

# The Hard Rise, Brutal Fall of America's First Black-Owned Record Company



## Black Swan Blues: The Hard Rise & Brutal Fall of America's First Black-owned Record Company

by Paul Slade

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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In the early 20th century, the music industry was dominated by white-owned record companies. Black artists were often relegated to second-class status, and their music was often not given the same exposure as white music. In 1921, Harry Pace, a black entrepreneur, founded Black Swan Records, the first black-owned record company in the United States.

Pace was a visionary businessman who saw the potential for a black-owned record company to succeed. He assembled a team of talented musicians and singers, and he began to release recordings that showcased their unique talents. Black Swan Records quickly became a major force in

the music industry, and its recordings were played on radio stations and jukeboxes across the country.

One of the most popular Black Swan Records artists was Bessie Smith, who became one of the most successful blues singers of all time. Smith's recordings for Black Swan Records helped to popularize the blues genre, and she became a major influence on later generations of musicians.

However, Black Swan Records' success was short-lived. The company faced a number of challenges, including financial difficulties and competition from larger, white-owned record companies. In 1928, Black Swan Records was forced to close its doors.

The closing of Black Swan Records was a major blow to the black music industry. However, the company's legacy continues to live on. Black Swan Records helped to pave the way for other black-owned record companies, and its recordings continue to be enjoyed by music lovers around the world.

## **The Founding of Black Swan Records**

Harry Pace was born in Covington, Georgia, in 1884. He was the son of a former slave, and he grew up in poverty. However, Pace was a bright and ambitious young man, and he was determined to succeed. After graduating from high school, Pace moved to Atlanta, where he worked as a journalist and a music promoter.

In 1921, Pace founded Black Swan Records with the help of two partners, W.C. Handy and Perry Bradford. Handy was a successful blues musician, and Bradford was a wealthy businessman. Pace's goal was to create a

record company that would showcase the talents of black musicians and singers.

Black Swan Records was initially based in Atlanta, but it soon moved to New York City, which was the center of the music industry at the time. Pace assembled a team of talented musicians and singers, and he began to release recordings that showcased their unique talents.

### **The Success of Black Swan Records**

Black Swan Records quickly became a major force in the music industry. The company's recordings were played on radio stations and jukeboxes across the country, and its artists were some of the most popular musicians of the day. One of the most popular Black Swan Records artists was Bessie Smith, who became one of the most successful blues singers of all time.

Smith's recordings for Black Swan Records helped to popularize the blues genre, and she became a major influence on later generations of musicians. Other popular Black Swan Records artists included Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Fletcher Henderson.

Black Swan Records' success was due in part to Pace's keen eye for talent. He was able to identify and sign some of the most talented musicians of the day. He was also a shrewd businessman, and he was able to negotiate favorable contracts with his artists.

### **The Challenges Faced by Black Swan Records**

Despite its success, Black Swan Records faced a number of challenges. The company was undercapitalized, and it often had difficulty meeting its financial obligations. The company also faced competition from larger,

white-owned record companies, which had more resources and were able to offer their artists better deals.

In addition, Black Swan Records was often the target of racism. The company's records were sometimes banned from radio stations and jukeboxes, and its artists were often subjected to discrimination and violence.

### **The Closing of Black Swan Records**

In 1928, Black Swan Records was forced to close its doors. The company had been facing financial difficulties for several years, and it was no longer able to compete with the larger, white-owned record companies.

The closing of Black Swan Records was a major blow to the black music industry. However, the company's legacy continues to live on. Black Swan Records helped to pave the way for other black-owned record companies, and its recordings continue to be enjoyed by music lovers around the world.

### **The Legacy of Black Swan Records**

Black Swan Records was a pioneer in the black music industry. The company helped to break down racial barriers and to give black musicians and singers a platform to share their talents with the world.

Black Swan Records' legacy continues to live on today. The company's recordings are still enjoyed by music lovers around the world, and its artists continue to inspire generations of musicians.

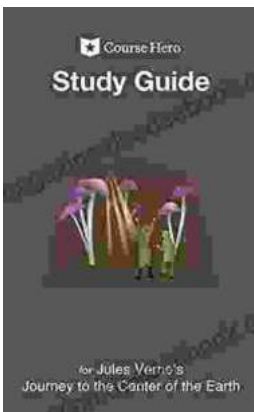
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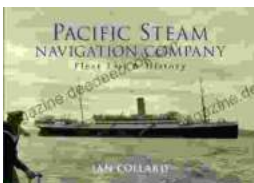
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