



Kill 'Em and Leave: Searching for James Brown and the American Soul

James McBride

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National Book Award winner James McBride goes in search of the “real” James Brown after receiving a tip that promises to uncover the man behind the myth. His surprising journey illuminates not only our understanding of this immensely troubled, misunderstood, and complicated soul genius but the ways in which our cultural heritage has been shaped by Brown’s legacy.

Kill 'Em and Leave is more than a book about James Brown. Brown’s rough-and-tumble life, through McBride’s lens, is an unsettling metaphor for American life: the tension between North and South, black and white, rich and poor. McBride’s travels take him to forgotten corners of Brown’s never-before-revealed history: the country town where Brown’s family and thousands of others were displaced by America’s largest nuclear power bomb-making facility; a South Carolina field where a long-forgotten cousin recounts, in the dead of night, a fuller history of Brown’s sharecropping childhood, which until now has been a mystery. McBride seeks out the American expatriate in England who co-created the James Brown sound, visits the trusted right-hand manager who worked with Brown for forty-one years, and interviews Brown’s most influential nonmusical creation, his “adopted son,” the Reverend Al Sharpton. He describes the stirring visit of Michael Jackson to the Augusta, Georgia, funeral home where the King of Pop sat up all night with the body of his musical godfather, spends hours talking with Brown’s first wife, and lays bare the Dickensian legal contest over James Brown’s estate, a fight that has consumed careers; prevented any money from reaching the poor schoolchildren in Georgia and South Carolina, as instructed in his will; cost Brown’s estate millions in legal fees; and left James Brown’s body to lie for more than eight years in a gilded coffin in his daughter’s yard in South Carolina.

James McBride is one of the most distinctive and electric literary voices in America today, and part of the pleasure of his narrative is being in his presence, coming to understand Brown through McBride’s own insights as a black musician with Southern roots. *Kill 'Em and Leave* is a song unearthing and celebrating James Brown’s great legacy: the cultural landscape of America today.

Praise for *Kill 'Em and Leave*

“Thoughtful and probing . . . with great warmth, insight and frequent wit. The results are partisan and enthusiastic, and they helped this listener think about the work in a new way. . . . James McBride’s welcome elucidation . . . is clear, deeply felt and unmistakable.”—**Rick Moody, *The New York Times Book Review***

“[McBride] turns out to also be the biographer of James Brown we’ve all been waiting for. . . . McBride’s true subject is race and poverty in a country that doesn’t want to hear about it, unless compelled by a voice that demands to be heard.”—**Boris Kachka, *New York***

“The definitive look at one of the greatest, most important entertainers, The Godfather, Da Number One Soul Brother, Mr. Please, Please Himself—JAMES BROWN.”—**Spike Lee**

“James McBride on James Brown is the matchup we’ve been waiting for, a musician who came up hard in Brooklyn with JB hooks lodged in his brain, a monster ear for the truth, and the chops to write it.”—**Gerri**

Hirshey, author of *Nowhere to Run: The Story of Soul Music*

“An unconventional and fascinating portrait of Soul Brother No. 1 and the significance of his rise and fall in American culture.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

From the Hardcover edition.

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