

= There 's a Riot Goin ' On =

There 's a Riot Goin ' On is the fifth studio album by American band Sly and the Family Stone , released on November 20 , 1971 , by Epic Records . It was recorded during 1970 and 1971 at Record Plant Studios in Sausalito , California , with sessions dominated by band frontman Sly Stone during a period of drug use and inter @-@ group tension . The album embraced a darker and more challenging sound than the psychedelic soul style of the group 's previous records , making use of hard funk rhythms , primitive drum machines , and a unconventional mixing techniques . Originally intended to be issued as Africa Talks to You , the record was retitled There 's a Riot Goin ' On in response to Marvin Gaye 's album What 's Going On (1971) , released five months before .

There 's a Riot Goin ' On entered the Billboard Pop Album and Soul Album charts at number one upon its release , while the album 's lead single , " Family Affair " (1971) , topped the Pop Singles chart . By 2001 , it had sold one million copies and been certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) . Received with ambivalence upon its release , the album is now praised as one of the greatest and most influential recordings of all @-@ time , and ranked at or near the top of many publications ' " best album " lists . In 2003 it was ranked number 99 on Rolling Stone magazine 's list of the 500 greatest albums of all time .

= = Background = =

Having achieved great success with their 1969 album Stand ! and performance at Woodstock , Sly & the Family Stone were due to have submitted an album of new recordings to Epic Records by 1970 . However , Sly Stone , the group 's creative head and multi @-@ instrumentalist , missed several recording deadlines , worrying CBS executive Clive Davis , and a Greatest Hits album was released in an eighteen @-@ month stretch during which the band released no new material . Relationships within the band were deteriorating , with friction between the Stone brothers and bassist Larry Graham . Epic executives requested more product , and the Black Panther Party , with which Stone had become associated , was demanding he make his music more militant and reflective of the black power movement , that he replace Greg Errico and Jerry Martini with black instrumentalists , and replace manager David Kapralik . After moving to Los Angeles , California in late 1969 Stone and his bandmates began to use cocaine and PCP heavily rather than recording music . During this time Sly & the Family Stone released only one single , " Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin) " / " Everybody Is a Star " , issued in December 1969 . Although " Star " was a positive song in the vein of their previous hit " Everyday People " (1968) , " Thank You " featured a darker political theme .

By 1970 Stone had become erratic and moody , missing nearly a third of the band 's concert dates . He hired streetwise friends Hamp " Bubba " Banks and J.B. Brown as his personal managers , and these enlisted gangsters Edward " Eddie Chin " Elliott and Mafioso J.R. Valtrano as his bodyguards . Stone assigned these individuals to handle his business dealings , find drugs and protect him from those he considered enemies , among them his own bandmates and staff . A rift developed between Sly and the rest of the band , which led to drummer Gregg Errico 's departure in early 1971 .

Speculation arose as to the release of new studio material . In a December 24 , 1970 article for Rolling Stone magazine , journalist Jon Landau wrote ;

Stone 's intention of a darker , more conceptual work was influenced by drug use and the events that writer Miles Marshall Lewis called " the death of the sixties " ; political assassinations , police brutality , the decline of the civil rights movement and social disillusionment . According to The Austin Chronicle , " slowed down , [Sly 's] quest for post @-@ stardom identity mirrored black America 's quest for post @-@ Sixties purpose . "

= = Recording and production = =

Sly Stone mostly worked on There 's a Riot Goin ' On alone in a studio that he had built for himself at The Plant Studios , also known as The Record Plant , in Sausalito , California , or at his home

studio in the loft of his Bel Air mansion . He would often lie down in the bed and record his vocals with a wireless microphone system . According to the other Family Stone members , most of the album was performed by him alone , overdubbing and sometimes using a drum machine . Other band members contributed by overdubbing alone with Sly instead of playing together as before . For " Family Affair " and some other selections Stone enlisted several other musicians including Billy Preston , Ike Turner , and Bobby Womack instead of his bandmates , and several female vocalists mostly omitted from the final mix .

The album 's muddy , gritty sound was due in part to this overdubbing and erasing and mixing techniques nearly drowned out undubbed sounds . Miles Marshall Lewis stated " Never before on a Sly and the Family Stone album were songs open to so much interpretation , and even more so , dripping with cynicism . On the other hand you can hardly hear what he 's saying for most of the album . Like Radiohead 's Kid A or even the Rolling Stones ' Exile on Main St. more recent to the time , a murkiness in the mix of the record inhibits complete comprehension of the words . " Stone felt that the rhythm box made unrealistic sounds if used as designed , so he resorted to overdubbing the drum sounds manually , again contributing to the difficult mix .

In the fall of 1971 Stone delivered the final mixes to the CBS Records offices , relieving the worried Clive Davis . CBS issued " Family Affair " as the first single , the band 's first in nearly two years . It became their fourth and final number @-@ one pop hit . A somber , electric piano @-@ based record , sung by Sly and sister Rose Stone , Sly delivering his part in a low , relaxed tone . It is one of the earliest hit recordings to use a drum machine - the first was probably another Sly Stone production , Little Sister 's " Somebody 's Watching You " .

= = Music and lyrics = =

Stone reworked 1969 's " Thank You " single as a slower , closing track , " Thank You For Talking to Me Africa " which , according to Allmusic 's Matthew Greenwald was a blues and gospel influenced examination of urban tension and the end of the 1960s , " perhaps the most frightening recording from the dawn of the 1970s , capturing all of the drama , ennui , and hedonism of the decade to come with almost a clairvoyant feel . " " Africa Talks to You " is a nine @-@ minute funk jam written in response to Sly Stone 's backlash from estranged fans and friends , record industry associates , and the media . According to biographer Eddie Santiago , the lyrics cynically portray " fame and its cold retrogression into perceived insanity " , with a chorus that reflects " Sly 's feelings on being cut down in his prime like a tree in the forest . "

" Smilin ' " is a hymn to getting high , introduced by a " slow , wispy soul that sounds like it 's drifting in from a distant radio somewhere " . Jurek wrote , " Sister Rose 's voice is all sweet , and at first so is Sly 's , but as the horns and bassline come stepping in , Sly 's voice gets heavy and is distorting in places deliberately . The delicate keyboard lines , luxuriant and in the pocket as they are , cannot keep the voice contained . There 's a minimal instrumental break in the tune and it suddenly fades just as it emerged . "

The album 's title track is silent and listed as zero minutes and zero seconds long . For many years it was speculated that this cryptic track listing and the title of the album referred to a July 27 , 1970 riot in Chicago , Illinois for which Sly & the Family Stone had been blamed . The band was to play a free show in Grant Park (Chicago) but the crowd became restless before the band began and started rioting . Over a hundred people were injured , including several police officers , and the reason given to the press was that the band was late and / or refused to perform . The original LP jacket featured a photo collage with a picture of the band @-@ shell in Grant Park overlaid with a photo of a police car . However in 1997 Sly Stone said that the " There 's a Riot Goin ' On " track had no running time simply because " I felt there should be no riots . "

= = Artwork = =

The original cover art for Riot featured a red , white , and black American flag with suns in place of the stars . No other text or titles appear on the cover , although Epic executives added a " Featuring

the Hit Single ' Family Affair ' " sticker to the LP for commercial viability and identification purposes . Family Stone A & R director Steve Paley took the photograph . Three of the custom flags were created : one for Sly , one for Epic Records , and one for Paley . The album was later reissued with a more conventional cover featuring a photograph of Sly in concert , titles and text .

In an interview with Jonathan Dakss Stone explained the album cover 's concept , stating " I wanted the flag to truly represent people of all colors . I wanted the color black because it is the absence of color . I wanted the color white because it is the combination of all colors . And I wanted the color red because it represents the one thing that all people have in common : blood . I wanted suns instead of stars because stars to me imply searching , like you search for your star . And there are already too many stars in this world . But the sun , that 's something that is always there , looking right at you . Betsy Ross did the best she could with what she had . I thought I could do better . "

The outer album sleeve features a photo collage , by artist Lynn Ames , depicting American cultural images of the early 1970s . Featured on this collage were color photos and black & whites of the Family Stone , the Capitol , a grinning boy in plaid pants , the American flag with a peace sign in place of the stars , the Marina City twin towers of Chicago , a Department of Public Works caution sign , a piece of the Gettysburg Address , the tail end of a gas guzzler , drummer Buddy Miles , the Lincoln Memorial , soul musician Bobby Womack , a bulldog , several anonymous smiling faces , and Sly 's pit bull , Gun .

= = Reception = =

There 's a Riot Goin ' On was met with divided reaction from fans and music critics who were not used to the album 's sound and lyrical content . Los Angeles Times writer Robert Hilburn expressed a mixed response towards the band 's stylistic change from " soulflavored " songs such as " Everyday People " and " Hot Fun in the Summertime " , stating " there is little on the album that is worth your attention " . Other major music publications praised this new direction : in his review for Rolling Stone magazine , music journalist Vince Aletti wrote that " At first I hated it for its weakness and its lack of energy and I still dislike these qualities . But then I began to respect the album 's honesty " . Aletti cited it as " one of the most important fucking albums this year " and " the new urban music ... not about dancing to the music , in the streets . It 's about disintegration , getting fucked up , nodding , maybe dying . There are flashes of euphoria , ironic laughter , even some bright stretches but mostly it 's just junkie death , oddly unoppressive and almost attractive in its effortlessness " . A columnist for Hit Parader magazine gave Riot a favorable review , and stated that the album has " a lot that makes Sly the in @-@ person rave that he is . "

In his consumer guide for The Village Voice , critic Robert Christgau gave There 's a Riot Goin ' On an " A- " , which he later revised to " A + " , Christgau noted that " what 's expressed is the bitterest ghetto pessimism " and complimented its " subtle production techniques and jarring song compositions " , while citing it as " one of those rare albums whose whole actually does exceed the sum of its parts " . There 's a Riot Goin ' On was included on several music publications ' " End of the Year " lists and critics ' polls , including The Village Voice 's Pazz & Jop albums list at number seven . The album achieved commercial success with two hit singles and debuting at number @-@ one on the Billboard Pop Albums and Soul Albums chart . In his book Mystery Train : Images of America in Rock ' n ' Roll Music , published four years following the album 's release , music critic and writer Greil Marcus called There 's a Riot Goin ' On " Muzak with its finger on the trigger . "

= = Legacy = =

There 's a Riot Goin ' On has since been viewed by critics as one of the greatest and most influential albums . Christgau wrote in 2007 : " Sly Stone had ' Made It ' . But its temptations and contradictions ate him up . The result was the prophetic 1971 There 's a Riot Goin ' On , recorded in anarchic , druggy torpor over a year , or was it two , Stone didn 't know the difference . Its taped @-@ over murk presaging Exile on Main St. , its drum @-@ machine beats throwing knuckleballs at Miles and JB , it was darker than the Velvet Underground and Nico and funkier than shit , yet

somehow it produced two smash hits , including the stark , deep " Family Affair " . In a retrospective review , Zeth Lundy of PopMatters called There 's a Riot Goin ' On " a challenging listen , at times rambling , incoherent , dissonant , and just plain uncomfortable " with " some episodic moments of pop greatness to be found " and viewed it as a radical departure from the band 's previous work :

In 1994 There 's a Riot Going On was ranked number 14 in Colin Larkin 's Top 50 Soul Albums . Larkin described the album as " unlike anything heard before in black music " . A 2003 article for Rolling Stone commented ; " Sly and the Family Stone created a musical utopia : an interracial group of men and women who blended funk , rock and positive vibes ... Sly Stone ultimately discovered that his utopia had a ghetto , and he brilliantly tore the whole thing down on There 's a Riot Goin ' On , which does not refute the joy of his earlier music . " In addition to being featured near the top of several major publications ' " best album " lists , There 's a Riot Goin ' On was also ranked at number 99 on Rolling Stone 's 2003 list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time , one of four Sly & the Family Stone entries to be included on the list ; it is the second highest of the band 's entries , preceded by Greatest Hits (# 60) , and followed by Stand ! (# 118) and Fresh (# 186) . Pitchfork Media named it the fourth best album of the 1970s

= = Influence = =

Along with its critical recognition , There 's a Riot Goin ' On is considered one of the first instances of the funk music later popularized by George Clinton and Funkadelic , the Ohio Players , and similar acts . There 's a Riot Goin ' On , as well as the follow @-@ ups Fresh and Small Talk , are considered among the first and best examples of the matured version of funk music , after prototypical instances of the sound in Sly & the Family Stone 's 1960s work . The album 's sound also influenced Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock to crossover to jazz @-@ funk . Riot 's songs have been extensively covered and sampled . Artists who have covered or reworked songs from Riot include Iggy Pop , John Legend , Lalah Hathaway , Ultramagnetic MC 's , De La Soul , Beastie Boys and Gwen Guthrie . Funk music genre in general had great influence on pioneering hip hop acts such as Afrika Bambaataa , DJ Kool Herc and many others .

Dave Rosen of Ink Blot magazine said that the album sounds unique , ironically in view of its vast influence ; " Sly employed the unconventional (and possibly entirely original) technique of mixing live drums with what was at the time a primitive drum machine ... The introspective , yet political lyrics , the hard and dirty funk grooves , the inspirational , yet depressing songs ? all of these elements would come to influence not only peers like Marvin Gaye and James Brown , but two generations of rappers and funkateers who paid homage to Sly 's vision by making his samples and beats an essential backbone of their own innovations . Sly 's Riot is still goin ' on . " In his book There 's a Riot Goin ' On , author Miles Marshall Lewis described There 's a Riot Goin ' On in retrospect as " one of the most powerful and haunting albums to inspire the hip hop movement . "

= = Track listing = =

= = = Original LP = = =

All songs written , produced and arranged by Sylvester Stewart for Stone Flower Productions .

Side one

" Luv n ' Haight " ? 4 : 01

" Just Like a Baby " ? 5 : 12

" Poet " ? 3 : 01

" Family Affair " ? 3 : 06

" Africa Talks to You ' The Asphalt Jungle ' " ? 8 : 45

" There 's a Riot Goin ' On " ? 0 : 00

Side two

" Brave & Strong " ? 3 : 28

" (You Caught Me) Smilin ' " ? 2 : 53
" Time " ? 3 : 03
" Spaced Cowboy " ? 3 : 57
" Runnin ' Away " ? 2 : 51
" Thank You for Talkin ' to Me Africa " ? 7 : 14

== = CD reissue == =

Bonus tracks for 2007 Epic / Legacy limited edition compact disc reissue . The title track , which was originally no time , was placed at four seconds for the reissue and was accompanied by previously unreleased bonus material .

" Runnin ' Away " (mono single version) ? 2 : 44
" My Gorilla Is My Butler " (instrumental) ? 3 : 11
" Do You Know What ? " (instrumental) ? 7 : 16
" That 's Pretty Clean " (instrumental) ? 4 : 12

== Charts ==

== = Album == =

== = Singles == =

== Personnel ==

== = Musicians == =

Larry Graham ? bass , backing vocals
Greg Errico ? drums
Gerry Gibson ? drums
Bobby Womack ? guitar
Freddie Stone ? guitar
Ike Turner ? guitar
Sly Stone ? arrangements , drums , drum programming , keyboard programming , synthesizers , guitar , bass , keyboards , vocals
Billy Preston ? keyboards
Jerry Martini ? tenor saxophone
Cynthia Robinson ? trumpet
Rose Stone ? vocals , keyboards
Little Sister ? backing vocals

== = Production == =