



I Feel Good: A Memoir of a Life of Soul

By James Brown

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James Brown has always been a fascinating, controversial figure. From his humble childhood in Georgia, he went on to change the face of American music with hit after hit on the R&B charts. And while he was a courageous public figure in a time of national strife and adversity, his personal life took many destructive turns, leaving a long and difficult path of redemption ahead of him. For the first time in well over a decade, he speaks candidly and at length about his tumultuous, incredible journey.

James Brown moves beyond his music and his much-publicized legal troubles to delve deeply into the highs and lows of his life.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Others may have followed in my wake, but I was the one who turned racist minstrelsy into Black soul—and by doing so, became a cultural force." So claims Brown in the opening pages of his garrulous, vernacular memoir written with the aid of Eliot (author of bios on the Eagles and Bruce Springsteen). And Brown makes a convincing argument, tracing his gutsy transformation from dirt-poor grade school dropout to gospel singer, legendary showman and musical innovator who broke the color barrier of 1950s and '60s pop by melding African-American rhythm and blues with gospel and rock to become the Godfather of Soul. Along with fascinating details about life in the music industry, Brown relates how soul music, which begins on the upbeat (traditional blues began on the downbeat) was a "statement of race, of force, of stature, of stride" and "the perfect marching music for the civil rights era." The "rock-a-soul" that Brown created (along with rockers Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and others) "was not just about rebellion—it was the rebellion itself," he says. Chronicling such peace-seeking yet controversial events as his 1968 U.S.O. tour of Vietnam and his landmark Boston Garden performance the day after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, Brown cites his own example as a "self-made and therefore self-owned Black man." Though he sometimes attributes his legal, financial and political woes to a racist establishment too eager to judge a black man before his day in court, Brown remains a deeply positive force dedicated to the "international language of music." This is a fascinating memoir of a trailblazer in music and civil rights.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—The 72-year-old Godfather of Soul reflects on the dramatic ups and downs of his life, from the time that doctors pronounced him stillborn until the present. In the '60s, he was the first entertainer to rent out theaters and work for himself. He also created Fair Deal Productions to reflect his vision of how the music industry should operate. He purchased several radio stations, pushed young people to finish their education, and created scholarships for poor black students. Brown identifies performers who influenced his style, such as saxophonist Louis Jordan and singer Jackie Wilson. Likewise, he names celebrities who have modeled themselves after him, including Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson. He discusses his role as a pioneer of soul and funk music and points out how disco and rap have affected his career. This inspirational memoir illustrates Brown's strong will to overcome and succeed despite numerous personal tragedies and professional setbacks. He refers to prison time of a decade and a half ago as "poor man's medicine." After the deaths of his son and his third wife, he survived emotionally by throwing himself into his work. Aspiring entertainers can benefit from the business, artistic, and personal advice that Brown interweaves throughout the book.—*Joyce Fay Fletcher, Rippon Middle School, Prince William County, VA*

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From [Booklist](#)

It's likely that R & B singer Brown is better known to today's audiences for his lurid run-ins with the law—he served two and a half years after a 1988 arrest on drug and assault charges—than for his music. If so, that's a shame, because he was arguably the most important and influential figure in 1960s black music. Plenty of fans and critics have sung his praises, but seldom as avidly or as entertainingly as does Brown himself in these brief but beguiling memoirs. He recounts his harsh childhood in the rural South, his early days performing on the chitlin' circuit, and his breakthrough 1956 hit, "Please Please Please." In the '70s, changing musical tastes and political upheaval helped derail his career, leading him to a self-destructive turn toward addiction and domestic violence in the following decade. He now credits prison for saving his life, claiming, "I wasn't arrested—I was *rescued*." After his release, he returned to performing with a renewed vigor that

belied his advanced age, culminating in a triumphant 2003 return to Harlem's Apollo Theatre, site of his epochal 1962 live album (see Douglas Wolk's *Live at the Apollo* [BKL S 15 04]). This isn't a brand-new bag-Brown covered much the same territory in a 1986 autobiography. But this second look is worthwhile, if only to hear the Godfather of Soul extol white rappers as signs of social progress. *Gordon Flagg*
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Users Review

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