Syllabus for Motown Records: The Greatest Soul Music Label

Fromm Institute
8 Tuesdays, 1pm-2:40pm
January 8-February 26
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Week One

The Roots of Motown

I.

A. Berry Gordy, Jr. tries several professions without much success as a young man in the 1950s, including jazz record store owner, factory worker, and soldier.

B. By the late 1950s, he makes inroads into the music business as a songwriter, particularly through hits he composes for Jackie Wilson.

C. In the late 1950s, he founds Motown Records in Detroit, drawing upon local talent in all facets of the music scene.

Other themes: Support and criticism from the Gordy family for Berry's endeavors; the overall Detroit African-American music scene in the 1950s; the difficulties of establishing an independent record label.

II.

A. Motown's first successes are with Marv Johnson, and distributed through United Artists. But Gordy realizes he has to control all facets of the record business, including publishing and distribution, for Motown to be as powerful as he hopes.

B. In the early 1960s, Motown gets its first big national hits with the Miracles' "Shop Around" and the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman." The label continues to build its roster with artists like Mary Wells, though it will take a while before some of the groups they sign, like the Supremes and the Temptations, have hit records.

Other themes: the competitive independent record business of the early 1960s; the establishment of a Motown studio within the same buildings as its business operations.

Week Two

Motown in the Early 1960s

I.
A. Motown starts to accumulate hit records by several artists, including more by the Miracles, the Marvelettes, and Mary Wells, as well as other acts like the Contours, with "Do You Love Me."

B. Motown is also developing a base of talented session musicians and producers/songwriters, including the trio of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, who will be their most successful songwriting/production team.

Other themes: the contributions of Gordy's second wife, Raynoma; Motown's failed ventures into blues, jazz, and spoken word music.

II.

A. By 1963, Motown is becoming a major force in the record business, with continued hits by their early stars being joined by smash hits from others, like Stevie Wonder's "Fingertips" and Martha & the Vandellas' "Heat Wave." Marvin Gaye also has his first hits in this year.

B. In addition to leading the Miracles, Smokey Robinson is a major contributor to Motown as a producer and songwriter for other artists, especially Mary Wells.

Other themes: the Motown Revue tours the United States as an ensemble, playing major venues like the Apollo Theater in New York; the quality control meetings overseen by Berry Gordy, in which decisions are made by committee.

Week Three

Motown Becomes the Sound of Young America

I.

A. Although the arrival of the Beatles in the US in early 1964, followed by many other UK acts in the British Invasion, threatens the success of many American soul and rock musicians, Motown not only thrives, but keeps getting bigger. Its motto is "the sound of young America."

B. In addition to the continued success of artists who had success prior to the Beatles' breakthrough, Motown jumps into another league when the Temptations and the Supremes have their first big hits after years of failures.

Other themes: The influence of Motown on the Beatles, who cover a few Motown songs on their second album; the influence of Motown on other British Invasion groups.

II.

A. Motown suffers its first major loss when Mary Wells leaves the label. Wells will never
have another big hit, and in the 1960s, Motown will not lose another big star to a different company.

B. Throughout 1964, Motown keeps growing with huge hits like Martha & the Vandellas’ "Dancing in the Street," and adding new star acts like the Four Tops. Their biggest boost, however, is from the Supremes, who have five straight #1 hits in the mid-1960s, in the middle of Beatlemania.

Other themes: the development of a Motown charm school and choreography instruction to establish well-groomed, clean-cut images; male-female duo side projects help reinforce the Motown brand.

Week Four

Motown in the Mid-'60s

I.

A. Big hits keep coming for numerous Motown acts in the mid-1960s, like the Temptations' "My Girl," the Supremes' "Stop! In the Name of Love," the Four Tops' "Reach Out," and the Miracles' "Goin' to a Go-Go." Many are written/produced by Holland/Dozier/Holland and Smokey Robinson, but other writers and producers like Norman Whitfield start to make their mark.

B. Motown expands its reach beyond Detroit with hits by a Los Angeles singer, Brenda Holloway. After three years without a big hit, Stevie Wonder gets his career back on track with 1966's "Uptight," and his stardom is never endangered afterward.

Other themes: The role of network television in popularizing Motown, especially The Ed Sullivan Show; failed attempts by Motown to record white musicians.

II.

A. Besides their biggest stars, Motown has depth to its roster with singers with more mid-level hits. They include Tammi Terrell, Kim Weston, Junior Walker, and Jimmy Ruffin.

B. Motown also adds to its stable by signing artists who have hits with other labels. But though some will be successful on Motown, especially Gladys Knight & the Pips, others will struggle, like the Isley Brothers and Chuck Jackson.

Other themes: Motown's prioritization of singles over albums, though rock LPs are starting to become more important both commercially and artistically; Motown starts to make a major impact in the UK market.

Week Five
Motown in the Late 1960s

I.

A. On the surface, Motown's as successful as ever in the late '60s, with continued huge hits by its stars, like Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," Stevie Wonder's "My Cherie Amour," and the Temptations' "I Wish It Would Rain."

B. However, in 1967 Holland/Dozier/Holland sue Motown, and don't work for the label again. By the end of the 1960s, they've left to found their own company. The Supremes replace Florence Ballard with Cindy Birdsong and become billed as Diana Ross & the Supremes, with Ross leaving the group at the end of the 1960s.

Other themes: impact of Detroit riots on Motown; Motown starts to relocate from its neighborhood offices.

II.

A. After rarely venturing into socially conscious lyrics, Motown starts to do so and keep up with the times on hits like the Temptations' "Cloud Nine" and the Supremes' "Love Child." With producer Norman Whitfield, the Temptations also become the first Motown act to reflect the influence of psychedelic music.

B. Although a lull in developing new superstars after the mid-1960s, Motown ends the decade with a bang by introducing the Jackson Five to the nation with the #1 hit "I Want You Back."

Other themes: Motown's increased focus on recording and conducting business in Los Angeles; artists who've cooled off, like Martha & the Vandellas, start to feel neglected

Week Six

Motown in the Early 1970s

I.

A. With a somewhat more updated sound drawing from trends in psychedelic and funk music, Motown continues to roll on with big hits by the Temptations, the Jackson Five, and Diana Ross. Edwin Starr has a huge Motown signature hit with "War."

B. It also has its first hits with white acts on its Rare Earth subsidiary, by R. Dean Taylor and the group that is actually called Rare Earth.

Other themes: failed attempts by Motown to break further into the white rock and pop market; departures of key members for solo careers affect prospects of the Supremes and the Temptations.
II.

A. Motown closes its Detroit offices after fully relocating to Los Angeles, although it continues to be a successful label.

B. Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder successfully demand more artistic independence than any Motown artist previously received, and are the first to make serious album-length statements.

Other themes: Berry Gordy's focus gets diverted by ambitions to enter movies; the impact of Motown's departure on Detroit's music community.

Week Seven

Motown’s Legacy

I.

A. Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder continue to pace Motown with both listeners and critics with best-selling albums and singles in the mid-1970s.

B. However, Diana Ross does not quite match the popularity her recordings with the Supremes enjoyed, and does not quite become a movie superstar, despite Berry Gordy's ambitions.

C. Although some Motown artists enjoy success after leaving for other labels, they rarely match the peaks of what they did with Motown. One exception is Michael Jackson, who only becomes a solo superstar in the late 1970s for a different company.

Other themes: Motown's Los Angeles operations; Motown's continued failure to establish itself in fields outside of its main strength, soul music.

II. Other Soul Offshoots

A. Although Motown continues to sell a lot of records throughout the rest of the twentieth century, it no longer has a distinct stylistic identity. Berry Gordy sells his ownership in Motown in the late 1980s.

B. Motown continues to be celebrated in compilations, on classic radio, and at the Motown museum in Detroit.

Week Eight

Motown’s Influence
A. Motown was a huge influence on white rock of the 1960s and 1970s, especially British acts like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart, and Dusty Springfield.

B. Its classics have been covered by rock, soul, and reggae acts of all kinds, from the Beach Boys and reggae star Peter Tosh to Creedence Clearwater Revival.

C. In the 1970s, stars like James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt revived some Motown songs to have hits of their own. Motown songs have also been used in many films, and occasionally satirized in cinema and television.
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**Recommended Reading:**

*Ain't Too Proud to Beg: The Troubled Lives and the Enduring Soul of the Temptations*, by Mark Ribowsky (Wiley, 2010). Though it suffers somewhat from the unavailability of most of the original Temptations (most of whom had died by the time this book was written) for interviews, this is a decent overview of the great Motown group.

*The A&R Man*, by William Mickey Stevenson (Stevenson International Entertainment, 2015). Mickey Stevenson wasn’t the most well known producer/A&R man at Motown, but was involved in a lot of their hits (sometimes as a songwriter) in the first half of the 1960s. This book is a little loose and rambling, but presents stories from an important behind-the-scenes figure not highlighted in most Motown histories.

*Berry, Me, and Motown*, by Raynoma Gordy Singleton (Contemporary, 1990). Memoir by Berry Gordy’s second wife, married to the Motown chief from 1960 to 1964. Singleton was intimately involved in helping to run the nuts-and-bolts of Motown in its early days, and the most interesting parts of this book are her memories of that time. The problems and end of their marriage and some disputes in its aftermath are also covered extensively, and aren’t as interesting.

*Between Each Line of Pain and Glory: My Life Story*, by Gladys Knight (Hyperion, 1997). Not great even by the standards of celebrity memoirs, and as much about her troubled personal life as her music, this still has some recollections of her work with the Pips, though the section on their stardom at Motown isn’t as lengthy as you’d expect.

*Call Her Miss Ross*, by J. Randy Taraborrelli (Birch Lane, 1989). With more than 500 pages, a very lengthy unauthorized biography of Diana Ross, though about half of it covers her post-Supremes solo years.

*Calling Out Around the World: A Motown Reader*, edited by Kingsley Abbott (Helter Skelter, 2001). A collection of essays and critiques of aspects of the 1960s Motown sounds, including some material from interviews with Motown personnel and reprints of vintage Motown articles. Note that this focuses very much on the label’s earliest years, and many readers would dispute the stances of some contributors that the company went into artistic decline after the mid-1960s.

*Dancing in the Street: Confessions of a Motown Diva*, by Martha Reeves and Mark Bego (Hyperion, 1994). Lengthy memoir by the lead singer of the Vandellas has plenty of detail about their Motown days, and more than its share of bitterness about some of the company’s policies and Reeves’s feeling that the label neglected the group in some respects.
Detroit 67: The Year That Changed Soul, by Stuart Cosgrove (Polygon, 2016). Divided into twelve chapters for each month of the year, this closely examines the artistically triumphant but internally turbulent year of 1967 at Motown Records. Less successfully, it also weaves in events shaking the Motor City outside of Motown in 1967, particularly Detroit’s summer riots and the police misconduct that led up to it, as well as the boiling rock underground led by the MC5 and their manager, John Sinclair. It’s best when it closely examines controversial developments at Motown, particularly the firing of Florence Ballard from the Supremes and disputes which led the songwriting/production team of Holland-Dozier-Holland to leave the label.

Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye, by David Ritz (Da Capo Press, 2003). The most in-depth biography of the troubled soul star (who was shot to death by his father in 1984), by an author who worked with Gaye as a songwriting collaborator toward the end of the singer’s life.

Dreamgirl: My Life As a Supreme, by Mary Wilson (St. Martin’s Press, 1986). More hard-hitting and tell-all than most Motown memoirs, Wilson’s account of her Motown days covers a lot of territory. Her criticisms of Diana Ross’s sometimes egotistic behavior got the most attention, but she also had a lot to say about Motown in general. Her subsequent, less interesting book Supreme Faith covered her post-1970 career, and both volumes were later combined into one.

Guitars, Bars, and Motown Superstars, by Dennis Coffey (University of Michigan Press, 2004). Coffey was a session guitarist on some important Motown records, particularly the Temptations’ excursions into psychedelic soul. This is a short book that is only of interest to specialists, but has some accounts of his Motown sessions.

Lonely Teardrops: The Jackie Wilson Story, by Tony Douglas (Sanctuary, 1997). Although it’s not a scintillating read, this biography packs a lot of information into its 400 pages, following Wilson’s career from his days with Billy Ward & the Dominoes to his solo stardom and tough final years in a coma before his death in the 1980s. Although Wilson wasn’t on Motown, Berry Gordy’s work with him as a songwriter in the late 1950s represented Gordy’s first successes in the music business, making Wilson important to the Motown story.

The Lost Supreme: The Life of Dreamgirl Florence Ballard, by Peter Benjaminson (Lawrence Hill, 2008). Ballard was one of the original Supremes, but not nearly as visible or interesting as Diana Ross. Nor did she get to tell her own colorful account of their heyday, as fellow backup Supreme Mary Wilson did. Nonetheless, this is a modest volume about her life, which was tragic in some respects, especially after she quit/was fired from the Supremes in 1967, ending up in poverty before dying about a decade later.

Mary Wells: The Tumultuous Life of Motown’s First Superstar, by Peter Benjaminson (Chicago Review Press, 2012). Mary Wells’s period of stardom at Motown was short, and not quite enough to make a big book about. But this is likely to be the only
reasonably comprehensive attempt, including her long post-Motown artistic, commercial, and personal decline.

Motown: The Golden Years, by Bill Dahl (Krause, 2001). Although this isn’t as tightly constructed an overview as the best Motown history (Nelson George’s Where Did Our Love Go? The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound), this 350-page oversize paperback has a great deal of detail on Motown in the 1960s and 1970s. Aside from separate chapters on all the Motown stars, there are literally dozens of short profiles of the many other acts on the label’s roster, and many pictures.

Motown: Music, Money, Sex and Power, by Gerald Posner (Random House, 2002). Investigative-oriented volume, which emphasizes the business and manipulative sides of the company more than most previous studies had. It’s a pretty straightforward account of the giant soul music label's rise and eventual decline, with almost three-fourths of the text devoted to Motown's pre-1970 heyday. Posner did new interviews and research (particularly relating to some of Motown's legal wrangling), in addition to trawling through a lot of previously published sources, and the story's told well, though there's not much in the way of earth-shaking revelations.

Motown: The Sound of Young America, by Adam White with Barney Ales (Thames & Hudson, 2016). As an executive at Motown Records, Barney Ales had an inside look at the company’s operations, though more from a promotional/business standpoint than artistic one. This book can’t quite decide whether to be an overall history of Motown or a look at its promotional side, and isn’t the greatest read as a result. But it does have some inside stories and is lavishly illustrated, with many color images and reproductions of vintage record covers.

The Original Marvelettes: Motown’s Mystery Girl Group, by Marc Taylor (Aloiv, 2004). Although they had their share of big hits, the Marvelettes were perhaps the least colorful Motown stars, in part because personnel changes and the lack of a star lead singer made them harder to identify. Their story doesn’t make for the most interesting or longest book, but this is likely to be the one that attempts to set it down in a full-length volume.

Secrets of a Sparrow: Memoirs, by Diana Ross (Villard, 1993). Unsurprisingly, Ross’s autobiography isn’t as controversial as Mary Wilson’s look at the Supremes years, or as in-depth as biographies of Ross and the Supremes that are listed elsewhere here. But it does lay out some her thoughts about the Supremes and her solo career, and a lot about her personal life, from her perspective.

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered: The Soulful Journey of Stevie Wonder, by Mark Ribowsky (Wiley, 2010). Though it didn't get much attention, this is a reasonable biography of one of the most beloved figures in twentieth century popular music, properly focusing on his 1960s and 1970s work with Motown.
Smokey: Inside My Life, by Smokey Robinson with David Ritz (McGraw-Hill, 1989). Disappointingly slight and written in a superficial style common to many celebrity memoirs, Robinson’s autobiography still has some interesting details about Motown’s origins and the Miracles’ biggest hits, though it doesn’t dig much deeper. Considering his importance to both Motown and popular music as a whole, he deserves a much better biography.

The Supremes: A Saga of Motown Dreams, Success, and Betrayal, by Mark Ribowsky (Da Capo, 2010). Another volume by prolific Motown biographer Mark Ribowsky, which like his books on the Temptations and Stevie Wonder is the most in-depth one on the subject.

Temptations, by Otis Williams with Patricia Romanowski (Cooper Square, 2002). Otis Williams was the least well known member of the Temptations during their glory years – he didn’t take lead vocals, and didn’t even have the occasional bass lines Melvin Franklin did. But he was the only one who stayed with them the entire twentieth century. He tells their story in a reasonably in-depth and readable fashion here, documenting both the music and their oft-stormy conflicts and personnel changes.

To Be Loved, by Berry Gordy (Warner, 1994). The Motown founder and boss’s autobiography, which has a lot of interesting memories of the company’s birth and prime, though some of its avoidance of the accusations and controversies that have sometimes been associated with the label can seem defensive.

What’s Going On?, by Ben Edmonds (MOJO, 2001). An entire book on Marvin Gaye’s What’s Going On album, benefiting from first-hand interviews with people who were at Motown and/or involved in the recording and Gaye’s life/career at the time.

Where Did Our Love Go?: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound, by Nelson George (University of Illinois Press, 1997). Of the numerous books that have been written about Motown (including biographies and memoirs for its artists and chief Berry Gordy, Jr.), this remains the best and most readable, balancing history with insightful and fair critical description.

Women of Motown: An Oral History, by Susan Whitall (Avon, 1998). Short (150-page) compilation of comments, with some linking context, by and about the Supremes, Martha Reeves, the Marvelettes, Mary Wells, Kim Weston, Claudette Robinson (of the Miracles), Brenda Holloway, Tammi Terrell, and a couple of the more obscure Motown female actors, Mable John and the Velvelettes.
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Recommended Listening:

A. Greatest Hits Collections by Motown Stars

The Contours, *The Very Best of* (Motown, 1999). Although they were one of the less talented and versatile early Motown acts, the Contours would be important if for nothing else than their huge 1962 hit “Do You Love Me,” one of the greatest raucous soul dance smashes of all time. Some of their other songs were pretty good too, like “Shake Sherry” and “First I Look at the Purse,” but they never had another hit nearly as big or as good.

The Four Tops, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1997). Their peak was brief, but for a while the Four Tops were one of Motown's biggest vocal groups, and perhaps its most forceful. This might be missing a few post-Motown hits, but what's here is classic mid-to-late-'60s soul, including of course their chart-topping "Reach Out (I'll Be There)."

Marvin Gaye, *Anthology* (Motown, 1995). Two-CD best of one of Motown's most important and eclectic singers and songwriters, from peppy early-'60s hits like "Hitch Hike" and "Stubborn Kind of Fellow" to more serious-minded late-'60s/early '70s material like "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" and "What's Going On."

Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell, *20th Century Masters: The Millennium Collection: The Best of Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell* (Motown, 2000). Gaye recorded duets with several female Motown acts, but was most successful with his collaborations with Tammi Terrell. It’s brief, but this eleven-song CD has the most celebrated of these, including “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” “You’re All I Need to Get By,” and “Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing.”

Brenda Holloway, *The Very Best of Brenda Holloway* (Motown, 1999). Unlike the vast majority of Motown hitmakers, Holloway was not based in Detroit, instead hailing from Los Angeles. Besides her big 1964 hit “Every Little Bit Hurts,” she had a small 1967 hit with “You’ve Made Me So Very Happy,” which became a much bigger hit for Blood, Sweat & Tears, and which she co-wrote.

The Isley Brothers, *60’s Greatest Hits and Rare Classics* (Motown, 1991). A strange title for a group that only had one big hit on Motown, “This Old Heart of Mine.” That song’s here, along with twenty others they recorded during their brief stint with the label in the mid-to-late-'60s. The biggest hits they recorded in the ‘60s for other labels (“Twist and Shout” and “It’s Your Thing”) are also included, if only to make sure there’s some validity to the plural of the “greatest hits” in the collection’s title.
The Jackson 5, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1995). The last superstars to emerge from Motown in the 1960s, the Jackson 5 combined teen and preteen appeal with exuberant contemporary soul grooves. This has their initial group of megasmashes ("I Want You Back," "The Love You Save," "ABC") and continues up through their early disco hit "Dancing Machine."

Marv Johnson, *The Best of Marv Johnson: You Got What It Takes* (United Artists, 1992). Technically speaking, Johnson was not a Motown artist, although in its early days Motown recorded him and had his records distributed by United Artists. The pop-soul blend of his late-'50s/early-'60s tracks helped establish the Motown blueprint, and a couple dozen songs from that period are here, including "Come to Me," "You Got What It Takes," "I Love the Way You Love," and "(You’ve Got to) Move Two Mountains."

Gladys Knight & the Pips, *Anthology* (Motown, 1995). Though not the flashiest of Motown's singers, Knight was one of the best, and she and the Pips were reliable hitmakers for the label in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This two-CD compilation has them, including "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" and "Neither One of Us," though not "Midnight Train to Georgia," which they hit with just after leaving the label.

Martha & the Vandellas, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1998). Motown's most successful girl group before they were surpassed by the Supremes, and a more fiery one, especially on "Heat Wave" and "Dancing in the Street."

The Marvelettes, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1998). The poppiest of Motown's star female groups, though not to their detriment, with their early-'60s smash "Please Mr. Postman" vital to putting the label on the map. They continued to score hits over the course of the decade with songs like "Too Many Fish in the Sea," "Don't Mess with Bill," and "My Baby Must Be a Magician."

Rare Earth, *The Collection* (Spectrum, 2004). Best-of for Motown’s only truly successful white rock group includes their hits “Get Ready,” “(I Know) I’m Losing You,” and “I Just Want to Celebrate.”

Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, *The Definitive Collection* (Motown, 2008). There were more worthy Miracles songs than the eighteen here, but this has the biggest hits they made during their first decade, from "Shop Around" to "The Tears of a Clown." The Miracles were a group, not just a vehicle for Robinson, but he did dominate it with his high voice and superb songwriting.

Edwin Starr, *The Very Best of Edwin Starr* (Motown, 1998). Relatively brief (14-song) overview of the highlights of one of Motown’s less remembered hitmakers has the two smashes people remember him for (“25 Miles” and “War”), and a couple good R&B hits he recorded shortly before joining the label (“Stop Her on Sight (S.O.S.)” and “Agent Double-O Soul.”
The Supremes, *Gold* (Motown, 2005). There are plenty of Supremes greatest hits collections. This two-CD, forty-track one is more thorough than most, including all of their 1960s hits, and the ones they did in the 1970s without Diana Ross.

The Temptations, *Anthology* (Motown, 1995). Two-CD compilation of Motown's top male vocal group, from their early sweet pop-soul hits (often written or co-written by Smokey Robinson) through their psychedelic funk of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Junior Walker, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1997). Twenty-five songs mixing instrumentals and vocals by Motown’s star saxophonist on a single disc, including all of their hits, among them “Shotgun,” (“I’m a) Road Runner,” and “What Does It Take (To Win Your Love).”

Mary Wells, *The Ultimate Collection* (Motown, 1998). Mary Wells was briefly Motown's biggest star before she left the label, never to have a big hit again, and the Supremes moved into her place. Her girl-group influenced sound was also the sound of Motown finding its feet as a soul-pop powerhouse, most memorably on "My Guy," but also on other hits Smokey Robinson wrote and produced for her, like "Two Lovers" and "The One Who Really Loves You."

Stevie Wonder, *The Best of Stevie Wonder: 20th Century Masters: The Millennium Collection* (Motown, 2005). It is strange that such a major musician as Stevie Wonder does not have a truly good, lengthy, chronologically sequenced greatest hits collection. This one has a dozen of his most famous songs from his first decade or so as a recording artist, including his hits "Fingertips Part 2," "Uptight," and "For Once in My Life," though it stops short of his more personal and most popular work from the early-to-mid-1970s.

Stevie Wonder, *Original Musiquarium I* (Motown, 1982). Two-CD compilation of his 1970s hits, including such well-played numbers as "Higher Ground," "Superstition," "Living for the City," and "You Are the Sunshine of My Life." Of course, as one of soul's most popular album-oriented artists, his albums of the time also have music worth checking out, especially the four he made in 1972-76 after changing his contract with Motown to assure artistic freedom (*Talking Book, Innervisions, Fulfillingness' First Finale, and Songs in the Key of Life*). 

Various Artists, *Hitsville USA: The Motown Singles Collection 1959-1971* (Motown, 1992). Four-CD box set featuring the major hits from Motown's golden era, not only from Motown superstars like the Supremes, Miracles, Temptations, Marvin Gaye, and Stevie Wonder, but also such important major and minor ones as saxophonist/singer Junior Walker; Gladys Knight & the Pips; Edwin Starr ("War"); and the Contours ("Do You Love Me").
B. Best-ofs by Secondary Motown Acts

The Elgins, *The Best of the Elgins* (Motor City Music, 1996). This male-female vocal group, with lead singer Saundra Mallett, never had a big pop hit during their time with Motown in the mid-’60s. But they had a Top Ten R&B singles with “Darling Baby” and “Heaven Must Have Sent You,” both of which are on this 18-song compilation.

Eddie Holland, *It Moves Me: The Complete Recordings 1958-1964* (Ace, 2012). This two-CD, 56-track set is way too specialized for the casual fan, but it’s the best compilation of Holland’s work as a singer on the market. Far better known as one-third of the Holland-Dozier-Holland production/songwriting team, Eddie Holland also had some minor success as a solo artist. This collection has not just his Motown recordings, but also tracks he cut for some other labels. These tracks aren’t nearly as good as the hits he wrote and produced for others, but carry some historical interest for those with a deep interest in Motown’s early days, and do include one outstanding single, the raucous “Leaving Here.”

Chuck Jackson, *The Motown Anthology* (Tamla Motown, 2005). Mostly forgotten today, Chuck Jackson had some good pop-soul hits in the early 1960s, not joining Motown until late in the decade. Another “too extensive for non-collectors” production, this two-CD, 48-song collection has the three LPs he did for the label and some rare/unreleased cuts. Unfortunately, he never found a particularly distinctive sound or hit-bound tunes during his time with the company.

Shorty Long, *The Essential Collection* (Spectrum, 2000). Remembered almost exclusively for his 1968 semi-novelty hit “Here Comes the Judge,” Shorty Long did some other recording for Motown before his death in 1969. He wasn’t an especially serious or talented artist, but this has the only two other songs for which soul fans remember him, “Devil with the Blue Dress” (covered for a hit by Mitch Ryder) and “Function at the Junction,” along with other items, usually frivolous ones like “Here Comes Fat Albert.”

The Originals, *The Very Best of the Originals* (Motown, 1999). A male vocal group who tilted toward the sweet, lush soul style, the Originals are most known for a couple 1969-70 hits they scored with Marvin Gaye’s help as songwriter/producer, “Baby I’m For Real” and “The Bells.” They’re both here, along with a smattering of other singles, B-sides, LP cuts, and unreleased tracks.

Jimmy Ruffin, *20th Century Masters—The Millennium Collection: The Best of Jimmy Ruffin* (Motown, 2001). The older brother of the Temptations’ David Ruffin is almost exclusively remembered for his sole Top Ten hit, 1966’s “What Becomes of the Broken Hearted.” That’s here, of course, along with his Top Twenty single from the following year (“I’ve Passed This Way Before”), though Jimmy wasn’t either as good a singer as David or privileged with access to material on par with the Temptations’ hits.
The Spinners, *Motown Superstar Series, Vol. 9* (Motown, 1992). The Spinners did become superstars, but not until the 1970s, when they become affiliated with the Philadelphia soul sound. This brief disc has ten songs from their largely unsuccessful years at Motown, including their one hit with the label, 1970’s “It’s a Shame.”

The Temptations, *“One By One”: The Best of Their Solo Years* (Motown, 1995). An unusual two-CD compilation that, though credited to the Temptations, doesn’t feature any actual Temptations tracks. Instead, it has solo efforts recorded by four Temptations (David Ruffin, Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, and Dennis Edwards) after they left the group. It’s not too interesting, truth be told, but does have the two solo hits that people remember, Ruffin’s “My Whole World Ended (The Moment You Left Me)” and Kendricks’s “Keep on Truckin’.”

Tammi Terrell, *The Essential Collection* (Spectrum, 2001). Although known mostly for her hit duets with Marvin Gaye, Terrell also recorded on her own for the label, if with only modest success. This best-of focuses on those solo sides, including just one of the Gaye duets, “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough.”

Undisputed Truth, *Smiling Faces: The Best of* (Motown, 2003). Aside from the Temptations and Rare Earth, Undisputed Truth were the Motown act who took on the most trappings of the psychedelic age. Besides their one big hit “Smiling Faces Sometimes,” this also has their version of “Papa Was a Rollin’ Stone,” which predated the Temptations’ big hit with the same song by a few months.

The Velvelettes, *The Very Best of* (Motown, 1999). The Motown “girl group” that came closest to stardom without quite achieving it, the Velvelettes had a couple minor mid-’60s hits, “He Was Really Sayin’ Somethin’” (a big British hit for Banarama in the early 1980s) and “Needle in a Haystack.” Both of them are here, along with about a dozen other recordings from their brief time at Motown, during which they made music slightly similar to (but not as good as) the Marvelettes and Martha & the Vandellas.

Kim Weston, *Greatest Hits and Rare Classics* (Motown, 1991). Like Tammi Terrell, Kim Weston was known more for dueting with Marvin Gaye (on her biggest hit, “It Takes Two”) than her own records, though she had some modest success with some solo singles, particularly “Take Me in Your Arms (Rock Me a Little While).” She was something of a journeywoman singer, but her mid-’60s records were typical accomplished Motown productions, and can be heard here.

Various Artists, *Complete Motown Singles 1959-1972* (Motown, 2005-2013). This is actually a fourteen-volume series, with the early years 1959-1961 represented by the first; one volume devoted to each of the years from 1962-1970; and two volumes apiece for the years 1971 and 1972. This is way too exhaustive for anyone but the aficionado and dedicated historian. Indeed, many of the non-hit singles and B-sides aren’t interesting. But it gives you a sequential document of precisely how the label evolved in what it issued on its preferred format, seven-inch singles.
C. Box Sets and Multi-Disc Compilations

There are many box sets and multi-disc compilations of Motown artists, and sometimes several for specific acts. There may well be more in the future. Here are some good ones, in the instructor’s opinion.

Marvin Gaye, *The Master* (Motown, 1995). Four-disc set mixes hits and interesting obscurities/rarities like his great title song for the blaxploitation movie *Trouble Man*, and also includes some highlights from his brief post-Motown career, in particular “Sexual Healing.”

The Jackson 5, *Soulsation!* (Motown, 1995). Four-CD set covering the years from 1969-1975 has all their Motown hits (including the solo ones by Michael Jackson and Jermaine Jackson) and an entire disc of rare and unreleased tracks.

Martha Reeves & the Vandellas, *Live Wire! The Singles 1962-1972* (Motown, 1993). Two-CD comp has all the big hits, but also flops and low-charting singles, including notable ones like “Motoring” (covered by the Who in the 1960s, though the band didn’t release it until many years later) and the anti-war “I Should Be Proud.”

The Marvelettes, *Deliver: The Singles 1961-1971* (Motown, 1993). Another double CD that, by virtue of its length and span, takes in quite a few songs that didn’t make it big in addition to the big hits, among them one of the better mild Motown hits by a big act, 1965’s “I’ll Keep Holding On.”

Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, *The 35th Anniversary Collection* (Motown, 1994). Four-CD box goes back to their pre-“Shop Around” singles “Got a Job” and “Bad Girl,” and has the original version of “Shop Around” (predating the re-recorded big hit one), as well as minor hits like “I Gotta Dance to Keep from Crying” that tend to miss the best-of compilations. There are also some singles Robinson did after leaving the Miracles, including the mid-’70s hits “Cruisin’” and “Quiet Storm.”

The Supremes, *The Supremes* (Motown, 2000). This minimally titled box set isn’t a one-stop for everything you might want, since some of the hits are represented by alternate versions rather than the originals. And if you didn’t get one of the first 25,000 copies, this didn’t include a fifth live disc. There are still lots of non-hit extras, including alternate takes and original 45 mixes, for big fans with the passion and budget.

The Temptations, *Emperors of Soul* (Motown, 1994). Five-disc box goes all the way back to a pre-Temptations track they did as Otis Williams & the Distants, and has a lot of their obscure output before their first hit (1964’s “The Way You Do the Things You Do”). There are a lot of obscure items alongside the big hits, though the last two CDs, all dating from the post-“Papa Was a Rolling Stone” days, are pretty forgettable.
The Temptations, *Psychedelic Soul* (Universal, 2003). Working with producer Norman Whitfield, the Temptations went deeper into psychedelic-influenced funk and social commentary than any other Motown act of the late 1960s and early 1970s, at least until Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder asserted their artistic independence. This two-CD compilation has key efforts along those lines like "Cloud Nine," "Psychedelic Shack," "I Can't Get Next to You," "Ball of Confusion," and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone." Keep in mind, though, that all along they were continuing to issue suave romantic hits like "I Wish It Would Rain" and "Just My Imagination," which you can hear on hits collections like *Anthology*.

Mary Wells, *Looking Back 1961-1964* (Motown, 1993). The best investment for Wells fans who want something more than a single disc best-of, including all the hits (among them her duet with Marvin Gaye, “What’s the Matter With You Baby”) and plenty of pretty unknown items, some of them previously unreleased.

Stevie Wonder, *At the Close of a Century* (Motown, 1999). Four-disc set is notable for spanning the 1960s to the 1990s, with a whole disc of hits from his first decade that predated his emergence as an independent singer-songwriter. That phase of his ‘70s career is documented on discs two and three, though the post-‘70s material on disc four is sadly uninteresting in comparison to what he’d previously done.

D. Standalone Albums

**Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On?* (Tamla, 1971).** Arguably the first album by a soul star meant to be heard as an interconnected piece, rather than a collection of singles or even a collection of strong songs. Gaye brought social consciousness to the forefront of Motown soul as never before with the title song, "Inner City Blues," and "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)." Of course he had plenty of other hits in the late 1960s and early 1970s (most notably "I Heard It Through the Grapevine") that can be heard on collections like *Anthology*, and delved back into romantic soul on 1973’s *Let's Get It On*, whose title track gave him one of his hugest singles.

**Marvin Gaye, *Let's Get It On* (Tamla, 1973).** After the social consciousness of the *What’s Going On* album, Gaye returned to romance as his main theme with his next LP. The difference between this and his ‘60s longplayers was that Gaye was conscious of maintaining high quality and a flow among the tracks. The title song was a huge #1 hit, though it’s sometimes forgotten that the album was a big smash too, reaching #2.

**The Miracles, *Recorded Live On Stage* (Motown, 1963).** Recorded at the Regal Theater in Chicago and the Apollo in New York, this is notable as a fairly gritty snapshot of the Motown sound onstage before it got too slick. Only one of the seven songs (“You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me”) was a big hit, with “Shop Around” strangely absent. Another live LP of some note from the same period, though not as consistently strong in its songs, is Stevie Wonder’s *Recorded Live: The 12 Year Old Genius*, which has both parts of his hit single “Fingertips.”
The Temptations, *Sing Smokey* (Gordy, 1965). Not many non-best-of Motown LPs attracted much notice, but this one has its champions for exclusively featuring songs Smokey Robinson wrote or co-wrote (he also produced all of these too). “My Girl” and “The Way You Do the Things You Do” are the most famous of these, and there are Temptations versions of songs that were more famously done by the Miracles (“You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me,” “(You Can) Depend on Me”) and Mary Wells (“You Beat Me to the Punch”).

Stevie Wonder, *Music of Mind* (Motown, 1972). Notable as the first album on which Wonder had creative freedom and independence from the Motown assembly line, and the first on which he explored the use of synthesizer, although it didn’t have songs as outstanding as the ones on his next batch of mid-'70s LPs.

Stevie Wonder, *Talking Book* (Motown, 1972). The first of his truly popular albums as an independent singer-songwriter, hitting #3 and featuring two hits that set the template for his forceful hard-rocking ‘70s sound (“Superstition”) and his sweet romantic ‘70s sound (“You Are the Sunshine of My Life”).

Stevie Wonder, *Innervisions* (Motown, 1973). As hot as he was after “Superstition” and *Talking Book*, Wonder got even hotter with *Innervisions*, with the hits “Higher Ground,” “Living for the City,” “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout a Thing.”

Stevie Wonder, *Fulfillingness’ First Finale* (Motown, 1974). Not as much of a critical smash as his previous two records, this nonetheless found him continuing to forge personal and experimental ground with “Boogie on Reggae Woman” and the uncommonly despondent “You Haven’t Done Nothin’.”

Stevie Wonder, *Songs in the Key of Life* (Motown 1976). Sometimes considered the peak of his ambitious mid-'70s period, or certainly his most ambitious record of that era, with two more Wonder standards in “Sir Duke” and the sentimental “Isn’t She Lovely.”
MOTOWN

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Notable People (Excluding Star Musicians):

Berry Gordy, Jr.: Founder of Motown whose drive, and songwriting/production contributions, were vital to its enormous success, although his autocratic style caused friction with some of Motown's artists and producers.

Brian Holland-Lamont Dozier-Eddie Holland: Often referred to as Holland-Dozier-Holland or simply H-D-H, this trio were Motown's most successful production/songwriting team, working extensively with the Supremes, the Four Tops, and Martha & the Vandellas. After a dispute over royalties with Berry Gordy, Jr. in 1967, they left Motown and continued working together for their own Hot Wax/Invictus labels.

Norman Whitfield: The Motown producer who more than any other pushed the label to keep up with the times with more rock-funk-oriented arrangements and socially conscious material, especially with the Temptations.

Mickey Stevenson: Aside from Smokey Robinson, the most important Motown producer/songwriter/A&R man in the label’s early years, working on records by many Motown acts.

The Corporation: The unnamed Motown team (actually Berry Gordy, Freddie Perren, Deke Richards, and Alphonzo Mizell) responsible for producing the early Jackson 5 hits.

The Funk Brothers: The informal name given to the core of musicians who played on sessions for Motown. The best known of these were probably bassist James Jamerson, drummer Benny Benjamin, keyboardist Earl Van Dyke, and guitarist Dennis Coffey, the last of whom had some big instrumental soul-funks hit of his own in the early 1970s.

James Jamerson: Bassist who was the most renowned of Motown's session players, though most of his fame came after his prime. Many bassists admire him as a big influence, most notably Paul McCartney.

Malcolm Cecil & Robert Margouleff: The pair behind the electronic music group Tonto's Expanding Headband, who influenced Stevie Wonder to start using synthesizers in his music in the early 1970s, and worked with him on his most popular '70s albums.

Dennis Coffey: Session guitarist instrumental to the Temptations’ transition to psychedelic soul with hits like “Cloud Nine” and “Ball of Confusion,” especially with his wah-wah effects. Later had instrumental hits in the early 1970s (for a different label, Sussex) as a performer, including “Scorpio” and “Taurus.”
**Cholly Atkins:** Choreographer for several major Motown acts, including the Temptations, Supremes, Miracles, and Four Tops. The smooth dancing and concert presentation of Motown acts was instrumental in solidifying their crossover success with pop audiences of all races.

**Maxine Powell:** Ran Motown’s “charm school,” geared toward teaching the label’s young artists grace and manners to help them cross over to mainstream pop audiences.

**Ed Sullivan:** As he did with British Invasion artists, Sullivan often had Motown singers on his top-rated TV variety show, especially the Supremes. These were vital to exposing them to audiences of all backgrounds and, by subtle extension, helping to break down segregation.

**Nick Ashford & Valerie Simpson:** Although they’d eventually have hit records of their own, for a few years starting in the late ‘60s, this duo worked for Motown as a songwriting/production team, their biggest hit being Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell’s “Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing.”

**Anna Gordy:** An older sister of Berry Gordy and also involved in the record business, with her own label Anna and with Motown. The first wife of Marvin Gaye, she also co-wrote some songs for Gaye and the Originals.

**Gwen Gordy:** Another older sister of Berry Gordy, and with Berry and Billy Davis, co-wrote hits for Jackie Wilson in the late 1950s.

**Harvey Fuqua:** After hit 1950s doo-wop records as a singer with the Moonglows, Fuqua entered the record business and helped bring Marvin Gaye to Motown, also doing work for the label as a songwriter/producer.

**Raynama Gordy Singleton:** Berry Gordy’s second wife, and did much to help run Motown during their marriage in the early 1960s.

**Herman Griffin:** As Mary Wells’s husband, Griffin is notorious in Motown lore for being crucial to convincing her to leave the label in 1964.

**Clarence Paul:** Assistant A&R director at Motown in the early 1960s, and worked on hits by Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder as a producer/songwriter.

**Frank Wilson:** Writer/producer on records by numerous Motown stars, including the Temptations, the Four Tops, the Supremes, Marvin Gaye, Brenda Holloway, and Eddie Kendricks.

**Ivy Jo Hunter:** Wrote or co-wrote songs for the Four Tops, the Marvelettes, the Isley Brothers, and Martha & the Vandellas.
**Syreeta:** Syreeta (full name Syreeta Wright) co-wrote some material with Stevie Wonder in the early 1970s, when the pair had a brief marriage.

**Notable Places:**

**Motown Historical Museum:** Open for the past 25 years, and located at the original building, 2648 West Grand Boulevard in Detroit, where Motown was headquartered when it rose to glory in the early-to-mid-1960s. Studio A, the most renowned of the studios Motown used, is here and part of the museum.