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## Resources for This Lesson

### Reading 1: The Great Migration

*In 1940, 77 percent of black Americans still lived in the South – 49 percent in the rural South. The invention of the cotton picker was crucial to the great migration of blacks from the Southern countryside to the cities of the South, the West, and the North. Between 1910 and 1970 six a half million black Americans moved from the South to the North; five million of them moved after 1940, during the time of the mechanization of cotton farming. In 1970, when the migration ended, black America was only half Southern, and less than a quarter rural; “urban” had become a euphemism for “black.” The black migration was one of the largest and most rapid mass internal movements of people in history.*

-- Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, 1991

- ➡ Was the Great Migration solely about African Americans moving from the South to the North? What types of communities were they leaving, and what kinds of communities were they moving to?
- ➡ According to the passage, what was one of the primary reasons for African-American migration during this period?

### Reading 2: Rhythm and Blues

*The migration of African Americans to the urban industrial centers of Chicago, Detroit, New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere in the 1930s created a new market for jazz, blues, and related genres of music.... The precursors of rhythm and blues came from jazz and blues, which overlapped in the 1930s through the work of musicians such as The Harlem Hamfats, with their 1936 hit “Oh Red,” as well as Leroy Carr, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, and T-Bone Walker. There was also increasing emphasis on the electric guitar as a lead instrument, as well as the piano and saxophone. In 1948, RCA Victor was marketing black music under the name “Blues and Rhythm”... In 1949, the term “Rhythm and Blues” replaced the Billboard category Harlem Hit Parade.*

-- RadioVintage.net, “Rhythm ‘n Blues”

- ➡ How did the Great Migration influence the kinds of music played in cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles?
- ➡ What were the musical roots of Rhythm and Blues? What was one of its defining features?

### Reading 3: WDIA Memphis

*Claiming to reach an incredible 10 percent of the total black population of the United States, WDIA was a celebration of firsts: the first radio station in the country with a format designed exclusively for a black audience; the first station south of the Mason-Dixon line to air a publicly recognized black disc jockey; the first all-black station in the nation to go 50,000 watts; the first Memphis station to gross a million dollars a year; the first in the country to present an open forum to discuss black problems; and, more importantly, the first to win the hearts and minds of the black community in Memphis and the Mid-South with its extraordinary public service. For most blacks living within broadcast range, WDIA was “their” station...*

*In many ways, the radio station was a metaphor for the era in which it was born, a time when black people forged a positive life for themselves out of the malevolent circumstances of racial segregation. Refusing to suffer the indignities of a racist society, talented black people (with a little help from their white friends) instead fashioned from the cloth of segregation a beautiful garment, an all-black radio station, worn with honor and pride by the black community of Memphis.*

-- Louis Cantor, *Wheelin' On Beale: How WDIA-Memphis Became the Nation's First All-Black Radio Station and Created the Sound that Changed America*, 1992

- ➔ What was unique about WDIA in Memphis?
- ➔ How did African Americans feel about WDIA?
- ➔ If a station such as WDIA played Rhythm and Blues and other music performed by African-American artists, how might that have influenced white radio listeners?

### Reading 4: Memphis DJ Dewey Phillips

*Dewey Phillips's name is best associated with a single moment in the history of American popular culture. He is the disc jockey who introduced Elvis Presley in Memphis and the Mid-South by playing his first record and then conducting his first live on-the-air interview. More important, however, if less well known is the contribution Dewey made to the rock 'n' roll revolution of the 1950s by both turning on a huge southern white audience to the previously forbidden “race” music and by providing indispensable assistance to Elvis's early career at a time when Elvis and his local record label, Sun, were still virtually unknown.*

*Years before his famous Presley interview, Dewey Phillips' famous late-night radio program Red, Hot and Blue was already changing the musical landscape of the South if not the nation. Dewey's inspired lunacy made rock 'n' roll much more palatable for a generation whose parents were still outraged by the music itself. Red Hot and Blue, which took Memphis by storm in the early 1950s, not only prepared the Mid-South for Elvis's rise to stardom but also became the launchpad for Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, B.B. King, Carl Perkins, and dozens of other top recording artists.*

*It all started in Memphis back in 1949, in what local veteran entertainer and film-score producer Jim Dickinson calls the “it” year. Two gigantic events occurred: Memphis’s own WDIA became the first radio station in the country to switch to all-black programming, and WHBQ’s Dewey Phillips became one of the first southern white radio announcers to legitimize the new black rhythm and blues sound by making it acceptable and respectable to a white teenage audience. Within a decade, race music would become part of the white mainstream, Memphis would become home to some of the biggest names in the music industry, and Elvis Presley would detonate a cultural explosion that would do no less than rearrange the entertainment map of much of the world.*

-- Louis Cantor, *Dewey and Elvis: The Life and Times of a Rock ‘N’ Roll Deejay*, 2005

➡ *What kind of music did Dewey Phillips play?*

➡ *What was the impact of a white disc jockey playing Rhythm and Blues and other music by African-American artists in the 1940s and early 1950s? How was it different from an African-American disc jockey playing this music?*

### **Reading 5: Hunter Hancock on Los Angeles Radio**

*In 1948, black Los Angeles knew nothing of the nationwide cultural ferment that was soon to come. The Hancock show — and the man who delivered it — was presumed to be a black thing. It all added up — the tunes, the sponsors, the patter. Surely no white deejay would play this music. Hancock’s energy and easy style sounded irresistibly rebellious, even dangerous to listeners accustomed to the standard baritone and stilted formality of radio announcers. The hedonism of the music he played, combined with Hancock’s slight touch of a black dialect, pulled many listeners into what felt like an illicit zone, the place Normal Mailer described as “the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pitch, scream and despair”...*

*In the end, the issue was not so much the pigmentation of Hancock’s skin but what he represented—a break with the formality of the past, a gift to a new generation eager for an identity of its own, and an endorsement by a powerful social institution, the media, of the freedom, sexuality, and fun that had been dismissed and derided and something only for subjugated blacks. The voice that delivered these tunes was offering the holy grail of American pop culture — freedom from respectability.*

-- Marc Fisher, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Generation*, 2007

➡ *How did Hancock break barriers with his radio broadcasts?*

➡ *How does the author describe Hancock’s on-air personality? Why might listeners have assumed he was black? How did Hancock’s style reflect the rebellious spirit of early Rock and Roll?*

### **Videos 1 & 2: Early Rhythm and Blues Hits**

Roy Brown, “Good Rockin’ Tonight” (1947)

Ruth Brown, "Teardrops from My Eyes" (1950)

- ➡ How would you describe the sound and mood of these songs?
- ➡ Why do you think Dewey Phillips and Hunter Hancock were eager to play this music on the radio?

### **Video 3: Dewey Phillips on the Radio**

Dewey Phillips, "Red, Hot and Blue"

- ➡ How would you describe Phillips' on-air personality?
- ➡ What do you think made Phillips so popular with both black and white audiences? Do you think he'd be popular today? Why or why not?
- ➡ How do disc jockeys use their personalities to draw in listeners? How could a DJ like Phillips use his popularity to expose listeners to music they might not have heard before?

### **Video 4: Hunter Hancock on the Radio**

Hunter Hancock, "Huntin' With Hunter"

- ➡ How would you describe Hancock's on-air personality?
- ➡ What do you think made Hancock so popular? Do you think he'd be popular today? Why or why not?
- ➡ How do disc jockeys use their personalities to draw in listeners? How could a DJ like Hancock use his popularity to expose listeners to music they might not have heard before?