

Sheldon Harris: Biography

Raised and educated in Brooklyn, New York, Sheldon Harris's interest in jazz and blues began as a record collector in the 1930s. As an after-hours interest, he attended extended jazz and blues history and appreciation classes during the late 1940s at New York University and The New School for Social Research (New York) under the direction of the late Dr. Marshall W. Stearns, noted jazz authority. In 1954, he joined Dr. Stearns at New York's Institute of Jazz Studies, serving as a volunteer secretary until its transfer to Rutgers University in 1966.

From 1963 to 1971, he was blues editor of *Jazz & Pop Magazine*, a national publication, writing feature stories, critiques, record and book reviews. He has also contributed jazz and blues articles to the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Current Biography*, *Downbeat*, *Living Blues*, *Jazz Journal* (UK), *Blues Forum* (Germany) among others and has written an extensive number of record album liner notes. He was also staff member of *Record Research Magazine* and a member of the Record Research Associates of New York and the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors, Inc.

Mr. Harris had lectured on blues and related music at Rutgers University; Alfred University/College; Jersey City State; Brooklyn College and Queens College among other schools and universities, as well as community and student centers, clubs and private social groups. He also organized and presented live concerts at the International Center of New York.

He appeared on WSOU-FM radio as guest lecturer as part of the Seton Hall University (South Orange, NJ) educational black studies jazz series; participated in talks and interviews on the Candy Jones Show (WMCA-radio, NYC); The Larry King Show (WOR national radio network); The Bill Nolan Show (WPKN-FM radio, Bridgeport, CN); All Things Considered (NPR); A Taste of the Blues (WBAI-radio, NYC); The Joe Franklin Show (WOR-TV / WOR-radio, NYC); Carol's Corner (WCBS-TV, NYC); Brooklyn Magazine (NNYC-TV, NYC); and others.

After nearly 20 years of research, his book *Blues Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Blues Singers*, (Arlington House, 1979) lists detailed biographical facts on 571 of the most noted singers in the history of the blues and is now considered a prime reference source in the field. It won the Memphis Blues Foundation's "National Blues Music W. C. Handy Award" in 1981 as the outstanding blues book of the year and in 1983 won its "Blues Hall of Fame Award" in the classics of blues literature category. An emendated soft-cover edition was published in 1981 by DaCapo Press (NYC).

In collaboration with veteran jazz trombonist and blues singer, Clyde E. B. Bernhardt, he wrote *I Remember: Eighty Years of Black Entertainment, Big Bands and the Blues* (U of Pennsylvania Press, 1986). Written in first person, it is a colorful and detailed autobiography covering virtually the entire history of jazz from the viewpoint of a practicing black musician.

In 1945, he began a 30-year professional career in the advertising business, eventually serving as a long-time account executive at the Doyle Dane Bernbach Advertising Agency (NYC).

He also had a 3-year war service record, serving in the U.S. Air Force in England and Germany. His wife of 47 years, Gladys, died in 1994.

Sheldon Harris passed away at the age of 81 on 8 September 2005 from complications associated with Alzheimer's.