



Jazz in America Glossary for Lesson V - The Bebop Era

contrafact: A jazz tune based on an extant set of chord changes, usually from a standard; the result when composers use the chord structure of a given, established composition to write an entirely new composition (e.g., "Donna Lee" is a contrafact of "Back Home Again in Indiana;" "Moose the Mooch" is a contrafact of "I Got Rhythm").

range: The gamut of pitches from low to high that a voice or an instrument is capable of producing.

scat singing: A vocalist's improvisatory device whereby he/she sings in nonsense syllables rather than lyrics as a means of approximating an instrumental solo; vocal improvisation (note: listen to Ella Fitzgerald singing "How High the Moon" on *The Complete Ella in Berlin*).

standards: Familiar, well-established popular or jazz tunes; those songs which through widely repeated performance have become part of the standard jazz repertoire.



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Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan V--American History Essay

A Reaction to Racism in American Literature, Art, and Music

In the latter part of the 19th century, "Realism" became the dominant feature in American literature and influenced the Progressive Era writers of the early 20th century. In the years immediately following World War I, a number of American authors of the realist school began to explore race relations. Dramatists such as Eugene O'Neill and Paul Green wrote plays based on African American themes. O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924) were immensely popular. Green won the Pulitzer Prize for *In Abraham's Bosom*, a play performed by a predominately African American cast in a period when few African American artists were able to find work outside vaudeville or minstrel shows. At the same time, a number of African American writers came to prominence writing novels and poetry based on their experiences as African Americans. This literary movement, originally centered in Harlem, New York, became known as the "Harlem Renaissance" (1920s-1930s). It was the outgrowth of a number of factors including the Great Migration to northern cities and the growing anger over both overt and covert racism.

Authors, musicians, and painters gathered in Harlem and in other large urban areas throughout the North and developed a distinctly African American cultural movement cognizant of the political, economic, and social issues of prejudice and discrimination that were part of the Black experience in America. Historians have described the Harlem Renaissance as a period in which the African American writer ". . . had achieved a degree and kind of articulation that make it possible for him to transform his feelings into a variety of literary forms. Despite his intense feelings of hate and hurt, he possessed sufficient restraint and objectivity to use his materials artistically, but no less effectively." (John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th edition [New York: McGraw Hill, 1994]). Another historian depicts the period in literature as one in which writers sought to be writers, not African American writers. Although the themes of their works reflected a pride in their race, they would "be fashioned with high technical skill and designed for an audience not exclusively Negro. There would, however, be no catering to whites." (Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Making of America* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996]).

The wave of lynching in America was one of the issues that galvanized the artists of the Harlem Renaissance. The poet Claude McKay (<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=26>), one of the angriest voices of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote of the need for African Americans to resist oppression. In his poem "If We Must Die" (<http://www.poets.org/poems/poems.cfm?prmID=1019>), McKay was reacting to race riots of "Red Summer" (1919). In his poem, "The Lynching," McKay equates a lynching with the crucifixion and, in the last few lines of this short poem, describes onlookers who came to gape at the hanging figure of a man.

*...The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue.*

*And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.*



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In 1939, Billie Holiday, one of the most famous of all jazz singers, recorded the song "Strange Fruit" which expressed her feelings regarding lynching in America and made a powerful statement against racism that was ever-present in her style. Holiday used jazz as an instrument to marshal public opinion to support anti-lynching legislation that languished in congress.

Lynching was also the subject of works by African American visual artists. *Lynch Mob Victim*, painted by William Johnson, depicts a lynched man with women weeping at his feet resembling often-depicted scenes of the crucifixion of Christ. Johnson also included lynched figures in the background of a painting of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas entitled *Let My People Free* (ca. 1945).

Racism, in no small way, contributed to the demise of Swing and inception of Bebop in the late 1930s and early 40s. This new, complex, combo-oriented African American innovation was, in part, an outgrowth of the young black players' rejection of the awkward integration and discriminatory pay scales of big band swing (African Americans were almost always paid less than their white counterparts). More often than not, they had watched their music capitalized on by white America; the attendant financial rewards likewise eluded them. African Americans had to contend with the most oppressive manifestations of racial prejudice and segregation. Even those jazz stars featured with the name white bands were subject to the most demeaning indignities. Of his experiences with the Artie Shaw band, African American jazz trumpet superstar Roy Eldridge said "Man, when you're on the stage, you're great, but as soon as you come off, you're nothing. It's not the worth the glory, not worth the money, not worth anything." (James Lincoln Collier, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History* [New York: Dell Publishing, 1979]).

Bebop was a dramatic and self-conscious revision of swing, an attempt by its originators in the early 1940s to reclaim the music that was so successfully commercialized and marketed by the white bands. The bebop pioneers were intensely serious which was reflected in the complexity of their music; they effectively and consciously created a new musical elite that excluded from their ranks all who did not meet predetermined artistic standards. With its fiery spirit, bebop was to represent, in some measure, a new black militancy which would continue to grow over the next two decades.

For further research on lynching in American history examine the Crime Library's website "Lynchings in America: Carnival of Death" (<http://crimelibrary.com/classics2/carnival/5.htm>). The five short readings entitled, "Lynchings in America," "The History of Lynching," "Lynchings in the Press," "The Ku Klux Klan," and "The Beginning of the End" provide a good overview of this macabre episode in American history and the failed efforts to secure an anti-lynching law in the United States.

The Library of Congress' American Memory Collection "African American Perspectives" also contains an essay entitled "Mob-violence and Anarchy, North and South" (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aap/aapmob.html>) and a short biographical sketch of Ida B. Wells-Barnett (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aap/idawells.html>), a crusader in the campaign to pass anti-lynching legislation. The website links to both an audio and text excerpt of Ida Wells-Barnett's pamphlet "Lynch Law in Georgia." Also examine the



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"Time Line of African American History" for the years 1881-1900 (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aap/timelin2.html>) and 1901-1925 (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aap/timelin3.html>) that give statistics on the number of lynchings reported during given years.

Questions to consider:

1. How did literary works of the Harlem Renaissance explore and expose critical social issues?
2. How did artists such as Claude McKay, Billie Holiday, and William Johnson use their talents to promote awareness of the horrors of lynching in America?
3. How did racism play a role in the demise of Swing and inception of Bebop?



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Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan V--Jazz Biography 1

CHARLIE PARKER, ALTO SAXOPHONE (1920-55) Biography

(<http://www.downbeat.com/artists/window.asp?action=new&aid=117&aname=Charlie+Parker>)

Alto saxophonist Charlie Parker developed a new jazz style that moved away from music popularized by the big bands. Although some jazz musicians and the general public seemed to scorn Bebop and clung to Swing, Parker's new style came to have a commanding influence despite the rift it caused among old and new jazz musicians.

Consider the following questions as you read the biography of Charlie Parker:

1. When was Charlie Parker introduced to music?
2. What differentiated Bebop from Swing?
3. What accounts for Bebop's popularity?
4. Why did some define Bebop as "outlaw" music?

Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan V--Jazz Biography 2

BILLIE HOLIDAY, VOCAL (1915-1959) Biography

(<http://www.downbeat.com/artists/window.asp?action=new&aid=56&aname=Billie+Holiday>)

Billie "Lady Day" Holiday is considered to be one of the world's greatest blues and jazz singers of all time. Born Eleanor Fagan Gough in Baltimore, Maryland, Billie changed her name when she began her singing career. When asked about her singing style, Holiday replied, "I don't think I'm singing. I feel like I am playing a horn. I try to improvise like Les Young, like Louis Armstrong, or someone else I admire. What comes out is what I feel."

Consider the following questions as you read the biography of Billie Holiday:

1. What difficulties did Billie Holiday encounter in her early life in Baltimore?
2. How did Holiday get her start in the entertainment world?
3. Why do you think Holiday chose to record "Strange Fruit?" What does this recording reveal about racism?
4. What makes Billie Holiday's singing style so different from others?