I. Motown: The Sound of Integration

“This organization is built on love”
- Berry Gordy
A. Motown: The Early Years

1. Berry Gordy
   a. Began music career as producer and songwriter
      - wrote songs while working as an automobile factory line employee among other jobs
   b. first success in 1957 with "Reet Petite" by Jackie Wilson and a year later with million selling "Lonely Teardrops"
   c. 1959, Motown Record Company
      [issued records under several label names]
      - 1. borrowed $800 dollars from family
      - 2. rented an 8-room house
   “If I ever get this house, I’ll have it made. I’ll live upstairs, I’ll have my offices down in the front part, and I’ll have a studio in the back where I can make demonstration records or masters to sell to record companies.” – Berry Gordy
A. Motown: The Early Years

2. Early Recordings
   a. originally recorded R&B artists on Tamla Records
   b. 1959 recorded “Bad Girl” by William “Smokey” Robinson and the Miracles
      - Robinson convinced Gordy to distribute his own records
   “When I started we licensed our singles to other companies such as United Artists. Smokey Robinson gave me the idea to go national with my product; my attorneys and other people said it was madness, that I shouldn’t do it because a hit would throw me into bankruptcy since [we were] undercapitalized.”
   c. 1960, Gordy co-wrote “Shop Around” by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles
A. Motown: The Early Years

2. Early Recordings
   d. capitalized on the girl group craze for the next four years

3. Mary Wells
   a. began as a songwriter with Motown
   b. sang a version of “Bye Bye Baby”
      [top 10 on R&B chart]
   c. two years later teamed with Smokey Robinson with “The One Who Really Loves You,” “You Beat Me to the Punch,” and “Two Lovers”
   d. following year: “Laughing Boy” and “Your Old Stand By”
   e. 1964 – “My Guy” a chart-topper
A. Motown: The Early Years

4. The Marvelettes
   a. discovered at Inkster, Michigan talent show
   b. “Please Mr. Postman” Motown’s first #1 hit 1961

5. Martha and the Vandellas
   a. recorded due to the success of the Marvelettes, another Detroit-area group
   b. 1963 million-selling “Heat Wave” and in 1964 “Dancing in the Street” neared the top of the pop charts

6. Mary Wells, the Marvelettes, and Martha and the Vandellas identified Motown as a major source of the girl-group sound
B. Civil Rights

1. The civil rights movement, which began in the 1950s and escalated during the early 1960s, resulted in significant achievements in 1964 and 1965 that would coincide with the Motown heyday

   a. 1964 – The Civil Rights Act
      - Economic Opportunity Act – “War on Poverty”
      - Office of Economic Opportunity (Job Corps)
      - Volunteers to the Service of America (domestic Peace Corps)
      - Head Start and Upward Bound Program
      - Criminal Justice Act
      - Food Stamp Act
      - Housing Act – billion for urban renewal
      - LBJ agreed to cut taxes by $11.5 billion

   b. 1965 – Voting Rights Act
      - Elementary and Secondary Education Act – billions for desegregated schools
      - Medicare – medical and hospital insurance for elderly
C. The Sound of Integration

1. In 1964, Berry Gordy assembled the parts of a music machine to create a distinctive Motown sound, which reflected and furthered the integration of African Americans into white America
   a. Berry Gordy believed in Martin Luther King’s peaceful dream
      • made records of King’s famous speeches
   “Berry felt that our job in Detroit was to make blacks aware of their culture, of the problems and some of the ways out of the problems. We’d showcase our artists to young kids...and it gave us a chance to get the youngsters off the street and see what our image was all about...inspiring them a little to maybe live up to that imagery” – Motown producer, Mickey Stevenson
   “I saw Motown much like I saw the world Dr. King was fighting for, with people of different races and religions, working together harmoniously for a common goal.” - Gordy
2. Berry Gordy specially groomed and cultivated streetwise teens from Detroit to make them acceptable to mainstream America

   a. in ’64 hired Maxine Powell as grooming tutor
      - “I always thought of our artists as diamonds in the rough who needed polishing.”

   b. same year hired choreographer Cholly Atkins
      - performed at Cotton Club and Savoy Ballroom
      - “Within a year, we had the best-looking artists in the record business”
C. The Sound of Integration

3. By the mid-1960s, Berry Gordy had assembled a Motown team that could take poor African American youths from Detroit and teach them to talk, walk, dress and dance like successful debutantes and debonair gentlemen.

4. Gordy combined the polished image of the Motown acts with a gospel-based music that could appeal to the American mainstream.
   a. R&B too sexy, drugs and alcohol for mothers and fathers
   
   “We enjoyed John Lee Hooker and B.B. King just as much as the next guy, but we would reject anything that had a strong blues sound to it.” - Gordy
C. The Sound of Integration

5. instead of blues and R&B, Gordy favored music:
   a. grounded by an insistent, pounding rhythm section
   b. punctuated by horns and tambourines
   c. featuring shrill, echo-laden vocals with gospel’s call and response
      - built on and expanded Philip Spector's wall of sound

“The sound of young America” according to Berry Gordy

- Hitsville U.S.A. sign
D. The Supremes on the Assembly Line

1. The Supremes fulfilled Berry Gordy’s dream of a polished African American act that sang gospel-based pop to both African Americans and whites.

2. The Supremes
   
   a. Dianna Ross, Mary Wilson, Florence Ballard, and Betty McGlown began singing together in high school
      - 1. born in Detroit low-income housing project
      - 2. Motown secretary drew name out of hat
   
   b. not much success in first four years at Motown
   
   c. Motown focused more attention on the girls after Mary Wells left in 1964
   
   d. The Supremes, groomed by the Motown organization, scaled the charts in 1964
      - 1. “When the Love Light Starts Shining Through His Eyes,” “Where Did Our Love Go” topping both R&B and pop charts
      - 2. appeared on Ed Sullivan television show [where Elvis and Beatles got their starts] and became overnight pop stars
D. The Supremes on the Assembly Line

3. The Assembly Line Process - Berry Gordy, using methods practiced in the Detroit auto factories, ensured the continued success of the Supremes by assembling the parts of a hit-making machine:

- a. standardized songwriting
  - 1. songwriting team of Holland/Dozier/Holland in ‘62
  - 2. “Where Did Our Love Go,” became blueprint for later success
  - 3. “Stop! In the Name of Love,” “You Can’t Hurry Love”

- b. in-house rhythm section
  - Funk Brothers – trademark percussive beat

- c. a quality control process
  - weekly meetings; scrutinization “It was Brutal!” – Ron Miller, writer

- d. selective promotion
  - 1. Ed Sullivan Show, Dean Martin Show, The Tonight Show, Hollywood Palace and the Orange Bowl Parade
  - 2. played at the Copacabana, Yale University’s prom (with Duke Ellington), and LV, NV!

“I worked in the Ford factory before I came in the [record] business, and I saw how each person did a different thing. And I said, ‘Why can’t we do that with the creative process’?”
D. The Supremes on the Assembly Line

- e. family atmosphere (reminiscent of Henry Ford)
  - 1. Gordy limited girls to $100 weekly allowance
  - 2. girls not allowed to date
  - 3. gave each a diamond ring to dissuade possible suitors

- “Someone saw mine last week and he said ‘Oh, you’re engaged.’ I said, ‘Yeah, to Motown.’” – Mary Wilson

- “You have to be very strict with young artists. That instills discipline” – Berry Gordy
E. The Motown Stable

1. The Temptations
   a. began as a street-corner doo-wop group
   b. signed with Gordy in 1960 and had little success through 1964
   c. ran the Temptations through the assembly line
      1. carefully cropped afros
      2. top hats and tails
      3. precise choreography
   d. recorded Smokey Robinson’s “My Girl,” an answer to Mary Wells hit “My Guy”
   e. recorded “Since I Lost My Baby” and “Get Ready” by Smokey Robinson and “Ain’t Too Proud To Beg,” “Beauty is Only Skin Deep,” “(I Know) I’m Losing You”
E. The Motown Stable

2. revival of the Four Tops from Detroit
   a. recording since early ‘50s
   b. signed by Motown in 1963; change in image
   c. hit “Baby I Need Your Loving,” “I Can’t Help Myself,” “Reach Out (I’ll Be There),” “Standing in the Shadows of Love,” and “It’s the Same Old Song”

• benefitted from finishing school like other Motown acts
E. The Motown Stable

3. During the mid-1960s, Berry Gordy had established a music empire that included:
   a. 8 record labels
   b. a management service
   c. a publishing company
   d. grossed millions each year

4. from 1964 to 1967
   a. 14 number one pop singles
   b. 20 number one singles on R&B charts
   c. 46 Top 15 singles
   d. 75 Top 15 R&B records
      • 1966, 75% of Motown releases hit the charts

5. 1967, Motown empire began to decline due to internal problems

6. Berry Gordy had created one of the most commercially successful African American-owned enterprises and certainly the most successful African American-owned record company

Although Motown continued to produce major hits throughout the 1970s and 1980s by artists like the Jacksons, Rick James, Lionel Richie and long-term signings, Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson, the record company was no longer the major force it had been previously. Gordy sold his interests in Motown Records to MCA and Boston Ventures on June 28, 1988 for $61 million.