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Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion

Robert Gordon

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The story of Stax Records unfolds like a Greek tragedy. A white brother and sister build a monument to racial harmony in blighted south Memphis during the civil rights movement. Their success soon pits the siblings against each other, and the brother abandons his sister for a visionary African-American partner. Under integrated leadership, Stax explodes as a national player until, Icarus-like, the heights they achieve result in their tragic demise. They fall, losing everything, and the sanctuary they created is torn to the ground. A generation later, Stax is rebuilt brick by brick and is once again transforming disenfranchised youth into stellar young musicians.

Set in the world of 1960s and ‘70s soul music, *Respect Yourself* is a character-driven story of racial integration, and then of black power and economic independence. It’s about music and musicians--Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, the Staple Singers, and Booker T. and the M.G.’s, Stax’s interracial house band. It’s about a small independent company’s struggle to survive in an increasingly conglomerate-oriented world. And always at the center of the story is Memphis, Tennessee, an explosive city struggling through volatile years. Told by one of our leading music chroniclers, *Respect Yourself* is the book to own about one of our most treasured cultural institutions and the city that created it.

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