American Popular Music

Cross Road Blues
Race and Hillbilly Records evolve out of one another

- Ralph Peer
  - Sophie Tucker
  - Mamie Smith
  - Bessie Smith
    - Columbia Records sensation
  - Fiddlin’ John Carson
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
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
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
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 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
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
  - "Wildwood Flower" 1928
    - 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
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
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
“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