

Women of the Blues



Mamie Smith

- First African American female singer to record vocal Blues. (1920)
- Record was called "Crazy Blues"
 - Sold one million copies in one year.
 - Song was written by Perry Bradford
- "Crazy Blues" was originally titled "Harlem Blues"
 - Record company changed the title to "Crazy Blues" because "Harlem Blues sounded too African American."
 - Record company only wanted to sell to white audiences.

Race Records

- Records that were produced by, performed by, and sold to African Americans.
- Often times, African Americans were forced to record after hours at the recording studios rather than during the day.
- Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" was one of the first race records.

Ma Rainey

- Popular female blues singer with a deep powerful voice, who influenced other singers of the time.
 - Mentored Bessie Smith
- Sang Blues in traveling shows for 20 years before recording her first record in 1923.
- Recorded over 100 songs in 6 years.
 - Bo Weavil Blues

Ma Rainey cont.

- Ma's nickname was "The Mother of the Blues."
- Ma toured with her husband, Pa, and called the act, the "Assassins of the Blues."

Bessie Smith

- Major Blues and Jazz singer with the title "Empress of the Blues."
- Ma Rainey was her mentor.
- Recorded with Louis Armstrong
- First recording was "Downhearted Blues (1923).
- Bessie was slated to perform at Carnegie Hall in the concert "From Spirituals to Swing," but died in a car crash.