CHAPTER NINETEEN:
BLACK CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE 1930s AND 1940s

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Although the 1930s and 1940s were difficult times for many African Americans, they continued to develop their own distinctive culture, especially in urban areas. In music, blacks had to rely frequently on whites for publishing. However, the black form of bebop emerged from an impatience with the lack of improvisation in the big band swing music. Charlie Parker led the bebop sound, which included its own culture and fashion. Other aspects of popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s, on the other hand, failed to incorporate blacks, yet often provided at least some element of escapism. Radio almost completely eliminated blacks from any role, even to the point of casting two white men as the black characters in the popular Amos ‘n’ Andy series. Most blacks criticized the show heavily for stereotyping blacks, and allowing whites to laugh at black efforts. Movies were little better for African Americans. Although some achieved fame and rewards, roles remained limited to the buffoon or servant, especially before World War II. Some black filmmakers attempted to cater to blacks, with more sophisticated roles and stories. The 1930s and 1940s also saw a continuation of black literature, art and music with the Chicago Renaissance. Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday pushed jazz limits, Thomas Dorsey popularized gospel and Katherine Dunham choreographed for blacks. Many of the artists also incorporated critiques of racism and white society in their work. In literature, three authors, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison published significant, sophisticated works reflecting their views of the black experience. In sports, through men like Jesse Owens, Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson blacks demonstrated a talent when allowed to compete without discrimination. Two new religious movements also emerged during the 1930s and 1940s, each a reaction to continued racism and each an attempt to bring power, understanding and control back into black people’s lives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Understand the development, and importance of, swing, big band and bebop in music for blacks.

Understand the role and presentation of blacks in popular culture, including comic strips, movies and radio.

Understand the characteristics, developments, artists and authors of the Chicago Renaissance, as well as how some participants actively attempted to better conditions for blacks as a whole.

Understand how sports figures contributed to black culture during the period.

Understand the developments of black religious culture during the 1930s and 1940s, including the Nation of Islam and the Peace Mission Movement.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Introduction - Role of Cultural Power

II. Black Culture in a Midwestern City
   A. Classical Music Interest
   B. Institutional Support
C. Legend Singers

III. The Black Culture and Industry and American Racism
   A. Reliance on others publish
   B. Political Content of Black Art
   C. Marketing

IV. The Music Culture From Swing to Bebop
   A. Importance of Music
   B. Effect of Great Depression on Music Industry
   C. Importance of New York City
   D. Development of Big Band Swing
   E. Development of Bebop
   F. Resistance to Bebop
   G. Bebop Culture
   H. Waning of Bebop

V. Popular Culture for the Masses: Comic Strips, Radio and the Movies
   A. Role of Mass Culture
   B. The Comics
      1. Role of humor
      2. “The Jones Family”
   C. Radio and Race
      1. Racial restrictions
      2. *Amos ’n’ Andy*
         a. Actors
         b. Show details
         c. Movie
      3. Black reaction
      4. TV Show
      5. Effect of *Amos ’n’ Andy*
      6. Eddie Anderson
   D. Race, Representation and the Movies
      1. General Roles
      2. *Gone With the Wind*
      3. Post World War II Films
      4. Oscar Micheaux
      5. Attitude in Hollywood for Marginalized Groups

VI. The Black Chicago Renaissance
   A. Differences From Harlem Renaissance
   B. Prominent People
   C. Critics of Chicago Artists
   D. Class Structure of Chicago
   E. Black Institutions/Music
   F. Jazz in Chicago
      1. Prominent Artists
      2. Spread across America
   G. Gospel in Chicago
      1. Definition/Place
2. Characteristics
3. Prominent Singers

H. Chicago in Dance and Song: Katherine Dunham and Billie Holiday
   1. Importance of Dance
   2. Katherine Dunham
      a. Training
      b. Characteristics of choreography
      c. Success/Political Protest
   3. Billie Holiday
      a. Career
      b. Protest

VII. Black Graphic Art
   A. Social Realist School
   B. Criticism of Capitalism
   C. Harmon Awards
   D. Effect of Federal Aid Projects

VIII. Black Literature
   A. Evaluation
   B. Richard Wright’s Native Son
      1. Storyline
      2. Analysis
   C. James Baldwin Challenges Wright
      1. Criticism
      2. Wright’s Response
      3. Second Response
   D. Ralph Ellison and Invisible Man
      1. Storyline
      2. Views of Blacks

IX. African Americans in Sports
   A. Possibilities Without Racism
   B. Jessie Owens and Joe Louis
      1. Owens and the 1936 Olympics
      2. Joe Barrow and Boxing
   C. Breaking the Color Barrier in Baseball
      1. Pre World War II Segregation
      2. Jackie Robinson
      3. Larry Doby

X. Black Religious Culture
   A. Definition of the “Black Church”
   B. Relationship Between Religious and Secular Culture
   C. The Nation of Islam
      1. Origins
      2. Beliefs
   D. Father Divine and the Peace Mission Movement
      1. Origins
      2. Beliefs/Appeal
3. Move to Harlem

XI. Conclusion

TEST MATERIALS

MAP QUESTIONS
(Locate the following regions, geographical features or political entities on a map)
St. Louis
New York City
Chicago
Berlin
Italy
Ethiopia
Sayville, New York

IDENTIFICATIONS
(For each of the following, identify by answering the questions – who? what? when? where? And describe the significance by answering the question – why is this important? Why do we study this?)
Lincoln University
Summer High School
Kenneth Billups
Legend Singers
National Association of Negro Musicians
Louis Armstrong
bebop
territorial bands
Apollo Theater
big band swing music
Charlie “Bird” Parker
zoot suits
Malcolm Little
hipster culture
“The Jones Family”
The Amos ‘n’ Andy Show
Charles Correll
Freeman Gosden
Kingfish
Sapphire
Mama
Check and Double Check
Nannie Helen Burroughs
Alvin Childress
Spencer Williams Jr.
The Jack Benny Show
Beulah
Hattie McDaniel