

SETTING

TIME AND PLACE

MUSIC CREDITS

“(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons”

Written by William Best and Deek Watson

Performed by Sam Cooke

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Courtesy of ABKCO Music & Records, Inc. and Sony Music Entertainment

“Blowin’ In The Wind”

Written and Performed by Bob Dylan

Published by Special Rider Music

Courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment

“Put Me Down Easy”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“Having A Party”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“Cupid”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“You Send Me”

Written and Performed by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

Courtesy of ABKCO Music & Records, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“Somebody Have Mercy”

Written and performed by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

Courtesy of ABKCO Music & Records, Inc. and Sony Music Entertainment

www.samcooke.com

“Chain Gang”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“A Change Is Gonna Come”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

“Good Times”

Written by Sam Cooke

Published by ABKCO Music, Inc.

www.samcooke.com

TIME:

February 25, 1964

Place:

The Hampton House Hotel
in Miami, Florida

On this particular night in Miami, newly crowned heavyweight champ Cassius Clay chose to forgo lavish celebrations at the luxurious Fontainebleau Hotel—opting instead to spend it with his close friends Malcolm X, Sam Cooke, and Jim Brown in the Hampton House in Overtown, the Black neighborhood where he'd trained.

Located on the north side of Miami, literally across the railroad tracks, Overtown was known as “Colored Town” in 1896 when incorporated into the city. The neighborhood developed into a vibrant community that hosted many mainstream Black entertainers—including Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Nat King Cole—at its height in the 1940s and 1950s.

In the the last days of segregation, the Hampton House thrived. Established in 1954, the hotel was one of the only establishments in the area open to African Americans, and it became a hot spot for many notable Black celebrities and activists—so much so that it was promoted as the “Social Center of the South.” Muhammad Ali had a permanent room, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a regular guest, and the Congress of Racial Equality held weekly meetings here.



Singer/actress Josephine Baker with boxer Joe Louis and friends inside Knight-beat Club at the Sir John Hotel. Photo Courtesy: The Black Archives History & Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc. 1957



Kemp Powers is a writer, editor, playwright, author, and gumbo enthusiast.

A journalist for almost 20 years, he has told countless stories in the pages of magazines and newspapers ranging from *Esquire* to *Forbes*. His play *One Night in Miami...* enjoyed an acclaimed world premiere at Rogue Machine, winning four NAACP awards and the Ted Schmitt Award for outstanding new play. A recipient of a Knight Journalism Fellowship at the University of Michigan, his current projects include the development of his new play, *The Two Reds*. He is also the author of *The Shooting: A Memoir*. Kemp's work was selected for publication in *The Moth's* first-ever book of collected works, released in September 2013, by Hyperion Books. He is a resident playwright at Los Angeles' award-winning Rogue Machine Theatre company.

A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

BY SAM COOKE

I WAS BORN BY THE RIVER IN A LITTLE TENT,
OH, AND JUST LIKE THE RIVER I'VE BEEN RUNNING EVER SINCE.

IT'S BEEN A LONG, A LONG TIME COMING,
BUT I KNOW A CHANGE GONNA COME. OH, YES IT WILL

IT'S BEEN TOO HARD LIVING, BUT I'M AFRAID TO DIE.
'CAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S UP THERE BEYOND THE SKY.

IT'S BEEN A LONG, A LONG TIME COMING
BUT I KNOW A CHANGE GONNA COME. OH, YES IT WILL.

I GO TO THE MOVIE AND I GO DOWN TOWN.
SOMEBODY KEEP TELLING ME DON'T HANG AROUND.

ITS BEEN A LONG, A LONG TIME COMING,
BUT I KNOW A CHANGE GONNA COME. OH, YES IT WILL

THEN I GO TO MY BROTHER
AND I SAY, "BROTHER, HELP ME, PLEASE,"
BUT HE WINDS UP KNOCKIN' ME
BACK DOWN ON MY KNEES.

OH, THERE BEEN TIMES WHEN I THOUGHT I COULDN'T LAST FOR LONG,
BUT NOW I THINK I'M ABLE TO CARRY ON.

IT'S BEEN A LONG, A LONG TIME COMING
BUT I KNOW A CHANGE GONNA COME, OH YES IT WILL.

The Change That CAME: That Night in Miami, 1964

by Catherine María Rodríguez,
Production Dramaturg



Written by Sam Cooke

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“It’s been a long, a long time coming,” crooned Mr. Soul, Sam Cooke. “But I know a change gon’ come.” And come it did—but slowly, and not without provocation.

In 1964, the Great Society was greatly troubled. The president had just been assassinated. Jim Crow ruled widely, and even integrated locker rooms, recording studios, and playgrounds reeked of racial division. As citizens spilled into the streets demanding Civil Rights, blood spilled abroad too, in intensified intervention in Vietnam. The generation gap widened into a chasm, while nations faced off in global Cold War. Media scrutiny and government surveillance amplified. The era of space exploration was also an era of intense soul searching.

But for all the talk of times a-changin’, “the Civil Rights Movement was at an impasse,” notes Mark Anthony Neal, Professor of Black Popular Culture at Duke University. “There were folks who felt that the Movement had made great gains on going forward, but that it was now stalling. And there were folks who felt they could push it a little further...”

Through this struggle, perhaps even because of it, friendships emerged. Soulful singer Sam Cooke, Muslim minister Malcolm X, living legend Jim Brown, and undaunted underdog Cassius Clay found each other amid the maelstrom, and forged strong bonds. **Where the quartet’s friendship began remains unknown, but that they sought each other out is evident. That they spent the night of February 25, 1964, all together is historical fact. And that they looked to each other for laughs, leadership, support, and accountability seems only logical.**

“They were friends. They were independent thinkers. They refused to bow down,” observes playwright Kemp Powers, author of *One Night in Miami...* “And they were righteous.”

They were indeed righteous and resolute, though with dramatic differences in philosophy and approach. Malcolm’s vocal dynamism resonated with young Cassius,

himself easily as outspoken and fiercely proud. But their separatist world-views and religious fervor contrasted with Cooke and Brown’s more secular, business-savvy inclination to work for change from within oppressive systems.

Yet, despite their differences, these four giants shared much in common, from histories and challenges to goals and ideals. “They were all in the same circles,” observes Professor Neal. “It made sense for Cooke, Ali, and Brown to be together since they were around the same age. And Malcolm was very savvy. He recognized who Ali was in terms of his tongue-in-cheek playfulness; he knew early on that he wasn’t just a clown, and so reached out. [Also,] he’s been suspended by the Nation of Islam for his comments on Kennedy’s murder; in some ways, Malcolm is hanging on to the Nation through Ali.”

By 1964, each faced enormous obstacles; each was poised to beat the odds; and each would be forever changed (alive or dead) within a year. Neal adds, “They understood intuitively that it was a friendship that couldn’t be too public, particularly because of the perception of the Nation of Islam at the time.” This big night together was likely their last as a foursome, notes Powers: **“They were all on the precipice of some pretty dramatic change. The next day, Clay became Muhammad Ali; within months, Malcolm broke with the Nation of Islam, followed quickly by his break from Ali; a year later, Jim Brown retired from the NFL and began his film career; and a year from this night, both Sam Cooke and Malcolm X were dead.”**

But the source of their renown goes deeper than their cultural and professional impacts, or even their untimely deaths. For Powers, their greatness is rooted in their profound convictions: “As bold as these guys were, they were even bolder for their time. They were radical in their fearlessness. Being these prominent figures made them each targets for J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI and any number of racist organizations that hated the fact of their existence.” Neal adds that, though today Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali are the more recognizable

names, at the time the opposite was true: “Cooke and Brown were stars. In some material ways, they had the most to lose: real access to fame and celebrity, economic influence, inroads they’d worked to establish.”

For Powers, what began as a desire to stage a slice of life involving his four favorite pop icons quickly evolved into an exploration of the difficult decisions they faced.

“What makes them so inspiring is that they were all aware of the risks, and they flew in the face of them.” The four men not only called for change, they provoked it.

While Powers sees his play as an entertaining, fictionalized riff on a historical happening, he also recognizes parallels between its world and ours. “Although it’s a historical play, it’s almost eerie how contemporary its issues are,” he observes. “Sadly, a lot of the issues these guys are dealing with in the play are issues we’re still dealing with as a country. The first production was timely because we were in the midst of the Trayvon Martin verdict. Now, here we are a year and a half later, in the midst of Ferguson and more.”

Yet, Powers also finds solace in remembering these men as everyday heroes and active agents: “To me, it’s empowering to see these icons as real human beings, people that you can aspire to be like, as opposed to near-deities.

These men’s stories should be inspiring, not intimidating. To say, these guys were able to do what they did with a particular set of challenges, so why can’t I work within my unique set of challenges?”

Though textbooks tell tale of the four as giants among men, *One Night in Miami...* shows them as mortals who collectively, independently, and restlessly strove for a better world.

And so the soulful cry, the hopeful refrain, and the promise sounds on. “It’s been a long, a long time coming. But I know a change gonna come. Oh, yes it will.”





FOUR ICONIC MEN, One Historic Night

by Catherine María Rodríguez,
Production Dramaturg

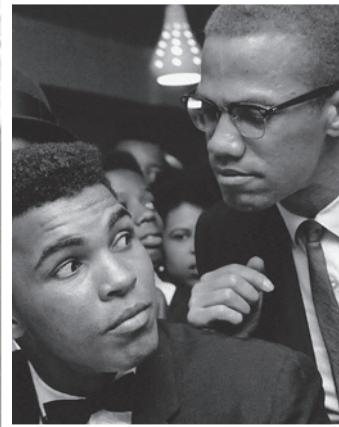
Ali. Brown. Cooke. X. When these four men gathered in a room at the iconic Hampton House hotel to celebrate Clay's assumption of the Heavyweight Championship, they came together as friends, as workers in a common struggle, and as men on the brink of transformation—looking not backwards, but far ahead. But what paths brought them here?

THE GREATEST

The theft of his bike coaxed him into the ring; the pursuit of excellence kept him there; and his public conversion to Islam transformed him from a sports figure into an icon: **Muhammad Ali**. Born Cassius Marcellus Clay in Louisville, spunky “Cash” had “It” from the start, and everybody (himself included) knew it. He began training at 12; by 18, he had earned national titles and Olympic gold. In 1960, he turned pro and continued to rack up awards. His lyrical trash talk and fancy footwork, paired with his success inside the ropes, gained him the attention of the boxing world and the media. In 1963, he became a contender for the Heavyweight Championship title, then held by the imposing Charles “Sonny” Liston. The match was a joke to most, with Clay relegated to upstart status against 7-1 odds. But the young boxer was undaunted; wild-eyed, he proclaimed himself “The Greatest,” and promised an upset. Against all expectations save his own, Clay took the title in six rounds, and his battle cry of “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee” snagged headlines. The day after his victory, Clay set the media abuzz once more by officially announcing that he was joining the Nation of Islam and taking the name Muhammad Ali. With his antics outside the ring and his achievements in it, Ali quickly became a global phenomenon.

BIG JIM

At 6’2” and 230 pounds, **Jim Brown** was a powerful, All-Star running back. In 1965, he was at the height of his NFL career, one that he’d worked hard to establish but would shortly leave—all on his own terms. From a young age, James Nathaniel Brown’s athleticism was apparent. Coaches still clinging to separatism in sports were repeatedly reluctant to start him. At Syracuse, he sat benched until a series of injuries required that he play. And then play he did. His fearsome agility earned him overnight celebrity on campus; and when his prowess became impossible to deny, a starting position followed. In 1957, he joined the Cleveland Browns as the sixth overall pick in the NFL. He quickly outpaced his competition, becoming the Browns’ all-time leading rusher (a record he still holds) and leading the team to victory in the 1964 NFL Championship—shutting out the Baltimore Colts, 27-0. In the locker room, Brown promoted a sense of pride among his Black teammates, while also encouraging interactions between players of both races. “Big Jim” proved a game changer and leader off the field, too. Ever the strategist, he looked to play the long game in search of progress for himself and for others. To support Black-owned businesses, he established the Negro Industrial and Economic Union (NIEU); he steadily mobilized Black sportsmen around social issues; and, ultimately, he retired from football to pursue film after recognizing the opportunity for greater economic and cultural influence—and the potential for self-determination—in the transition from athlete to action hero.



MR. SOUL

From gospel to soul and pop, from race records to commercial hits, and from backup singer to superstar-producer, **Sam Cooke** was the epitome of a crossover artist. But the King of Soul came from humble roots, born Samuel Cook (the “e” was added by a producer who thought it would be “classier”) in Clarksdale, Mississippi. When his father, a Baptist preacher, organized the kids into a church choir, Sam’s smooth voice and charm stood out. Soon professional opportunities beckoned, and with the Soul Stirrers, Sam experienced his first commercial success. He toured with the group for six years, establishing himself nationally as a top gospel artist. But hungry for more, Cooke dove into the pop genre. Though the gospel world reacted harshly, questioning his decision to play “devil’s music,” Minister Cooke encouraged his son, and Sam signed with RCA in 1960. He refined his bluesy, gospel-inflected tunes and perfected his iconic yodel.

By 1964, Cooke had transformed himself into a solo artist and chart topper, with hits from “Chain Gang” to “Another Saturday Night.” His independent spirit led him to co-found record labels SAR and Derby, along with two music publishing companies. Through these agencies, Cooke produced, wrote for, and licensed his and others’ music. Still, despite his support of minority artists, Cooke continued to receive criticism from those who argued that he’d abandoned his roots. Perhaps in response to this, and upon hearing Dylan’s instant classic “Blowing in the Wind,” he wrote “A Change is Gonna Come”—a return to gospel stylings, a powerful musical foray into direct political engagement, and an eerie harbinger of his death. Mere weeks before the song’s release, in December 1964, Cooke was shot and killed.

IBROTHER MINISTER

Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, Satan, **Malcolm X**, and finally, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz: he was a man of continued self-invention. Malcolm Little was born in 1925 to parents who were devout Baptists as well as devoted followers of liberationist Marcus Garvey. When the family moved from Nebraska to Michigan, they became the target of white supremacists. Their house was burned down shortly after their arrival, and two years later father Earl was found dead in the street. Without their breadwinner, the family sank into desperate poverty. Malcolm began shoplifting to support his siblings, but was caught and sent to live with an older, white couple. After making a name for himself as petty criminal “Detroit Red,” a stint in prison earned Malcolm the nickname “Satan.” While incarcerated, an older inmate introduced him to the prison library, and his brother brought him news of the Nation of Islam (NOI).

Prison became a university: he joined a debate club, wrote constantly, and read voraciously. Drawn to the NOI’s philosophy of self-determination, pride, and independence, Malcolm petitioned to join. He soon began making headlines as a Black Muslim, taking the surname “X” as a placeholder for his “true African name.” He became a leading temple minister, a top recruiter, and a close confidante to the NOI’s leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. A dynamic speaker and expert debater, Malcolm earned renown and responsibility within the NOI—as well as steady surveillance from the FBI. Eventually, rivalries and rifts grew between him and members of the NOI, all the way to top leadership. In the early 1960s, frustrated by an order of silence and ever more at odds with the Nation, he began to distance himself. By March 1964, he announced the launch of his own Muslim movement. A month later, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca. And less than a year after the play’s events, the brother minister was killed. 