

Throwback: Sam Cooke-A Change Is Gonna Come



Sam Cooke wrote “A Change Is Gonna Come” after he and his entourage experienced a whites-only hotel in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1963. Cooke also heard Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ In The Wind” on the radio questioning the existence of war and Martin Luther King Jr.’s I Have A Dream speech and used all of these things as inspiration. He was moved by the tension in the country that was forming the Civil Rights Movement but he also said the song came to him in a dream the same year as the hotel debacle. “A Change Is Gonna Come” was recorded in 1964 after singer/record producer J.W. Alexander warned him about not making any money from it because of the topic. Cooke responded by telling Alexander he just wanted the song to make his father proud. He debuted the song on *The Johnny Carson Show* in February of 1964 with a full string section. The performance was not recorded and it was the only time he

performed “A Change Is Gonna Come” in his life. He did not have the desire to perform it again because the arrangement was complex and he agreed with Bobby Womack that it sounded “like death.” On March 1, 1964, the tune was released on Cooke’s *Ain’t That Good News* album and as a single seven months later.

“A Change Is Gonna Come” did become a song adopted by the Civil Rights Movement soon after it was released. The song’s legacy started there but through the years many artists have covered it and added to its relevance including Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, The 5th Dimension, Terrence Trent D’Arby, Seal, Bobby Womack, The Supremes, Lizzo and Beyoncé. Hip-Hop producers have sampled it on songs by Nas, Lil Wayne, and Ghostface Killah. Spike Lee used the song famously in his Malcolm X film and Barack Obama referred to it when he won the 2008 presidential election.

Cooke was fatally shot in December of 1964 two weeks before “A Change Is Gonna Come” was released as a single. In 2019, Shreveport, Louisiana mayor Adrian Perkins apologized to Cooke’s family for the 1963 incident and posthumously awarded the singer the key to the city. In 2020, Leslie Odom Jr. portrayed Sam Cooke in the Regina King-directed *One Night In Miami* and reenacted Cooke’s performance of “A Change Is Gonna Come” on *The Johnny Carson Show*.

The Black Rock Coalition's Tribute To Sam Cooke

[vimeo]30372974[/vimeo]

The Black Rock Coalition paid tribute to Sam Cooke a few days ago at The Schomburg Center in Harlem.

Dr. Channsin Berry Discusses His Documentary On Sam Cooke