

# Rhythms of Resistance: Jazz and the Pursuit of Freedom



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# Rhythms of Resistance: Jazz and the Pursuit of Social Justice

- 1 ..... Scope**
- 2 ..... Standards**
- 3 ..... Tips for Teaching Hard History**
- 4 ..... Module 1: The American Civil Rights Movement**
- 11 ..... Module 2: The Evolution of Blues and Jazz**
- 16 ..... Module 3: Freedom Songs: Music as an Act of Resistance**
- 21 ..... Module 4: Civil Rights and Jazz in Palm Beach County**
- 25 ..... Class Project: Rhythms of Resistance: Jazz and Civil Rights**



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# Scope

## Content Overview

"Rhythms of Resistance: Jazz and the Pursuit of Social Justice" is a curriculum that examines the intersection of jazz music and social justice movements throughout history. Through the study of iconic jazz musicians and their works, students will explore how jazz functioned as both a form of resistance and a catalyst for social change. The curriculum highlights how Black music, particularly jazz, provided a powerful platform for protesting racial injustice, challenging systemic oppression, and strengthening community solidarity.

### **Topic:**

Rhythms of Resistance:  
Jazz and the Pursuit of Social Justice

Suggested Time:  
2 Weeks

### Essential Questions:

- How has jazz music historically served as a tool for social resistance and activism in the fight for racial justice and equality?
- In what ways can jazz continue to inspire contemporary movements for social change, and how can we draw connections between past struggles and current social justice issues?

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will analyze key events in African American history, focusing on their contributions to the fight against racism, inequality, and injustice.
- Students will evaluate the impact of African American involvement in civic activities from the American Revolution to Reconstruction.

# Standards

SS.912.A.1.1 Describe the importance of historiography, which includes how historical knowledge is obtained and transmitted, when interpreting events in history.

SS.912.A.1.2 Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.

SS.912.A.1.4 Analyze how images, symbols, objects, cartoons, graphs, charts, maps, and artwork may be used to interpret the significance of time periods and events from the past.

SS.912.A.1.7 Describe various socio-cultural aspects of American life including arts, artifacts, literature, education, and publications.

SS.912.A.5.10: Analyze support for and resistance to civil rights for women, African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities.

SS.912.A.7.5: Compare nonviolent and violent approaches utilized by groups (African Americans, women, Native Americans, Hispanics) to achieve civil rights.

SS.912.A.7.6: Assess key figures and organizations in shaping the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement.

SS.912.A.2.5 Assess how Jim Crow Laws influenced life for African Americans and other racial/ethnic minority group

SS.912.P.10.1 Define culture and diversity.

SS.912.P.10.3: Discuss the relationship between culture and conceptions of self and identity.

SS.912.S.2.1 Define the key components of a culture, such as knowledge, language and communication, customs, values, norms, and physical objects.

ELA.K12.EE.1.1 Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

ELA.K12.EE.2.1 Read and comprehend grade-level complex texts proficiently.

ELA.K12.EE.3.1 Make inferences to support comprehension.

ELA.K12.EE.4.1 Use appropriate collaborative techniques and active listening skills when engaging in discussions in a variety of situations

ELD.K12.ELL.SI.1 English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.

ELD.K12.ELL.SS.1 English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies.

MU.912.H.1.1 Investigate and discuss how a culture's traditions are reflected through its music.

MU.912.H.2.3 Analyze the evolution of a music genre.

## Tips for Teaching Hard History



Facilitating discussions about racism in the classroom can be challenging yet crucial for fostering understanding and empathy among students. Here are some tips for educators:

**Establish a Safe and Respectful Environment:** Create ground rules that emphasize respect, active listening, and open-mindedness. Ensure that students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or reprisal.

**Provide Context and Historical Background:** Before diving into discussions about racism and antisemitism, provide historical context and background information to help students understand the roots and complexities of these issues. Primary source documents and documentaries suggested.

**Encourage Critical Thinking:** Encourage students to critically analyze information, question assumptions, and consider multiple perspectives. Help them develop the skills to evaluate evidence, recognize bias, and engage in reasoned discourse.

**Address Emotions and Reactions:** Recognize that discussions about racism and antisemitism can evoke strong emotions and reactions from students. Create space for students to process their feelings and provide support as needed. Encourage constructive dialogue while also acknowledging the emotional impact of these topics

# Module 1

## The American Civil Rights Movement



March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963

The Civil Rights Movement, which took place primarily during the 1950s and 1960s, was a nationwide struggle for racial equality and justice, led by African Americans and supported by allies from all walks of life. It aimed to end segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement that African Americans faced in schools, public spaces, and voting rights. Through nonviolent protests, legal challenges, and acts of civil disobedience, activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and organizations such as the NAACP played crucial roles in challenging the systemic racism of the time. Key events, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, and the Selma to Montgomery marches, brought attention to the plight of African Americans and led to landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The movement not only changed laws but also helped shift societal attitudes, making it one of the most significant periods in American history.

## Module 1: The American Civil Rights Movement



Sojourner Truth

### African American Resistance

African Americans have a long history of resisting injustice in the United States, fighting against slavery, segregation, and racial oppression. Enslaved Africans resisted through uprisings like **Nat Turner's Rebellion** (1831) and **the Stono Rebellion** (1739). Free African Americans such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, played pivotal roles in the abolitionist movement, advocating for the end of slavery and equal rights.



Marcus Garvey

After **the Civil War, the 13th Amendment** (1865) abolished slavery, granting African Americans new **political and economic opportunities during Reconstruction**. Black men gained the right to vote and held office, but this progress was short-lived. By 1877, the end of Reconstruction led to the implementation of **Black Codes** and **Jim Crow laws** in the South, which restricted the rights of African Americans and enforced segregation.



A. Phillip Randolph

In response to racial violence and inequality, figures like **Ida B. Wells-Barnett** led anti-lynching campaigns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. **The Great Migration** (1910-1970) saw over six million African Americans move North and West, seeking better opportunities and escaping Jim Crow. Organizations like the **NAACP** and **Marcus Garvey's UNIA** fought segregation and promoted racial equality, while leaders like **A. Philip Randolph** pushed for workplace equality and **Mary McLeod Bethune** advanced education and voting rights for African Americans.

These efforts laid the groundwork for future civil rights movements, inspiring ongoing struggles for racial justice. From legal challenges to grassroots activism, African Americans have continued to lead the charge against racial oppression, advocating for equality and justice in every facet of American life.

## Module 1: The American Civil Rights Movement



*Rosa Parks being fingerprinted on February 22, 1956, by Deputy Sheriff D.H. Lackey, following her indictment as one of the leaders of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.*

### The American Civil Rights Movement

The period between 1954 and 1968 marked a pivotal time in the fight for civil rights in the United States, as major legal, social, and political changes began to take shape. In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case **Brown v. Board of Education** declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. This decision set off a wave of momentum for desegregation and became a catalyst for the broader Civil Rights Movement, inspiring activism across the country.

In Montgomery, Alabama, the struggle for equality continued with the **Montgomery Bus Boycott** from 1955 to 1956. After **Rosa Parks** was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger, the African American community, led by figures like Parks and **Martin Luther King Jr.**, boycotted the city's buses for over a year. This peaceful protest resulted in a Supreme Court decision that deemed bus segregation unconstitutional, highlighting the power of collective action in challenging racial discrimination.

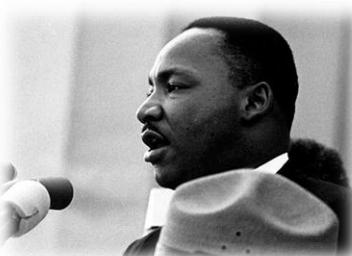
The 1960s saw the rise of direct action protests such as sit-ins and **Freedom Rides**, organized by groups like the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. Activists staged sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and boarded interstate buses to challenge segregation laws in the South, often facing violence and arrests. These efforts put significant pressure on the federal government to enforce civil rights laws and brought national attention to the injustices faced by African Americans in the South.

By the late 1960s, the **Black Power Movement**, led by figures like **Malcolm X** and the **Black Panther Party**, advocated for racial pride, self-determination, and economic empowerment. This shift challenged the limits of nonviolent protest and pushed for more direct approaches to racial justice.

# Timeline of The American Civil Rights Movement



*Nettie Hunt and her daughter Nickie sit on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court, where Nettie explains to Nickie the significance of the Court's ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education case.*



*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington.*



*President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 while Martin Luther King Jr. and others observe.*

**1954**

**Brown v. Board of Education:** The Supreme Court declares racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, overturning Plessy v. Ferguson and sparking the desegregation movement.

**1955**

**Emmett Till's Murder:** 14-year-old Emmett Till is killed in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a white woman. His open-casket funeral and the subsequent trial bring national attention to racial violence and injustice in the South.

**1955**

**Montgomery Bus Boycott:** In response to Rosa Parks' arrest, African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, boycott the city's segregated bus system for over a year. The boycott ends with the Supreme Court ruling bus segregation unconstitutional.

**1960**

**Sit-ins:** Four African American college students stage a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, sparking similar protests nationwide.

**1961**

**Freedom Rides:** Civil rights activists, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), ride interstate buses to challenge segregated bus terminals in the South.

**1963**

**March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom:** Over 250,000 people gather in Washington, D.C., to demand jobs and civil rights. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech.

**1964**

**Civil Rights Act of 1964:** President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the landmark legislation, which bans discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment and public accommodations.

**1965**

**Voting Rights Act of 1965:** This law eliminates discriminatory voting practices, such as literacy tests and poll taxes, that disenfranchised African Americans, especially in the South.

## Comprehension Check

**Directions:** Please read the questions below and provide responses

Discuss the significance of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. How did this landmark ruling serve as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement?

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In what ways did the efforts of African American leaders like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, A. Philip Randolph, and Mary McLeod Bethune contribute to the long-term fight for racial equality and justice in America?

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# Key People, Places, and Events

**13th Amendment:** The amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1865, that abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime.

**A. Philip Randolph:** A labor leader and civil rights activist who fought for African American rights, particularly in the workplace, and helped organize the March on Washington in 1963.

**Black Codes:** Laws passed in the southern United States after the Civil War that restricted the freedom of African Americans and tried to keep them working in low-paying jobs, often similar to slavery.

**Black Panther Party:** A revolutionary socialist organization founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale that advocated for self-defense, racial pride, and armed resistance to systemic oppression.

**Black Power Movement:** A political and social movement in the 1960s and 1970s that emphasized racial pride, self-determination, and empowerment for African Americans, often associated with Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party.

**Brown v. Board of Education:** A landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case that declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, marking a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement.

**Civil War:** A conflict from 1861 to 1865 between the Northern states (Union) and Southern states (Confederacy) primarily over slavery, which led to the end of slavery in the U.S. and the preservation of the Union.

**Frederick Douglass:** A former enslaved African American who became a prominent abolitionist, writer, and speaker advocating for the end of slavery and civil rights for African Americans.

**Freedom Rides:** A series of civil rights protests in the 1960s where integrated groups rode buses in the South to challenge segregation in interstate bus travel.

**Harriet Tubman:** An escaped enslaved person who became a leader of the Underground Railroad, helping hundreds of enslaved individuals escape to freedom in the North.

**Ida B. Wells-Barnett:** A journalist and activist who led anti-lynching campaigns and fought for African American civil rights and women's suffrage.

**Jim Crow:** A system of state and local laws enforcing racial segregation in the Southern United States, established after Reconstruction and lasting until the Civil Rights Movement.

# Key People, Places, and Events

**Marcus Garvey:** A Jamaican-born political leader who advocated for Black nationalism and the return to Africa movement, emphasizing pride in African heritage and economic independence.

**Mary McLeod Bethune:** An educator and civil rights leader who founded the National Council of Negro Women and played a key role in promoting African American education and voting rights.

**Malcolm X:** A prominent African American leader and advocate for Black empowerment, self-defense, and the Nation of Islam, known for his outspoken stance on race relations and his shift toward more inclusive ideas before his assassination in 1965.

**Martin Luther King Jr.:** A leader in the Civil Rights Movement who advocated for nonviolent protest and civil disobedience to end segregation and racial injustice, best known for his "I Have a Dream" speech.

**Montgomery Bus Boycott:** A 1955-1956 protest against bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, sparked by Rosa Parks' arrest, which led to a Supreme Court ruling declaring bus segregation unconstitutional.

**Nat Turner's Rebellion:** A 1831 slave rebellion in Virginia led by Nat Turner, where enslaved African Americans rose up, killing around 60 white people, resulting in harsh reprisals.

**Reconstruction:** The period after the Civil War (1865-1877) focused on rebuilding the South, granting rights to freed slaves, and attempting to integrate them into American society, but ended with the rise of Jim Crow laws.

**Sojourner Truth:** An abolitionist and women's rights activist, known for her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, advocating for the rights of African American women.

**Stono Rebellion:** A 1739 slave revolt in South Carolina, where a group of enslaved Africans attempted to escape to Spanish Florida, but were stopped, resulting in harsher slave laws.

**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC):** A civil rights organization formed in 1960 that played a key role in sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and other nonviolent protests against segregation.

**The Great Migration:** A mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to urban areas in the North and West between 1910 and 1970, seeking better job opportunities and escaping racial discrimination.

**The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People):** a civil rights organization founded in 1909 to fight racial discrimination, protect voting rights, and promote equality for African Americans through legal action, advocacy, and public education.

## Module 2

# The Evolution of Blues and Jazz



African Americans have shaped the landscape of American music for centuries, beginning with spirituals and work songs rooted in African rhythms and oral traditions during slavery. These early forms evolved into blues, jazz, gospel, Country, R&B, soul, rock, funk, and hip-hop—genres that not only reflect the struggles and triumphs of Black life but also revolutionized global music culture.

## Module 2: The Evolution of Early Black Music



*Enslaved Black American family working in a Georgia field, around 1850*

### The Birth of Spirituals

Millions of Africans were forcibly taken from their homeland and brought across the Atlantic to be enslaved in the Americas. Despite this brutal uprooting, they managed to preserve many parts of their culture, especially music and dance. These cultural traditions became a vital source of strength and hope amid the harsh conditions of slavery.

Life for enslaved people was extremely difficult, with both physical hardship and emotional pain. To protect their spirits, they created work songs and spirituals that were sung without instruments (a cappella). These songs combined African musical traditions with the experiences of slavery and Christian beliefs. One famous spiritual, "Wade in the Water," is believed to have held secret messages for enslaved people trying to escape, advising them to travel through water to avoid being tracked by dogs.

Because enslaved Africans were often forbidden from reading, writing, or using drums—especially after 1739, when drums were outlawed due to their role in rebellions—music became an essential part of worship and communication. In their worship gatherings, enslaved people used hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and call-and-response singing, combining African traditions with Christian spirituals. These gatherings were closely monitored by slaveholders, who often required a white person to be present and banned musical instruments.

#### Did You Know?

In response to the Stono Slave Rebellion of 1739, colonial authorities passed strict laws banning the use of drums and forbidding enslaved Africans from learning to read and write, aiming to prevent further uprisings and limit communication among enslaved people.



## Module 2: The Evolution of Early Black Music



"The Father of Jazz," Buddy Bolden

### Gospel

After the end of slavery, the Black Church emerged as the central institution in African American communities. It was one of the few places where Black people could gather freely, exercise leadership, and influence social and cultural life. The church was not only a spiritual refuge but also a hub for education, political organizing, and community support. Within this setting, church musicians began to draw from traditional spirituals and African rhythms to create new forms of secular music that reflected their experiences and hopes beyond the walls of worship.

### Blues and Jazz

In the 1860s, **the Blues** emerged in the rural South, often called the “Mother of All Modern Music.” It combined African and African American musical traditions with themes of hardship, endurance, and resilience. The music expressed the pain of oppression alongside the strength to overcome it. Pioneers like **W.C. Handy**, known as the Father of the Blues, and singers such as **Mamie Smith**, **Ma Rainey**, and **Bessie Smith** helped popularize the genre. Over time, Blues evolved into regional styles like Chicago and Memphis Blues, influencing many other music forms.

Around the same time, **Jazz** developed in New Orleans in the late 19th century. The term “Jazz” likely comes from the slang “jasm,” meaning energy or spirit. Jazz blended Blues, Ragtime, African, Latino, and European music into an energetic, improvisational style. **Buddy Bolden**, considered the father of Jazz, led early bands known for spontaneous performances. In the 1920s, artists like **Louis Armstrong**, **Duke Ellington**, and **Cab Calloway** brought Jazz to national and international fame. Armstrong’s 1927 recording of "Potato Head Blues" remains a landmark in Jazz history.

Both Blues and Jazz grew from African American cultural expressions shaped by struggle, faith, and community. These genres transformed American music and offered powerful outlets for creativity, resilience, and identity. Their enduring influence continues to shape music and culture worldwide.

## Comprehension Check

**Directions:** Write a short response to the question below.

How did the Blues and Jazz genres reflect the experiences and resilience of African American communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? Use specific examples from the text to explain how these musical styles developed and influenced American culture.

# Key People, Places, and Events

**Bessie Smith:** Known as the “Empress of the Blues,” she was a pioneering African American blues singer in the early 20th century, famous for her powerful voice and emotional delivery.

**Blues:** A music genre that originated in the rural South among African Americans in the late 19th century, characterized by expressive melodies and themes of hardship, endurance, and resilience.

**Buddy Bolden:** Often called the "Father of Jazz," he was an early New Orleans bandleader known for spontaneous, improvisational performances that helped shape Jazz.

**Cab Calloway:** A prominent Jazz singer and bandleader during the Harlem Renaissance, known for his energetic performances and scat singing.

**Duke Ellington:** A legendary Jazz composer, pianist, and bandleader whose innovative work helped popularize Jazz worldwide during the 20th century.

**Gospel:** A genre of Christian music rooted in African American religious traditions, featuring expressive vocals and themes of faith and hope.

**Jazz:** A dynamic, improvisational music genre that developed in New Orleans in the late 19th century, blending Blues, Ragtime, African, Latino, and European musical elements.

**Louis Armstrong:** Influential Jazz trumpeter and vocalist, credited with popularizing Jazz globally; known for his virtuosity and charismatic performances.

**Mamie Smith:** One of the first African American singers to record blues music commercially, helping to bring the genre to wider audiences in the early 20th century.

**Ma Rainey:** Known as the “Mother of the Blues,” she was an early influential African American blues singer and songwriter.

**Spirituals:** Religious folk songs created by enslaved African Americans, combining Christian themes with African musical traditions, often expressing hope and resistance.

**W.C. Handy:** Known as the “Father of the Blues,” he was a composer and musician who helped popularize Blues music through published compositions and performances.

## Module 3

### Freedom Songs: Music as an Act of Resistance



John Coltrane, C 1967

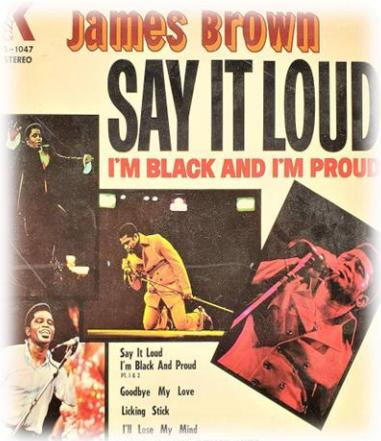


**Clockwise from top left:** Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair—victims of the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama.

Inspired by the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four Black girls, John Coltrane's "Alabama" channels collective mourning into a solemn, improvised elegy, turning tragedy into a powerful act of musical resistance.

**During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans used music as a powerful tool of protest, unity, and hope. Freedom songs like "We Shall Overcome" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" echoed through marches, sit-ins, and mass meetings, drawing from gospel, spirituals, and folk traditions. These songs uplifted spirits, communicated messages of resistance, and reinforced collective identity, turning music into a vital force in the fight for justice and equality.**

## Module 3: Freedom Songs: Music as an Act of Resistance



Album cover of *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud* (1969), representing a powerful declaration of pride and cultural identity.

### Songs of Hope

Music was an important part of the Civil Rights Movement, helping people stay hopeful and work together. Songs like "We Shall Overcome," based on African American spirituals and gospel music, became anthems of the movement. Protesters sang them during marches, sit-ins, and rallies, using the music to lift their spirits and stay strong even when facing danger or unfair treatment. These songs brought people together, gave them courage, and helped spread the message of the movement, showing the world the determination of those fighting for equality and justice.

During the Civil Rights Movement, artists used music to inspire change and highlight social justice issues. Folk musicians like **Bob Dylan**, **Pete Seeger**, and **Joan Baez** performed songs addressing inequality and human rights. Hits like Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" became anthems that motivated action and hope, often sung at rallies and protests to unite people in the fight for equality.

At the same time, soul music played a major role in empowering the Black community. Rooted in gospel, R&B, and jazz, soul music expressed the struggles, hopes, and pride of African Americans during a time of widespread discrimination. Artists like **Aretha Franklin**, **James Brown**, and **Curtis Mayfield** used their music to highlight the challenges facing the black community while also celebrating their strength and resilience. Songs like these provided comfort, motivation, and a sense of solidarity, helping to inspire a generation to keep fighting for civil rights and social justice.

### Did You Know?

**Billie Holiday**'s 1939 jazz performance of "Strange Fruit," written by Jewish songwriter **Abel Meeropol**, exposed the horrors of lynching in the American South, becoming a haunting anthem that challenged racial violence.



## Module 3: Freedom Songs: Music as an Act of Resistance

### More than Entertainers

Many musicians during the Civil Rights era were more than entertainers—they were active participants in the struggle for racial justice. They used their voices, talent, and public influence to speak out against inequality and inspire change. **Nina Simone**, for example, wrote and performed “Mississippi Goddam” as a direct response to racial violence and systemic oppression, challenging audiences to confront the harsh realities Black Americans faced. Similarly, artists like **Harry Belafonte** and **Mahalia Jackson** leveraged their fame and platforms to support civil rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., participating in marches, benefit concerts, and public campaigns to advance the movement. Music became a unifying force, giving people hope, strength, and a shared language of resistance.

Tragedy often fueled the creation of music that expressed collective pain and galvanized communities. The 1963 bombing of **the 16th Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham, Alabama, which claimed the lives of four young Black girls, shocked the nation and intensified the fight for civil rights. In response, jazz legend **John Coltrane** composed “Alabama,” a deeply moving piece that transformed grief into a solemn, improvised elegy. The song conveyed the sorrow and outrage felt by countless individuals while simultaneously serving as a call to perseverance and action, showing how music could both memorialize loss and motivate social change.

Through these works, music became a form of activism and a vital part of the Civil Rights Movement. It provided a platform for artists to speak truth to power, educate audiences, and foster solidarity across communities. From protest songs to elegiac compositions, musicians helped to amplify the voices of those fighting for justice, ensuring that the struggles and triumphs of the era were not only heard but felt deeply. Their contributions demonstrated that art and activism could intersect to create lasting cultural and social impact, leaving a legacy of empowerment for future generations.



Nina Simone, 1965.



John Coltrane, 1963

## Comprehension Check

**Directions:** Please read the questions below and provide responses

In what ways did artists use their music and public influence to actively participate in the Civil Rights Movement?

Why can music be considered a form of activism, and how did it help shape public awareness and social change during the Civil Rights era?

# Key People, Places, and Events

**16th Street Baptist Church:** A church in Birmingham, Alabama, that was bombed in 1963, killing four young Black girls; the tragedy became a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights Movement.

**Abel Meeropol:** A Jewish songwriter who wrote “Strange Fruit,” a protest song about the horrors of lynching in the American South.

**Aretha Franklin:** Known as the “Queen of Soul,” she used her music to express empowerment, pride, and the struggles of the Black community, becoming an important figure during the Civil Rights era.

**Billie Holiday:** A jazz and blues singer whose 1939 performance of “Strange Fruit” powerfully protested racial violence and lynching in the United States.

**Bob Dylan:** A folk musician and songwriter who created songs addressing social justice issues, civil rights, and political change in the 1960s.

**Curtis Mayfield:** A soul musician whose songs often highlighted the struggles and aspirations of the Black community, contributing to the soundtrack of the Civil Rights era.

**Harry Belafonte:** A singer and activist who supported the Civil Rights Movement, using his fame and resources to aid leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**James Brown:** A soul and funk musician whose energetic music celebrated Black pride and became closely associated with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

**Joan Baez:** A folk singer and activist who used her music to protest injustice and support civil rights, often performing alongside other influential artists like Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger.

**John Coltrane:** A jazz saxophonist and composer whose 1963 composition “Alabama” responded to the Birmingham church bombing, turning grief into a powerful musical statement of resistance.

**Mahalia Jackson:** A gospel singer and civil rights activist who lent her voice to support the movement and inspire audiences, often performing at rallies and events.

**Nina Simone:** A singer and pianist whose music directly addressed racial violence and social injustice, including the powerful protest song “Mississippi Goddam.”

**Pete Seeger:** A folk musician and activist who wrote and performed songs advocating for social justice, civil rights, and equality.

**Sam Cooke:** A soul singer whose music combined themes of love and social consciousness, with songs like “A Change Is Gonna Come” becoming anthems for the Civil Rights Movement.

## Module 4

# Civil Rights and Jazz in Palm Beach County



**African Americans have played a pivotal role in shaping Florida's history, particularly in Palm Beach County, from the post-slavery era through the Civil Rights Movement. Like in other parts of the country, music served not only as a form of protest but also as a vital source of joy and cultural expression.**

## Module 4: Civil Rights and Jazz in Palm Beach County

### Did You Know?



Places like **the Sunet Lounge** in West Palm Beach was once hub of vibrant night life. One notable landmark of this legacy is the Sunset, famously known as "The Cotton Club of the South," which during its prime was recognized as the largest fireproof dance hall in the South owned and operated by African Americans. During the Big Band era, legendary jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Cab Calloway.



*William "Bill" Holland Sr.: Civil Rights Leader Who Championed School Integration in Palm Beach County*

### Racial Turmoil in Paradise

Palm Beach County, Florida, is widely known for its beaches and warm weather, but it also has a long history of racism and discrimination. Throughout the early 20th century, African Americans established thriving communities across the region, including **Pearl City**, and **the Styxx. The Osborne Colored Addition**, a neighborhood specifically designated for Black residents, was initially planned in 1917, and on November 22, 1966, a local ordinance formally established a "negro district." Despite these imposed restrictions, African Americans from these and other communities organized and actively challenged the oppression they faced, building resilience and advocating for justice.

Local activists, including **William "Bill" Holland Sr.**, **Maude Ford Lee**, **Frank Malcolm Cunningham Sr.**, and **Alfred "Zack" Straghn**, played a pivotal role in challenging segregation in Palm Beach County. They fought tirelessly to desegregate schools, beaches, parks, and other public facilities, confronting systemic racism and discriminatory policies. Through their leadership and organizing, these individuals helped dismantle Jim Crow laws locally, creating greater access, equality, and opportunities for African American residents throughout the county.

## Comprehension Check

**Directions:** Write a short response to the question below.

How does the history of segregation and activism in Palm Beach County help us understand the ongoing struggle for racial equality and civil rights in local communities today?

## Key People, Places, and Events

**Alfred “Zack” Straghn:** Community leader and civil rights advocate in Palm Beach County who fought against segregation and promoted equality and justice for African American residents in Delray Beach.

**Frank Malcolm Cunningham Sr.:** Attorney and activist who contributed to dismantling Jim Crow laws by organizing efforts to desegregate schools, parks, and public spaces in Palm Beach County.

**Maude Ford Lee:** Influential African American activist and leader in Palm Beach County who worked to desegregate public facilities and expand civil rights opportunities.

**Pearl City:** One of the early African American communities in Palm Beach County, established in Boca Raton during the early 20th century as a self-sustaining neighborhood for Black residents.

**Sunset Lounge:** A historic nightclub in West Palm Beach, often called “The Cotton Club of the South,” where legendary African American musicians performed and the Black community gathered for entertainment and cultural expression.

**The Osborne Colored Addition:** A neighborhood planned in 1917 specifically for Black residents, later formally designated as a “negro district” in 1966, reflecting the racial segregation policies of the era.

**The Styxx:** Historically African American community once on Palm Beach island, where Black families built homes, businesses, and social networks despite segregation.

**William “Bill” Holland Sr.:** Civil rights activist and attorney in Palm Beach County who played a key role in challenging segregation and spearheaded the landmark case to integrate local schools.

# Class Project: Rhythms of Resistance: Jazz and the Civil Rights Movement

## Divide students into teams

Each team focuses on a specific theme, such as:

- Influential Jazz Musicians (e.g., Duke Ellington, Nina Simone)
- Landmark Civil Rights Events (e.g., March on Washington, school desegregation)
- Jazz Venues and Communities (e.g., Sunset Lounge, Cotton Club influence)
- Jazz and Protest Songs (e.g., music as activism)



## Research

- Investigate your topic using reliable sources, including biographies, music recordings, historical accounts, and photos.
- Collect images, audio clips, or video clips that illustrate your theme.

## Build the Virtual Exhibit

- Use a platform such as Google Sites, Canva, or Padlet to create the exhibit.
- Each team should include:
  - A brief written description of their topic (1–2 paragraphs)..
  - At least 3 multimedia elements (images, audio clips, or video).
  - A short reflection explaining why this topic was important.

## Presentation

- Each team will present their section of the exhibit to the class.
- Discuss how music influenced activism and brought communities together.



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