

Online Resources

Billie Holiday photos from the Library of Congress:
William Gottlieb Collection
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/gottlieb:@field\(SUBJ\)+@1\(Holiday,+Billie,+1915-1959+\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/gottlieb:@field(SUBJ)+@1(Holiday,+Billie,+1915-1959+))
Carl Van Vechten Collection
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/vanquery.html> (use keywords "Billie Holiday" to search)

Recordings

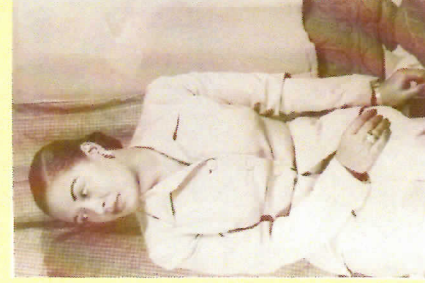
The Lady Sings (Proper Box UK, ASIN: B00005Q35B)
Billie Holiday's Gold (Hip-O Records, ASIN: B000AMJE71)
Ken Burns' Jazz Collection: Billie Holiday (Polygram, ASIN: B000050I3R)
The Ultimate Collection: Billie Holiday (Hip-O-Records, ASIN: B0007X9U2Y)
Billie Holiday: The Complete Decca Collection (Verve, ASIN: B000003N36)
The Complete Billie Holiday on Verve (Polygram Records, ASIN: B0000046P3)

HOLD AN EVENT: Lady Day's Literary Salon

Read the book and then indulge your inner Billie Holiday with a celebration worthy of Lady Day. As Holiday's jazz plays in the background, guests with flowers in their hair read passages from the book, pose for "Sophisticated Lady" photos, and pass the mic for Billie-oke. Add music videos and live jazz to the mix for unforgettable fun. Variations: Billie's Gardenia Tea, Billie's Blue Moon Lounge, Lady Day's Literary Lounge. For the complete online guide, visit www.becomingbillieholiday.com.

Web Site: www.becomingbillieholiday.com

Comment on Billie: www.myspace.com/becomingbillieholiday



Billie Holiday, 1949
Credit: Library of Congress,
Carl Van Vechten Collection



Carole Boston Weatherford
Illustration by Floyd Cooper

BECOMING BILLIE HOLIDAY

by Carole Boston Weatherford

Art by Floyd Cooper

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Before there was Billie Holiday—living her lyrics—there was young Eleanora Fagan practically raising herself on Baltimore's streets. She hit New York just as the Harlem Renaissance gave way to the Great Depression. Luckily, Eleanora had a voice. She started recording as a teen, and, by age 25, had shared the spotlight with some of the era's hottest bands. Poems by Carole Boston Weatherford trace Eleanora's metamorphosis into Lady Day—from her Baltimore beginnings to her Harlem heyday, culminating with "Strange Fruit." Stunning sepia-toned art by Floyd Cooper completes this sensitive portrait.

Behind the Scenes

Weatherford, a long-time Holiday fan, claims Billie as her muse. She says that the singer prodded her into penning this memoir. Before writing a single word, though, Weatherford listened to Holiday's early recordings, read biographies and perused oral histories. "As I researched," says Weatherford, "Holiday seemed to whisper in my ear, and as I wrote, she seemed to hum in the background. The result is a collection of ninety-seven poems, titled after Holiday's songs and narrated by the singer herself.

Floyd Cooper's art was created with a subtractive technique, using erasers to make shapes from a ground of paint. The shapes were then enhanced with mixed media, mostly oil based, layered in a dry brush fashion. "I love Billie Holiday and I can't help it," says Cooper. "Her soulful sound tugs at my own past, calling me home. The surprising thing is, just like her music, working on this book took me back home in that same figurative way."

Discussion Questions

1. During Eleanora's childhood, her mother sometimes worked as a live-in maid, causing them to be separated. How did these separations affect young Eleanora? How would you describe the mother-daughter relationship?
2. How did her early experiences cause her to grow up fast and to be street-wise?
3. What kind of relationship did Eleanora long for with her father?
4. What aspects of Eleanora's youthful behavior contradicted her Catholic upbringing?
5. Why did Eleanora choose to drop out of school?
6. Eleanora was sent to reform school twice—for skipping school and after a rape. How did the time in reform school affect her?

7. Eleanora/Billie sometimes got in physical fights. What does this say about her?
8. Why did the blues speak to young Eleanora when she heard them on the record player in the brothel where she did odd jobs?
9. How did Eleanora feel when her singing first gained attention in Baltimore clubs?
10. Eleanora arrived in New York as the Harlem Renaissance ended and the Great Depression began. But thanks to jazz and the Great Migration, Harlem was nevertheless a black "mecca." Try to imagine Eleanora's first impressions of Harlem.
11. How did Eleanora feel when she first heard her recordings?
12. When Eleanora's musical career blossomed, she chose Billie Holiday as her stage name. If you were a performer, what would be your stage name?
13. Why did Billie connect with saxophonist Lester Young?
14. Billie loved dogs. What did dogs offer her that humans did not?
15. Billie enjoyed movies and pulp fiction magazines. Why did she favor these pastimes?
16. When Clarence saw Billie perform, why did he leave without greeting her?
17. Billie was never close to her father Clarence. How did she feel at his funeral?
18. How did Billie's experiences with racism shape her performance of the anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit?" Cite some of her experiences with discrimination.
19. Why did Billie repeatedly get involved with so-called no-good men?

Author



Baltimore-born Carole Boston Weatherford is the New York Times best-selling author of such books as *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, winner of a Caldecott Honor and an NAACP Image Award; *Birmingham*, 1963, winner of the Jefferson Cup and Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award; and *The Sound that Jazz Makes*, winner of the Carter G. Woodson Award. Weatherford teaches at Fayetteville State University. www.caroleweatherford.com

Illustrator



Floyd Cooper has illustrated more than 60 books for children, including *Grandpa's Face* by Eloise Greenfield, *Meet Danira Brown* by Nikki Grimes, and *I Have Heard of a Land* by Joyce Carol Thomas. He authored *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes* and *Jump: From the Life of Michael Jordan*. The winner of three Coretta Scott King Honors and an NAACP Image Award, Cooper lives in Pennsylvania. www.floydcooper.com