

Jackie Ormes: The First Female African-American Cartoonist

Written by Kymberly Keeton
Saturday, 17 December 2011 14:44



I was on Facebook recently and saw this post regarding African American female [cartoonists](#) . The site is entitled, The Ormes Society that was featured on the social networking site. The society is named after Jackie Ormes, the first African American Woman Cartoonist (who was born August 1st 1911). I immediately went online to research her profile and how long she had been creating black cartoons. Nancy Goldstein, a scholar, wrote a biography about Jackie Ormes and features some really amazing work by the cartoonist on her website.

The first comic strip that I read was entitled “Torchy in Heartbeats,” which ran from 1950-54 in African American newspapers. The website says of the cartoon, “Torchy pursues adventure and romance, while at times confronting racial injustice and social ills.”

The next strip is entitled “Patty Jo ‘n’ Ginger”. The cartoonist created over five-hundred of these cartoons in the years from 1945-56 when the series ran in in the *Pittsburgh Courier* newspaper. It features information regarding history, advocacy, and the African American experience in the United States.

Jackie Ormes, also created African American dolls in the 1940s and they were named: “Patty Jo dolls” , the first American Black dolls to have an extensive upscale wardrobe in 1947. There is a great video that you can watch on the website that features commentary about the dolls, and some historical/visual commentary is available to listen to in regard to the time period.

Jackie Ormes’ work was published in African American Newspapers including the *Chicago Defender*

and
Pitt

sburgh Courier

from 1937-56. In 1950, the *Courier* commenced an eight-page color comics insert, where Ormes re-invented her Torchy character in a new comic strip, “Torchy in Heartbeats.” This

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Torchy was a beautiful, independent woman who found adventure while looking for true love. Ormes expressed her talent for fashion design as well as her vision of a beautiful African-American female body in the accompanying Torchy Togs paper doll cut outs. Torchy showcased an image of Black woman who, in contrast to the contemporary stereotypical media portrayals, was assertive, brilliant, and intrepid. According to Nancy Goldstein, the cartoonist was a leftist, and was investigated by the FBI during the McCarthy Era. Mrs. Ormes was an important cartoonist and social commentator whose work had gone undiscovered for over fifty years.

Mrs. Ormes had a great forty-five year marriage with Earl Clark Ormes. She retired from cartooning in 1956. However, she proceeded to create art, including murals, still lifes and portraits. As a philanthropist in the South Side Chicago, she produced fundraiser fashion shows and various projects. In addition, she was on the founding board of directors for the DuSable Museum of African American History. Mrs. Ormes passed away on December 26th 1985 at the age of 74.

After reading about Jackie Ormes, I checked out The Ormes Society in more detail. Their website features a nice listing of African American women cartoonists and historical documentation regarding this genre. Their creed as a society states on the website that they are, "... an organization dedicated to supporting black female comic creators and promoting the inclusion of black women in the comics industry as creators, characters, and consumers." If you are interested in African American cartoons this is a great website to bookmark. I really enjoyed it too.



Visit: Jackie Ormes Online: www.jackieormes.com

Visit: The Ormes Society Online: <http://theormessociety.com/>

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