformed into a student of black music, with a new understanding and a new passion for the art, in its myriad forms. I now am beginning to understand how much influence black music has had on American culture, and how much influence it has had on my own life. I can further state that this book, this odyssey, has renewed my love for music. For that reason, above all others, I can say that Kevin Phinney's "Souled American", is a truly fine book. I give it my highest recommendation.

One of my favorite books of all time! Definitely worth any price.

This is truly one investment that was worth the money. This book is informative and contains a lot of factual information.

Great!

I have been listening to Kevin for years. Was sad when he went off to write this book. He was gone way too long but the book was worth the wait. Not only have I learned so much from listening to

Kevin and Kevin every morning but now to read the book and all the work and research that went into it. It belongs with my C/D's so I can refer to it when those nagging questions arise. Great work of art and I loved the conversation with Bonnie R.

Misleading title and misleading ideals on culture. I don't know if one can ever really know everything about one culture. The writer wears many hats for this book; and sometimes it makes the book nothing other than an interesting look at history and music. Unfortunately, there are many historical and cultural aspects neglected (probably because that would make this the longest book in the world) and it leaves something to be desired. I wouldn't call this book negligent if you are one who likes reading books on this topic. My guess is the writer is counting on this. Debates over who originated what, where, and for whom seems to be the secondary concern. Talking about the process of innovation seems to be the primary interest of the author. Collaborative forces at work to achieve separate goals.

I read *Souled American* in a few sittings - it's that good. Here, for what I think must be the first time in a highly readable and very entertaining book, are the truths that some music historians have tried hard to keep in the dark. Writer Kevn Phinney has a pleasant writing style and this enhances the overriding theme of this fact-crammed journey through Black Blues and White Rock And Roll - that much of what we know or experience as the roots of "white rock" was really the result of the hard work and vast talent of earlier African-American musical artists and, in some cases, musical geniuses. The interviews with such greats as Ray Charles, David Byrne, Sly Stone, Willie Nelson, B.B. King, Bonnie Raitt, and others are worth the price of the book alone. Mr. Phinney really knows how to ask questions and draw out information. The author's understanding of how musical worlds, tastes, styles, and talents blended or were at odds with each other enhances his thesis. He appreciates the historical roots of blues and rock. When did any writer of a book head for Kansas City to really dig into the subject of KC Blues and then make a sane link to specific styles of rock and roll. Sheer brilliance. And enthrallingly written. The author brings in references to myriad bands, such as The Rolling Stones or Chaka Khan. The musical richness of this volume is superb. Mr. Phinney details politics, sociology, and culture as it influences music from the horrid days of Jim Crow to the White Rap escapades of Eminem. The author knows full well that white culture has been mightily transformed by black music. There is no escaping this fact. *Souled American* is a great book that has long been needed. Mr. Phinney makes stunning links between slave chants and specific musical riffs being heard today. This entire project seems a staggering undertaking. But the

book is not daunting at all. It works on every level. It informs, enlightens, entertains, and succeeds on every level and I'm glad I read it. The author has a keen awareness of culture, counter-culture, and cultural shifts. Not only should the book be read by every musician, it should be read by anyone who loves the blues or rap or hip hop or good old rock and roll.

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