

Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction 3/e

Sample Essay for Chapter 8

The study of women's pop music activities from 1895-1945 reveals that accepted musical roles for women were impacted by cultural ideas about race, not just gender. Describe several examples that were given in Chapter 8.

STOP and write your essay before scrolling down.

The study of women's **pop music activities** from **1895-1945** reveals that accepted musical **roles** for women were impacted by cultural ideas about **race**, not just **gender**. **Describe several examples** that were given in Chapter 8.

Popular music often reveals cultural values, and from 1895-1945 in America, the musical roles that women were allowed to play differed substantially according to race. This chapter specifically addresses roles for white and Black women during this era, **in such performance areas** as professional concert bands, the circus, and in home-based keyboard performance, among others.

In terms of band music, white women were largely held to limited roles in professional groups. While women did sing with groups like the Sousa band, it was almost unheard of that a woman would be

found playing any instrument, except perhaps harp. This reflected the band's historical roots in the military, which did not initially allow women to participate, and which was racially segregated. White women often formed gender-segregated groups, most of which were amateur groups with no pay involved. **On the other hand, Black women** instrumentalists often performed side-by-side with men in professional bands, particularly in family groups such as the Young Family band. Black musicians often reported that race, not gender, was a factor in limiting where and for whom musicians could perform. These mixed-gender ensembles performed for Black audiences.

Similarly, the instrumental ensemble under the circus tent was exclusively male in white circuses whose personnel performed for white audiences. Women instrumentalists who appeared in performance were presented as visual sideshows, not to be taken seriously. Not unlike the concert band world, **however**, Black women played instruments of all kinds in tent performances, and again, exclusively for Black audiences.

Yet **another example** where racial differences are reflected in popular music culture can be found when examining early women's magazines that included sheet music sections. The significant **divide between the white and Black press** was evident in publications like the *Godey's Ladies Book*, where sheet music intended for performance in the parlor was clearly marketed to white women only.

These are just three examples in which popular music artifacts and history reveal cultural ideas about race, not just gender, in regard to women.