MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Murray State's Digital Commons

Honors College Theses

Student Works

Fall 12-7-2021

"A Change is Gonna Come": Music and Its Role in the Civil Rights Movement

Nathanial Humphrey

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/honorstheses

Part of the African History Commons, Social History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation

Humphrey, Nathanial, ""A Change is Gonna Come": Music and Its Role in the Civil Rights Movement" (2021). *Honors College Theses*. 102.
https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/honorstheses/102

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Theses by an authorized administrator of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu.

Murray State University Honors College

HONORS THESIS

Certificate of Approval

"A Change is Gonna Come":
Music and Its Role in the Civil Rights Movement

Nathanial C. Humphrey
December of 2021

Approved to fulfill the requirements of HON 437 or 438

____
Dr. Brian Clardy, Associate Professor
History Department

Approved to fulfill the Honors Thesis requirement of the Murray State Honors Diploma

____
Dr. Warren Edminster, Executive Director
Honors College

Examination Approval Page

Author: Nate Humphrey

Project Title: “A Change is Gonna Come”: Music and Its Role in the Civil Rights Movement

Department: History

Date of Defense: November 22, 2021

Approval by Examining Committee:

______________________________ ________________

(Dr. Brian Clardy, Advisor) (Date)

______________________________ ________________

(Dr. Todd Hill, Committee Member) (Date)

______________________________ ________________

(Dr. William Mulligan, Committee Member) (Date)

"A Change is Gonna Come": Music and Its Role in the Civil Rights Movement

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the Murray State University Honors Diploma

Nathanial C. Humphrey

December of 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction. 1

We Shall Overcome. 4

Bob Dylan. 8

Sam Cooke. 14

Motown. 18

The Era of Jazz. 24

Songs of the Times. 31

Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. 39

Conclusion. 49

Bibliography. 52

Introduction

Music is one of the most important, yet underrated, parts of an individual's life. Everywhere you go, you can hear some form of music. You can hear it on the radio in your car, the loudspeaker in the local shopping center, the church during worship, even the ice-cream truck driving down the street has music. Many artists use music to convey a message and get a point across to their listeners. This was especially prevalent during the civil rights movement when artists utilized their talent for multiple purposes: to motivate, to pass time, to spread religion, and to provide strength against harassment and brutality. Overall, the music of the civil rights movement was a key tool used to convey the message and reflect the values of supporters of the movement.

This paper will be split into seven sections, each with the purpose of discussing a key element of music within the civil rights movement. Some of these elements include the effect of jazz music, the effect of the Motown record label, and the effect of specific artists such as Sam Cooke, Bob Dylan, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. The entirety of the paper will discuss different songs and artists that played an important part in the civil rights movement by increasing morale, unifying black Americans and their allies, and to express emotions about the blatant and brutal racism that were occurring.

Before going into this paper, it must be discussed what exactly was the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement was a campaign by African Americans and allies to end

racial discrimination and segregation throughout the United States. This was a social movement that began at the grassroots level and eventually gained enough traction to garner national attention and widespread participation. Civil disobedience and nonviolent protests began a dialogue in the country between government officials and the activists themselves, resulting in legislation and legal decisions that aimed to help put African Americans on a more equal playing field within the United States.

When exactly the civil rights movement occurred is a topic that is debated among many scholars. Some believe that the civil rights movement "stemmed almost immediately from the iniquitous decision announced by the Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896."[1] Other scholars such as Howard Sitkoff have argued that the movement began in the 1940s, highlighting blacks founding political organizations, World War II, and the landmark decision of *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944.[2] Some argue that the civil rights movement went through multiple phases since slavery ended.[3] However, a majority of the scholars follow a form of the "Montgomery to Memphis" time frame, and this is the most ideal time frame to use when analyzing the music that impacted the movement. Scholar Hugh Murray has said, "Historians in pipe-smoke filled rooms ought not to try to rename it."[4] With all of this information, this paper will place the timeline of the civil rights movement as beginning with the decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education on May 17, 1954 and ending with the signing of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 on April 11, 1968.

---

[1] Raphael Cassimere Jr., "Equalizing Teachers' Pay in Louisiana," *Integrated Education*, July-August 1977, 3.

[2] Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1978), 335.

[3] Adam Fairclough, "Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 24, December 1990, 389.

[4] Hugh Murray, "Change in the South," *Journal of Ethic Studies*, Summer 1988, 119-135.

This helps distinguish what music is considered to be a part of and to be influential to the civil rights movement.

As stated earlier, music is one of the most important parts of an individual's life. John Steinbeck said, "Songs are the statement of a people. You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, the wants and aspirations."[5] Music was this way for many people in the civil rights movement, especially those who were actively involved in civil disobedience, protests, and freedom rides. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle. They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours."[6] These freedom songs that Martin Luther King Jr. speaks about are the hymns, anthems, and belief systems that continued the spark of the civil rights movement.

---

[5] Alan Lomax and Nora Guthrie, *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (United Kingdom: Bison Books, 1967).

[6] "Hope for America: Performers, Politics, and Pop Culture," *Library of Congress.*

We Shall Overcome

The anthem of the civil rights movement was a gospel song known as “We Shall Overcome.” This song is arguably the most important of the freedom songs because it became the foundation of civil rights music. This song was lyrically descended from a hymn called “I’ll Overcome Some Day” written by Charles Albert Tindley in 1901.[7] The structure of the song “We Shall Overcome” also was influenced from “I’ll Overcome Some Day.”[8] However, the song also has resemblances and influences from a number of other hymns such as "O Sanctissima" and "I'll Be All Right.”[9] According to Victor Bobetsky, “’We Shall Overcome' owes its existence to many ancestors and to the constant change and adaptation that is typical of the folk music process.”[10] This song may have been created before the civil rights movement, but its use before and during the movement as a protest song is what brought it significant fame.

“We Shall Overcome” first gained its fame as a protest song during the winter of 1945-1946. A five-month protest began in the winter when the mostly black female members of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers Union went on strike against the American Tobacco Company. Lucille Simmons, one of the strikers, is said to have sung and lead the hymn to end each day’s picketing in order to keep spirits high. At these strikes, Lucille Simmons had

[7] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), 33.
[8] David A. Graham, “Who Owns ‘We Shall Overcome’?,” *The Atlantic*, April 14, 2016.
[9] Ethan J. Kytle and Blain Roberts, “Birth of a Freedom Anthem,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2015.
[10] Victor V. Bobetsky, *We Shall Overcome: Essays on a Great American Song* (New York City: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), 9.

been able to teach the song to Zilphia Horton.[11] Zilphia was married to Myles Horton, the co-founder of the Highlander Folk School.[12] With this connection, Zilphia Horton was able to introduce the song to the singer Pete Seeger who found the song to be extremely powerful.[13] Seeger changed some lyrics, writing, "I changed it to 'We shall'... I think I liked a more open sound; 'We will' has alliteration to it, but 'We shall' opens the mouth wider; the 'i' in 'will' is not an easy vowel to sing well…"[14] Guy Carawan took the alterations from Pete Seeger and taught them to the attendees of the founding meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Here, it spread and became the anthem of civil rights activists and African American labor unions.[15] This was the beginning of how the song came into pop culture from a protest song to a genuine anthem.

The peak of the song's influence came on August 28, 1963 when "We Shall Overcome" was sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington. Joan Baez, a twenty-two-year-old folk singer led the crowd of over 300,000 people in singing this unifying song. Two years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson was delivering a speech to Congress in which he said, "What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just

---

[11] John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 2nd ed.* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 177.

[12] Julia Schmidt-Pirro and Karen M. McCurdy, "Employing Music in the Cause of Social Justice: Ruth Crawford Seeger and Zilphia Horton," *Voices – The Journal of New York Folklore,* Spring-Summer 2005, 32-36.

[13] David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing?: The Ballad of Pete Seeger* (Da Capo NY: Random House Publishing Corp, 1981), 222-223.

[14] Pete Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone – A Musical Autobiography* (Bethlehem PA: Sing Out, 1997).

[15] David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing?*, 222-223.

Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."[16] Johnson was speaking about the violent attacks on protestors during the Selma marches, and by directly quoting the title of the song, he legitimized a protest movement.

Martin Luther King Jr. also recited the words from the anthem in some of his sermons. Two of the most notable are his four days before his death in Memphis and his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech.[17] When Martin Luther King Jr. died, over fifty thousand people attended his funeral on April 9, 1968, where they concluded the services with the group joining together to sing the anthem "We Shall Overcome."[18] The lyrics of the song are as follows:

> We shall overcome, some day
>
> Oh, deep in my heart
> I do believe
> We shall overcome, some day
>
> We'll walk hand in hand
> We'll walk hand in hand
> We'll walk hand in hand, some day
>
> Oh, deep in my heart
> I do believe
> We shall overcome, some day
>
> We shall live in peace
> We shall live in peace
> We shall live in peace, someday
>
> Oh, deep in my heart
> I do believe
> We shall overcome, some day

---

[16] Lyndon B. Johnson, "President Johnson's Special Message to Congress: The American Promise," *LBJ Presidential Library,* March 15, 1965.

[17] Martin Luther King Jr., "1964 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech," Oslo, Norway, December 10, 1964.

[18] Nick Kotz, *Judgement Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 419-420.

We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid, TODAY

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, someday

The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around someday

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day[19]

This song is arguably the most impactful of all the civil rights songs and anthems. It was an extremely easy hymnal for people to learn, with the simplicity of it making it easy for massive crowds of protestors to sing. It could even be considered that this song was the soundtrack of civil rights itself. Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, this song has been utilized in countries all over the world, including China, India, Northern Ireland, South Korea, and Lebanon.[20]

---

[19] Pete Seeger, "We Shall Overcome," recorded 1962, track 1 on *The Bitter and the Sweet,* Columbia Records.
[20] "We Shall Overcome: The Story Behind the Song," *The Kennedy Center.*

Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan was an extremely influential and pivotal part of the civil rights movement. Bob Dylan is a singer/songwriter who many consider to be the greatest songwriter of all time.[21] Bob Dylan was born Robert Zimmerman in Minnesota in 1941. Dylan's paternal grandparents immigrated to the United States from Odessa, a port city within Ukraine, following the pogroms against the Jews in 1905. Dylan's maternal grandparents were Jews who emigrated from Lithuania to the United States in 1902.[22] Dylan's parents also raised him in a close-knit Jewish community.[23] Family and religion played an important part in Dylan's childhood and musical influence.

Bob Dylan gained an interest in music as a kid when he first started listening to the radio, gravitating towards blues and country stations out of Shreveport Louisiana.[24] However, when he became a teenager, rock and roll became his passion. While in high school, he began several bands to perform covers of rock and roll artists such as Elvis Presley and Little Richard. Dylan's high school yearbook even labeled him "Robert Zimmerman: to join 'Little Richard'" in 1959.[25] Dylan enrolled in the University of Minnesota in 1959, where he began to play local coffeehouses and become involved in the folk music circuit. It was also at this time that he

---

[21] "No. 1 Bob Dylan," *Rolling Stone*, April 10, 2020.

[22] Howard Sounes, *Down The Hallway: The Life of Bob Dylan* (New York City: Grove Press, 2001), 12-13.

[23] Robert Gluck, "Bob Dylan: 'Prophet' and Medal of Freedom Recipient," *Jewish Journal,* May 21, 2012.

[24] Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan, Revised and Updated Edition* (New York City: Omnibus Press, 2011), 38-40.

[25] Michael Gray, "One of a Kind: Bob Dylan at 70," *Japan Times,* May 22, 2011.

started introducing himself as Bob Dylan. He explained the reasoning as, "You're born, you know, the wrong names, wrong parents. I mean, that happens. You call yourself what you want to call yourself. This is the land of the free."[26] This is the start of the famous Bob Dylan, the folk artist.

In 1960, Dylan dropped out of college at the end of his freshman year and moved to New York City to try and begin his musical career. Dylan was influenced by many different people in New York City, including artists such as Woody Guthrie and Ramblin' Jack Elliott.[27] He was also influenced by African American poets that he encountered, especially one named Big Brown. Dylan began picking up material from folk signers while playing many shows in Greenwich Village. Here, he found many friends and connections into the musical business, some of which lead him to play harmonica on other artists' albums. Dylan playing harmonica on the album of Carolyn Hester, another folk singer, led to the recognition of John Hammond, an album producer.[28] John Hammond signed Bob Dylan to Columbia Records, where Dylan released his first album on March 19, 1962.[29]

Dylan's second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, is what really set Bob Dylan's path to be remembered as singer-songwriter, and especially one to popularize protest songs. One song, "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall", referred to an impending apocalypse and was associated with the Cuban Missile Crisis, a political event that had developed weeks after the song began to

---

[26] Rebecca Leung, "Dylan Looks Back," *CBS News*, June 12, 2005.
[27] Howard Sounes, *Down The Hallway, 72.*
[28] Richie Unterberger, "Carolyn Hester Biography," *AllMusic*, October 8, 2003.
[29] Ed Vulliamy, "How Bob Dylan, Music's Great Enigma First Revealed His Talent to The World 50 Years Ago," *The Guardian,* March 17, 2012.

be performed.[30] Two other songs were considered protest songs for the civil rights movement. One of them, "Oxford Town", was written to represent James Meredith.[31] James Meredith was the first black student to risk enrollment at the University of Mississippi, where he was met with much opposition and hatred. The other song was "Blowin' in the Wind", which is widely considered to be one of Bob Dylan's most important and poignant songs.

"Blowin' in the Wind" is a protest song that encompasses many areas including the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. The song was released for the first time in 1962 in Pete Seeger's magazine devoted to topical songs, *Broadside*.[32] The song was written in 1962 and released in 1963 as a single and then the first track on Dylan's second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.* The song itself asks a series of rhetorical questions about war, freedom, and peace to which it answers, "The answer my friend, is blowin' in the wind."[33] Some have described that answer as, "impenetrably ambiguous: either the answer is so obvious it is right in your face, or the answer is as intangible as the wind."[34]

Many scholars consider the song to be an anthem for the civil rights movement. Mavis Staples, an American rhythm and blues and gospel singer, and civil rights activist, has spoken before on how she was astonished upon first hearing the song. She could not understand how a white man could write something that captured the frustrations and desires of black people so well.[35] Also, Sam Cooke, an extremely popular black pop artist, felt the exact same way as

---

[30] Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades: Take Two* (New York City: Viking, 2000), 101-103.
[31] Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 156.
[32] Richard Williams, *Dylan: A Man Called Alias* (New York City: Henry Holt & Co, 1992), 42.
[33] Bob Dylan, *Blowin' in the Wind* (New York City: Sterling Children's Books, 2011).
[34] Mick Gold, "Life and Life Only: Dylan at 60," *Judas! Magazine*, April 2002, 43.
[35] Martin Scorsese, *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* (France: Paramount, 2006).

Mavis Staples. In fact, Cooke was disappointed in himself as a black man that he had not written a song that had impacted the civil rights movement to the effect that "Blowin in the Wind" had. Sam Cooke had even gone as far as to include a version on his live album, *Sam Cooke at the Copa.*[36]

Many have argued what the exact lyrics meant in the song "Blowin' in the wind. Bob Dylan sang the lyrics:

> Yes, and how many years must a mountain exist
> Before it is washed to the sea?
> And how many years can some people exist
> Before they're allowed to be free?
> Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head
> And pretend that he just doesn't see?
> The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
> The answer is blowin' in the wind[37]

In these lyrics, Dylan is not claiming to hold the answers to the rhetorical questions he asks. He instead is showing his beliefs that there is an answer in the world, the world just has to pursue the resolution.

"Blowin' in the Wind" was sung in many instances of the civil rights movement. In 1963, Dylan himself sang the song at a voter registration rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. At the March on Washington, the song was delivered by Peter, Paul, and Mary, on the same day that Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. Peter Yarrow, of Peter, Paul, and Mary recalls during the march from Selma to Mongtomery, "When we sang it, it was in a field where probably I'd say, oh, 5,000 of the poorest people I'd ever seen, all of them black. And they

---

[36] Michael Gray, *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* (New York City: Continuum International, 2006), 149-150.
[37] Bob Dylan, "Blowin' in the Wind," recorded 1963, track 1 on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan,* Columbia Records.

waited in the rain for a couple of hours 'cause the sound system had gone to the wrong destination. We sang it very slowly, very, very--in a very determined way, but with a sense of the weariness of the people that surrounded us."[38] The song itself has been part of the most pivotal moments of the civil rights movement.

The song was covered by the Chad Michael Trio, but their release was delayed due to the word “death” being in the song. So, capitalizing on the delay, the trio of Peter, Paul, and Mary released their cover. The single sold over 300,000 copies in its first week and reached the number two spot on the *Billboard* pop chart.[39] It also spent five weeks at number one on the Middle-Road charts.[40] The song has had long lasting impact as well. The song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1994.[41] The song was also ranked number 14 on Rolling Stone’s 2004 list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.[42] In the 2021 list, the song was lowered to number 100.[43]

Dylan has continued to contribute to the civil rights movement further than just writing “Blowin’ in the Wind”. Just like his fellow artists Peter, Paul, and Mary, Bob Dylan too played at the March on Washington. He sang the song “Only a Pawn in Their Game” that speaks about the murder of Medgar Evers, a prominent civil rights activist and member of the NAACP. Evers was murdered due to negligence on behalf of the police who were supposed to protect him on a daily basis due to a large multitude of threats from white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan. In

---

[38] “’Blowin’ in the Wind’ Still Asks the Hard Questions,” *National Public Radio Music*, October 21, 2000.
[39] Michael Gray, *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia,* 63.
[40] Joel Whitburn, *Top Adult Contemporary: 1961-2001* (New York City: Record Research, 2002), 192.
[41] “Grammy Hall of Fame,” *Recording Academy Grammy Awards*, 1994.
[42] “The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, December 11, 2003.
[43] “The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, September 15, 2021.

this song, Dylan claims that Evers' killer is not the one to truly blame, instead it should be the country's "systematic racial discrepancy, ingrained into the heart of the nation by those in charge."[44] The song was given mixed reviews as many marchers did not agree with the sentiments of the song.[45]

Even after the protests of the 1960s, Bob Dylan remained highly involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1976, Dylan wrote the song "Hurricane" about Rubin Carter. Rubin Carter was a boxer who was wrongly imprisoned for twenty years for three murders that he did not commit.[46] Dylan's song helped Rubin Carter obtain a retrial and be acquitted of all charges because it shed a constant light and attention on the case. Dylan continues to write music today, hoping to see a world where people can live harmoniously. He believes there is an ongoing pursuit of change, and that is demonstrated in his most popular song "The Times They Are a-Changin'" Because of this, Bob Dylan, even though he is a white man, is considered one of the most important civil rights artists.

---

[44] David Thurman, "An Ally in Times of Crisis: Bob Dylan's Contribution to the Civil Rights Movement," *Medium*, June 14, 2020.

[45] William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

[46] "Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter Dead at 76," *CBC News*, April 20, 2014.

Sam Cooke

Another extremely important freedom anthem is the song titled, "A Change is Gonna Come." This song was written by the artist known as Sam Cooke, referred to many as the "King of Soul." Sam Cooke is a singer/songwriter who was born in Mississippi, but spent his childhood growing up in Chicago, Illinois. Cooke began singing in Chicago, having joined a band with his siblings called the Singing Children[47], then later becoming the lead singer of a band called the Highway Q.C.s at fourteen years old.[48] Cooke began his singing career as a gospel singer, being credited as the man who introduced a younger audience, mostly women, to gospel music. The band released a number of Christian gospel songs, many of which he had written, including "Jesus Gave Me Water" in 1951.[49]

Sam Cooke turned his career over from gospel to pop music in 1957 where he became more popular and a household name. That same year, he released his first hit, "You Send Me" which spent six weeks on top of the Billboard R&B chart.[50] The song also spent three weeks at the top of the Billboard pop chart, elevating Cooke into mainstream status as a trendy artist.[51] Because of this success, Sam Cooke went from earning about $200 a week to over $5,000 a

---

[47] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke* (New York City: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 13-14.

[48] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 29-31.

[49] "Jesus Gave Me Water," *SongsofSamCooke*, February 16, 2013.

[50] "Show 17 – The Soul Reformation: More on the Elevation of Rhythm and Blues," *Pop Chronicles*, University of North Texas Digital Library, June 22, 1969.

[51] Maury Dean, *Rock 'N' Roll Gold Rush: A Singles Un-cyclopedia* (New York City: Algora Publishing, 2003), 176.

week, a hefty amount, especially for the 1960s.[52] Cooke followed this initial success by becoming the first major black artist to sign with RCA Records. Here he released numerous mainstream hits including "Chain Gang", "Bring It On Home to Me", and "Twistin' the Night Away".[53]

1961 saw the start of Sam Cooke as an entrepreneur. He began his own record label, naming it SAR Records, which included many black artists such as the Valentinos, Johnnie Taylor, and Mel Carter.[54] Cooke also created KAGS Music, his publishing imprint and management firm.[55] The manager of both of these companies helped negotiate a deal where the holding company Tracey, Ltd (named after Cooke's daughter), would produce and own Cooke's recordings, and the record label would get distribution rights and a six percent royalty. Ultimately in this contract, Cooke was able to obtain ownership of his master recordings after thirty years.

In 1963, Sam Cooke heard Bob Dylan's song "Blowin' in the Wind", a song that was discussed in detail earlier in this paper. Cooke was significantly moved by the song. He was bewildered that a song that was so on key about racism could be written by a white man, and he was bothered and ashamed in himself as a black man that he had not written a song to that effect.[56] However, he also realized that by writing and performing a song to that degree would alienate his mostly white fan base, so instead of writing a song himself at that time, he chose to

---

[52] "Sam Cooke Finds Single Click Leads to Big Payoff On One-Nighters, Video," *Variety,* February 5, 1958.
[53] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 390.
[54] Jay Warner and Quincy Jones, *On This Day in Black Music History* (New York City: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), 10.
[55] Fred Goodman, *Allen Klein: The Man Who Bailed Out the Beatles, Made the Stones, and Transformed Rock & Roll* (New York City: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 40.
[56] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 512.

include Dylan's song into his repertoire.[57] The March on Washington also happened in that same year where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his influential *I Have a Dream* speech that further cemented Cooke's belief that he should write a song that speaks on racism in America. So, towards the end of 1963, after a dream where the lyrics came to him, Cooke put pen to paper and wrote the influential song "A Change is Gonna Come."[58]

At the end of 1963, Cooke began to record the song. Peter Guralnick says, "It almost scared him that the song—it was almost as if the song were intended for somebody else. He grabbed it out of the air and it came to him whole, despite the fact that in many ways it's probably the most complex song that he wrote. It was both singular—in the sense that you started out, 'I was born by the river'—but it also told the story both of a generation and of a people."[59] Cooke was warned when recording this song that it may not make as much money as his earlier pop hits, or that some would consider it too political, however those worries no longer bothered Cooke.[60] The song was eventually released on Cooke's *Ain't That Good News* album that was released in mid-February of 1964.[61] However, it would not be released as a single for another nine months.

Cooke performed the song on February 7, 1964 on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* to a national television audience. A full string section was arranged for the playing of the song, and it was believed that this moment would be a milestone for both Cooke and African

---

[57] "Sam Cooke And The Song That 'Almost Scared Him'," *National Public Radio*, February 1, 2014.
[58] Patrick Ryan, "'One Night in Miami': The True Story Behind Sam Cooke's Stirring 'A Change is Gonna Come'," *USA Today*, January 17, 2021.
[59] "Sam Cooke And The Song That 'Almost Scared Him'," *National Public Radio*, February 1, 2014.
[60] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 541.
[61] "Billboard," *The Billboard Publishing Company*, February 22, 1964.

Americans. However, just two days after his performance, the Beatles performed their set on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, substantially overshadowing Cooke's performance.[62] This would be the last time Sam Cooke ever performed "A Change is Gonna Come" in his lifetime. He chose not to perform the song because of how complex the piece was, and how ominous it was compared to the rest of his music. The single was set to be released in late December of 1964, however on December 11, just two weeks before its release, Sam Cooke was fatally shot at a Los Angeles motel. Sam Cooke never got to see the release of the song as a single, and never got to witness the impact and legacy the song had.

Just as Cooke had intended, this song brought awareness to the civil rights movement to mainstream pop music fans. At the time of its release, it was only a modest hit compared to the lighter pop tunes that he had released, but the song has beat the test of time. In 2007, the National Recording Registry deemed the song, culturally, historically, or aesthetically important,"[63] thus giving it reason to be a song selected for preservation in the Library of Congress. The National Public Radio called the song "one of the most important songs of the civil rights era,"[64] and also ranked it, along with 300 other songs, as one of the most important songs ever recorded.[65] Most recently, the song was ranked number three in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 2021 edition of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.[66] Both Sam Cooke and his anthem, "A Change is Gonna Come", left their impact on the mainstream music business, the civil rights movement, and the world as a whole.

---

[62] Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 552.

[63] Sheryl Cannady, "Recordings by Historical Figures and Musical Legends Added to the 2006 National Recording Registry," *Library of Congress*, March 6, 2007.

[64] "Sam Cooke And The Song That 'Almost Scared Him'," *National Public Radio*, February 1, 2014.

[65] "NPR 100: Master List of Top 300 Songs," *National Public Radio*.

[66] "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, September 15, 2021.

Motown

Record labels were an extremely important part of the civil rights movement. Many record labels would not hire black artists or refused to release pieces of work that would be considered too edgy or political at that time. However, there were some labels that took the risk and hired black artists, leaving a lasting impact on the music business and the black community. One of the most important of these record labels was Motown Records. Motown was founded in Detroit, Michigan by Berry Gordy Jr. under the name of Tamla Records in January of 1959.[67] It later became Motown Record Corporation in April of 1960, with Motown being a combination of the words motor and town, to pay homage to Detroit.

Motown found almost immediate success. Some of the early hires were black artists such as Eddie Holland, Mable John, and Mary Wells. In 1960, The Miracles released their song “Shop Around”, that peaked at number two on the *Billboard* Hot 100[68] In 1961, the Marvelettes released “Please Mr. Postman”, which would end up being Motown’s first U.S. number-one pop hit.[69] The company had begun to establish itself as a force in the music industry and had begun

[67] Gilbert Cruz, “A Brief History of Motown,” *Time*, October 15, 2016.
[68] Joel Whitburn, *Top R&B/Hip-Hop Singles: 1942-2004* (Menomonee Falls: Record Research, Incorporated, 2004), 404.
[69] Larkin Colin, *The Virgin Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (London: Virgin Books, 1997), 879-880.

to attract attention of black artists. In the years that followed, Motown would release more than 180 number one hits worldwide.[70]

The Motown label would go on to sign some of the most popular black artists of all time, including that of The Supremes, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Jackson 5, the Commodores, Smokey Robinson, and the Temptations.[71] In 1968, Motown held five different records in the pop Top 10 charts, as well as holding the top three spots for an entire month.[72] Motown was not only popular in the United States, but it was also getting worldwide attention in countries within Europe and Africa. Otis Williams of the Temptations said, "They didn't know about Warner Brothers or Columbia or whoever, but when we went behind the Iron Curtain, to Gdansk, or to Africa, and people knew about Motown, that's when I thought, 'Man, we are a very unique company.' That let us know that it was really reaching far and wide."[73] Motown's music was wide reaching, to audiences of all races and nationalities.

Motown was popular to black and white audiences in America. This record label's ability to transcend racial boundaries is what really made it so revolutionary. The singles that were reaching number one on the charts were being singled out and appreciated by other record companies, thus leading to the "social acknowledgment of the label's distinct 'Motown Sound'."[74] These songs were not civil rights anthems or even racial political songs though. They were basic structure "doo-wop" songs with simple lyrics and catchy tunes. Berry Gordy Jr. has

---

[70] Alan Light, "Motown's Link to Civil Rights Movement on Display," *The New York Times,* March 19, 2014.
[71] Arwa Haider, "Motown: The music that changed America," *British Broadcasting Corporation,* January 9, 2019.
[72] Alan Light, "Motown's Link to Civil Rights Movement on Display."
[73] Alan Light, "Motown's Link to Civil Rights Movement on Display."
[74] James Schoonmaker, "Motown: Its True Impact on the Civil Rights Movement," *Manchester Historian*, March 15, 2015.

been depicted as a businessman who was not willing to risk album sales to get over a political message that would be deemed unpopular to the white audiences.[75] Motown did not release any music that had a political message or racial undertones in the first decade of existing. Motown was an activist promotion in giving black artists a chance to release music, but not release messages.

In 1971, Marvin Gaye of Motown Records released his song "What's Going On". This is considered to be the first song that Motown had supported any form of activist song or artist. This song would go on to sell over a million copies and would be ranked number four in *Rolling Stone's* 2004 edition of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." [76] It would also go on to be ranked and number six in the 2021 edition.[77] This song was originally written Obie Benson of the group Four Tops after he witnessed the violence of Bloody Thursday while in Berkeley in 1969.[78] His group refused to record the song, stating that it was a protest song, to which Benson replied, "I said 'no man, it's a love song, about love and understanding. I'm not protesting, I want to know what's going on.'"[79] The untitled song was given to Gaye who added a section and decided to record it as his own.

Before recording, Gaye had given Gordy a call and informed him of his intentions in recording a protest song, to which Gordy responded with, "Marvin, don't be ridiculous. That's taking things too far."[80] Even when Gaye recorded the song and played it back for Gordy, he still

---

[75] James Schoonmaker, "Motown: Its True Impact on the Civil Rights Movement."
[76] "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, December 11, 2003.
[77] "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, September 15, 2021.
[78] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 155.
[79] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 157.
[80] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 157.

refused to release the song, telling Gaye it was "the worst thing I ever heard in my life."[81] Marvin Gaye responded by going on strike, refusing to record another song until "What's Going On" was released.[82] Eventually, Barry Ales, Motown's sales vice president, released the song without Gordy's knowledge. It was a hit at radio stations and within the radio world, obtaining high-volume sales. The success of the song forced Gordy to allow for Gaye to be able to produce his own music, resulting in the *What's Going On* album that Rolling Stone has ranked as the greatest album ever recorded.[83] The single and album both helped Motown realize that their white audience may not be frightened by political messages.

Black Forum Records, a subsidiary of Motown, was dedicated to releasing spoken-word albums from black activists. These mainly focused on speeches and poems that advocated for unity and pro-civil rights movement.[84] Those who were recorded and released albums included Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Margaret Danner, Elaine Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and Langston Hughes. Black Forum was created for the purpose of providing "a permanent record of the sounds of the civil rights struggle and the sounds of the era."[85] However, Motown founder Berry Gordy was not initially supportive of creating this subsidiary because he believed that if Motown released political music it would take away from the artists currently there, such as the Supremes and the Temptations.

---

[81] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 157.
[82] James Schoonmaker, "Motown: Its True Impact on the Civil Rights Movement."
[83] "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, September 22, 2020.
[84] Patrick O. Thomas, *Listen, Whitey!: The Sights and Sounds of Black Power, 1965-1975* (Oakland: Fantagraphics, 2012).
[85] "Looking Back at Motown's Civil Rights Recordings," *WNYC Studios*, January 19, 2014.

In 1963, Motown released the album *The Great March to Freedom*. This album was a recording of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech during the Detroit's Great March of 1963. This was vastly different to the music he was releasing at the time; however, Gordy understood the historic significance of the speech King had delivered. By recording this speech, Gordy made King an album selling Motown artist and aligned himself with the Civil Rights Movement. However, it could be argued that Gordy only supported King because of his intentions to sell albums. Gordy had hoped that black Americans would consider the album to be a "must have."[86] This is furthered by the lack of album deal for Malcolm X when he delivered his "Message to the Grass Roots" speech that occurred in Detroit.[87] By releasing an album by Malcolm X, the leader of the militant wing of the civil rights movement, he was sure to have financial repercussions.

Gordy had to be convinced to create the subsidiary label by record executive Ewart Abner who was involved in many areas of activism, including that of C.O.R.E. and working with Martin Luther King Jr.[88] Ultimately, the label could not survive. Television and radio broadcaster Alvin Hall said, "When Motown distributed records, it had a group of distributors that would order the records—they'd order 20 Supremes, 15 Temptations, and two Black Forum. There was never the demand or distribution for the records like they anticipated, so after losing money, Berry Gordy closed the door on it."[89] Although the label was short lived, lasting from 1970-1973, it still released multiple albums that promoted and furthered along the civil rights movement.

---

[86] Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 23.
[87] Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 56.
[88] "Looking Back at Motown's Civil Rights Recordings," *WNYC Studios*, January 19, 2014.
[89] "Looking Back at Motown's Civil Rights Recordings," *WNYC Studios*, January 19, 2014.

Although Motown made some progress towards the civil rights movement, some would argue that they did not do enough. Motown was one of the most popular destination for black artists, but the label continued to release mostly love songs. Most would assume that a highly successful, black, independent record label during the height of racial inequality would have released more political anthems, but this was not the case. Instead, other record labels showed more dedication towards racial equality. However, the musicians from Motown became stars in their own and developed a platform that furthered along black pride. Many of these artists defied stereotypes and released music that transcended race, class, and other social boundaries. Gordy recalled, "Despite the hostility and racism we faced, we knew we were bringing joy to people. The audiences were segregated. The venues had a rope down the middle of the audience separating blacks from whites, but soon the rope was gone, and black kids and white kids were dancing together to the same music. It created a bond that echoed throughout the world."[90] Ultimately, Motown gave black artists an opportunity and did not need to release political anthems to have an impact on the civil rights movement.

---

[90] Berry Gordy, *To Be Loved: The Music, The Magic, the Memories of Motown: an Autobiography* (New York City: Warner Books, 1994).

The Era of Jazz

Jazz is a genre of music that has been closely associated with the civil rights movement and the black community as a whole. Jazz originated within black communities in New Orleans, with its roots coming from the mixing of other genres of music, mostly that of blues and ragtime music.[91] Jazz has been considered a major form of musical expression of traditional music and popular music intertwining to create a new form.[92] The roots of jazz come from West African cultural and musical expressions, and in African-American music traditions.[93] However, it has spread around the world and has evolved based on its national, regional, and local musical cultures, thus creating different styles.

Jazz itself is extremely difficult to define because of the numerous different styles. However, one of the key elements in jazz music is the art of improvisation. This is attributed to the influence of blues music that originated from work songs and field hollers of black slaves on southern plantations. A repetitive call and response pattern were typical of these work songs and field hollers, as was the improvisational aspect that is popular in blues and jazz music. This differed from the popular classical music that focused on a written score and gave the power of the music over from the composer to the artist themselves.[94] Because of this, an artist will never

---

[91] "Jazz Origins in New Orleans – New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park," *National Park Service.*

[92] Thomas Hennessey, "From Jazz to Swing: Black Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1917-1935," PhD diss., (Northwestern University, 1981), 470-473.

[93] Jean Ferris, *America's Musical Landscape* (New York City: Brown and Benchmark, 1993), 233.

[94] Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1998).

play the same composition twice. The artist's mood, interaction with the audience, or experience will cause the artist to change the melodies, harmonies, or other aspects of the music.[95] In jazz bands, this improvisation could come from the band in its entirety, or from small groups or soloists within that band.

Jazz has had important ramifications to the civil rights movement and to the fight for equality as a whole. For many African Americans, jazz has helped draw attention to black contributions to the culture and history of the nation. However, other African Americans jazz is considered to be a reminder of "an oppressive and racist society and restrictions on their artistic visions."[96] A reason for this could be the "white jazz" genre of jazz that really showcased white musicians throughout the Midwest and other areas of the United States. Papa Jack Laine, also known as "the father of white jazz" was the leader of the Reliance band in New Orleans in the 1910s.[97] The first jazz group to record was a group known as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a group whose members were white and had Bix Beiderbecke, one of the most prominent soloists of the 1920s.[98] The Chicago Style of jazz was also developed by white jazz musicians including Eddie Condon and Bud Freeman. Other prominent white artists to come out of Chicago are Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa, both of which were popular band leads during the swing era of the 1930s[99]

---

[95] Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 89.

[96] "African American Musicians Reflect On 'What Is This Thing Called Jazz?' In New Book By UC Professor," *Oakland Post,* March 20, 2002, 7.

[97] Bob Yurochko, *A Short History of Jazz* (New York City: Rowan & Littlefield, 1993), 10.

[98] Phillip Larkin, *Jazz Writings* (New York City: Continuum, 2004), 94.

[99] Andrew R.L. Cayton, Richard Sisson, and Chris Zacher, *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 569.

Many of the black artists experienced ferocious racism, from both the southern and northern parts of the United States. In the North, jazz musicians had to undergo the "cabaret card" laws. Any musician had to have a form of identification to work in New York City, and these identification cards could be revoked by the New York Police Department for any minor infraction. This prevented artists like Billie Holliday and Charlie Parker the right to work in New York City during the peak of their careers.[100] Because of the brutal racism in the United States, many black artists decided to move to Europe where they were more welcomed and had more creative control in a more inclusive area. Some of these artists include that of Dexter Gordon, Bud Powell, and Kenny Clarke.[101] The experience of black performers in Europe at the time was that they "lived and moved freely throughout a variety of nations and communities."[102] These artists tended to only return to stateside for the occasional recording, while those artists who stayed in the United States tended to use their frustration and anger as a muse for their artistic creations.

Although there are examples of "white jazz" and instances where racism was imposed on black artists, the genre in its entirety helped user along the civil rights movement. Jazz music's popularity in the early 1900s, especially post World War II jazz, helped pave the way for civil rights movement. Jazz musicians themselves, as well as their music, helped change the attitudes Americans had about race during the leadup and time of the civil rights movement. According to

---

[100] "Cabaret Cards: The Law Police Used To Keep Musicians Of Color Off Stage," *National Public Radio Music*, June 3, 2020.

[101] Curtis Davenport, "The Quest for Freedom – Jazz and the American Civil Rights Movement," *JazzArts*, June 9, 2020.

[102] Rachel Gillett, "Jazz and the Evolution of Black American Cosmopolitan in Interwar Paris," *Journal of World History,* 21, no. 3, September 2010, 472.

jazz writer Nat Hentoff, jazz music went as far as to hasten the civil rights movement.[103] A multitude of bands had both black and white members, an intermingling that was not typically seen in the United States at that time. Stanley Crouch, a jazz critic, has been quoted saying, “Once the musicians who played it and the listeners who loved it began to balk at the limitations imposed by segregation, jazz became a futuristic social force in which one was finally judged purely on the basis of one’s individual ability. Jazz predicted the civil rights movement more than any other art in America.”[104]

Within the jazz community, there was an attitude of inclusion and integration that occurred much earlier than the United States as a whole. As early as the 1920s, black and white artists would play secretly in jam sessions, bouncing off musical concepts and ideas off one another. In 1936, Benny Goodman hired Teddy Wilson to play piano in his trio. This is considered to be the first time a black musician appeared onstage with a white band.[105] Teddy Wilson was quoted saying, "As a matter of fact, it was an asset, the racial mixing, the interest in the United States was just tremendous. And the public was so for the thing. Not one negative voice in any audience that we ever heard — just tremendous enthusiasm. The jazz fans were like — they were just hungry for this sort of thing.”[106] By the 1940s, jazz bands all over the United States were publicly performing with both black and white musicians.

---

[103] Nat Hentoff, “How Jazz Helped Hasten the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2009.

[104] Nat Hentoff, “How Jazz Helped Hasten the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2009.

[105] “Benny Goodman: Forever The King Of Swing,” *National Public Radio Music*, May 30, 2009.

[106] “Benny Goodman: Forever The King Of Swing,” *National Public Radio Music*, May 30, 2009.

It was not just the musicians getting along and integrating though. Many musicians have also commented on how they knew that their music was bringing about a more equal world. Louis Armstrong had written in a letter to Leonard Feather about an inspiring moment when getting on stage to play. He said, "I was playing a concert date in a Miami auditorium. I walked on stage and there I saw something I'd never seen. I saw thousands of people, colored and white, on the main floor. Not segregated in one row of whites and another row of Negroes. Just all together—naturally. I thought I was in the wrong state. When you see things like that, you know you're going forward."[107] The music was universally enjoyed, by all people, regardless of race or political affiliation.

The most current form of jazz in the late 1950s and 1960s was that of free jazz. Musicians of free jazz believed that the popular previous forms, such as bebop and modal jazz, were too limiting. Free jazz differed than that of other styles of jazz because a pre-established form is done away with and improvisation becomes a much larger element. Elements of music structures such as chord progressions, a set melody, and a set harmony were rejected Free jazz also changed the rhythm with the use of accelerando and ritardando, making the rhythm feel like a wave.[108] Some of the most common characteristics of free jazz included the use of different instruments, diatonic chord cycles, displaced rhythms, solo playing, and an intense expression of emotions. Overall, free jazz "was an attempt to break from the traditions of jazz and create something entirely new. As jazz musicians became more comfortable with improvisation, a new

---

[107] Nat Hentoff, *At the Jazz Band Ball: Sixty Years on the Jazz Scene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 115.

[108] John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1984), 158.

sound emerged: experimental, unorthodox, and rebellious."[109] It was also typically played by only individuals and small groups, with the exception of a few bands.

The movement started with a saxophonist named Ornette Coleman. Coleman had been previously recording music that had abrupt changes in tempo and did not follow the thirty-two-bar form that was typical of jazz at that time.[110] Coleman released what many consider the most important album to the free jazz movement with *Free Jazz*, which gave the name for the movement.[111] At first, jazz musicians had mixed emotions on the free jazz movement. Miles Davis wrote in his book about Ornette Coleman, "He just came and fucked up everybody."[112] Other musicians such as Leonard Bernstein saw Coleman as more of a visionary. However, with the 1960s being an extremely rebellious time, music began to follow suit with the time. John Lewis, the musical director of Modern Jazz Quartet said, "Ornette Coleman is doing the only really new thing in jazz since the innovations in the mid-forties of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and those of Thelonious Monk."[113] Artists such as John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Albert Aylor, and Eric Dolphy began to follow Coleman and his free jazz form, thus making the movement more popular.

The rise in popularity of free jazz saw the formation of groups, thus bringing legitimacy to the genre that was initially thought to be an impostor to jazz. The most famous of these groups was that of the Art Ensemble of Chicago that grew out of the Association for the Advancement

---

[109] Herbie Hancock, "What is Free Jazz?," *MasterClass*

[110] Ian Anderson, *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 62.

[111] Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 309-311.

[112] Miles Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 249

[113] Francis Davis, "Ornette's Permanent Revolution," *The Atlantic,* September 1985.

of Creative Musicians (AACM). This group consider themselves an avant-garde group, and their performances are both aural and visual, contributing more to their inventiveness. In 1969, it is reported that they used over five hundred instruments in their European tour.[114] Some of those instruments would include bicycle horns, wind chimes, gongs, and other "little" percussion instruments. The Art Ensemble of Chicago traveled around Europe because there they would typically have a more enthusiastic audience.

[114] Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz (The Roots of Jazz)* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1994), 177.

Songs of the Times

Although free jazz was a popular form of jazz that was created and made popular during the civil rights movement, it was not the only method used for expression. Many jazz artists, of all different sub-genres of jazz, used their anger and frustrations as a muse for their music. Some artists created explosive concept albums, while others created striking tracks and singles. These artists spoke of their own, and many of their listeners, pain and frustration. They tried to relate to their black audience and show them their anger and beliefs. However, they also wanted to convey to their white audiences just how enraged they are at the world they live in. These songs became political and societal statements, but they also became uniting anthems for black Americans at the time.

In 1960, composer and drummer Max Roach and lyricist Oscar Brown released the jazz album entitled *We Insist!* The intention upon release of this album was to perform it in 1963 at the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation.[115] The cover of this album also references the famous sit-in movement of the civil rights movement with the black musicians sitting at a counter to a presumed to be whites only diner. The album itself is an avant-garde jazz album and it primarily focuses on the civil rights movement itself.[116]

---

[115] C.H. Garrigues, "A New Jazz Label Voices a Shocking Call for Freedom," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 12, 1961.

[116] Howard Reich, "Such Sweet Sorrow," *Chicago Tribune,* September 3, 1995.

The album consisted of five songs, three of which talk about the struggles of black men and women in Africa and their fight for civil rights. The other two, "Driva' Man" and "Freedom Day" speak on the struggles of slaves in America. "Driva' Man" uses several tactics to evoke the image of slavery with the use of an intense percussive hit that is supposed to "conjure up images of forced labor"[117], such as the cracking of a whip. "Freedom Day" is supposed to be a response to the Emancipation Proclamation, however this song was difficult to finish because of the idea of freedom being difficult to grasp. Max Roach said about the song, "We don't really understand what it really is to be free. That last sound we did, 'Freedom Day,' ended with a question mark."[118] This album made Roach one of the first artists to use jazz to address racial or political issues of the 1960s.[119] Michael G. Nastos, a music critic and jazz aficionado, said, "Every modern man, woman, and child could learn exponentially listening to this recording — a hallmark for living life"[120] It has also been said that this album is, "a painful history of exploitation, a cry for justice, and catalyst for change."[121] This album is remembered today as a jazz landmark and that an enduring civil rights statement, and a model for future projects that dealt with the subject of race.[122]

There were many jazz songs that were released that had a lasting effect on the civil rights movement. One of the most significant songs from this time was Billie Holliday's "Strange

[117] Alissa White, "'We Insist! Freedom Now': Max Roach's Transatlantic Civil Rights Imperative," *Jazz Education Journal,* 2007, 48.

[118] Ingrid Monson, "Revisited! The Freedom Now Suite," *JazzTimes*, September 2001.

[119] Peter Keepnews, "Max Roach, a Founder of Modern Jazz, Dies at 83," *The New York Times*, August 16, 2007.

[120] Michael G. Nastos, "We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite – Max Roach," *AllMusic*.

[121] "Six Jazz Classics and the Fight for Civil Rights," *Carnegie Hall.*

[122] John Morthland, "Max Roach, We Insist! – Freedom Now Suite," *eMusic*, August 29, 2006.

Fruit". This song was originally a poem written by Abel Meeropol and later put to music, then it was popularized by Holliday in 1939. The song itself speaks of the lynching of black people within America, and the song compares these victims to fruit on a tree. At the time of writing, lynching of black Americans was at an all-time high, especially in the Southern United States.[123] The song was originally written to express Meeropol's horror at a photograph taken by Lawrence Beitler that depicted the hanging and battered bodies of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in a Marion, Indiana mob lynching.[124]

Initially, Holiday was afraid to include the song in her performance because she was fearful of the crowd retaliating, but because the song reminded her of her father, she began to incorporate it into her live performances.[125] The lyrics of the song are as follows:

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
> Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees[126]

Because of the power of the song and the intensity of the lyrics, rules were written for when Holliday would perform it. Waiters would stop serving prior to the song, Holiday would close with the song, the room would be dark except for a singular spotlight that would shine on Holiday, and there would be no encore.[127]

Holiday was rejected by her label and producer when she approached them to record the song. Their reasoning was that they feared reaction from the Southern record retailers, as well as

---

[123] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 561.
[124] Edwin Moore, "Strange Fruit is Still a Song for Today," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2010.
[125] David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song* (New York City: Harper Collins, 2001), 40-46.
[126] Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit," recorded 1939, track 2 on *Jazz at the Philharmonic,* Commodore.
[127] Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011)

negative publicity for the radio network, CBS.[128] She ultimately was able to record the song with the Commodore label. The song eventually sold a million copies, and as of today is Billie Holiday's highest selling recording.[129] The song has had a lasting effect on history, so much so that in 2002 the Library of Congress chose the song as one of fifty recordings to be added to the National Recording Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".[130] However, what makes this song so iconic is that has been said to be "the beginning of the civil rights movement"[131], making it a declaration of equality in the United States.

Another notable song was "Fables of Faubus", a protest that was composed by Charles Mingus. This song was written to protest the Arkansas governor, Orval Faubus.[132] Faubus was the governor who sent out the National Guard in 1957 to prevent the integration of Little Rock Central High School. This became known as the Little Rock Crisis as nine black teenagers were initially prevented from entering the high school. The song was a call-and-response with sarcasm and a direct attack on the way thinking and actions of Governor Faubus. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

> Oh, Lord, no more Ku Klux Klan
> Name me someone who's ridiculous, Dannie
> Governor Faubus!
> Why is he so sick and ridiculous?
> He won't permit integrated schools
> Then he's a fool![133]

---

[128] David Margolick, *Strange Fruit*, 61-62.

[129] Edwin Moore, "Strange Fruit is Still a Song for Today," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2010.

[130] "National Recording Registry 2002," *Library of Congress.*

[131] David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (New York City: Running Press, 2000).

[132] Charles Hersch, *Democratic Artworks: Politics and the Arts from Trilling to Dylan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 109.

[133] Charles Mingus, "Original Faubus Fables," recorded 1960, track 2 on *Presents Charles Mingus,* Candid Records.

The song was originally recorded for the *Mingus Ah Um* album, but Columbia Records refused to release the song with lyrics, practically censoring Mingus. Because of this, Mingus settled to release the song in instrumental.[134] However, a defiant Charles Mingus released the song with lyrics included in 1960 on the album *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* under a more independent label in Candid, but he had to change the title to "Original Faubus Fables".[135]

Similar to Mingus, John Coltrane also wrote a song about a critical moment in the civil rights movement. John Coltrane wrote the song "Alabama" as a memorial to the four young black girls that were killed in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.[136] This was an attack carried out by the Ku Klux Klan that had been a response to a string of events in during the time of the civil rights movement, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the imprisonment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and the turning of hoses on protestors by Bull Connor in Birmingham.[137] Coltrane was not one to speak on political events, so instead he turned his thoughts and beliefs over into his music, thus providing a song that is "an accurate psychological portrait of a time."[138]

Nina Simone contributed to the legacy of jazz songs that spoke up about racial injustice. She released the song "Mississippi Goddam" in 1964 on her album *Nina Simone in Concert*. Similar to Coltrane, Nina Simone wrote the song in response to the bombing of the 16th Street

[134] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 183.
[135] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds,* 264.
[136] Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York City: Schirmer Books, 1976), 150.
[137] "Six Jazz Classics and the Fight for Civil Rights," *Carnegie Hall.*
[138] Ben Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007).

Baptist Church, as well as the murders of Medgar Evers and Emmitt Till that had occurred in Mississippi.[139] In the song, Simone sings:

> Do things gradually
> "Do it slow"
> But bring more tragedy
> "Do it slow"
> Why don't you see it
> Why don't you feel it
> I don't know
> I don't know
> You don't have to live next to me
> Just give me my equality[140]

Simone performed this song as a fast-paced show tune at Carnegie Hall. At that concert, a majority of the audience was white.[141] That concert was made into a single and was released to the public, thus popularizing the song and making it a more aggressive anthem for the civil rights movement than some of those previously mentioned.

"Mississippi Goddam" was not well received in the South and was actually banned in some states because of its title.[142] There were boxes of the album sent to radio stations across the country, with many sending those records back broken in half.[143] The song ultimately harmed Simone's career, but made her impact long-lasting. This was not Simone's only protest song, as she had written "To Be Young, Gifted and Black", "Ain't Got No, I Got Life", and "Four Women", all of which were important, but none had reached the fame of "Mississippi Goddam".

---

[139] Salamishah Tillet, "Nina Simone's Time Is Now, Again," *The New York Times,* June 19, 2015.

[140] Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam," recorded 1964, track 7 on *Nina Simone in Concert,* Phillips Records.

[141] Claudia Roth Pierpont, "A Raised Voice: How Nina Simone Turned the Movement into Music," *The New Yorker,* August 11, 2014.

[142] Liz Fields, "The Story Behind Nina Simone's Protest Song, 'Mississippi Goddam'," *Public Broadcasting Service*, January 14, 2021.

[143] Adam Chandler, "How the Civil-Rights Era Made and Broke Nina Simone," *The Atlantic*, June 27, 2015.

Just like Holiday's "Strange Fruit", "Mississippi Goddam" was chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" in 2019.[144] Nina Simone later stated that this was her "first civil rights song"[145] and was the turning point in her musical career that saw her music take a more political turn.

Another political song that Nina Simone performed was "To Be Young, Gifted and Black". This song was written as a tribute to Simone's friend, Lorraine Hansberry.[146] Lorraine Hansberry was the author of the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, a play that discusses racism, assimilation, and housing discrimination. Nina Simone first played this song to a crowd of about 50,000 people at the Harlem Cultural festival on August 17, 1969. The song was later recorded at her concert at the Philharmonic Hall and released on her *Black Gold* album. Some of the song's lyrics are as follows:

> To be young, gifted and black
> Oh, what a lovely precious dream
> To be young, gifted and black
> Open your heart to what I mean
> In the whole world you know
> There are a million boys and girls
> Who are young, gifted and black
> And that's a fact![147]

This song was intended to instill a pride and confidence for black children to feel good about themselves. It was also meant to inspire a population of black men and women that they are

---

[144] Travis M. Andrews, "Jay-Z, a speech by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and 'Schoolhouse Rock!' among recordings deemed classics by Library of Congress," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2019.

[145] Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4, March 1, 2005, 1349-1379.

[146] "Nina Simone's 'Lovely, Precious Dream' For Black Children," *National Public Radio*, January 8, 2019.

[147] Nina Simone, "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," recorded 1970, track 7 on *Black Gold,* RCA Records.

more than just their skin color. Meshell Ndegeocello, a ten-time Grammy nominee, said of the song, "It's the first time I heard those words said about young black people. You know, being of color, you did not feel that you were gifted – and especially if you're black."[148] This song took on a different role within the Civil Rights Movement. Instead of spewing one's anger over political motives or a song that speaks of ones overcoming obstacles, this song is meant to tell black men and women that they are already special and that they should embrace it and be proud of their culture and identity.

[148] "Nina Simone's 'Lovely, Precious Dream' For Black Children," *National Public Radio*, January 8, 2019.

Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington

Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington are arguably two of the most famous and most important jazz figures to walk this planet. Their legacies are immense and extremely difficult to put into words the effect they had on music as and pop culture as a whole. Both Armstrong and Ellington have won numerous awards and honors and were considered to be immensely popular during the peak of their careers and at the present time. All of this at a time when black artists did not have the opportunities white ones had. Both of their careers were important to the civil rights movement because without their contributions, black musicians would not have had the platforms and opportunities to showcase their art and beliefs.

Louis Armstrong was one of the most influential figures within jazz music. Armstrong's career spanned five decades and through many of the different movements and eras of jazz.[149] Armstrong began his career in his hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana, becoming an extremely talented and innovative trumpet and cornet player.[150] Armstrong traveled to Chicago with his band leader and mentor, Joe "King" Oliver, then ultimately to New York City where he became a soloist and renowned recording artist. This is really where Louis Armstrong became the national icon he was known to be. His concerts, radio appearances, and his time in film and

[149] Richard Cook, *Richard Cook's Jazz Encyclopedia* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 18-19.
[150] Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* (New York City: Broadway Books, 1997), 1.

television showcased Armstrong as one of the hottest celebrities at that time. He was instantly recognizable in the pop culture world.

Louis Armstrong had an exceptional impact on the civil rights movement. During the 1920s, Armstrong was a key part of the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was a revival of African American culture, including music, art, theater, and dance, in the neighborhood of Harlem, Manhattan, New York City.[151] At this moment in time, Armstrong was known to many as "The World's Greatest Trumpet Player".[152] Many audiences, both white and black, came to watch him perform, which in turn increased his popularity immensely. He also had an immense impact on the community because of his popularity, touching many different artists. One specific artist was the poet Langston Hughes, who acknowledged that Armstrong was one of the most important and recognized musicians during this era.[153] Langston Hughes also believed Armstrong to be important to the newfound love of black culture during the Harlem Renaissance.[154]

Armstrong was one of the first black entertainers that was widely popular with a white and international audience. He was accepted into white society, on and off the stage, as a black man. However, Armstrong was often ridiculed for his closeness to white society. He was also criticized for his playing in front of segregated audiences. He was commonly called an "Uncle

[151] "Harlem in the Jazz Age," *New York Times*, February 8, 1987.

[152] Evan Andrews, "9 Things You May Not Know About Louis Armstrong," *History*, November 20, 2020.

[153] "Satchmo: The Life of Louis Armstrong," *Public Broadcasting Service*, July 6, 2005.

[154] "Langston Hughes Presents the History of Jazz in an Illustrated Children's Book (1995)," *Open Culture*, March 31, 2015.

Tom" by many different reporters, a term that pained Armstrong deeply.[155] Overall, many black Americans believed that Louis Armstrong did not utilize his position of power and popularity to take a strong enough stand for the Civil Rights Movement. The black community was not fully behind the black star.

Armstrong was fully aware of the black community's opinion of him. However, he did not publicly speak about the civil rights movement until 1957 when he was interviewed in his hotel room in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Armstrong was asked about his opinions on the situation going on in Little Rock, where nine black students were not permitted from attending the high school. Armstrong responded saying, "It's getting almost so bad a colored man hasn't got any country," as well as insulting Governor Faubus and President Dwight Eisenhower's response.[156] Armstrong even went as far as to talk about how he intended to cancel a tour of the Soviet Union on behalf of the State Department because he could not represent a government of a country that was in conflict with its own people.[157] The interviewer, Larry Lubenow, showed Armstrong his article for approval to which Armstrong responded, "Don't take nothing out of that story," and "That's just what I said and still say," and gave his signature at the bottom of the paper.[158]

Armstrong was met with intense criticism around the country. Some radio stations, specifically in the south, threw out Armstrong's records. The press also made many comments

---

[155] Ricky Riccardi, "'I'm Still Louis Armstrong – Colored': Louis Armstrong and the Civil Rights Era," *That's My Home: Louis Armstrong House Museum Virtual Exhibits*, May 11, 2020.

[156] Jason D. Antos, "Louis Armstrong Broke Silence On Civil Rights In 1957," *Queens Gazette*, March 3, 2010.

[157] "Louis Armstrong, Barring Soviet Tour, Denounces Eisenhower and Gov. Faubus," *The New York Times*,

[158] Jason D. Antos, "Louis Armstrong Broke Silence On Civil Rights In 1957," *Queens Gazette*, March 3, 2010.

on Armstrong's interview. The *Chicago Defender* stated that Armstrong's words had the "explosive effect of an H-bomb."[159] The *Jet* magazine, one that had previously called Armstrong a "Uncle Tom" had also compared Armstrong's comments to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles leading a chorus of the Russian national anthem at the United Nations. Even members of the African American community were angered at him for not speaking up sooner and for his choice of words. Sammy Davis Jr. spoke his opinion of Armstrong, saying, "You cannot voice and opinion about a situation which is basically discrimination, integration, etc. and then go out and appear before segregated audiences … which Louis Armstrong had done for years."[160] Others that had blasted Armstrong in the media were Thurgood Marshall and Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

As well as the complaints in the newspapers, there were calls for people to boycott Armstrong's concerts. The Ford Motor Company even went as far as to threaten to pull out of a Bing Crosby special because Louis Armstrong was supposed to appear.[161] The manager of Van Cliburn, a world-renowned piano player, refused to let Cliburn perform a duet with Louis Armstrong on Steve Allen's talk show. It was also highly requested by the media that Armstrong be dropped off of a scheduled appearance of *Crescendo,* the all-star episode of the *DuPont Show of the Week*. Even DuPont himself wanted Armstrong removed, but CBS refused to do so.[162] Armstrong went on to sing the chorus of, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" while sitting in a rocking chair.

---

[159] David Margolick, "The Day Louis Armstrong Made Noise," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2007.
[160] "Sammy Davis Jr. Says Satchmo No Spokesman," *The Pittsburgh Courier,* October 12, 1957.
[161] David Margolick, "The Day Louis Armstrong Made Noise," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2007.
[162] Ricky Riccardi, "'I'm Still Louis Armstrong – Colored'."

Although Armstrong didn't publicly speak out until 1957, he and his band had been playing the song "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue" to his audiences. This song was originally composed by the artist Fats Waller, with lyrics being written by Harry Brooks and Andy Razaf.[163] The song was included in the all-black musical, "Hot Chocolate".[164] The songs purpose was to be about a dark-skinned black woman losing her man to a light-skinned black woman.[165] Some of the song's lyrics are as follows:

> I'm white – inside – but that don't help my case
> Cause I can't hide what is in my face
> How would it end? Ain't got a friend
> My only sin is my skin
> What did I do to be so black and blue?[166]

This song was not routinely part of Armstrong's repertoire, but it was one that he played for all of his life. He even famously played this song in East Germany in 1965, shortly after the events of Bloody Sunday.

In addition to his interview in 1957, Louis Armstrong was interviewed again for another article in 1964 in which he explained why he did not perform in the civil rights marches that were occurring. "But me, if I'd be out somewhere marching with a sign and some cat hits me in my chops, I'm finished. A trumpet man gets hit in the chops and he's through. If my people don't dig me the way I am, I'm sorry. If they don't go along with me giving my dough instead of marching, well–every cat's entitled to his opinion. But that's the way I figure I can help out and

---

[163] "Black and Blue (1929)," *Jazz Standards*.
[164] Joe Nocera, "Louis Armstrong performs 'Black and Blue'," *New York Festival of Song*, August 4, 2020.
[165] Joe Nocera, "Louis Armstrong performs 'Black and Blue'."
[166] Louis Armstrong, "Black and Blue," recorded 2001, track 25 on *Jazz & Blues: 36 Outstanding Tracks,* Weton-Wesgram.

still keep working. If they let me alone on this score I'll do my part in my way."[167] Armstrong also found a connection to Martin Luther King Jr. as he supported him donations. After King was assassinated, Armstrong and four other black musicians threatened to boycott the Academy Awards until they postponed the ceremony.[168] In 1970, Bob Thiele presented Armstrong with the idea to record and cover the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome".

Duke Ellington was a pivotal part of jazz history, considered by many to be "the most significant composer of the genre."[169] However, Ellington himself was a strong opponent to the categorizing of himself in one genre, as he considered himself a musician of American music, not just jazz.[170] Ellington was born in Washington, D.C. but based his career out of New York City where gained a national profile as an orchestra leader, composer, and pianist. Ellington had a regular appearance at the Cotton Club in Harlem, and he toured Europe several times with his orchestra, which had many players considered to be the best in their craft. Some of those players consisted of saxophone player Johnny Hodges, tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, and bassist Jimmy Blanton.

Duke Ellington was never very vocal about racism. Although he worked and lived throughout the civil rights movement, Ellington did not have the reputation to speak out about the cause. Instead, Ellington "brushed off racism with articulacy and humor in the public eye."[171] Ellington believed that expressing his pride in the black community through his music and

---

[167] Charles L. Sanders, "Louis Armstrong – Reluctant Millionaire," *Ebony*, November 1964, 143-144.
[168] Ricky Riccardi, "'I'm Still Louis Armstrong – Colored': Louis Armstrong and the Civil Rights Era."
[169] Marcello Piras, "Ellington, Duke [Edward Kennedy]," *Grove Music Online*, October 16, 2013.
[170] Mark Tucker, *The Duke Ellington Reader* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.
[171] Lana Crowe, "What did Duke Ellington have to say about racism?," *Medium*, June 30, 2020.

compositions would have a more long-lasting impact than with statements. He was also aware how easily his career could be taken from him if he was a verbal black man who rejected stereotype. Ellington has been quoted as saying, "You can say anything you want on the trombone, but you gotta be careful with words."[172] Because of this, Ellington chose to release music that articulated how he felt.

Duke Ellington believed that music itself was a form of activism, however, he also used his appearance to try and eliminate racist stereotypes. To Ellington, presentation meant everything. He made it a point to look elegant with dapper suits and slicked back hair. When Ellington was invited to play in Hollywood films, he would be on the screen as a "suave, big time conductor – commanding the room with his music."[173] This was vastly different as to how black Americans were portrayed on the screen at the time, most of them being portrayed as poor manual laborers, household help, or racist caricatures. Ellington's portrayal in movies were a point of pride to the black community.

Ellington used his popularity to stage the musical *Jump for Joy*. It first opened up at the Mayan Theater in Los Angeles, California in the summer of 1941. This show was an all-black musical that offered a variety of song, dance, and comedic performances. Gary Giddens would go on to call this show a "benchmark in American theater."[174] What made *Jump for Joy* different than other all-black casts is that it dispelled the racist stereotypes that were typical of pop culture

---

[172] Richard O. Boyer, "The Hot Bach – III," *New Yorker*, July 8, 1944, 26-27.

[173] Laura Townsend, "How Duke Ellington used his appearance to subvert racist stereotypes, and other ways he fought racism," *Public Broadcasting Service*, March 24, 2021.

[174] A.H. Lawrence, *Duke Ellington and His World* (London: Routledge, 2003), 305.

at the moment, and instead openly celebrated African American culture and traditions. Graham Lock stated in his book, “What *Jump for Joy* made particularly clear was the contempt that blacks felt for various white representations of blackness, not least the figure of Uncle Tom and the notion that blacks belonged – and were happy – in the South”[175] The show ran for 122 performances, with Duke Ellington and his orchestra playing in the pit every night. Ellington considered this work to be his original piece for civil rights, and it helped pave the way for his eventual album, *Black, Brown, and Beige.*[176]

An example of a work that Ellington wrote to articulate his feelings towards the black community and the civil rights movement was his album *Black, Brown, and Beige*. This album is an extended jazz work that was released after Ellington performed it live in 1943 at Carnegie Hall in front of a mostly white audience. The album consisted four songs including “Work Song”, “Come Sunday”, “The Blues”, and “Three Dances” which had three different movements that consisted of “West Indian Dance”, “Emancipation Celebration”, and “Sugar Hill Penthouse”. All of these songs were an attempt to capture Ellington’s feelings through music on the race relations within the United States at the time.[177] He wrote about the horrors of slavery and the challenges of post-slavery black America. The song was not well received as he made no appearances on the *Billboard* chart.[178] It has also been posed that the song has been diminished for Ellington to have ben understating his feelings through the song due to fear of demining his

[175] Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 95.

[176] David Johnson, “Jump for Joy: Duke Ellington’s Celebratory Musical,” *Indiana Public Media*, February 5, 2008.

[177] Garth Alper, “Black, Brown, and Beige: One Piece of Duke Ellington’s Musical and Social Legacy,” *College Music Symposium*, October 1, 2011.

[178] “Record Reviews,” *Billboard*, March 30, 1946.

image to white audiences.[179] However, Ellington being booked at Carnegie Hall was a huge stepping stone for African Americans, and he has been acclaimed for attempting to use that opportunity to prompt a conversation on race.[180]

Ellington later released an album in 1958 under the same name, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, that had been reworked into a longer version. This album is considered to be in three parts, "Black", "Brown", and "Beige", all three representing the history of a black American. In his autobiography, Ellington said, "*Black, Brown, and Beige* was planned as a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro, and the first section, "Black," delved deeply into the Negro past. In it, I was concerned to show the close relationship between work songs and spirituals"[181] He then wrote about how "Brown" represented the contribution made by black citizens to America in blood, and how "Beige" portrays African Americans from the end of World War I to the current times. Overall, the album was a longer, more detailed, history of the black American, and it was meant to educate and unify.

Both of these men, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, were scorn at by members of the black community for not being vocal enough during the civil rights movement. Many believe that they could have done more with their platform. However, using their music as activism was an extremely important way to get their message of unity across. Their audiences were of all colors, nationalities, and backgrounds. Listening to and appreciating the music of either of these men brought together audiences for a similar, unifying, reason. Their impact on music and the civil rights movement can still be felt today.

---

[179] Claudia Pierpont, "Black, Brown, and Beige," *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2010.
[180] Garth Alper, "Black, Brown, and Beige: One Piece of Duke Ellington's Musical and Social Legacy."
[181] Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (Garden City: De Capo Press, 1973), 181.

Conclusion

The 1960s were a time of social and political upheaval throughout the entire United States. At this time, the Vietnam War was raging on, President John F. Kennedy promised that a man would land on the moon by the end of the decade, and the counter-culture movement was pushing full steam ahead. However, arguably the most important movement to come out of this time was the peak of the civil rights movement. The March on Washington had about 250,000 people attend with the goal being to advocate for civil and economic liberties for black Americans.[182] There was also the Selma to Montgomery protest marches that occurred in 1965 with over 25,000 people supporting voting rights for black Americans.[183] The movement aimed to have legislation passed that benefited black Americans, and that is exactly what they did. Two prominent pieces of legislation that was passed was that of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[184]

Although there was extreme upheaval within the United States, music was still being made. Louis Armstrong once wrote in a letter to a Vietnam solider about the joy music can bring to life even in the darkness, and even went as far as to say that "music is life itself."[185] Martin

---

[182] Drew Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation* (New York City: Harper Collins, 2003), 177.

[183] Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

[184] Allen Weinstein, *The Story of America: Freedom and Crisis from Settlement to Superpower* (London: DK Publishing, Inc., 2002).

[185] Joe Taysom, "The heartfelt letter Louis Armstrong wrote to a fan: 'Music is life itself'," *Far Out Magazine*, August 4, 2020.

Luther King Jr. stated in his speech at the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival, "Much of the power of our Freedom Movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies when spirits were down."[186] Music was, and still is, an important part of a country's culture, and that was the way in the 1960s as well. Music represents a group of people's emotions and beliefs. Music often tells a story or shares a particular idea with a society. Ultimately, the culture of a country can change depending on the music they listen to.

Songs of the civil rights movement proved to have many different uses. Some songs, such as "We Shall Overcome", were meant to unify black men and women under one goal. Other songs, such as Charles Mingus's "Fables of Faubus", were meant to antagonize and vilify those who were actively trying to bring down black America and slow down the civil rights movement's progress. Albums such as Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige* and Max Roach's *We Insist!* were created to tell a story about the progress of a black person in the present world. Each song and album were created with a different purpose, but they all had the same goal in mind: to express their emotions and beliefs on what is happening to black men and women in America. These songs were not necessarily created for the movement itself, instead these songs were a "natural outpouring, evidencing the life force of the fight for freedom."[187] It was also the intention of these songs to change the culture of America at the time to promote black equality and unity.

[186] "Martin Luther King at the Berlin Jazz Fest in 1964," *Jazz in Europe*, January 21, 2019.
[187] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Music in the Civil Rights Movement," *Public Broadcasting Service*, July 2006.

The music was extremely important to those who were writing, singing, and performing their songs, but it had just as much of an impact on those listening too. Whether it be at rallies, sit-ins, protests, sitting inside their living room, or even in a prison cell, people were always singing. Some of the most important reasonings for their singing was that it memorialized the story and struggle of a black American, it served as a battle cry, and it helped bring people of all races, classes, and social orders together under one unifying song. This brought encouragement and morale to times and events that were considered to be extremely emotionally taxing and difficult.

There were also reasons that songs were specifically selected to be sung in that moment in time. Bernice Johnson Reagon, a famous freedom singer, has said, "If you don't pay attention to the specificity of the songs they chose at a particular time, around a specific situation, you miss an opportunity to hear masses of people speak."[188] The masses of people singing created a collective voice of people speaking, as if masses of people were collectively telling the same exact story at the same exact time. This was extremely important in the aspect of capturing the culture and uniting participants in expressing the same emotions and pain to those being impacted by the marches and protests.

The civil rights movement was a time where black Americans and their allies fought to end racial discrimination and segregation, and they did so by uniting under a sole purpose to pass legislation to support that cause. Music was an important way for the black Americans and their allies to unite. It was also extremely important for self-expression of black artists to convey the

[188] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Music in the Civil Rights Movement."

racism and discrimination they have experienced, as well as civil rights allies conveying how they view unity in America. Music's role in the civil rights movement was both descriptive and prescriptive. The descriptive describes the reality of the world and how the conditions currently were. The prescriptive describes a dream that stretches beyond the current conditions and provides hope and motivation for that dream. The movement was ultimately enhanced and expanded beyond marches and protests because of the music being released.

Bibliography

"African American Musicians Reflect On 'What Is This Thing Called Jazz?' In New Book By UC Professor." *Oakland Post.* March 20, 2002.

Alper, Garth. "Black, Brown, and Beige: One Piece of Duke Ellington's Musical and Social Legacy." *College Music Symposium*. October 1, 2011.

Anderson, Ian. *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007.

Andrews, Evan. "9 Things You May Not Know About Louis Armstrong." *History*. November 20, 2020.

Andrews, Travis M. "Jay-Z, a speech by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and 'Schoolhouse Rock!' among recordings deemed classics by Library of Congress." *The Washington Post*. March 20, 2019.

Antos, Jason D. "Louis Armstrong Broke Silence On Civil Rights In 1957." *Queens Gazette*. March 3, 2010.

Armstrong, Louis. "Black and Blue." Recorded 2001. Track 25 on *Jazz & Blues: 36 Outstanding Tracks.* Weton-Wesgram.

"Benny Goodman: Forever The King Of Swing." *National Public Radio Music*. May 30, 2009.

Bergreen, Laurence. *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life.* New York City: Broadway Books, 1997.

"Billboard." *The Billboard Publishing Company*. February 22, 1964.

"Black and Blue (1929)." *Jazz Standards.*

"'Blowin' in the Wind' Still Asks the Hard Questions." *National Public Radio Music*. October 21, 2000.

Bobetsky, Victor V. *We Shall Overcome: Essays on a Great American Song*. New York City: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015.

Boyer, Richard O. "The Hot Bach – III." *New Yorker*. July 8, 1944.

"Cabaret Cards: The Law Police Used To Keep Musicians Of Color Off Stage." *National Public Radio Music*. June 3, 2020.

Cannady, Sheryl. "Recordings by Historical Figures and Musical Legends Added to the 2006 National Recording Registry." *Library of Congress*. March 6, 2007.

Cassimere Jr., Raphael. "Equalizing Teachers' Pay in Louisiana." *Integrated Education*. July-August 1977.

Cayton, Andrew R.L.; Sisson, Richard; Zacher, Chris. *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Chandler, Adam "How the Civil-Rights Era Made and Broke Nina Simone." *The Atlantic*. June 27, 2015.

Cole, Bill. *John Coltrane.* New York City: Schirmer Books, 1976.

Colin, Larkin. *The Virgin Encyclopedia of Popular Music*. London: Virgin Books, 1997.

Cook, Richard. *Richard Cook's Jazz Encyclopedia.* London: Penguin Books, 2005.

Crowe, Lana. "What did Duke Ellington have to say about racism?" *Medium*. June 30, 2020.

Cruz, Gilbert. "A Brief History of Motown." *Time*. October 15, 2016.

Davenport, Curtis. "The Quest for Freedom – Jazz and the American Civil Rights Movement." *JazzArts*. June 9, 2020.

Davis, Francis. "Ornette's Permanent Revolution." *The Atlantic.* September 1985.

Davis, Miles. *Miles: The Autobiography*. New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990.

Davis, Townsend. *Weary Feet, Rested Souls*. New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Dean, Maury. *Rock 'N' Roll Gold Rush: A Singles Un-cyclopedia.* New York City: Algora Publishing, 2003.

Dunaway, David King. *How Can I Keep from Singing?: The Ballad of Pete Seeger*. Da Capo NY: Random House Publishing Corp, 1981.

Dylan, Bob. *Blowin' in the Wind.* New York City: Sterling Children's Books, 2011.

Dylan, Bob. “Blowin’ in the Wind.” Recorded 1963. Track 1 on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*. Columbia Records.

Ellington, Edward Kennedy “Duke”. *Music Is My Mistress.* Garden City: De Capo Press, 1973.

Fairclough, Adam. “Historians and the Civil Rights Movement.” *Journal of American Studies*. Vol. 24, December 1990.

Feldstein, Ruth. “’I Don’t Trust You Anymore’: Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s.” *Journal of American History* 91. no. 4. March 1, 2005.

Ferris, Jean. *America’s Musical Landscape*. New York City: Brown and Benchmark, 1993.

Fields, Liz. “The Story Behind Nina Simone’s Protest Song ‘Mississippi Goddam.’” *Public Broadcasting* Service. January 14, 2021.

Garrigues, C.H. “A New Jazz Label Voices a Shocking Call for Freedom.” *San Francisco Examiner*. March 12, 1961.

Giddins, Gary. *Visions of Jazz: The First Century*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gillett, Rachel. “Jazz and the Evolution of Black American Cosmopolitan in Interwar Paris.” *Journal of World History.* 21, no. 3, September 2010.

Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 2nd ed.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996.

Gluck, Robert. “Bob Dylan: ‘Prophet’ and Medal of Freedom Recipient.” *Jewish Journal.* May 21, 2012.

Gold, Mick. “Life and Life Only: Dylan at 60.” *Judas! Magazine*. April 2002.

Goodman, Fred. *Allen Klein: The Man Who Bailed Out the Beatles, Made the Stones, and Transformed Rock & Roll.* New York City: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

Gordy, Berry. *To Be Loved: The Music, The Magic, the Memories of Motown: An Autobiography*. New York City: Warner Books, 1994.

Graham, David A. “Who Owns ‘We Shall Overcome’?” *The Atlantic*. April 14, 2016.

"Grammy Hall of Fame." *Recording Academy Grammy Awards*. 1994.

Gray, Michael. "One of a Kind: Bob Dylan at 70." *Japan Times.* May 22, 2011.

Gray, Michael. *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*. New York City: Continuum International, 2006.

Guralnick, Peter. *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke.* New York City: Little, Brown and Company, 2005.

Haider, Arwa. "Motown: The music that changed America." *British Broadcasting Corporation.* January 9, 2019.

Hancock, Herbie. "What is Free Jazz?" *MasterClass.*

Hansen, Drew. *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation*. New York City: Harper Collins, 2003.

"Harlem in the Jazz Age." *New York Times*. February 8, 1987.

Hennessey, Thomas. "From Jazz to Swing: Black Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1917-1935." PhD diss. Northwestern University, 1981.

Hentoff, Nat. *At the Jazz Band Ball: Sixty Years on the Jazz Scene*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Hentoff, Nat. "How Jazz Helped Hasten the Civil Rights Movement." *The Wall Street Journal*. January 15, 2009.

Hersch, Charles. *Democratic Artworks: Politics and the Arts from Trilling to Dylan.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Heylin, Clinton. *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades: Take Two.* New York City: Viking, 2000.

Holiday, Billie. "Strange Fruit." Recorded 1939. Track 2 on *Jazz at the Philharmonic.* Commodore.

"Hope for America: Performers, Politics, and Pop Culture." *Library of Congress.*

"Jazz Origins in New Orleans – New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park." *National Park Service.*

"Jesus Gave Me Water." *SongsofSamCooke*. February 16, 2013.

Johnson, David. "Jump for Joy: Duke Ellington's Celebratory Musical." *Indiana Public Media*, February 5, 2008.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "President Johnson's Special Message to Congress: The American Promise." *LBJ Presidential Library.* March 15, 1965.

Jones, William P. *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights.* New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

Jost, Ekkehard. *Free Jazz (The Roots of Jazz).* Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1994.

Keepnews, Peter. "Max Roach, a Founder of Modern Jazz, Dies at 83." *The New York Times*. August 16, 2007.

King Jr., Martin Luther. "*1964 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech." Oslo, Norway. December 10, 1964*.

Kotz, Nick. *Judgement Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Kytle, Ethan J. and Roberts, Blain. "Birth of a Freedom Anthem." *The New York Times*. March 15, 2015.

"Langston Hughes Presents the History of Jazz in an Illustrated Children's Book (1995)." *Open Culture*. March 31, 2015.

Larkin, Phillip. *Jazz Writings.* New York City: Continuum, 2004.

Lawrence, A.H. *Duke Ellington and His World.* London: Routledge, 2003.

Leung, Rebecca. "Dylan Looks Back." *CBS News*. June 12, 2005.

Light, Alan. "Motown's Link to Civil Rights Movement on Display." *The New York Times.* March 19, 2014.

Litweiler, John. *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958.* Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1984.

Lock, Graham. *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

“Looking Back at Motown’s Civil Rights Recordings.” *WNYC Studios*. January 19, 2014.

Lomax, Alan and Guthrie, Nora. *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People*. United Kingdom: Bison Books, 1967.

Lynskey, Dorian. *33 Revolutions Per Minute.* London: Faber & Faber, 2011.

Margolick, David. *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights*. New York City: Running Press, 2000.

Margolick, David. *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song.* New York City: Harper Collins, 2001.

Margolick, David. “The Day Louis Armstrong Made Noise.” *The New York Times*. September 23, 2007.

“Martin Luther King at the Berlin Jazz Fest in 1964.” *Jazz in Europe*. January 21, 2019.

Mingus, Charles. “Original Faubus Fables.” Recorded 1960. Track 2 on *Presents Charles Mingus.* Candid Records.

Monson, Ingrid. *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Monson, Ingrid. “Revisited! The Freedom Now Suite.” *JazzTimes*. September 2001.

Moore, Edwin. “Strange Fruit is Still a Song for Today.” *The Guardian*. September 18, 2010.

Morthland, John. “Max Roach, We Insist! – Freedom Now Suite.” *eMusic*. August 29, 2006.

Murray, Hugh. “Change in the South.” *Journal of Ethic Studies*. Summer 1988.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma.* New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1944.

Nastos, Michael G. “We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite – Max Roach.” *AllMusic.*

“National Recording Registry 2002.” *Library of Congress.*

“Nina Simone’s ‘Lovely, Precious Dream’ For Black Children.” *National Public Radio*. January 8, 2019.

“No. 1 Bob Dylan.” *Rolling Stone*. April 10, 2020.

Nocera, Joe. "Louis Armstrong performs 'Black and Blue'." *New York Festival of Song.* August 4, 2020.

"NPR 100: Master List of Top 300 Songs." *National Public Radio*.

Pierpont, Claudia Roth. "A Raised Voice: How Nina Simone Turned the Movement into Music." *The New Yorker.* August 11, 2014.

Pierpont, Claudia. "Black, Brown, and Beige." *The New Yorker*. May 10, 2010.

Piras, Marcello. "Ellington, Duke [Edward Kennedy]." *Grove Music Online*. October 16, 2013.

Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Music in the Civil Rights Movement." *Public Broadcasting Service*. July 2006.

"Record Reviews." *Billboard*. March 30, 1946.

Reich, Howard. "Such Sweet Sorrow." *Chicago Tribune.* September 3, 1995.

Riccardi, Ricky. "'I'm Still Louis Armstrong – Colored': Louis Armstrong and the Civil Rights Era." *That's My Home: Louis Armstrong House Museum Virtual Exhibits*. May 11, 2020.

"Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter Dead at 76." *CBC News*. April 20, 2014.

Ryan, Patrick. "'One Night in Miami': The True Story Behind Sam Cooke's Stirring 'A Change is Gonna Come.'" *USA Today*. January 17, 2021.

"Sam Cooke And The Song That 'Almost Scared Him.'" *National Public Radio*. February 1, 2014.

"Sam Cooke Finds Single Click Leads to Big Payoff On One-Nighters, Video." *Variety.* February 5, 1958.

"Sammy Davis Jr. Says Satchmo No Spokesman." *The Pittsburgh Courier.* October 12, 1957.

Sanders, Charles L. "Louis Armstrong – Reluctant Millionaire." *Ebony*. November 1964.

"Satchmo: The Life of Louis Armstrong." *Public Broadcasting Service*. July 6, 2005.

Schmidt-Pirro, Julia and McCurdy, Karen M. “Employing Music in the Cause of Social Justice: Ruth Crawford Seeger and Zilphia Horton.” *Voices – The Journal of New York Folklore*. Spring-Summer 2005.

Schoonmaker, James. “Motown: Its True Impact on the Civil Rights Movement.” *Manchester Historian*. March 15, 2015.

Scorsese, Martin. *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan.* France: Paramount, 2006.

Seeger, Pete. “We Shall Overcome.” Recorded 1962. Track 1 on *The Bitter and the Sweet.* Columbia Records.

Seeger, Pete. *Where Have All the Flowers Gone – A Musical Autobiography.* Bethlehem PA: Sing Out, 1997).

Shelton, Robert. *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan, Revised and Updated Edition*. New York City: Omnibus Press, 2011.

“Show 17 – The Soul Reformation: More on the Elevation of Rhythm and Blues.” *Pop Chronicles*. University of North Texas Digital Library, June 22, 1969.

Simone, Nina. “Mississippi Goddam.” Recorded 1964. Track 7 on *Nina Simone in Concert.* Phillips Records.

Simone, Nina. “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.” Recorded 1970. Track 7 on *Black Gold.* RCA Records.

Sitkoff, Harvard. *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1978.

“Six Jazz Classics and the Fight for Civil Rights.” *Carnegie Hall.*

Smith, Suzanne E. *Dancing in the Street.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Sounes, Howard. *Down The Hallway: The Life of Bob Dylan*. New York City: Grove Press, 2001.

Taysom, Joe. “The heartfelt letter Louis Armstrong wrote to a fan: ‘Music is life itself’.” *Far Out Magazine*. August 4, 2020.

“The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” *Rolling Stone*. September 22, 2020.

"The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time." *Rolling Stone*. September 15, 2021.

"The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time." *Rolling Stone*. December 11, 2003.

Thomas, Patrick O. *Listen, Whitey!: The Sights and Sounds of Black Power, 1965-1975*. Oakland: Fantagraphics, 2012.

Thurman, David. "An Ally in Times of Crisis: Bob Dylan's Contribution to the Civil Rights Movement." *Medium*. June 14, 2020.

Tillet, Salamishah. "Nina Simone's Time Is Now, Again." *The New York Times.* June 19, 2015.

Townsend, Laura. "How Duke Ellington used his appearance to subvert racist stereotypes, and other ways he fought racism." *Public Broadcasting Service*. March 24, 2021.

Tucker, Mark. *The Duke Ellington Reader*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Unterberger, Richie. "Carolyn Hester Biography." *AllMusic*. October 8, 2003.

Vulliamy, Ed. "How Bob Dylan, Music's Great Enigma First Revealed His Talent to The World 50 Years Ago." *The Guardian.* March 17, 2012.

Warner, Jay and Jones, Quincy. *On This Day in Black Music History.* New York City: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006.

"We Shall Overcome: The Story Behind the Song." *The Kennedy Center.*

Weinstein, Allen. *The Story of America: Freedom and Crisis from Settlement to Superpower*. London: DK Publishing, Inc., 2002.

Whitburn, Joel. *Top Adult Contemporary: 1961-2001*. New York City: Record Research, 2002.

Whitburn, Joel. *Top R&B/Hip-Hop Singles: 1942-2004.* Menomonee Falls: Record Research, Incorporated, 2004.

White, Alissa. "'We Insist! Freedom Now': Max Roach's Transatlantic Civil Rights Imperative." *Jazz Education Journal.* 2007.

Williams, Richard. *Dylan: A Man Called Alias.* New York City: Henry Holt & Co, 1992.

Yurochko, Bob. *A Short History of Jazz.* New York City: Rowan & Littlefield, 1993.