



Billie Holiday
(April 7, 1915 – July 17, 1959)

Eleanora Fagan Childhood

- Eleanora Fagan was born on April 7, 1915, in Philadelphia, the daughter of Sarah Julia "Sadie" Fagan and Clarence Holiday, an unmarried teenaged couple
- Tough childhood as dad left to work as a musician
- Arrested for prostitution at 13. Was working as a cleaning lady at a brothel. Mother was arrested as well. She was working as a prostitute.



Billie Holiday Early Career

- As a young teenager, Holiday started singing in nightclubs in Harlem.
- She took her professional name (Billie) from Billie Dove
- When John Hammond saw Holiday sing he was impressed
- Hammond arranged for Holiday to make her recording debut, at age 18
- “Your Mother’s Son-In-Law” was her first hit



Influences

- Probably the biggest influences on Billie was blues singer Bessie Smith and Jazz singer Louis Armstrong.
- Smith was popular in southern states; however, she did not gain national attention until Billie talked about her as an influence.



Short Stint as a Big Band Singer

- Receives the nickname “Lady Day” from sax player Lester Young
- She teams with the Count Basie Orchestra in 1937
- The conditions were horrible but Holiday liked it because she got to pick what they were playing



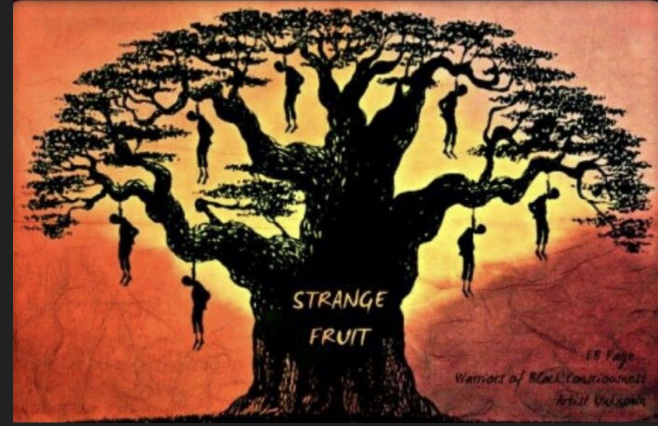
One Aspect of Her Significance

- 1938 - Hired by Artie Shaw becoming the first African American to work with a white orchestra
- Opened doors for other African-American artists to work with white musicians



Racial Consciousness

- In 1943 Holiday signs up with Decca Records
- Work becomes more introspective and moody.
- Songs from this period like “Don’t Explain” and “Strange Fruit” highlight Billie’s concern with race issues in America.



Strange Fruit

- On August 7, 1930, 3 men: Thomas Shipp, Abram Smith, and James Cameron, were lynched for a crime they did not commit by a lynch mob in Marion Indiana.
- A white Jewish high school teacher from the Bronx named Abel Meeropol published a poem in 1937 called “Bitter Fruit” after seeing a picture of two of the boys who were lynched that night.

Strange Fruit Cont...

- Meeropol put the poem to music
- In 1939 the song was introduced to Billie Holiday. She first performed it at the Cafe Society, the first integrated nightclub in New York
- Billie made it the final song of every performance from that point on in her career
- She recorded it in 1939 and the song made her a star
- In 1999, Time Magazine named it the most important song of the century



**Then the sudden smell of
burning flesh**

Holiday's Downfall

- String of abusive men in her life
- Addiction to drugs
- Arrested several times for drug possession



Holiday's End

- By early 1959 Holiday was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver
- On May 31, 1959 Holiday was taken to Metropolitan Hospital in New York to be treated for liver and heart disease
- The Federal Bureau of Narcotics arrested Holiday for drug possession while she was dying in a bed
- On July 17, 1959 at 3:10 a.m. Holiday died at age 44 from pulmonary edema and heart failure caused by her cirrhosis



It is Billie Holiday who was, and still remains, the greatest single musical influence on me.

— *Frank Sinatra* —

AZ QUOTES

Behind the Beat Phrasing



Significance

- Billie Holiday is considered one of the best jazz vocalists of all time
- First African-American to sing in front of an all white orchestra opening doors for other artists of color
- Behind the Beat Phrasing
- Holiday would influence artists like Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Etta James, Aretha Franklin. And so many other jazz vocalists.

Activity

Which is Billie?



Benny
Goodman
with vocalist
Billie Holiday

"Riffin'
The
Scotch"

Columbia
2867-D,
recorded on
Dec. 18, 1933











LADY DAY
THE BEST OF BILLIE HOLIDAY