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Jazz music: From black pride to political consciousness to social change in the United States

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Abstract: African Americans have been marginalised, discriminated against, and excluded from American society for centuries. First as slaves, but later when they gained emancipation, they remained relegated, differentiated, and discounted, in a range of areas, including in the political and economic spheres. Music has been a means to promote their greater inclusion in American society, drawing together and uniting all Americans through its power. While there have been links drawn between music and the African American struggle for equality, there has not been sufficient focus on the pivotal role that specifically jazz music has played in this regard. Jazz particularly has been a vehicle for promoting Black pride, political consciousness, and social change. This article argues that jazz has had a major effect on African American culture, society, and experience. Analysing the works of legendary jazz musicians James Brown, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, and The Temptations, this article shows that jazz is not only as a catalyst for, but a driving force in, the fight for political freedom, as well as for economic empowerment, which is arguably still ongoing today.

Keywords: music; jazz; United States of America; African Americans; human rights; pride; consciousness; social change

1. Introduction

Historically, music has been used as a means of promoting liberation in many societies by marginalised groups [1]. It has raised consciousness, promoted socialisation and political, social, and economic empowerment [2], and created methods for inclusion and group cohesion [3]. It is important to note how “progressive traditions for social justice in Black music” have acted as sources and tools for agency and resistance against the oppression of this group [4]. This means that African American music has been a key factor in sharing their culture, calling for action, and being a movement for change [5,6]. Jazz is no exception to this and is arguably one of the main mechanisms that has been and can be used to understand African American life and experience [7]. This paper aims to highlight the important role of jazz in the fight against marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion of African Americans in the United States, and show that despite a lack of acknowledgment by some, just how pivotal the role of jazz was (and arguably still is).

Jazz as a music style has existed for over a century, with expressions from different artists taking different forms and being used to convey different messages [8]. Jazz music speaks to the soul, whether for relaxing, for happiness, or for emoting

sadness and disarray. However, as well as evoking emotion, jazz artists have also become experts in unifying their listeners. Jazz has arguably been a springboard to explain the innermost workings of society and call for pride in the way one looks and feels. Jazz has also been used not only to instil Black pride, but to inspire political and social rhetoric [9].

African Americans have faced marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion for centuries, and music has often been used as a means for liberation. Music allowed for inclusion in society in some ways, with much of this inclusion stemming from the use of music as anthems for the Black Power movement of the 1960s. As has been noted, “[t]he music of Black folk has always been the magnifying glass that illuminated the traditions and struggles of Black people. Thus, music is the quintessential medium through which the artist can liberate the Black masses” [10]. This shows that music provides a lens into the African American experience and has been at times been used as a call for the movement for change and liberation of African Americans in American society. For African Americans, music in general has acted as a source of resistance and agency. It does, however, also provide insights into African American culture and heritage. While jazz music was a pioneer in the African American struggle, little has been discussed in terms of the powerful role that it played. Nevertheless, the importance of jazz music has been recognised in the arguments of authors such as Ted Gioia [11] and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) [12]. They reveal that jazz music encouraged and inspired generations to embrace their roots and feel a sense of belonging and pride. This has given generations of African Americans the ability to motivate people in their community to stand up and speak out, giving a voice to those who cannot use their own.

This paper therefore aims to show that music, specifically jazz music, has played several roles, including influencing African American consciousness. However, African American consciousness also influenced jazz music. This interconnection, as will be argued, still exists today. It is argued that to understand how jazz music plays a role in Black pride, political consciousness, and social change, it is necessary to examine and understand its roots and influences. The methods utilised in this paper will consist of an analysis of jazz music in the African American community. It will also consist of an exploration of specific legendary jazz musicians such as James Brown, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, and The Temptations. Through these artists’ works, this paper reveals how jazz was a catalyst and driving force for freedom, through its emersion in African American culture, experience, and society.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section, looking at the roots and influences of jazz, explores how the history of the creation of jazz has a direct parallel to the history of African American society. This section discusses the importance of jazz in African American culture, and what its role in the struggle to break free of the shackles that American society has arguably held African Americans in for centuries. The second section analyses the creation of Black pride, and the use of jazz as a key mechanism to achieve racial consciousness and pride. This section reflects the importance of jazz as a unifier, a call to action, and as a medium to promote African American acceptance in all corners of American life. The third section explores jazz as a catalyst for political consciousness. This section questions how choices of music help to reflect the various concepts of Black pride, political consciousness, and social

change, and strives to determine the level of importance of this type of music choice to achieve the aims, realise the desires, and incorporate attitudes of African Americans in American society. The fourth section builds on this understanding to indicate how political consciousness was prescribed and motivated in jazz music, which resulted in social movements for change, through a variety of means, including protest and action. This rally incorporated jazz music in many ways, including through anthem creation, calls for support, and creation of awareness of the issues. Thus, jazz music was fundamental to the African American cause for liberation and in calls for a complete change in the way in which African Americans are viewed, treated, and understood in the United States. As such, this paper will explore how and why jazz music became a major contributor to both Black pride and liberation moments in the United States.

2. Jazz: Roots and influences

To conduct a sound analysis of the role of jazz music on Black pride, political consciousness, and social change, it is necessary to understand the roots and influences from which this music style emerged. The paper examines what the origins of jazz are, and how has it progressed both historically and culturally. This is done because it is important to reflect how this music style, which emerged from an influence of other African music styles, became a key aspect and tradition of African American culture. This ultimately led to it being employed in the fight against discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion, due to its ability to raise consciousness, promote socialisation, and unite people in the fight for freedom and equality.

“Jazz has always been a music of fusion”, writes Ted Gioia in his book *“The History of Jazz”* [11]. Jazz music, as is argued by many, stems from African performance music, culminating in a mix of musical styles, such as gospel, soul, minstrel songs, ragtime, blues, reggae, funk, and calypso [13,14]. This blend of styles has come to be an overall methodology of music for African Americans because it is a mixture of music styles which reflect the fusion of perspectives, expressions, and understandings that encapsulate African American culture and history.

This blend occurred because jazz was often performed in places where political discourses would occur, namely in speakeasies, homes, or other areas where people would break free from the so-called status-quo of segregated society and the “restrictive behaviour” that was associated with listening and dancing to jazz music [15,16]. As these were personal settings, where people were often more willing to share their political and social aspirations, free from public discourse or repercussion, simply convening in a separate sphere with likeminded individuals set the stage for various political and cultural discussions, and as such, developments, to take place. It is important to note that as a music style, jazz permeated across liberation movements. For example, World War II saw a strong push for jazz to be associated with liberation, which saw its ideological significance revitalised. After World War II, jazz’s popularity skyrocketed as a “symbol of liberation, exemplified by Louis Armstrong’s popularity across the Atlantic [17]. While this is not specifically only in the American context, it indicates how far jazz’s reach was as music of liberation, even outside of the US and the African American context. Suffices to say, jazz, as a fusion of other music, reflects the multitude of aspects that promote racial and political consciousness

that have been hinted at thus far and that will be explored in more depth further on [18].

It must be noted that there are various types of jazz movements such as Big Band, New Orleans, Ragtime, Swing, and Free Jazz [19]. Free jazz arose as a subgenre of jazz in the late 1950s and 1960s, with its name coming out of an album of the same name [20]. While some have called it “Avant-Garde Jazz, some “the New Thing” or “the New Black Music” it was certainly controversial amongst the jazz community [13]. It was a style created to find different types of expression by those who saw other forms of jazz as being too limiting. Critically it was also meant to create community and foster interaction [21]. It was meant to foster the notion of freedom in different senses of the word. In this regard, it has been argued that free jazz:

“Represented political freedom in two ways: negatively, by rejecting musical rules and conventions that restricted individual expression and discarding traditional hierarchical roles within the small group; and positively, by musically creating a group of equals that ... maximized individual expression while maintaining great cohesiveness.” [22].

However, the accumulation of various styles into jazz offers insight into the desires and influences of the African American community. For this reason, jazz serves as a useful methodology to examine the struggle for equality and inclusion because, more than other types of music, jazz is a lens to examine the African American community and their positions in relation to their political development, their understandings, their outlooks, and their desire for change. Jazz has its origins in music styles which also explored the theme of liberation in their works, influencing the political development of African Americans [23]. The theme of liberation has been prevalent in these music styles through their history. One could argue that the theme of liberation, was fundamental to the creation of jazz and its subsequent importance in the fight for equality and freedom. As such, jazz became an inherently political form of music, which often reflected the “rebellion and dissatisfaction” of the status-quo as far as the position of African Americans in society [16].

While aesthetic considerations were essential contributions to the development of jazz music, the fact that the music appealed to a wide swathe of people is critically important. As Paul Berliner notes, “[c]ontinually drawing sustenance from its fundamental ties to African American culture, the American jazz community cuts across boundaries defined by age, class, vocation, and ethnicity” [24]. These are important matters as jazz is a microcosm of the African American community’s feelings and attitudes.

Not only did jazz provide the group with political consciousness, but also provided them with economic autonomy and freedom in the form of economic income. Jazz music has allowed for the surpassing of barriers that are often used as a medium for exclusion, namely age, class, vocation, and ethnicity. This is critical because the creation of jazz, as a music that encapsulates various aspects and perspectives, and that is used for a range of reasons, highlights why it has played and can play a fundamental role in reducing and preventing the marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion of African Americans in the United States. Thus, the historical development of jazz to some extent at least is reflective of the development of the African American community itself. The music often reflects the fight of the group for non-

discrimination, anti-racism, human (civil) rights, and inclusion. An example of this includes the “Freedom Now Suite” by Max Roach, which exemplifies how the African American community in the South had experienced the violence taking place [25]. The “Sit-In” movement even pushed the album’s release from 1962 to 1960, due to the acceleration of the Civil Rights Movement itself [18]. Hersch writes that Roach used jazz music as a metaphor that in lieu of “emancipation from racist restrictions”, this would as act as a form of musical freedom for now [22].

The roots of jazz are important as they also signify the connection of the African fight for liberation to that of the role of the church and the use of the church for that purpose too. The church has played a significant role in many places fostering human rights and reconciliation [26]. In the US, this connection can be seen in that jazz had deep ties to the Church [11]. Not only was jazz a vehicle for liberation, but so too has the church. Gospel music has been used to call for change and involvement in campaigns and movements, with an example being Martin Luther King Jr. and his use of gospel. Gospel music was therefore another track on the road to liberation [27]. This grew out of, in many ways, the importance that gospel had in African American culture. In this regard, one of the most famous trombonists of New Orleans, Kid Ory, comments on the inspiration of a claimed “father” of early jazz, Buddy Bolden, who maintained that most of the tunes he used were from the “Holy Roller Church”, where Ory claims Bolden went to this church “not for religion ... [but] to get ideas on music” [28]. Thus, gospel music can be seen in some ways to be an inspiration for jazz music.

From around the turn of the 19th century, a large assortment of New Orleans musicians played a type of music that, “with the benefit of hindsight, can only be described as jazz” [11]. This is important because the roots of jazz, which as we know are inherently linked with themes of liberation, began to manifest much earlier than the liberation movements in the United States. This shows that jazz has influenced political consciousness for much longer than most realise. This genre of music was important in building the African American community into a solid bloc that fought for its greater development, economic autonomy, and wider integration into the American society. This is because music is an inherently social act, and thus is shared and built upon within a community of people that share it with a community of other people. As has been argued: “Black musical expression evolved along with Black life and circumstance; reflecting the emotions, desires, problems, and hopes of the Black community” [4]. This shows that the historical development of this music is interwoven with the historical development of the African American community fighting against their marginalised position in American society.

The “Jazz Age”, the time in which many argue jazz was at its most popular and influential, introduced a romanticism of this music [29]. It saluted its producers as defiant and rebellious, not only in music but in life too. Since its conception, jazz has been an ever-adapting style. This can be seen through the incorporation of new, expansive, and more complex techniques, harmonies, rhythms, and melodies. It has had this style because it is reflective of the changing and development of the political consciousness and movements for social change that were being undertaken by the African American community. Modern jazz musicians are considered “an underclass within an underclass”, relishing in the opportunity to “make a statement with ‘their’ music” [11]. This exemplifies how jazz musicians linked political freedom with

musical freedom and highlights how jazz “can ‘make real’ political ideas at the forefront of society, rendering them accessible to the senses” [22]. This means that jazz was and is a tool for expression of political thought and desire, encapsulating the use of music in the fight for freedom.

The individualism which defined the generation of Black jazz players of the 1940s, before the Civil Right Acts and the end of segregation, was “fired further by their marginal status as Black Americans at a critical juncture” in American history [11]. Since the 1940s, Black jazz musicians have developed a music which is “increasingly assertive of its ethnic roots” [13]. This is because “[j]azz has served as an arena for individual expression, one of the few public forums for African Americans for much of United States history” [22]. Thus, jazz was created at least in part to express African American individualism and speak out against their circumstances. However, jazz music was not popular among only African Americans, but among many different ethnicities, cultures, religions, and backgrounds. It thus became able to present the issues outside of that one community. This highlights how the music style, while important in the fight for freedom, was also a music style enjoyed by many others in different circumstances and allowed the issues to be brought out beyond what it was originally intended to do.

The role of jazz and its influence in the movement for equality was recognised by those who wanted to limit this struggle for liberation of African Americans. Thus, there were attempts to suppress jazz so as to uphold racial segregation [30]. These attempts at censorship saw a decline in “free jazz” but saw an upsurge of other types of expression of jazz. Thus, the common jazz that we know of today came to the fore through new expressions and experimentations with sound [31].

Jazz music’s role in Black pride, political consciousness, and social change has continued to develop around the world in recent times. Many of the great artists of this period are still popular because of the music’s rhythms, its emotive expression, and its insights into the struggle of African Americans. In many ways, jazz music is an audio history book. It offers unique perspectives and insights into the issues of racism, intolerance, discrimination, and other issues that African Americans were fighting against and the ways it did so. Therefore, it is not surprising that jazz has grown and spread from African American homes to the rest of world [32].

This is not only in the US, but there has been a spread of liberation music to other parts of the world. American music has been a means of liberation in other contexts, such as in South Africa [33]. Thus, for example, the music of American artist Sixto Rodrigues became an unintended (and unknown to the artist) liberation soundtracks for South Africa from the 1980s [34]. His music in many ways has jazz influences, and its calls for a change in the shackles of segregation, discrimination, and exclusion had resonance for South African audiences who saw his music as being relevant to them. Similarly, in the UK, liberation music too was popular. It was taken up, for example, by the rock band Pink Floyd. An example includes “Another Brick in the Wall”, which calls for a change in UK society [35]. It too became an influence around the world, where the lyrics became influential in the fight for values the music inspired. Thus, it is important to understand the role of liberation music in fights for freedom and equality and why jazz itself was such a powerful vehicle for change.

Therefore, as can be seen jazz music has been effective in advocating for equality and expressing the hardships of African Americans in the US. This stems from the roots and influences of jazz, and its role as a powerful mechanism for change. Music, and specifically liberation music, have been key drivers for political consciousness, social change, and racial pride.

3. Black pride: The role of Jazz

Jazz has been important in promoting Black pride. For this purpose, Black pride signifies a type of “racial socialisation”, meaning a promotion of culture and heritage to young people, and the creation of an attitude that validates a positive racial identity in adults [36]. Analysing this “racial socialisation” of Black pride encouraged by jazz music allows for a better understanding of the link between the struggle for freedom and the creation of this new and powerful music type. This section therefore highlights jazz music’s ability to raise consciousness, enhance socialisation, instil pride, and promote the continuation of cultural traditions and racial heritage. It argues that through jazz music, Black pride was promoted and continued, by sharing of identity, calls for unity, and the creation of a safe space for expression. This was important because Black pride ensures that this racial identity and promotion is continued in future generations by showing the importance of this identity and pride and unifying the members of this community for all time [37]. Tyson [38] explains that “because the dominant white culture in America treated African Americans as subalterns rather than full American citizens and full human beings, the Black Pride movement encouraged black Americans to look to Africa for their cultural origins” [38]. In order to find a place of belonging and way to unite in the movement for equality and inclusion, African Americans established Black pride by diving into their African roots, through exploration of sounds, history, and culture. These African roots, as one of the direct influences of jazz music, led to jazz being an identifier and unifier of the African American community. This is seen in the music of a range of musicians whose work were used to instil and promote values and continuance of Black pride, with much of the music calling for unity, sharing culture and heritage, promotion of cultural values, and pride in being African American. This is not to say that African American pride was introduced by jazz, but rather that jazz was a medium which to express pride and foster a deeper sense of pride.

Black pride, directly resulting from socialisation and social interaction, links with music, as in many ways it was instilled and shared through music. Music is an inherently social practice, producing strong social bonds between users, through sharing of emotions and having the ability to cross barriers that often divide human beings, such as race, culture, religion, and gender. Jazz, beyond being a style of music, is a “system of values shared by members of a community brought together by the socially productive forces of its musical activities” [14]. Thus, jazz is directly responsible for the creation of a community through its sharing of values that are easily understood in a musical format. According to Fuller [39], “The black aesthetic is a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflect the special character and imperative black experience”. This is important because it shows why jazz music, which employed this “black aesthetic”, was so powerful and effective

in uniting those living a “black experience.” This cause was to “promote Black life, Black history, and Black unity” [13]. Therefore, African American society has been reflected in Black music from the “field holler, work songs, and sorrow songs of slavery through to the rap music of today” [13]. Thus, music, to some extent at least, is a reflection of African American aspirations and needs and was key factor in creating Black pride and political consciousness. It has become a means to raise this consciousness and pride because it reflected the anguishes, problems, and wants of African Americans. As Archie Shepp indicates, the Black musician is a “reflection of the (Black) people as a social phenomenon” and believes that “through the force of their struggle are the only hope of saving America” [40]. This shows that jazz music instils an identity of “blackness” using it to identify and overcome their struggles. “Blackness” and “black aesthetic” are the understanding and sharing of values and feelings of African Americans. This links their personal identity with their relationship to society [24]. Black pride, “blackness”, and “black aesthetic” are fundamental to establishing a shared identity that is powerful in calling for change in the marginalisation and exclusion of African Americans. The ability of jazz music to create, uphold, and promote this identity is why it was such a powerful mechanism for social change.

Amiri Baraka, writing under the pseudonym LeRoi Jones, in his work “*Blues People*” states that “Black music—particularly jazz—clearly demonstrates the construction of a distinctive black culture which fuses African and European elements” [12]. However, as noted it was not only jazz that did this. There were others using other forms of music, such as James Brown, the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and many other non-jazz black artists who also contributed to black protest, resistance, and social justice through music in general. James Brown for example, using funk music, in 1968 released a song “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” which:

“[t]hrough the powerfully rhythmical patterns, Brown tries to show that blackness is a source of pride, beauty, and integrity. Therefore, the tensely rhythmical song puts blackness on a high pedestal” [41].

The song implored Black people to not move away from their identity but to embrace it. The lyrics evoke pride in being African American, and show a desire to change American society:

“We’re people, we’re just like the birds and the bees
We’d rather die on our feet
Than be livin’ on our knees
Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud” [42].

These lyrics were meant to indicate to their community, but others as well, that African Americans are also people deserving of rights, safety, equality, and inclusion, just as their white counterparts have enjoyed. The lyrics portray that James Brown would rather give his life fighting for freedom than continue under the shackles of the marginalisation and exclusion that African American society has had to endure. He calls for his fellow African Americans to be proud of their race, and to keep fighting for the inclusion and fair treatment that they deserve. Another of his songs was “Say it Loud,” which had various connotations, including about what political demonstrations ought to be about [43].

Protest music was part of the work of various other artists [44]. The Temptations sang political songs such as “Message from a Black Man” which sold many albums and inspired other artists to also take up themes that focused on issues concerning their people. Their music evoked African American pride with lyrics such as:

“Yes, my skin is black,

But that’s no reason to hold me back” [45].

This again, points out that the only difference between an African American and a white person is truly one thing: the colour of their skin. The Temptations exclaim that simply because the colour of their skin is different, that does not mean that they should be treated as being any less than anyone else. They sing that there is no reason to hold them back and separate them from the rest of society. These examples show that jazz attempted to instill Black pride and constructed a communal identity to try and overcome the difficulties that have plagued African American society.

Marvin Gaye released various protest-oriented songs, such as “What’s Going On.” Stevie Wonder also sang songs that had political messages and were meant to inspire people, such as his well-known song “You Haven’t Done Nothing.”

Thus, as this section reveals, Black pride played a fundamental role in the creation and maintenance of a political consciousness for the African American community, with jazz specifically acting as a catalyst. Black pride and jazz were important for the creation of political rhetoric, raising awareness of the plight of African Americans, as well as introducing the African American narrative into both the American and global sphere. Jazz music was fundamental in the creation, promotion, and maintenance of Black pride, which itself was a main driving force towards change in the United States. This has advanced the overall narrative of jazz as a means of liberation from discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion, which could still be important in the fight for equality for African Americans today.

4. Political consciousness: Jazz as a catalyst

This section highlights how jazz music galvanised political consciousness in African Americans and served as a catalyst for the promotion of said political consciousness. Political consciousness is defined as a way of “seeing, caring about and acting in the world” guided by “a commitment to human rights and justice and an understanding of power and inequity in social, political and economic systems, relations and values” [46]. This involves not only the questioning of the current power dynamics, but also “building new forms of more inclusive and transformative power that improve human life and forge bridges of cooperation” among the religious, cultural, ethnic, and racial differences of a society [46]. Jazz, as a cultural and racial phenomenon, gives African Americans a medium to understand and express their struggles in American society, and acts as a catalyst towards political consciousness. For these purposes, jazz acted as an orator or narrator of African American people’s feeling and desire for change. This can be seen in the emphasis that occurred in the Black Arts movement of the 1960s [47].

As a form of “new Black music”, jazz musicians felt a close connection with the Black Power movement. They saw it as their “duty” to “serve as messengers who would communicate the philosophy of the Black Power movement to the masses” [6].

Jazz music thus served as a narrator of the Black Power movement to the larger African American community. This was done in a variety of ways, including the fact that the Black Power movement also focused on economics, and the control that those such as music producers and club owners, generally who were white, had over Black musicians. The musicians wanted to be able to control the production and performance locations of their music [13]. They realised that their political and economic considerations should not be separated from African American culture or be separated from its expressive and created forms.

This brings to the fore that discrimination against African Americans is not only political but is also economic. In this sense, African Americans have also suffered, throughout history, and still today, economic marginalisation. Jazz has served as a means to fight for liberation and equality, thus not only in the political sense but in other ways including the economic. African Americans have had to fight for economic power in addition to political liberation because they were not only politically dominated since slavery but in other ways including the social and economic sectors. While they have been released from the shackles of slavery, they are still metaphorically shackled in American society, because they are a minority and are still economically marginalised.

Music, and especially jazz music, became a means to fight against the control that African Americans have felt and that has been reflected in their lives. Not only was it a means to fight against that control and that economic exclusion, but also as a means to gain economically as a source of income. As has been noted, jazz was and, in many ways, still is a popular music style, and the economic freedom that it has provided, and still does, has turned it into an important method for economic progression for some African Americans. In this sense, a number of African Americans have become dominant in music generally, and specifically in jazz, rock, rap, and hip-hop, for example. Some of the legends in the music industry include Satchmo (Louis Armstrong), Chuck Berry, Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Nat King Cole, Aretha Franklin, Jimmy Hendrix, BB King, and Wynton Marsalis.

These developments can be seen in the three main phases of jazz history. They exemplify the development of an expanding Black political and social consciousness. These are the “bebop” advancements in the 1940s, the “hard bop” and “soul” or “funk” movements of 1950s jazz, and the late 1950s and 1960s “new wave” of free jazz [48]. Each of these change eras influenced and responded to social and political changes in the African American community, and the relationship they had with the social order of the times. This is because it indicates how jazz music evolved and adapted with the African American community itself. As was previously mentioned, the music and its expression are reflective of the community, and thus changed to reflect the needs and feelings of the community at certain times.

For example, the bebop musicians’ “aggressive assertion” of their artistic status and their “uncompromising pursuit” of a complex jazz style mirrored the “new level of Black assertiveness” in the periods of war and post-war [48]. These developments arguably show a broad attitude change, self-confidence increase, and Black pride [48]. Thus, “hard bop” emphasised sounds, rhythms, moods, and textures, and saw musicians exploring sound to understand sound, rather than for “the sake of melody, harmony or swing feeling” [48]. Bebop-style jazz provided narrative, control,

economic autonomy, and political inclusion, as has been shown to be among the fundamental purposes of jazz music. This is important because it supports the argument of jazz as a catalyst for political consciousness.

A new consciousness came to the fore through the free jazz movement. This movement played a large role in the cultural shift of American society in that period. More than just advocating for harmonic structure or compositional form freedom, many African American musicians by then saw their music as “inherently political” [11]. Many believed that they needed to choose between “participating in the existing structures” that plagued American society, not only in the jazz world but also in the political world, or “rebellious against them” [11]. Black pride was no longer seen as isolated from the cultural and political currents of American life.

Thus, as has been indicated, while there has always been some “undercurrent of political advocacy” in the jazz world, there was a push for active political and social change. Amiri Baraka explains that this so called “new” jazz style signified more “radical changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes towards the general environment” [12]. This style incited a political consciousness that pushed African Americans to try and achieve change in the society that treated them as less than their white counterparts. Jazz incited a social change, being used in protest and action. This reveals the catalyst nature of jazz and how it was fundamental to the liberation movement of African Americans in the American society.

5. Social change: Protest and action through Jazz

The use of jazz and its specific political role is also mirrored during the “intensification” of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and the ghetto riots, alongside the “broader radicalization” of the 1960s. This left a critical mark on the “social interpretation of jazz” [48]. How African American musicians used their music to “protest their place in society and to promote change” can be heard in their lyrics, vocal expression, how they played their notes, and even their actions [13]. Baskerville [13] writes that “[a]s long as African-Americans continue to make music, they will continue to reflect their place in American society and a desire for social change” [13].

Music was a way that social change manifested itself. Jazz was important in not only pushing for social action, but also played a role in those social action movements. The sit-ins and bus boycotts also influenced jazz musicians to act through their music. This type of music was what that most protestors were familiar with, what they identified with, and what acted as a unifier for the community generally. This is exemplified in the piece of music “Alabama” by Coltrane [49]. In 1964, which was written in response to the killing of four African American girls in a Ku Klux Klan bombing of a Baptist Church [50]. It is argued that the saxophone part in the music was patterned on Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s funeral speech for the girls [51]. In parts of the song, a type of rage can be heard, with the drummer moving from a quiet whisper to a loud, pounding beat. The song not only shows the sadness of the events, but also the rage that African Americans felt about their oppression. As has been argued, “John Coltrane illustrated to all of America that the Black creative expression of jazz could be a vehicle of liberation, both in the spiritual and physical spheres” [4]. This again demonstrates the large role that jazz music has played in Black pride,

political consciousness, and social change. A critical issue to note is that this piece of music is fully instrumental. This indicates how fundamental jazz music itself, even without lyrics, is in evoking and portraying the struggle of the African American community

Similarly, Duke Ellington's "Black, brown, and beige" has played a critical role in inspiring and evoking African Americans' quest for liberation. It is in fact is one of the most famous jazz music works and is fundamental to the history of African American jazz musicians. In the three-part piece focusing on racial identity, the part "Black" is composed of "The Work Song", "Come Sunday" and "Light". The part "Brown" contains "West Indian Dance", "Emancipation Celebration" (later known as "Lighter Attitude"), and "The Blues". The final part, "Beige", depicts African Americans in the 1920s, the 1930s, and the World War II period. When introducing the piece, Ellington explained it as "a parallel to the history of the (African American person) in America" [52]. Another piece of music by Ellington is the piece "Come Sunday", which saw Ellington accompanied by singer Mahalia Jackson in 1953, in an emotional piece, called upon God to help save the African American people from their oppression. Some notable lyrics include:

"L-rd, dear L-rd above, G-d almighty
G-d above, please look down and see my people through" [53].

This piece exemplifies jazz music as an African American community narrator and unifier. It demonstrates that to a large extent jazz music played a role in the struggle for social change.

Arguably one of the most famous protest songs is Billie Holiday's 1958 "Strange Fruit" [54]. There, she sings about the lynching of African Americans, and how this community is not seen to be like the rest, but rather a "strange fruit" that grows "down south". This song starts off as if it was a love song, but as Holiday sings, the lyrics portray a haunting image of the lives of African Americans at that time. The song arguably begins with the most poignant lyrics:

"Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees" [54].

"Strange Fruit" was used throughout the civil rights and Black Power movements, due to its imagery of the struggle that African Americans faced. It exemplifies how jazz music played a role in Black pride, political consciousness, and social change, because of its ability to inspire African American protest and instill a desire for change.

All these examples are important to understand how powerful jazz music has been for African Americans. They show the important link between lyrics, sounds, and social movements. Thus, this section has revealed the influential use of language and sound in jazz, which is arguably still relevant today. It can even be used to discuss the plight that the Black Lives Matter campaign brings to the fore. The language and sounds of jazz music are ageless, because the problems of social injustice and discrimination are timeless too. Thus, jazz has reflected the manifestation of movements for social change and as a vehicle for the fight for liberation.

6. Conclusion

American society and culture through the ages has marginalised, discriminated against, and excluded, African Americans. It has treated them as inferior in American society as a whole. This is still the case in the United States today, as is exemplified in the Black Lives Matter movement in the fight for racial justice, particularly through the cases of George Floyd and Ahmaud Aubrey.

Throughout the analysis presented in this article, it can be seen that jazz music has played an important role in raising consciousness on a range of social, political and economic issues. While little academic work focuses on the role of jazz music, it is important to recognise its function as a driving force in the fight for freedom, which is arguably still ongoing today. However, much more is needed to reveal the powerful role that music, especially jazz, has played in the political and other life of dispossessed African Americans.

What is clear in this analysis is that jazz was a pivotal vehicle in the struggle for equality, as it highlighted the marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion of African Americans, as well as unified Americans of all races through the powerful sound of music. Jazz played a critical role in all its aspects of the African American struggle for equality and freedom, through its ability to unify, raise consciousness, and promote Black pride. Jazz was used to implore African Americans to fight for change and attempt to provide them with the fair treatment that they deserve. Jazz was used in the movement for social change in American society, so to incorporate African Americans suitably and fairly in all aspects of the wider society.

The development of that role can be seen through jazz music's roots, its expression, and its impact on the society. Jazz music has played a large role in promoting and maintaining Black pride, in inspiring and introducing political consciousness, and inciting and producing social change. Jazz's role, and the way it signifies the struggles of African American liberation, is exemplified in music of people such as James Brown, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, and The Temptations. They are just a few of many inspiring and powerful musicians that have contributed to this use of music for social justice purposes. Social change and social justice have been strong messages throughout the history of jazz music.

Jazz music gave African American musicians a voice, and unified people that identified with, and listened to, this music. It can perhaps be suggested that jazz music can still play a fundamental role today, in the ongoing struggles that African Americans face. The language and sounds that jazz music used to fight for social change and racial equality in the past are still as relevant today. Reflecting upon jazz works from James Brown, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, and The Temptations, one can see that jazz was a catalyst and promoter of much of the societal change that needed, and arguably still needs to occur in American society. Even though such music played a crucial role in raising the aspirations of people in the US and around the world, African Americans still face much exclusion. Jazz, in many ways, was a method to call for change in the treatment, perception, and lives of African Americans in the United States, but that fight continues.

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