

The Jazz Ambassadors: Playing the Frontiers of American Diplomacy

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Senior Group Website

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We first learned of the Jazz Ambassadors through the jazz band director at our school. We were immediately intrigued about the role some of America's most renowned jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie had in Cold War diplomacy. As we learned more about the topic, the Jazz Ambassadors perfectly personified the theme of Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas. Firstly, the ambassadors crossed new land frontiers as they traveled to hot spots around the world - including behind the Iron Curtain - to share American jazz. Furthermore, they crossed ideological frontiers created by Soviet propaganda which targeted America's Jim Crow policies through their integrated and African-American led ensembles. The Ambassadors also found a new platform for recognition and increased the legitimacy of jazz while promoting civil rights.

Our research process began with delving deeply into secondary sources to help us establish a strong foundation of knowledge. One book which proved to be exceptionally valuable to us was *Satchmo Blows Up the World* by Patty Von Eschen. The book provided us with important context, primary quotes which led us to important directions for future research such as public perceptions of jazz and the influence of Jim Crow on foreign relations. One challenge we faced was deciding how to focus our research on a program which spanned two decades - this was a challenge when we looked for sources as well. Proquest and the Library of Congress were invaluable and provided us with newspapers and photographs that we utilized throughout the website. The wide variety of primary and secondary sources we used helped us fully share the experiences of the Jazz Ambassadors.

We chose to present our research as a website because of the unique features of the category. We worked to incorporate a wide variety of primary sources and quotes as well as feature the performances of the ambassadors through media. The range of primary sources we

utilized to support our argument helped to emphasize the many frontiers the Jazz Ambassadors crossed, especially with the interactive features of NHDWebCentral.

Throughout the Cold War, the Jazz Ambassadors acted as mediators in an intense geopolitical moment. They surpassed ideological and geographical frontiers to share jazz and messages of American democracy with people around the world. That being said, another theme we sought to highlight was the paradox between the revered position of African-American ambassadors abroad to Jim Crow policies at home. The tours served as an opportunity for the Ambassadors to prove their value, and that of jazz, to a doubtful American audience -- thus crossing frontiers.

The impact of the Jazz Ambassadors' work is evident through the audiences around the world who were directly introduced to jazz and the associated democratic ideas as well as the jazz musicians who emerged as a result. Today, the modern iterations of the program exist, proving the value of jazz as an American cultural commodity and the worth of cultural diplomacy as a way to cross frontiers and force connections around the world.