

History of R&B and Soul Music Part 1

Course Content Document

This course looks at the evolution of Black popular music post-WW2 through the 1960s. Special attention is paid to big cities with large Black populations, and the rise and fall of the independent record companies recording Black musical forms like blues, rhythm & blues, jazz, gospel, doo-wop and soul. We distinguish this music from the white popular recordings sold at this time by the dominant major companies like Columbia, RCA-Victor and Decca.

Part 1 of the course covers New York, Chicago, New Orleans and assorted artists from the state of Georgia.

We start with an overview of white and black popular music immediately following WWII and the operation of the record business in general, beginning in New York City Atlantic Records was founded by the son of the Turkish ambassador to the US. Ahmet Ertegun was hoping to start a record label for the jazz he loved, but instead found a market for blues and rhythm & blues and went on to great success in pop, rock, r&b and soul, with artists like Ray Charles, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters, Ben E. King, the Coasters, Solomon Burke, Aretha Franklin and others.

New York was also the home of Scepter Records, where Dionne Warwick, Chuck Jackson, the Shirelles and many other black artists found fame.

We move to Chicago where Philip and Leonard Chess started the Chess label, home to blues stars like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and early 1950s rock and rollers Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. In the 1960s Chess will boast a strong soul roster with Etta James, Gene Chandler and the Dells. We will also study Chicago stalwarts Curtis Mayfield, Jerry Butler, Fontella Bass and the Marvellos.

Next we consider the incredible variety of New Orleans musicians such as Fats Domino, Lloyd Price, Professor Longhair, Clarence Frogman Henry, Irma Thomas, the Meters, the Neville Brothers and a dozen legendary small record labels.

We will finish up with a visit to the state of Georgia. While not a home to any notable record companies, it's the birthplace of American musical giants like Little Richard, James Brown and Bobby Byrd.

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