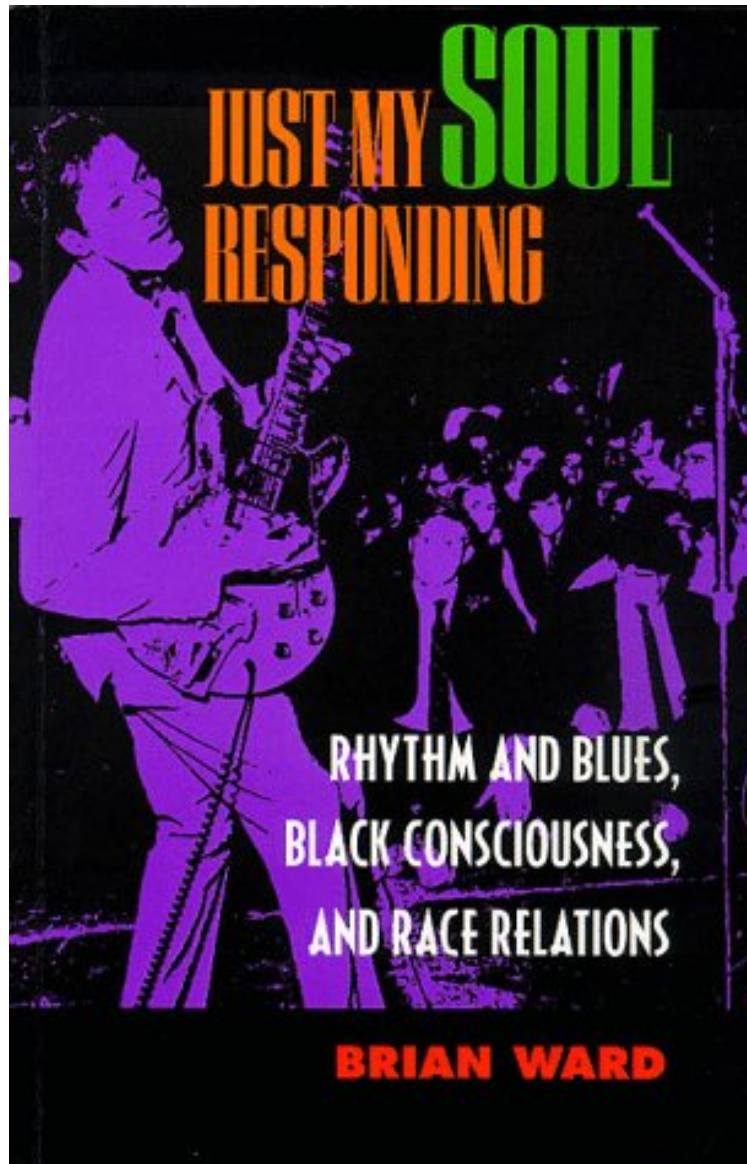


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Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations

Brian Ward

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Brian Ward : Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Essential readingBy ALBrian Ward's book is probably the most

valuable scholarly study of rock or closely-related music. The best-known works in this field are by music critics, which are often entertaining reads filled with fascinating inside information, but very light on evidence and argument. Some offer brilliant interpretation (e.g., Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train*), but they usually offer no evidence that the music has had any meaningful societal effects. Ward, in contrast, weaves a sophisticated argument about the interaction of rhythm and blues and racial consciousness. He also offers well-reasoned criticisms of the claims of a number of music critics (e.g., Nelson George). For those looking for lighter (but not entirely light-weight) reading, James Miller's *Flowers in the Dustbin* is a better choice, but if you want a well-written but scholarly study, Ward's is the best yet. Glenn Altschuler's *All Shook Up* and Michael Bertrand's *Race, Rock, and Elvis* are also well worth reading, for those looking for scholarly studies that examine other aspects of the early rock era. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. One of the best! By David This is one of the best books about popular music and race I have read - it is thorough, well-researched, penetrating, well-written, thoughtful and thought-provoking. Highly, highly recommended! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great information! By Customer I use this book to teach a protest class. Great information!

One of the most innovative and ambitious books to appear on the civil rights and black power movements in America, *Just My Soul Responding* also offers a major challenge to conventional histories of contemporary black and popular music. Brian Ward explores in detail the previously neglected relationship between Rhythm and Blues, black consciousness, and race relations within the context of the ongoing struggle for black freedom and equality in the United States. Instead of simply seeing the world of black music as a reflection of a mass struggle raging elsewhere, Ward argues that Rhythm and Blues, and the recording and broadcasting industries with which it was linked, formed a crucial public arena for battles over civil rights, racial identities, and black economic empowerment. Combining unrivalled archival research with extensive oral testimony, Ward examines the contributions of artists and entrepreneurs like Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and Berry Gordy to the organized black struggle, explaining what they did for the Movement and just as important why they and most of their peers failed to do more. In the process, he analyses the ways in which various groups, from the SCLC to the Black Panthers, tried with very mixed results to use Rhythm and Blues and the politics of celebrity to further their cause. He also examines the role that black-oriented radio played in promoting both Rhythm and Blues and the Movement, and unravels the intricate connections between the sexual politics of the music and the development of the black freedom struggle. This richly textured study of some of the most important music and complex political events in America since World War II challenges the belief that white consumption of black music necessarily helped eradicate racial prejudice. Indeed, Ward argues that the popularity of Rhythm and Blues among white listeners sometimes only reinforced racial stereotypes, while noting how black artists actually manipulated those stereotypes to increase their white audiences. Ultimately, Ward shows how the music both reflected and affected shifting perceptions of community, empowerment, identity, and gender relations in America during the civil rights and black power eras.

.com Addressing a gathering of black DJs in Atlanta in 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "In a real sense you have paved the way for social and political change by creating a powerful, cultural bridge between black and white.... You introduced youth to that music and created a language of soul and promoted the dances which now sweep across race, class and nation." "That music" was rhythm and blues, and Brian Ward uses King's quote to further the premise of his fascinating book, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*: that the music moved not only the feet of listeners, but their hearts and minds as well. But as with nearly anything associated with race relations in the U.S., there is a flip side to this record, and Ward offers ample evidence that suggests RB also served to reinforce white stereotypes of blacks and promoted continued segregation. As he points out, many of the same white fans who packed venues to see Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, and Aretha Franklin never supported the notion of equal rights or integration. In other words, entertainment was fine as long as it didn't challenge the status quo. It is precisely this lack of acceptance--combined with the snail's pace of civil rights legislation--that led to the emergence of the Black Power movement and the concurrent rise of funk and soul, the self-consciously inclusive offspring of RB originally geared specifically for black audiences. Of course, the fact that James Brown's "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" or Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready" carried undeniably political messages for blacks didn't mean the average white music fan couldn't "get up, get into it and get involved." Ward's insistence on this point clearly suggests, despite his attempt at objectivity, that he believes the music made a difference. Ward's coverage of RB stretches from the release of the Chords' single "Sh-Boom" in 1954 through the mid-1970s, so it is far from a complete history of the genre, but his work is to be applauded for both its ambition and enthusiasm. Though his theorizing may wear thin at times, *Just My Soul Responding* is exhaustively researched (the notes and sources stretch nearly 100 pages) and packed with the kind of anecdotes that music lovers will savor. Particularly adept coverage of Chuck Berry, James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, Motown founder Berry Gordy, and the roles of many other prominent artists who either supported and avoided the civil rights cause stand out as some of the book's highlights. In all, a rousing hybrid of history, social commentary, and the literate liner notes of an ardent fan. --Shawn Carkonen "A

superb demonstration of how to write American cultural history. Richly detailed and textured."--"Citation for a 1999 American Book Award
From the Inside Flap "Ward brings passion and an encyclopedic knowledge of RB to bear in his account of Brown vs. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the ebb and flow of economic and political clout within the Black community. . . . A densely textured and fascinating study."
Susan McClary, author of *Feminine Endings* "A highly original and imaginative history connecting African American popular music with corresponding developments in the Black freedom struggle. . . . Ward is particularly adept in his use of sources, combining a creative rendering of discography with ample use of archival material. . . . [Ward] forces the reader to think about the civil rights and Black power movements in new ways and offers keen insights for measuring the impact of the African American freedom struggle on both Black and white Americans."
Steven Lawson, Stanford University