Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan I--General

Jazz in America - Introduction

A. Description
    1. an introduction to the history of jazz and its contribution to and reflection of American culture in the 20th century
    2. a survey of the evolution of jazz styles from its inception to the present, contributions of important performers and composers, and musical techniques involved in the creation and performance of jazz
B. Requirements -- Students are required to:
    1. attend class lecture/discussions
    2. listen to jazz recordings
    3. read assigned material (student handouts and/or the website)
    4. keep an organized notebook of handouts and class notes
    5. take several quizzes (multiple choice, short answer, true-false, matching, and/or essay)
C. General Syllabus
    1. What is Jazz
    2. Elements of Jazz
        a. improvisation
        b. rhythm
        c. sounds and instruments associated with jazz
        d. harmony
        e. form
    3. Jazz's Roots, New Orleans, Ragtime, and Dixieland (1900-1930)
    4. Big Band Swing (1930s)
    5. Bebop (1940s)
    6. Cool and Hard Bop (1950s)
    7. Avant Garde/Free Jazz; Fusion (1960-1990)
    8. Jazz Today; Jazz Tomorrow (1990-2000+)

Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan I--American History Essay 1

Jazz Musicians as Cultural Intermediaries

Jazz was born out of the cultural experience of African Americans and can be traced in a direct line to the slave songs of the plantations through the Negro Spirituals, Ragtime, and the Blues. Music was an essential aspect of African American life. Many of the great spirituals expressed faith, perseverance, and a passion for freedom. "In the riotous rhythms of Ragtime" according to James Weldon Johnson, a prominent African American poet and musician, "the Negro expressed his irrepressible buoyancy, his keen response to the sheer joy of living." Blues were a reflection of the trials and tribulations of life. The cultural experiences of African Americans weave in and out of the lyrics and reflect emotions ranging from lamentation to exuberance.

In 1921 Johnson published an anthology of African American poetry and spirituals, entitled The Book of American Negro Poetry. In his preface Johnson wrote that artists accomplish their best when working with something they know best and, according to Johnson, "race" is what African Americans know best. In his poem, "O Black and Unknown Bards," (http://www.bartleby.com/269/39.html) Johnson recognizes the power of song and

celebrates the memory of "slave singers, gone, forgot, unfamed." The poem reflects Johnson's view that music formed the core of African American culture.

Jazz was born in the lower Mississippi Delta and was nourished in New Orleans. In the first decades of the twentieth century its emotional rhythms moved north with the Great Migration, a mass movement of Blacks from the South to urban areas seeking better opportunities and attempting to escape from rigid Jim Crow laws that held them in a state of virtual slavery. This distinctly American music, with an emphasis on improvisation, captured the spirit of the nation. The radio and phonograph had a major impact on Jazz's popularity as improvisation and the spontaneity that typified the music was better conveyed through sound than sheet music.

During World War I, African American soldiers introduced jazz to Europe. Band director Lt. James Reese Europe (www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/europe.html) and his "Harlem Hellfighters" of the 15th Regiment Machine Gun Battalion, gave a concert in Paris as part of the Allied celebration surrounding the Versailles Peace Conference. Popular enthusiasm for jazz prompted the French government to request that Europe's band give a series of performances in Paris. A French band director, unable to coax the same sound from his military band, invited Lt. Europe to a rehearsal. Europe explained that jazz was more than musical chords; it was a release of emotions. In an interview published in the Literary Digest on his return to the United States, Europe remarked: "I have come back from France more firmly convinced than ever that Negroes should write Negro music. We have our own racial feeling and if we try to copy whites we will makes bad copies. . . . The music of our race springs from the soil. . . ." (Literary Digest, April 26, 1919, Vol. 61, No. 4, pp. 27-28)

By 1920, jazz had traveled from the rural Mississippi Delta to New Orleans and through the Great Migration to northern urban centers and across the Atlantic to the capitals of Europe. The music had captured the imagination of white society and thousands of patrons flocked to dance halls and cabarets to revel in the music of African American musicians and singers. Music from the jazz clubs confronted the prejudice of the era. In the midst of the racial turmoil of the 1920s Survey magazine remarked that "...jazz with its mocking disregard for formality is a leveler and makes for democracy." (Survey, March 1, 1925, p. 665)

Although jazz musicians helped to erode racial prejudice, they were sometimes unable to break down long established barriers. At the same time Black musicians were opening doors, Harlem's Cotton Club, the most popular New York jazz club of the 1920s and 1930s, featured Black entertainers but seated only white patrons. In Chicago, Black musicians were prohibited from playing at downtown clubs but became well established in enclaves outside the center city.

In time color lines began to blur and interracial jazz bands formed. Black and white jazz musicians formed bonds based on their music and "gradually saw themselves as workers in similar creative enterprises. . . . Occasionally these bonds were strong enough to overcome deep mistrusts." (Burton Peretti, The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America, p.199)

In the 1920s some African American musicians looked upon jazz as a means of smashing Jim Crow barriers. Mixed audiences in northern urban areas began to put aside their prejudices. According to pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines, "it was musicians and theatrical people who first began to change the strictly segregated way of life." A half-century later, Hines organized band tours through the South to challenge Jim Crow laws.

While millions celebrated America's popular culture, jazz was not free of critics. In 1922 The

Ladies Home Journal ran a series of articles charging, "Jazz disorganizes all regular laws and order; it stimulates to extreme deeds, to a breaking away from all rules and conventions; it is harmful and dangerous, and its influence is wholly bad." (Anne Shaw Faulkner, "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation," The Ladies Home Journal, Vol. 38, No. 8, August 1921, p. 34) Jazz was considered to be nothing more than vulgar, cheap music. A refrain echoed by established African American families in the North admonished black migrants urging them to "blend in." But, jazz survived the barrage of detractors and became widely accepted. So dominant was its impact on American society that the 1920s came to be called the "Jazz Age."

Questions to consider:

1. How does James Weldon Johnson's poem "O Black and Unknown Bards" reflect the influence of music on Black culture?
2. How important was the Great Migration in spreading jazz throughout the nation?
3. According to James Reese Europe, how was the Black experience interwoven with jazz?
4. What accounts for the popularity of jazz in American popular culture?
5. How did jazz musicians begin the process of breaking down racial barriers? How effective were they?
6. Why do you think that jazz in the 1920s was characterized in some quarters as harmful to American values?

Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan I--American History Essay 2

The Disparity between American Ideals and Realities

The ringing words of the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all man are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," set forth the ideals of the American Revolution. The Declaration was more than a statement of independence; it formulated a basis of a free government based on equal opportunities for all. The Revolution was not justified so that one segment of the population could impose its will on another. The American ideal of equal opportunity and equal justice before the law were confronted by the realities of slavery. Benjamin Banneker, a free black from Maryland, wrote a letter in August 1791 to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson expressing the disparity between the American ideal and the political and social reality of slavery (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h71t.html). In his letter, Banneker, a talented mathematician and surveyor, recalled Jefferson's stirring words of the Declaration of Independence:

... Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of Mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of these rights and privileges, which he hath conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.

Although the Constitution, ratified in 1787,

(www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html) did not mention the word "slavery," it was far from silent on the subject:

- The "three-fifths compromise (Article I, Section 2): "Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years [indentured servants], and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. . . ."
- The slave trade: "The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight . . ." (Article I, Section 9); and Article V on the amendment process providing that "no amendment which may be made prior to the Year One thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any Manner affect the first and fourth Clauses in the Ninth Section of the first Article"
- Article IV, Section 2 commonly called the "fugitive slave" clause required all states to recognize the laws of states that bound persons in service and the return of such laborers who "escaped into another [state]."

In addition to these specific references, the federalist system, incorporated in the Constitution, recognized the rights of states to pass laws that were not in conflict with the Constitution thus legitimating the institution of slavery through state statutes.

During the debates at the Federal Convention in Philadelphia, some delegates from both North and South recognized the inconsistency of perpetuating slavery while establishing a government based on principles of the Enlightenment. Luther Martin, a delegate to the Federal Convention representing the slave state of Maryland, urged the Maryland ratification convention in January 1788 to reject the Constitution arguing, "...slavery is inconsistent with the genius of republicanism, and has a tendency to destroy those principles on which it is supported, as it lessens the sense of the equal rights of mankind, and habituates us to tyranny and oppression." (Nash, Race and Revolution, pp. 142-3)

On July 5, 1852, Abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke in Rochester, New York, on the commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Douglass told his audience that the "...Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." This moving speech (www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927.html) clearly expresses the sentiments of African-Americans who were left out of the "American Dream."

President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_Proclamation) and the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution (Reconstruction Amendments) appeared to return government to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence. However, by the end of Reconstruction the intent of these amendments and the civil rights legislation passed in pursuit thereof were eroded by legal restrictions placed on African Americans in the form of Jim Crow laws. While the former Confederate and border states passed laws enforcing a rigid segregation policy (de jure segregation), the North and West practiced a different form of segregation (de facto segregation) based on social mores. From the post-Civil War period through the mid-twentieth century voices of protest decried segregation of the races and made some inroads in rescuing the American dream of equality.

The twentieth-century poet Langston Hughes, in his poem "Let America Be America Again"

(http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15609), expressed his sentiments about the gap between the ideals of the American dream and the experience of the people of color, immigrants, poor farmers, and urban laborers. Hughes has been described as the "Jazz Poet" who openly expressed his commitment to a transformation of American society. (Amiri Baraka in the Forward to Hughes' The Big Sea: An Autobiography, New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 1986)

Nearly a century after the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution, the civil rights movement (referred to in history as the "Second Reconstruction") battered away at de jure segregation patterns in the South and de facto segregation in the remainder of the nation. African Americans, working to achieve full citizenship, set the agenda for women and other minorities striving to make the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence a reality for all Americans.

There is no question that the disparity between American ideals and realities has affected, and is reflected in, the evolution of jazz; in what ways and to what extent is open for discussion.

Questions to consider:

1. What inferences can you draw from does Banneker's letter to Thomas Jefferson regarding the aspirations of African Americans in the latter part of the eighteenth century?
2. How does the poem "Let America Be America Again" reflect the disparity between the ideals and reality of the American dream?
3. Examine the lyrics of Spirituals, ragtime, and the blues that relate to the conflicts expressed in "Let America Be America Again." How do these lyrics reflect the life experiences of African Americans?
4. Research how the compositions of jazz musicians are linked to the struggle for legal and social equality in twentieth-century America.

Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan I--Jazz Biography 1

THELONIOUS MONK, piano (1917-1982)
Biography: http://www.monkinstitute.org/monk.php?Page=TS-BIO

Thelonious Monk, the "High Priest of Bebop," was born in North Carolina in 1917. In 1922 the Monk family moved to New York in the closing years of the Great Migration. The young Monk was a musical prodigy and as a teenager won renown as a pianist. In a 1964 feature story, Time magazine described Monk as a man who "...never lies. He never shouts. He has no greed. He has no envy." The article further credits Monk as an inspiration to other jazz musicians. "...Rhythm scrambled forward at his touch; the oblique boldness of his harmonies forced the horn players into flights the likes of which had never been heard before." (Time, Vol. 83, No. 9, February 28, 1964, p. 86)

Consider the following questions as you read the biography of Thelonious Monk:

1. What can you infer from the Apollo Theater decision to bar Thelonious Monk from competition?
2. How did Monk's association with leading jazz musicians in Harlem influence his musical career?

3. What are the basic characteristics of Monk's musical style?
4. What accounts for his popularity?
5. How do contemporaries view Monk's bebop style of jazz?

Jazz in America Student Handout--Lesson Plan I--Jazz Biography 2

DUKE ELLINGTON, piano (1899-1974)
Biography: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_Ellington

Pianist Edward K. "Duke" Ellington was acclaimed during his lifetime as a great jazz composer, band leader, and performer. He was the first jazz musician to be inducted in the Royal Music Academy of Stockholm and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1943 Ellington's opera on African Americans, *Black, Brown and Beige*, premiered in New York and in 1963 he composed *My People* for the Century of Negro Progress Exposition in Chicago. He traveled extensively through Europe, Asia, and Latin America in the 1960s and to the Soviet Union in 1971. During his travels abroad Duke Ellington was recognized as a goodwill ambassador spreading American popular culture.

Consider the following questions as you read the biography of Duke Ellington:

1. Why was Duke Ellington considered one of the world's greatest jazz composers?
2. How did critics view his performances in the 1930s? What effect did the tour have on Ellington and his band?
3. How was Ellington's debut at Carnegie Hall different from those of other jazz musicians who appeared decades prior to his performance on stage at this venerable musical institution?
4. Why was Duke Ellington considered an ambassador of American popular culture?