



# Harlem of the West - The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era

*Elizabeth Pepin, Lewis Watts*

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Billie Holiday singing at the New Orleans Swing Club. Dexter Gordon hanging out at Bop City. Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane all swinging through town for gigs. Sound like a nostalgic snapshot from the New York jazz scene, or perhaps New Orleans? Nope. This particular sentimental journey describes San Francisco's Fillmore District in its heyday. The Fillmore in the 1940s and 1950s was an eclectic, integrated, and hopping neighborhood dotted with restaurants, pool halls, theaters, and shops many minority-owned and boasting two dozen active nightclubs and music joints within its one square mile. Although it has been commemorated in songs, poems, and in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, few people today know of the rich history of the Fillmore and its musical legacy because it vanished abruptly and so thoroughly due to redevelopment in the 1960s. Through dozens of archival photographs and oral accounts from the neighborhood residents and musicians who experienced it at its height, *Harlem of the West* celebrates this unique and rediscovered chapter in jazz history and the African-American experience on the West Coast.

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