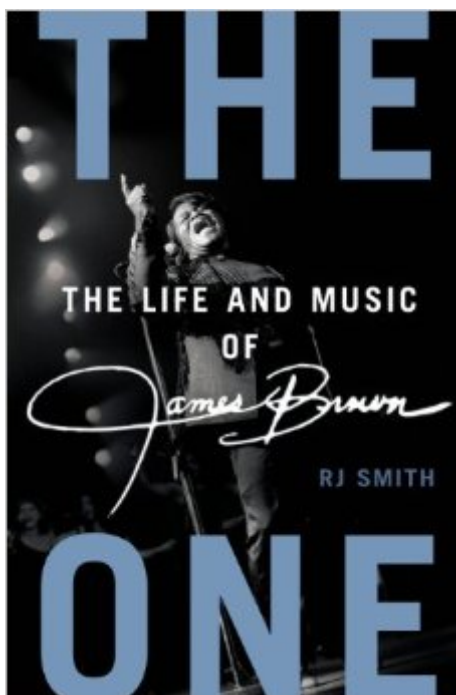


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# The One: The Life And Music Of James Brown



## Synopsis

The definitive biography of James Brown, the Godfather of Soul, with fascinating findings on his life as a Civil Rights activist, an entrepreneur, and the most innovative musician of our time. Playing 350 shows a year at his peak, with more than forty Billboard hits, James Brown was a dazzling showman who transformed American music. His life offstage was just as vibrant, and until now no biographer has delivered a complete profile. *The One* draws on interviews with more than 100 people who knew Brown personally or played with him professionally. Using these sources, award-winning writer RJ Smith draws a portrait of a man whose twisted and amazing life helps us to understand the music he made. *The One* delves deeply into the story of a man who was raised in abject-almost medieval-poverty in the segregated South but grew up to earn (and lose) several fortunes. Covering everything from Brown's unconventional childhood (his aunt ran a bordello), to his role in the Black Power movement, which used "Say It Loud (I'm Black and Proud)" as its anthem, to his high-profile friendships, to his complicated family life, Smith's meticulous research and sparkling prose blend biography with a cultural history of a pivotal era. At the heart of *The One* is Brown's musical genius. He had crucial influence as an artist during at least three decades; he inspires pity, awe, and revulsion. As Smith traces the legend's reinvention of funk, soul, R&B, and pop, he gives this history a melody all its own.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Because I have been an on-again-off-again fan of James Brown's music since the mid-sixties, to me it feels like the man has always been there. I remember him best as the ultimate showman, an

impression that is easily confirmed by watching some of the many James Brown videos that are readily found on YouTube today. Brown, because of the controversy surrounding his death and his multiple funerals, was a performer even in death, and I think he would have enjoyed and been pleased by that. I thought I knew James Brown - or, at least, everything I needed to know about him, but R.J. Smith's new James Brown biography, *The One: The Life and Music of James Brown*, showed me just how wrong I was. *The One* (which actually refers to the way that he emphasized the upbeat rather than the downbeat in his music) focuses on Brown's career path, as it should, but manages to get inside the man's head in a way that helps explain where much of his chronic reckless behavior originated. James Brown, like all of us, was the product of his environment, his deeper culture, and his upbringing. Unfortunately for those around him, he often embraced the worst elements of all three, making life for his several wives, his children, and his employees miserable, at best - and unsustainable, at worst. Smith documents Brown's troubled life in great detail. The failed marriages, the thousands of women who kept him company on the road, the children (most of whom he hardly knew), the drug abuse of his later years, the susceptibility to physical violence he could not always control, his mental abuse of band members - it is all there. James Brown was an extreme control freak; band members did not work for him - he owned them - but few would argue with the results of his musical vision or his impact on popular music and culture. One important part of Brown's legacy is seldom spoken of today. Largely because his music would eventually find a passionate white audience, he became an important figure in the civil rights movement of the sixties, often rubbing shoulders with the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders of the era. Brown saw himself as someone capable of unifying the races and he did his best to make it happen - even to the point of offending those of his own race who did not believe in the nonviolent tactics of Dr. King. National politicians of the day, although they sometimes abused his trust, recognized the importance of having his support - support that would eventually trigger a financially crippling boycott of Brown's music led by vocal elements of the black community. *The One* is for anyone interested in music history, pop culture, the civil rights movement, or simply what makes all of us tick. It is easy to forget (if we ever even realized the extent to which it was true) that James Brown was a real player in his prime, one of those important, but tragically flawed people, who comes around only every so often. *The One* will go a long way in setting the record straight.

Born in the segregated South, into poverty, nothing came easy to James Brown. Everything he got, he got through hard work and industry. The son of a turpentine man, Brown started out as a shoe shine boy, ended up in a juvenile correction facility, was a skilled athlete, and full of soul. Brown

drew musical influence from the performers on the chitlin circuit, only to go on to dominate the music industry for years. He influenced numerous musical genres and continues to serve as inspiration to performers today. Let me start by saying that I personally have never been a fan of funk or soul music. I think that had I grown up in the era of their inception, I actually would love the music. So, in all honesty, I knew very little about James Brown going into this book. Many of the songs mentioned were unfamiliar to me. So, this book was really an introduction to the Godfather of Soul. And what a comprehensive introduction it was. I felt like the book did a great job of establishing Brown's humble upbringings. I was pulled in at the very start, learning about his childhood. Being unfamiliar with the musical history of the South, I was fascinated to read about the wealth of talent to come from Georgia. I loved hearing how James Brown met Little Richard. Similarly, I was really enthralled to read about the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on Brown. It was fascinating to learn the impact of the ever changing sociopolitical situation, and how Brown both affected it and was affected by it. However, the middle section of the book was very heavy handed with details about the music, changes in band line up, and the ever elusive "One". To a music aficionado, or a huge Brown fan, I am sure this section of the book is interesting, but to me, I was a little lost. It really slowed down my reading during the middle portion of the book. The last portion of the book covered the only part of Brown's life with which I was familiar, from the 1980's on. I remembered a lot of the stories discussed, so again this part was really fascinating to me. The book overall paints a truly fascinating portrait of James Brown, not all of which is positive. It made me deeply respect James Brown and all his musical contributions.

I am a 64 year old white male who grew up on black music. In general I like all music and have seen a wide range of concerts which range from Elvis, Janice Joplin to early Ike and Tina Turner to Otis Redding. Of all of them no-one could hold a candle to James in the 60's and 70's. His stage shows were mind blowing. Reading this book took me back to my youth and collecting James Brown posters off telephone poles whenever James came to town. The book is a great read, and I would recommend it to any James Brown fans. H Howell

This is not just another JB story of the weary routine i.e. Left alone in the woods until the age of 5, troubled boy finds his way to town. Lives in Brothel...dances and hustles lots of change...sent to reform school for stealing ...released for good behavior...sings loud and dances like crazy...works hard...etc.etc. This is a difficult read for anyone who might ever have thought that Mr. Brown "walked on water" in spite of the ups and downs which started somewhere around 1975. In this

book, Mr. Brown is portrayed as a rough, coniving, even paranoid individual who puts every so-called friend, employee and acquaintance to the test, with his conflicting opinions and routine. He is ruthless, immensely talented, unpredictable and fascinating. It hurts to hear stories of Mr. Brown wielding a gun and firing shots in a nightclub. I think the kindest chapter is #24, called "The Dancer." If you are a fan of JB, and you know someone who never was, let them read this one simple chapter. It presents, with great imagination, a stunning profile of a great man.

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