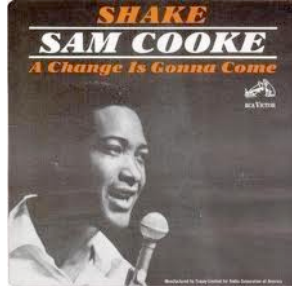


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## Sam Cooke, “A Change is Gonna Come”



Originally a Gospel singer, Sam Cooke was one of the pioneers of Soul music, topping the charts with hits such as “Wonderful World” and “Chain Gang.” Cooke’s hits were generally upbeat and rarely if ever crossed into political territory. But by the early 1960s, as the Civil Rights movement was growing stronger, Cooke became aware of the political power of music.

In October 1963, despite Cooke’s star status, he and members of his band were arrested when they tried to get a room at a whites-only motel in Shreveport, Louisiana. Cooke recorded “A Change is Gonna Come” that December. It was not a major commercial hit, but it quickly became one of the most influential songs of the Civil Rights movement. Numerous artists have covered the song, including Tina Turner, Lil Wayne, and Seal. On the night he won the 2008 election, Barack Obama told cheering crowds, “It’s been a long time coming, but tonight, change has come to America.”

### Excerpt from Lyrics

*I go to the movie and I go downtown  
Somebody keep telling me don't hang around  
It's been a long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will*

### Questions for Discussion

1. Cooke was known as one of the most talented vocalists in the history of popular music. How does he use his voice to convey emotion in this song?
2. Do the lyrics refer specifically to the Civil Rights movement? What story do they tell?
3. What is the overall mood of the song? Is it mournful? Optimistic? Can a song be both at the same time?
4. Why do you think this song has become so closely associated with the Civil Rights movement, and continues to be recorded by so many artists?