

The jazz music that came from the Jazz Age was pivotal for Black Americans. This was around the 1920's which was a very different and difficult time period for Black Americans. There was plenty of racism, segregation and inequality that Black Americans of that time experienced. Jazz music was sort of their way out. It was used to express themselves, create a cultural identity, unite one another, and a way to make change. Slowly but surely things started progressing. There was more interracial mixing at social events, welcoming black Americans. It was a leap in the right direction.



This image is from a parade showing a visual of the solidarity amongst black Americans. There is a poster which states "the new negro has no fear". The whole scenery is very powerful and uplifting. We see what it took for their voices to be heard and spread the message. Everyone had to come together and rally. They literally flooded the streets with people.

OAH's blog post has a quote from a black jazz singer who made a very strong point; "Ethel Waters, the famous jazz and blues singer, believed Black performing artists had the power to affect public opinion from the stage. "I realize the good work that I and all of us colored artists have been doing," she declared. "Many white people who would not listen to any other side of Negro life will gladly hear a Negro jazz artist or blues singer. All that helps pave the way by making them more sympathetic to our race." While jazz did not tear down the walls of racism and segregation in the United States in the inter-war period, the testimonies of Schuyler and Waters reveal the cracks developing in Jim Crow's foundation—and that jazz could help widen those cracks.(Charles Lester, Black activism and the Jazz Age, OAH, August 20,2024,<https://www.oah.org/process/black-activism-and-the-jazz-age-lester/> )" What makes this a strong point is, it's from someone who was a part of this movement. As a black Jazz singer who fought against the unjust time period, she is an excellent primary source. She thoroughly understands the positive impact the music her and her peers make. It leverages on the benefits of jazz. It's not the end all be all answer but they are aware how it's one of the only ways a white person will listen to them and have to rely on it to make progress against the issue at hand.

York College adds more proof to how Jazz was a way of breaking through inequality. "Jazz music has created a sense of integration between blacks and whites in the industry. Buster Bailey, a black jazz musician said, "One thing I'm happy to see is the integration that's happening among musicians" (qtd. in Means, 1968, p. 22). Discrimination still existed, but in the jazz community, musicians were somehow considered as equals. Whites were hired to perform in several black bands and the

white trombonist Roswell Rudd was introduced to jazz audiences by Archie Shepp (Gerard, 1998). Means (1968) cites Monroe Berger who notes that jazz music created black-white contact where a black musician received full acceptance as an equal and was “(often admired as superior) without condescension” (Means, 1998, p. 17). Jazz music has not only integrated people in the United States, but also brought them together internationally. It has been influenced by third world countries such as Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and India (Wheaton, 1994). (Zola Philipp, The social effects of jazz, York College, March 31, 2017, <https://www.york.cuny.edu/english/writing-program/the-york-scholar-1/volume-6.1-fall-2009/the-social-effects-of-jazz/>)” Just like the first quote, this also includes a primary source, via a black Jazz musician. Just like Ethel Waters, he experienced racism, fought against it and felt the positive impact through a similar ideology. They both acknowledge how the bigger problem is still there but jazz was powerful enough to unite Black Americans with one another as well as bringing white people into the mix. There was more collaboration which led to more acceptance of black Americans. Amongst one another, they knew jazz could solve a lot of their problems. The power jazz holds to unite people was so strong, it went beyond the US, it was literally international.

A report from the Journal of African American history has quotes from Donald Murray, chair of the Board of Directors of the District of Columbia Humanities Council that shows the unity amongst the black community from multiple areas. “The symposium explored the social and cultural history of 20th century African Americans from the vantage point of the 21st century and examined the impact of three key intellectual and cultural centers of the Jazz Age: Washington, DC, Paris, and New

Orleans. "In these cities," Murray declared, "African Americans individually and collectively used culture and identity to be remembered, acknowledged, and renewed.(Gardner, Bettye J., and Niani Kilkenny. "In Vogue: Josephine Baker and Black Culture and Identity in the Jazz Age." *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 93, no. 1, 2008, pp. 88–93, <https://doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv93n1p88>.)" People from different parts all banding together causes positivity. They were able to keep their heritage strong. It's a group act and basically impossible to do alone. In the second quote we see more of the unity to bring positive change against racial inequality. "It was the contribution of Harlem intellectuals to try and move the debate about jazz away from the conventional moral and racial ground where critics, black and white, tried to keep it.(Ogren, Kathy J. *The Jazz Revolution : Twenties America & the Meaning of Jazz*. Oxford University Press, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195074796.001.0001>.)" The people of Harlem slowly worked to separate the controversy that the whites wanted among jazz. It's an uphill battle but every negative association that gets taken away is a huge win for black Americans.

It's safe to say that during the Jazz Age, the whole jazz scene was like a tool for black Americans. Essentially all odds were against them. They were belittled, seen as inferior, and didn't fit in according to the white people of that time period. Due to all of this there was no choice but to stand up for themselves. Now, it didn't eliminate racism, segregation and inequality instantly as if blowing into a tuba or singing was some sort of magic problem solver. No, the momentum created helped cause a shift. Black Americans used jazz to change their perception. They showed they were just as talented, smart and capable as anyone else. They really had something going on and

took advantage of the power. It definitely worked because it created such a historical movement that is still talked about to this day.

## **Works Cited Page:**

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