



The Impact of the Music of the Harlem Renaissance on Society

Curriculum Unit 89.01.05
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The community of Harlem is one which is rich in history and culture. Throughout its development it has seen everything from poverty to urban growth. In spite of this the people of this community banded together to establish a strong community that became the model for other black urban areas.

As a result of this millions have migrated to this community since the 1880's, bringing with them heritages and traditions of their own. One of these traditions was that of music, and it was through music that many flocked to Harlem, especially in the 1920's through 1950's to seek their fortune in the big apple.

Somewhere around the year 1918 this melting pot of southern blacks deeply rooted in the traditions of spirituals and blues mixed with the more educated northern blacks to create an atmosphere of artistic and intellectual growth never before seen or heard in America. Here was the birth of the Harlem Renaissance.

The purpose of this unit will be to;

- a. Define the community of Harlem.
- b. Explain the growth of music in this area.
- c. Identify important people who spearheaded this movement.
- d. Identify places where music grew in Harlem.
- e. Establish a visual as well as an aural account of the musical history of this era.
- f. Anthologize the music of this era up to and including today's urban music.
- g. Understand how music acted as a "barrier breaker" to racism between whites and blacks of this era.

The targeted population will be students in grades 6-8 (middle school). The ideal time to explore this unit would be the third marking period, which encompasses the school's celebration of black history/brotherhood month in February and follows the observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in January.

Many students today, especially blacks, have no idea of what Harlem is, what the word Renaissance means, and how this period has anything to do with their lives. Many middle school aged students cannot identify or point Harlem out on a map.

Harlem, New York, originally a village along with Brooklyn was first settled by the Dutch around 1613. Today it is a black and hispanic community in Manhattan that is bounded by 110th St. on the south, and 155th St. on the north, and has Lenox and 8th Avenues serving as its main arteries.

This area served as the cultural capital of black America in the 1920's and 1930's and also the major center of night life in New York City. Unfortunately during this time the term "New Yorker" did not include anyone of color. Although as the years progressed many blacks were employed in these clubs as musicians, but none were granted admittance into these clubs. Consequently there were several attempts by blacks to establish musical businesses of their own. The first black owned record company Black Swan Records was established in 1920 by Harry Pace as was W.C. Handy's music publishing business.

The Harlem Renaissance began around 1918 and lasted to about 1933. Although short lived it changed the face of black America forever. It featured some of the biggest names in writing, literature, as well as other related fields.

Writers such as W.E.B. DuBois, Claude McKay, Zora Hurston, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and Langston Hughes all established themselves as exceptional writers of this period.

Philosopher and critic Alain Locke, and leaders such as A. Phillip Randolph and Jamaican born Marcus Mozhiah Garvey were all major contributors to this movement.

It is important to note that although this movement started in New York after World War I, the birth of this ideology can be traced to such leaders as Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver.

The word Renaissance brings to mind a rebirth and resurgence of art, music, and culture. This is also true in the case of Harlem, but why and how did it happen in Harlem?

As music shifted in the 1920's to urban areas job opportunities increased. Along with this was an increase in spending power for black Americans. America itself was also undergoing a change from agricultural center to industrial giant, thus transforming the core population from farm worker to urban dweller.

A change also occurred between artist and intellectuals. There was a demand made for equality through novelist, artist, and educators. This was the beginning of the Renaissance.

This emergence was so strong that whites had to admit that black artists were more than just novelties. In fact many white writers capitalized on the Renaissance and used it as a chance to expose the unfair treatment of blacks to America. Eugene O'Neill (a white writer) wrote "The Emperor Jones" and "All God's Chillun Got Wings" which featured none other than Paul Roberson.

Beginning in the late 1880's blacks began to emerge as professionals in many areas including scientific research, and artistic achievement. By the 1900's many had become scholars, scientists, poets, artists, and

musicians. Some of the more illuminating of these scholars lived or migrated to Harlem where there was a desire to both defend and promote the talents and worths of blacks and their culture.

This migration north was the main reason for a rise in the black middle class. There was also a change in attitude toward assimilating into white American culture. Large congregations of blacks who had moved from the South lured by opportunities in teaching and the arts soon found that they were the last hired, but also the first fired, and found jobs were hard to come by. These new urban blacks usually had to work in speakeasies under the whims of racketeers.

Fortunately they did bring their musical traditions of the blues and spirituals. This tradition deeply rooted because of their African heritage provided a source of employment for many during those lean times. Many found employment performing on the Harlem streets, at house parties, bordellos, or just about anywhere for a meal, a dollar or two.

In the beginning of the Renaissance there were three separate but easily identifiable means by which an urban black could climb onto the bandwagon of mainstream America;

First—there was a loud but sudden appreciation for anything that was black. This was the main idea of the Harlem Renaissance.

Second—for poorer blacks, Marcus Garvey led a back to Africa movement which represented a renewed sense of race pride.

Third—middle class blacks followed a milder kind of nationalism which followed the philosophy of the N.A.A.C.P.

Blacks in New York also had a voice by which to speak their views. Magazines such as the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Messenger*, and the *Amsterdam News* provided this vehicle.

Although all blacks had this idea of the Renaissance in their mind, philosophies differed on how to achieve it. So once again blacks were divided much the same way they were during slavery days, the house servant-field servant division from those days now divided urban blacks into groups usually headed by professional men such as doctors, lawyers, and of course ministers. Leadership in the community was now based on acquisition rather than on freed vs. slave condition.

Who were the people and places associated with the Harlem Renaissance and what affect did they have on it's development?

Many musicians gravitated to New York for various reasons and occupations. This mass migration during the late 1920's and 1930's helped to firmly establish New York as the mecca for black music.

Although these musicians were really great it is important to note that the mainstream of the Harlem Renaissance did not approve of this new type of music. Many did not frequent the clubs or associate with the big names of jazz during this time.

In spite of this reaction musicals such as "Shuffle Along" known as the liveliest, most brilliant musical of its time, written by Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, F.E. Miller, and Aubry Lyle played New York for one year and toured the world for two more. Stars such as Josephine Baker who later became a star in Follies Bergeres in Paris, Adelaide Hall, Ada Ward, Ethel Waters, and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson made a lasting impression on America.

One such star Florence Mills of “Shuffle Along” had such a profound impact on Harlem that as many as 500,000 people watched her funeral through the streets of Harlem.

Some of the greatest names, vocal and instrumental, sacred and secular found that living in a large northern city such as New York had numerous advantages. These are the greatest names in Jazz.

Louis Armstrong— although born in New Orleans and later moving to Chicago to perform with King Joe Oliver, his real chance came when he went to New York to get involved in the recording industry. With his group the hot six he took the use of a solo instrument (trumpet to new heights).

Cab Calloway— band director and vocalist and later a headliner at the Cotton Club Calloway is given credit for giving Ella Fitzgerald her start. He has starred in many movies throughout his career including the original “Cotton Club”. His most well known composition is titled “Minnie the Moocher”.

Miles Davis— a very serious trumpet performer of the bop/cool era who got his start with Parker. Davis is a veteran performer of many years noted for walking around stage or performing with his back to the audience, (characteristic of the bop movement).

Duke Ellington— without a doubt the single most important musician of this era. He was the headliner at the Cotton Club from December 4, 1927 into the 1930’s. Born in Washington D.C., Duke started performing music at an early age although he was awarded a fine arts scholarship.

Ellington played the piano but, his real instrument was his orchestra. Since his death the tradition of the Duke Ellington band has been carried on by his son Mercer.

Dizzy Gillespie— probably the most well known and recognized bop performer. Dizzy has appeared in motion pictures, television, radio, and record albums. His solo instrument is the trumpet which has some distinctly different characteristics. His trumpet has an elongated bell and when he performs on it his cheeks usually puff out.

Benny Goodman— proclaimed “the king of swing” by many. He was a headliner at the Savoy in the 1930’s and 1940’s after Henderson. Goodman got his big break when he was heard on coast to coast radio in the mid 1940’s. He continued performing until his recent death.

James Fletcher Henderson— a headliner at the Savoy Ballroom in the 1920’s and 1930’s. A well educated college graduate who originally came to New York to attend Columbia University. Early in his career he worked for W.C. Handy and finally Black Swan Records with Louis Armstrong. With his famous band which included Chick Webb, he helped to strip New Orleans and Chicago as the hub of jazz. His music was pure and simple, jazz at it’s finest.

Charles Parker— the leader of the bop movement. A tremendously talented saxophonist from Kansas City, Mo. He performed with such notables as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, and others. In his short lifetime he made a profound contribution to jazz and influenced many of today’s saxophone solist. A headliner at Minton’s and other clubs along 52nd Street.

Lester Young— one of the musicians who began the shift to Bebop in the 1940’s and later to Cool Jazz in the 1950’s. A featured performer at Minton’s Playhouse on 52nd Street. His dominant instrument is the saxophone.

These musicians performed and sometimes competed against one another in some of the world's most renowned clubs. The big three in Harlem along with the Savoy and Apollo provided that classic down home sound while in the 1940's and 1950's, the clubs along 52nd Street vied for top honors. Many of these clubs are still in existence today, some under different names, but without them the musical renaissance in Harlem could not have happened.

Although the above mentioned clubs and cabarets were important to the development of jazz during this era, other musical happenings also entered into the Harlem Picture.

First classical music could be heard at the Harlem "Y" and the 135th Street public library. This music was performed by the Harlem Symphony and was attended by many jazz artist.

Secondly one of the first clubs Arthur "Happy" Rhones virtually invented the Harlem night club. It was located at 143rd Street and Lenox, and featured plush decor, floor shows, and was the first club to hire waitresses. Other black clubs that flourished in the "Jungle" (133rd Street) were Bank's Basement Brownies, The Bucket of Blood, and Leroy's. In these clubs black performers entertained black patrons.

Unfortunately none of the previously mentioned clubs were as important to Harlem as were *rent parties*. These parties ignored by literature were the real life blood of the community. All the popular artist attended them after hours. The parties usually started at midnight and featured everything from food to booze. Most writers or upper crust Harlemites would not admit attending them but most of them did.

The rationale behind rent parties was that most rents were too high often forcing most households to share beds ("hot beds"). In order to pay the rent (which was often twice as high in Harlem as it was uptown), these parties were held as a fund raising event.

The Cotton Club— located at 644 Lenox Avenue flourished from 1921-1936. Originally it was owned by well known gangsters, this club was famous for Broadway like floor shows. Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway found a "home" here for many years as headliners. The club featured all black performers although no blacks were permitted as guest. The Cotton Club was closed in 1925 by federal agents for violating prohibition, but soon reopened. It was closed again on February 15, 1936 and moved to 47th Street between Broadway and 7th Avenue. Before being named the Cotton Club it was known as the Douglas Theatre owned by then Heavyweight Champ Jack Johnson.

Ed Smalls Paradise- located at 229 1/2 7th Avenue, opened on October 26, 1926 and closed in the mid 1960's making it the longest operating night spot in Harlem. In its hayday it featured singing and dancing waiters. Throughout the 1940's and 1950's it featured an array of talented jazzmen. In the 1950's Rock 'n' Roll took center stage. In the 1960's basketball star Wilt Chamberlain purchased the club and featured Ray Charles as his top performer. Finally in the 1970's with the coming of disco, Charles Higgins (husband of singer Melba Moore) purchased the club and tried to make it happen once again, he failed and it was sold to Carl Gearwood, a West Indian who tried to make it into a community oriented club with a theatre.

Connies Inn— located at 165 131st Street, featured Fats Waller as it's top performer after he was originally hired as a delivery boy in the 1920's. During the Harlem Renaissance celebrities of stage, national figures, and members of high society all partied from dusk to dawn at Connies.

Savoy Ballroom— opened on March 12, 1926 as the largest ballroom in Harlem. It occupied the entire second floor part of the building which took up a full block from 140th to 141st Street on Lenox Avenue. It was once

called “The world’s most beautiful ballroom”. Harlemites who frequented the club were known as “the track”. The major feature of the Savoy was “the battle of the bands” which began in the 1920’s by Harlem businessman Charles Buchanan and owner Moe Gale. This was a tremendous crowd getter sometimes attracting 5,000 people.

The featured performers, Fletcher Henderson and Chick Webb would be pitted against bands from New York, Chicago, and New Orleans. Many times these battles would cause riots in the streets. The most famous battle occurred in 1936 featuring Chick Webb against Benny Goodman attracting over 20,000 people. The swing era and songs like “stomping at the savoy” helped spread the clubs fame and kept it open. The savoy was finally torn down in 1958 for a housing project.

Apollo Theatre— located on 125th Street is known as the shire of black music and live entertainment beginning in 1934 when the Frank Schiffman family purchased it.* It feature(d)s new and old singers, vocal groups, comedians, and other acts. It’s most well known attraction is the Wednesday evening “Amateur Night”. Amateurs from all walks of life would compete for first place: a weeks booking at the Apollo. Those who didn’t measure up were “hooked” off the stage. Nightly there would be seated in the audience talent agents, booking agents, and managers all looking for new talent. The list of performers who have performed their reads like a who’s who among entertainers, from Duke Ellington, to Michael Jackson, to Run DMC all of whom have performed there over the years.

*The theatre was closed in 1976 but reopened in 1986.

After stars made it big as a show of gratitude they were expected to return and perform for the Harlem audience. The Apollo was also famous for holiday shows, Easter and Christmas Gospel shows, and today hosts a weekly television show “Showtime at the Apollo.”

The music of black America can be traced through the music of Harlem/New York City. Starting with the music of the Renaissance through Rap, New York has it all.

Harlem’s musical heritage started out with *Ragtime* and *Theatre* music. This quickly lead into *The Swing Era* which featured large groups performing dance music. This set the stage for all the great vocalist of the 1930’s. Finally as a reaction to dance music performers decided they were tired of people dancing and not listening to them. As a result *Bebop* was established.

Bebop was known as the music that was forced underground. The music shifted emphasis from dancing to listening. Bebop was also known as modern jazz that developed after World War II in the clubs along 52nd Street notably Mintons and The Swinging Door. Characteristically bop reflected the resentment black musicians felt over the rewards and benefits reaped by white big bands from swing developed by blacks. As a further break bop artist developed their own style of dress with berets and grew goatees. They also would perform with their backs to the audience. Lyrically, they developed scat singing a type of nonsense syllable singing. Bop musicians of note were Lester Young, Charles Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis.

The next direction that jazz took was a more subtle or *Cool* style to replace the hard driving swing (hot) style. The cool school referred to a state of intellectualism and wanted to bring order, structure, and clarity to music.

Late in the 1940’s blues acquired a strong beat, with a rhythm emanating from Boogie Woogie. Adding to that was the use of the electric guitar, tenor saxophone, and the elements, emotions and excitement of Gospel Music. Suddenly their was a new urban music, *Rhythm and Blues* .

The improved purchasing power of blacks during World War II and the introduction of recording tape made this style flourish from 1945 to 1960. Rhythm and Blues was good ghetto music, entertainment created by blacks who were still excluded from white clubs, theatres, and showrooms. They had to listen to records at home or on the juke box.

In the 1950's Rhythm and Blues fused with Country Music to create a new music known as Rock 'n' Roll. Although predominately performed by blacks, whites in America made superstars out of artists such as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and the Comets. Rock 'n' Roll which was rooted in black jump blues was a continuation of the tradition that had prevailed from the 1920's on.

In the 1960's *Soul*, which became a symbol of black identity developed as still another reaction to white American music. This music was more gospel oriented and reflected a rise in black nationalism and pride with the words "Soul Brother" and "Black is Beautiful", and the emergence of the black power movement. Soul is a feeling in music, which is sometimes bitterness, or pride, often determination but, always an expression of the days social and political situation. The development of black owned record companies (Motown, Atlantic, and Stax), soul singers such as James Brown, and Aretha Franklin, and any song with the word "soul" in the title, was soon a message reaching all the people.

Soon the cry in New York was for *Disco*, developed in the 1970's. This style of music was aimed at both white and blacks and was predominately heard in night clubs. The emphasis was placed on the recorded sound vs. the live performances such as the Hustle and the Bus stop made overnight successes out of Van McCoy and Donna Summer.

Finally a new sound could be heard on the streets of New York. In 1979 three young men took an instrumental accomplishment along with fast talking rhymes to New Jersey and recorded "Rappers Delight". The Sugar Hill Gang helped to popularize this style of music which originated in the black subculture of urban cities.

Rap is a style of speaking in which the performer does not sing the words but speaks rapidly over a rudimentary musical background. This background is usually a percussive ostinato accented with an occasional guitar chord. This style has it's antecedents in operatic recitative and in beatnik poets chanting to jazz. Rap as a black style uses rhymed street slang delivered at breakneck speed, similar to disc jockies of the 1960's and 1970's. Today rap can be heard in contemporary music of all types and by many popular artist today. With the aid of such shows as Video Soul, (BET) and "Yo, MTV Raps", (MTV) rap has now become a viable music style recently being added to The American Music Awards and The Grammy Awards.

Lesson Plans I.

Students will be given an opportunity to complete a written essay on one of the composers of the Harlem Renaissance. Students will be given a list of composers from this era. They will then be given an opportunity to research that composer from textbooks, library books, and/or encyclopedias.

Schools that have libraries in their building should utilize them. As a class, students should be given an opportunity to go to the library at least once a week. The project should also be given a time limit of not more than five weeks thereby allowing time for pre and post comments during the ten week marking period.

The format of the essay should be;

- a. Title Page
- b. Introduction
- c. Body
- d. Conclusion

The Title Page should include the composers name, as well as the students name, and any other pertinent information.

The Introduction should be at least 1/2 page in length and should state the purpose of the essay.

The Body should be at least three pages but not more than eight pages in length, written in the students own words. Creative writing is not only a system wide objective, but also a vehicle of self expression for the student. The body is the real substance of the essay.

The Conclusion should also be at least 1/2 page in length and should first address the issues raised in the introduction as well as give the student a chance to formulate an opinion.

As a final activity essays may be read out loud by either the student or the instructor. By doing this a grade may also be given for oral presentation.

Lesson Plan II

Have the students collect the "Arts" section of the Sunday New Haven Register. Students should collect as many newspapers as possible. Students should also bring in maps of the City of New Haven. (These maps are usually found in the parent/ student orientation packages).

Activity I

Students should identify places in New Haven where live music is performed.

Examples: The Shubert, The Palace, Woosley Hall, New Haven Coliseum, etc . . . students should be able to identify where these places are located on a map and if possible arrange a tour of these facilities. (Woosley Hall and The Shubert offer tours and open house days throughout the year or call to arrange a personal tour.

Activity II

At least once a week as a class activity, have students look in the newspaper to list the names of any musical groups appearing in the greater New Haven area. With it's close proximity to New Haven and local drawing power the Hartford Civic Center can also be included.

Have the students list the names and styles of music that each group performs that visits these concert halls and if possible, have examples available for students to listen to.

These logs should be handed in at the end of the marking period and graded.

Lesson Plan III

A comparison in musical styles of a composer of the Harlem Renaissance and a Rap composer of today can be made.

Approximately a week before this activity is scheduled prepare a tape with at least two artist, one Jazz artist (Ex. Ellington), and one Rap artist (Ex. L.L. Cool J). If you don't own any Rap Recordings try taping them from a local radio station, (WNHC 1340 AM), from a local television station (Yo MTV Raps, MTV or Video Soul, Bet), or have a student bring in an example for use in class. Local libraries may also be a resource for both types of music.

Comparisons should be made in the following areas;

- a. vocal style
- b. lyrics
- c. rhyming scheme
- d. instrumentation
- e. form (ABA etc . . .)
- f. meaning of the title
- g. any other area chosen by the instructor

This comparison can be made between several records from the two eras. Be sure to also discuss how the music of the time influenced other disciplines such as the style of dress, attitudes toward the country, and other social or political issues.

Have the students keep a log of these activities to be handed in at the end of this lesson.

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2. McLin, Lena . *Pulse A History of Music*. San Diego, California: Neil A. Kjos Music, 1977.

Suggested student Viewing

1. *Jazz Masters*. Merit Audio Visual, New York: 1982.
2. *Pathways To Music From Jazz to Rock* . Nick Rossi Keyboard Publications, New York: 1970.
3. *Soul Music*. Educational Audio Visual Inc., Pleasantville, New York: 1979

Suggested Jazz Recordings

1. Louis Armstrong "*Satchmo*", (A Musical Autobiography of Louis Armstrong); Decca DXM Records 1963.
2. Cab Calloway "*Chu*", Epic Records 1968.
3. Duke Ellington "*Flaming Youth*", The historic sound of the early and vital Harlem band in 16 exciting 1927-1929 recordings; RCA Victor Records 1969.
4. Ella Fitzgerald "*Rhythm is my Business*", Verve Records 1962.
5. Dizzy Gillespie "*Bird and Diz*", The Genius of Charlie Parker; Verve Records 1960.
6. Benny Goodman "*The King of Swing*", Columbia Records 1959.
7. The Fletcher Henderson Story "*A study in Frustration* " Thesaurus of Classic Jazz; Columbia Records.
8. Thelonius Monk "*Bean and the Boys*" , Prestige Records 1971.
9. Charlie Parker "*Jazz Perennial*", Verve Records 1960.
10. Jazz Folkways Records "*Various Jazz and Blues Artist Performing*" No.2-Volume 7 New York 1922-1934.
11.)*Outstanding Jazz Compositions of the 20th Century*, Columbia Records 1968.

Jazz Composers

Louis Armstrong

Eubie Blake

Cab Calloway

Miles Davis

Duke Ellington

Ella Fitzgerald

Dizzy Gillespie

Benny Goodman

Earl Hines

Fletcher Henderson

Thelonious Monk

King Joe Oliver

Charles Parker

Max Roach

Paul Roberson

Bessie Smith

Fats Waller

Ethel Waters

Ben Webster

Chick Webb

Teddy Wilson

Lester Young

Rap Artist

The Fat Boys

Kurtis Blow

Kool Moe Dee

Run DMC

Easy E

Grandmaster Flash

Sugar Hill Gang

M.C. Hammer

L.L. Cool J

Big Daddy Kane

Tone Loc

Sit Mix A Lot

M.C. Lyte

Salt & Pepa

Kit & Play

Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince

Raasheed

Slick Rick

Shinehead

De La Soul

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