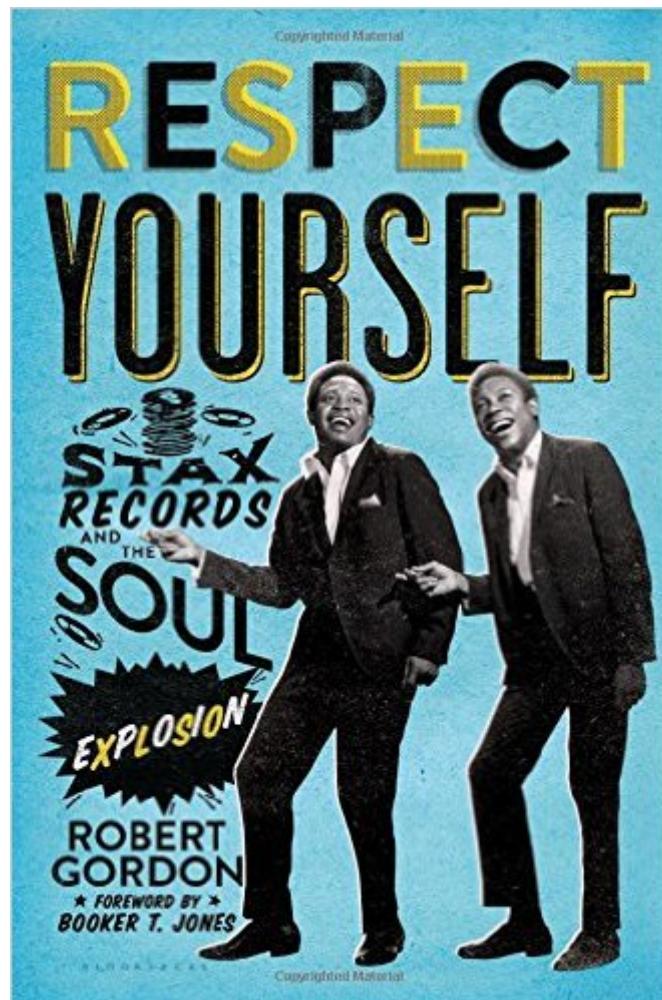


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# Respect Yourself: Stax Records And The Soul Explosion



## **Synopsis**

The story of Stax Records unfolds like a Greek tragedy. A white brother and sister build a record company that becomes a monument to racial harmony in 1960's segregated south Memphis. Their success is startling, and Stax soon defines an international sound. Then, after losses both business and personal, the siblings part, and the brother allies with a visionary African-American partner. Under integrated leadership, Stax explodes as a national player until, Icarus-like, they fall from great heights to a tragic demise. Everything is lost, and the sanctuary that flourished is ripped from the ground. A generation later, Stax is rebuilt brick by brick to once again bring music and opportunity to the people of Memphis. Set in the world of 1960s and '70s soul music, *Respect Yourself* is a story of epic heroes in a shady industry. It's about music and musicians -- Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, 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 a business world of burgeoning conglomerates. And always at the center of the story is Memphis, Tennessee, an explosive city struggling through heated, divisive years. Told by one of our leading music chroniclers, *Respect Yourself* brings to life this treasured cultural institution and the city that created it.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I read an electronic version of this book compliments of NetGalley. The opinions expressed here are mine alone. From beginning to ending this book is the story of Stax Records. Stax was founded by a

brother and sister, Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton, who were interested in music and wanted to promote the funky music that was being created in their home base of Memphis. Financed primarily by a second mortgage on Estelle's home, they worked on a shoe string budget that required day jobs to pay the bills and studio business was transacted in their spare time. In its entirety this is an interesting story. These were two people with a dream, but not exactly positioned to run a business and have it become hugely successful. Even more improbable, Stewart and Axton were white and most of the people who worked for them and also comprised their talent base were black. While segregation was huge in the south, once inside Stax there was racial equality and an intoxicating sense that the music would bring this diverse group forward both professionally and personally. Unfortunately, Jim's relative lack of expertise as the business grew and Estelle's role of mother hen had them often at odds with one another. Eventually, Jim nudged Estelle out of the company that she co-founded and Jim took on an African American partner who took the company to national prominence. Eventually, Stax became a victim of its own success and crashed and burned only to be revived again for another generation. Though not exactly heavy reading, I found this book consistently interesting as an equally interesting cast of characters came and went which included Carla Thomas, Booker T and the MG's, Isaac Hayes, Sam and Dave, Otis Redding, Donald "Duck" Dunn, Steve Cropper, and the Staple Singers.

"Artist after artist, song after song, Stax gave voice to the hearts and minds of a people too long silenced. And with that voice, Stax brought power to its artists and also to its audience. Stax had become the song of a nation." - page 341 As a collector of popular music for nearly a half century I was pretty familiar with the story of how Stax records was founded in Memphis, Tennessee in the late 1950's by a most unlikely duo. Jim Stewart was a fiddle player in a country swing band who decided to start a record company. His sister Estelle was so taken with the idea that she convinced her husband to mortgage their home in order to help the company that would become Stax get off the ground. What was really kind of bizarre was that Jim Stewart wanted to record black artists. Conventional wisdom said that the odds were stacked against them. But Jim Stewart and his fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants record company proved the skeptics wrong. Over the next two decades Stax would become a major force in American popular music. Robert Gordon has been writing about Memphis music and history for more than three decades. His latest effort "Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion" is a meticulously researched and downright entertaining book. It turns out that there was a whole lot about the history of Stax that I was unaware of. I simply could not put his one down. In "Respect Yourself" you will learn about all of the major

players at Stax, from the management to the extremely talented stable of house musicians to the major stars like Sam & Dave, Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Carla Thomas and The Staple Singers to name but a few.

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