

American Popular Music

# Cross Road Blues

# Race and Hillbilly Records

- Race and Hillbilly Records evolve out of one another
- Ralph Peer
  - Sophie Tucker
  - Mamie Smith
  - Bessie Smith
    - Columbia Records sensation
  - Fiddlin' John Carson



# Race Music

- Race Records: recordings of black performers, targeted at a black audience
- Mamie Smith
  - Recorded for Okeh Records
  - "Crazy Blues" - 1920
    - 75,000 copies sold first month



# Classic Blues

- Blues emerge in black communities of deep South
- Bessie Smith
  - One of all time greatest blues singers
  - “Empty Bed Blues” 1928
    - 12 bar blues song form
    - AAB lyrical form
    - Call and response between voice and instrument
    - “Real” lyrics: personal, emotional, frank



# Empty Bed Blues

- I woke up this morning with a awful aching head  
I woke up this morning with a awful aching head  
My new man had left me, just a room and a empty bed
- Bought me a coffee grinder that's the best one I could find  
Bought me a coffee grinder that's the best one I could find  
Oh, he could grind my coffee, 'cause he had a brand new grind
- He's a deep sea diver with a stroke that can't go wrong  
He's a deep sea diver with a stroke that can't go wrong  
He can stay at the bottom and his wind holds out so long
- He knows how to thrill me and he thrills me night and day  
Oh, he knows how to thrill me, he thrills me night and day  
He's got a new way of loving, almost takes my breath away
- Lord, he's got that sweet somethin' and I told my girlfriend Lou  
He's got that sweet somethin' and I told my girlfriend Lou  
From the way she's raving, she must have gone and tried it too

# Country Blues

- Flourished in rural South
- Mississippi Delta
  - Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson
  - Mostly black area
  - Sharecropping, poor region
  - Home of the bluesman: travels around in search of work

# Robert Johnson

- Most esteemed Delta bluesman
- Huge influence on future blues & rock artists
  - Keith Richards, Eric Clapton
- “Cross Road Blues” - 1936
  - Mysterious life
  - Cross roads curse



# Bristol Sessions: 1927

- The Carter Family
  - A.P. and Sara Carter, Maybelle
    - Traditional country vocal sound
    - Thumb brush style on guitar
  
- Jimmie Rodgers
  - One of country's first stars
  - "Blue Yodel No. 11" 1929
    - Blues in lyrics, style and form





# Blue Yodel #11

- I've got a gal, I give her presents by the score  
I've got a gal, I give her presents by the score  
No matter how many presents I give her, she's always wanting more
- Now lookahere, sweet baby, you sure don't treat me fair  
Lookahere, sweet mama, you sure don't treat me fair  
'Cause the presents you want would break a multimillionaire
- You want furs and diamonds, a fur coat made of seal  
You want furs and diamonds, a fur coat made of seal (Spoken: Killin' me!)  
But everything you want, now you want an automobile
- I believe to my soul, somebody's been riding my mule  
I believe to my soul, somebody's been riding my mule (Spoken: It's the truth, honey!)  
'Cause every time I want to ride, she acts such a doggone fool
- You may call yourself the meanest girl in town  
You may call yourself the meanest girl in town  
But let me tell you, baby, I'm gonna turn your damper down
- Listen here, baby, that's all I got to say  
Listen here, sweet mama, that's all I have to say (Spoken: That's all, honey)  
I know you're gwine to leave but you'll miss your daddy someday

# Big Band Swing

- 1935-1945: Swing Era
- Evolved from jazz-influenced dance orchestras of 1920s
- Early 1930s: Great Depression
  - Decline of phonograph & record sales
- Big Band swing allows musicians to make \$\$
  - Importance of radio
  - 1942-1944: Instrumental recording ban
    - Musician's Union

# Fletcher Henderson

- Attracted the best jazz musicians to his band
  - Louis Armstrong
  - Coleman Hawkins
  - Lester Young
- “Wrappin’ It Up” - 1934
  - Syncopation over steady 4-beat rhythm
  - Brass and saxophone play simple, repeating riff
  - C&R between sections



# Benny Goodman

- “King of Swing”
  - Leader of first popular swing-era big band
  - Clarinetist
  - Bought Henderson arrangements
  - Palomar Ballroom appearance
- “Taking a Chance on Love” - 1940
  - Features female crooner
  - Call and response
  - Time-keeping in rhythm section
    - foundation of swing



# Duke Ellington

- “Ko-ko” – 1940
  - 15 musicians
  - Timbre, harmonies, rhythm
  - “Exchange rhythm”
    - Call and response between sections
- “Work of art”
  - The band as a laboratory for experimentation



# Count Basie

- Led big band most closely associated with blues tradition
  - Kansas City style
  - Musicians had little training
  - Looser, less precise
  - Boogie woogie influence
- “One O’Clock Jump” - 1937
  - Boogie woogie intro
  - Emphasis on riffs



# Glenn Miller

- Led most popular dance band in the world
  - More records sold and concerts attended
  - "Peppy, clean-sounding style"
- "In the Mood"- 1939
  - Sax riff as centerpiece
  - "Trick" ending
  - Predictable structure





# Billie Holiday

- Several jazz singers emerge during Swing Era
  - Work with big bands
  - Usually unacknowledged
- Managed to create following
  - Distinct vocal timbre
  - Ability to phrase with ease
  - "God Bless the Child" - 1941





# Country Music in the Swing Era

- 1935-1945: Hillbilly music continues to grow
  - Based in folk traditions
  - Strophic form
- Historical Context
  - Great Depression
  - Mechanization of agriculture
  - Dust Bowl drought of 1930s

# Country Crosses Over

- Migration of rural White Southerners
  - Nashville, ATL, Chicago, STL, LA, Detroit
  - New urban audience
  - Hillbilly becomes *country and western*
- Radio Airplay
  - By 1945: 600+ hillbilly radio programs nationwide
  - *Grand Ole Opry*: the show that made country music famous

# Other Factors

- Independent Record Labels
  - Specialize in hillbilly music
  - Music industry pays more attention
- WWII
  - Armed forces radio
  - USO concerts
  - Themes of sentimentality, morality, patriotism

# Roy Acuff

- “Great Speckled Bird” - 1936
  - Crossed over to mainstream charts
  - Religious theme- appeals to Christian market
  - Strophic pattern of ballad tradition
  - Use of *dobro*: six string guitar



# Rise of Singing Cowboy

- Wider audience for country
  - “Western” replaces “hillbilly”
  - Country singers adopt cowboy hats
- Gene Autry
  - First successful singing cowboy
  - Hollywood film star
  - Less pronounced accent, deep baritone voice

# Gene Autry



"Back in the Saddle Again"- 1939