Jazz Behind the Iron Curtain

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During the Cold War, jazz music became a potent form of psychological warfare. The U.S. State Department co-opted jazz, hoping to both combat the international image of racism in the U.S. and promote American consumerism abroad by breaching the Soviet's ideological blockade. Founded in 1942, the government-funded radio station, Voice of America (VOA) began broadcasting seventy-nine days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The mission statement was simple: "The news may be good or bad, we shall tell you the truth."[1] Created as an appendage of the Office of War Information (OWI), VOA aimed at connecting the battlefront to the home front. By 1944, the station employed three thousand people worldwide and broadcasted in 40 different languages. The dissolution of the OWI in 1945 left the fate of the station in question. In 1946, advertising executive William Benton successfully lobbied for the station's continuance.[2] On February 17, 1947, VOA began their Russian service broadcasting with a 14-megawatt medium wave relay base, which was quickly blocked by Soviet jamming.[3] President Truman viewed such swift resistance from the Soviets as a sign of success, authorizing the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948 "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries."[4] Their programming consisted of world news, anti-communist propaganda and music shows like Willis Conover's *Jazz Hour* and Leonard Feather's *Jazz Club USA*.

VOA was an effort to combat international conceptions of American race relations. U.S. radio stations broadcasted music

[1] VOA News. "VOA's First Broadcasts: 'The News May Be Good or Bad, We Shall Tell You the Truth.'" YouTube video, 00:38, 8 Mar. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-k3bkvDDfgU.
[2] Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History.* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 41.
[3] Timothy Stoneman, "A Bold New Vision: The VOA Radio Ring Plan and Global Broadcasting in the Early Cold War," *Technology and Culture* 50, no. 2 (2009): 317.
[4] Smith-Mundt Act, 22 U.S.C, Ch. 18 § 1431 et seq. (1948)

written by black bandleaders and performed by mixed race ensembles in an attempt to challenge Soviet beliefs about American domestic life. The Soviet government purposefully perpetuated American racism through their own anti-capitalist propaganda filled with images of the lynching of black Americans. One such poster featured a faceless ragged black woman dangling by the neck from the outstretched arm of Lady Liberty while a smiling man in a top hat gazed up at her.[5] VOA played jazz music alongside news of the American civil rights movement to counter this sort of propaganda.

Jazz also served as a trojan horse of American consumerist culture and individualism across the Iron Curtain. World War II exposed earlier generations of Soviets to jazz. They spent their evenings tuning in to Voice of America's programming, sharing their nostalgia for a more 'decadent' time with their children. Bootleg recordings, cut on x-ray plates, exchanged hands through the black market created by censorship. For the youth of the 1960s who grew up without the intense pressures of the Stalinist purges, jazz and cultural identity became intertwined. They danced in nightclubs to Soviet-produced swing, drank, and dressed in the latest fashions. Even members of the Kommosol (Communist Youth League) decorated their dorm rooms with pictures from American magazines.[6] It is imperative to recognize that this narrative should not be taught as an American seduction of the Soviet "other." This over-simplification ignores the complex history of jazz in the Soviet Union. The reality was that jazz exports were much more effective in selling a lifestyle of individuality than dispelling images of racism in the United States. Race in the U.S. was commonly represented by consumer goods rather than abstract concepts.

Several historians have studied the promotion of Americanism abroad. Lisa Davenport and Penny Von Eschen, for example, focus on the contradictions between what the state department was trying

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[5] "Are you Lynching Negroes," 1930, *Bezbozknik u Stanka*, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/9/93/Bezbozhnik_u_stanka_US_1930.jpg

[6] Juliane Furst, *Stalins Last Generation: Soviet Post-war Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 128.

to convey and the reality for black Americans.[7] Both books are exhaustively researched accounts beyond the events of the Cold War drawing on writings of black intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes, American jazz criticism in magazines like Downbeat and Metronome, and detailed primary source accounts of concert attendees. Yet these accounts fail to consider the history of jazz in the Soviet Union. Davenport's work does not mention the presence of Soviet Jazz criticism in publications like *Pravda* (the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and *Izvestia* (the official newspaper of the Soviet government). Neither Davenport nor Von Eschen mentions the presence of jazz in the Soviet Union prior to World War II. Ignoring this history creates a narrative of American seduction that does not give credit to the sacrifices of Soviet musicians nor does it allow for an explanation as to why the Soviets had such an affinity for jazz music.

Soviet Portrayal of Race in America

The Soviet system represented hope for a better future to black Americans since racial hierarchies did not exist under Marxist theory. African Americans identified with the promise of overcoming oppression through unity and mutual aid.[8] During his three visits to the U.S.S.R. from 1926 to 1949, W.E.B. Du Bois studied and analyzed the Bolshevik Revolution. He wrote about the potential for self-determination that the communist system offered to victims of colonial oppression in his unpublished manuscript, "Russia and America."[9] This fascination with the Soviet system came partially as a result of the spread of leftist literature by labor groups like the Industrial Workers of the World and Communist International (Comintern) campaign in the "Black Belt" of the Southern United States. The Sixth Congress of the Comintern held

[7] Lisa E. Davenport *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* and Penny M. Von Eschen *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*.

[8] Oscar Berland, "The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the 'Negro Question' in America: 1919–1931: Part One." *Science & Society* 63, no. 4 (1999): 411-32.

[9] Bill V. Mullen, "Du Bois and the Russian Revolution," in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Revolutionary Across the Color Line*, (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 57-72.

in Moscow in the summer of 1928 officially endorsed the creation of a black republic in the American South, which would be an independent nation ruled by and for black Americans. This was a change of their earlier assertion at the Fourth Congress that supported a "Back to Africa" revolutionary movement.[10] This political influence flourished in the Negritude movement and groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Being black became a pan-national identity as the rise of black consciousness expanded through the global-knit community.[11]

The Soviet Union would use their various press outlets to equalize communism with salvation for black Americans. One state-produced short film portrays a black sharecropper's average day in contrast to his boss. For backbreaking work, he receives barely enough to feed himself. A morbidly obese Baptist preacher dangles false promises of salvation while his boss drives around in a fancy car, smoking cigars. When they meet at the end of the day, the boss beats him for not meeting quotas and drives down a street lined with lynched black men. In the final shot, a lone black prisoner shackled in a pitch-black cell sees a light through his window and the word 'Lenin' flashes across the screen.[12]

In the Soviet sphere, the notion of blacks as the driving force of American capitalism was a tangible concept. Historically, people of African descent occupied a subservient position in Russian society. Traders imported enslaved blacks, known as "Araps," from Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be used as servants for the aristocracy. During the twentieth century, European and American blacks traveled to Russia as deckhands, visiting athletes, entertainers, and intellectuals.[13] Despite the Soviet claims of

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[10] S. Frederick Starr, *Red & Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 101.
[11] James L. Roark, "American Black Leaders: The Response to Colonialism and the Cold War, 1943-1953," *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 2 (1971): 256.
[12] Nam Dau, "Animated Soviet Propaganda - American Imperialist: Black and White," YouTube Video, 2:28, July 4, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7qiVMgom8g.
[13] Allison Blakely, "The Negro in Imperial Russia: A Preliminary Sketch," *The Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 4 (1976): 351-61.

providing sanctuary for black Americans, it was still a racist society.

The Soviet press criticized the U.S. for exploiting blacks in the entertainment industry. During the coverage of the boxing tournament in the 1952 Olympic Games hosted in Helsinki, a journalist noted that "[...] all five gold medals won by the U.S. team in [...] boxing was won by Negroes."[14] All other athletes, including those of the Block states, mentioned in the article were described solely by nationality instead of race. By including race in their description of identity, Soviet press framed black American athletes as colonial acquisitions. Jazz music was discussed with a similar tone.

The Soviet press argued that the commercialization of jazz made a mockery of its authentic roots. Many in the Soviet sphere appreciated and acknowledged jazz that incorporated improvisational self-expression. Soviets viewed these pieces as movements against consumerism. "Broadway Jazz," on the other hand, became more widely associated with American consumerism. The constrained nature presented only a facade of self-expression behind a manufactured smile. It was criticized for appropriating primitive aesthetics for shock value. This process eliminated any cultural significance from the works and built on America's mindless consumption and ignorance of utilitarian values.[15] Soviets considered artists like Duke Ellington and Paul Robeson to be truly authentic. Robeson was a regular commentator in the Soviet press due to his pro-communist and anti-American rhetoric.[16]

Frequent references to black Americans in news articles published by Comintern (and later known as, the Communist International Bureau) pushed for their revolution. Founded by Vladamir Lenin in 1919, Comintern was an international organization devoted to the spread of communism. They became

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[14] V. Novoseltsev, "At the Olympic Games," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, September 13, 1952, 27.
[15] Alexander Kazem-Bek, "America Without Embellishment," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, May 01, 1957, 11-12.
[16] Paul Robeson, "statement by", Cur*rent Digest of the Russian Press*, September 20, 1949, 13.

the mouthpiece for priorities and values of the Soviet Union. They argued that the structures of American capitalism did not allow blacks the socio-economic freedoms they desired. Excluded from the American Dream, blacks were lynched and violently harassed by law enforcement.[17] They were subjected to segregation laws preventing them from freedom of mobility. Alongside Comintern's call to consciousness, writers provided examples of legitimate and effective revolutionary tactics.[18] Soviet news lauded movements against discrimination and hate crimes such as black progressive groups battling racist housing policies in Chicago.[19]

While the image of the Southern U.S. was most prominent in the Soviet news cycle, the message was to convince their audience that the problem was not concentrated in just one region but rather, it is an inherent part of daily American life. To do this, Soviet journalists cited statistics from studies conducted by American universities. A foreign affairs article in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reported that, unemployment among black Americans was 2.5 times higher than whites. The author attributed this class divide to the rising popularity of Civil Rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee whose leader, Stokely Carmichael was openly critical of capitalism.[20] It should be understood that these portrayals never announced a victory for black Americans. Political efforts portrayed an impossible struggle. Activism was only mentioned in the same breath as hate crimes and government suppression. The message of Soviet propaganda to black Americans was to fight for change or perish.

While leading a Civil Rights march across Mississippi in 1966, James Meredith was shot in the back. The Soviet Press exploited

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[17] Ya. Vysinsky, "On Aggressive Acts and Interference by the U.S.A. in Internal Affairs of Other Countries" *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, February 2, 1952, 13-14.

[18] B. Leibzon, "On the Leninist Criteria For Revolutionariness and the Forms of Revolutionary Struggle," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, July 10, 1968, :3-8.

[19] "Fascist Terror Against Negroes in the U.S.A." *Current Digest of the Russian Press,* October 4, 1949, 33.

[20] S. Vishnevsky, "After Overcoming Fear," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, November 16, 1966, 20-21.

the situation, convinced that the Soviet people sympathized with Meredith. The press highlighted the apathy and contrived nature of the government's response, pushing the narrative that the US only pretended to care about black people. Soviet propaganda frequently suggested that racism in the U.S. was enforced through government conspiracy. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was the center of attention for the Soviet Press for years. [21] By stressing that racism was organized and legislated, Soviet writers hoped to foster an image of an illegitimate government that did not care for its people. This asserted that Western democracy was an illusion that only heard the voices they chose to hear.

A Brief History of Jazz in the Soviet Sphere (1910-1950)

Ragtime music had been popular among the Russian peasantry and the middle-classes since the turn of the twentieth century. The music had gained similar levels of popularity in Western Europe from imported vaudeville films. Russian reproductions of the music centered around ideas of exoticism given the cinematic portrayals of black stereotypes associated with voodoo and hyper-sexuality. Among the peasantry and middle-classes, the "American negro" became a romanticized symbol of spiritual resistance under oppression.[22] The savage sentiment that became associated with ragtime lead to aristocratic dismissal of the genre as music for the masses. One Russian music critic deemed ragtime as American nationalist music that threatened the future of Russia's self-determination. The separation in taste between commoner ragtime fans and the opera and classical loving aristocrats constructed a hierarchy of cultural elitism that would only escalate as state control increased.

Though jazz had infiltrated practically every major city in Western Europe by the beginning of 1920, it would not make an appearance in Russia until 1922. Not because the elitism of the aristocracy had overcome the cultural degenerates, but rather the country had been engaged in a civil war from 1918 to 1920.

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[21] G. Vasilyev, "A Page From F.B.I. Archives," *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, December 17, 1975, 18.
[22] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 27.

Cultural patronage became isolated under the Bolshevik takeover. There were only songs of nationalist praise and military morale and a handful of exceptions for opera and classical music that celebrated the supremacy of Bolshevik culture.

The concentration of resources toward industrial and agricultural strength left little room for making instruments. The majority of music produced was choral. Russian Futurist poet, Valentin Parnakh, was credited for the importation of jazz to the Soviet Union. The cultural commissions focused on domestically produced works it could have only arrived from a native, an aspect of jazz history unique to only Russia and Estonia. Parnakh had encountered jazz in his travels to Paris, where he saw Louis Mitchell's *Jazz Kings* at the Trocadero in 1921. Absolutely enthralled by the New Orleans style strut, he published various articles in *Vesch*, a well-respected emigre journal. Parnakh wrote on the eccentricity and physicality of jazz music and dance. He characterized jazz as a crusade for spiritual emancipation. In the summer of 1922, Parnakh brought western instruments to Moscow and formed The First Eccentric Orchestra of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. His ensemble consisted of two violins, a piano, a banjo, drums, a xylophone, and fox-trotting dancers. It was unclear whether he simply could not find anyone to play saxophone or if he misunderstood the nature of jazz instrumentation, but the ensemble was identified by concert goers as a type of 'noise orchestra.'[23]

While the first jazz performance alienated peasants and aristocrats alike, it opened the field of jazz criticism and study in the Soviet Union. The most recognizable sonic characteristics that Parnakh had introduced had been cast aside but vibrant aesthetics of individual expression flourished under university studies and technical workshops. This new Soviet jazz aimed to distance itself from American decadence and portray a more active and responsible Soviet spirit. It would appear as if the soundtrack to Sergei Eisenstein films and Vsevolod Meyerhold musicals match the spirit of the Red Army Choir.[24] By 1925, Russia would have its own jazz renaissance.

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[23] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 46.
[24] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 51.

Music criticism and concert reviews flooded *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. Much of the criticism remained wholeheartedly anti-jazz. Prominent Russian writer Maxim Gorky wrote a notable essay in 1928 entitled, "On the Music of the Degenerate." He described jazz as an

> ... insulting and insane cacophony [that] is subordinated to a scarcely perceptible rhythm and, listening to this pandemonium for a minute or two, one involuntarily begins to imagine that it is the performance of an orchestra of lunatics, driven mad by sex, and conducted by a human stallion wielding an enormous phallus.[25]

Jazz was perceived as music for gypsies and blacks, thus a stain on the otherwise pure Soviet tradition. The illusion of overt sexuality and barbarism, both negative stereotypes of black people, provide evidence for the racist foundations of Soviet classism. One could draw parallels between the tone of Soviet nationalists and American Christians in regard to sin and syncopation.

Soviet jazz fell victim to nationalist fears. As jazz gained popularity in the Soviet sphere, classical musicians lost their jobs to gypsy musicians. By the early 1930s, gypsies had become the most prominent performers of jazz in urban night clubs. Gypsy restaurants and clubs on the outskirts of Moscow had already had the immoral reputation for sex and drinking prior to the days of ragtime.[26] The development of Soviet realism doctrine strived to develop a uniform Soviet culture by eliminating any impurities. The class distinction of party members on these cultural commissions allowed jazz musicians to become targets of the Stalinist purges of the interwar period. Valentin Parnakh was arrested and sentenced to hard labor in 1937, dying from exhaustion digging the White Sea Canal. His story was far from rare. The government arrested thousands of musicians on charges of misbehavior during a concert or playing with too much rhythm.

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[25] Maxim Gorky. "On the Music of the Degenerate." Pravda, April 18, 1928, 2. http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/upheaval-in-the-opera/upheaval-in-the-opera-text/on-the-music-of-the-gross/

[26] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 25-26.

The luckiest were exiled to the most remote provinces. Border regions had a longer history of contact with outside nations and thus a greater exposure to foreign films and music. Kiev-born violinist and pianist Alexander Sotnikov formed a twelve-piece swing band and played shows for The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs officers in Reader, a mining town bordering China.[27] Jazz proved harder to erase than initially thought, maintaining its sound under a state of hibernation while musicians went into hiding.

The Soviet government soon recognized this futility and made attempts to co-opt aspects of jazz into their socialist songs of struggle. The State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR held their first concert in 1938. Throughout their existence, they never received an audience reaction above indifference. Their big band and rigid song structure blocked any hint of improvisation in the group. The bulk of the music they performed was reflective of Russian classical despite being profusely advertised as jazz music. One concert in Yalta for a group of Red Air Force pilots broke out in a riot. By 1941, the Soviet Union nationalized swing music and employed it as a method of entertaining troops during World War II. Swing had grown out of jazz, but was considered to be a more polished, appropriate version of jazz music by the state**.** Soviet- funded ensembles called *dzhazes* had become organized in every district of the Red Army and Navy. While the lyrics of the music produced remained songs of nationalist morale and struggle, they had essentially stolen jazz standards from songs by Duke Ellington, Cole Porter, and Ray Noble. Pluralist control over the music in smaller ensembles allowed for a degree of individual expression. Soviet jazz received significant boost from the wartime alliance with the U.S. during World War II. Soldiers listened to bootleg recordings of western music and *dzhases* received fake books containing American jazz standards.[28] Soviets felt that jazz music was a part of their own cultural identity rather from the ethnic other. After Germany issued their final surrender on May 7th, 1945, *dzhases* paraded in the streets. Stability was still out of reach even after six years of war that resulted in eighty million deaths.

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[27] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 170-171.
[28] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 180.

Displaced populations, destroyed farmland, strained alliances, and mutilated national borders fostered an environment rid with disaffection and economic collapse. By 1946 Stalin's paranoia of foreign culture returned and he suppressed all evidence of culture beyond the Soviet borders.[29]

Jazz and Race: Countering Perceptions

VOA wished to convey jazz as a cohesive melting pot, showcasing blacks and whites working together to create their own landscape of expression and emotion. On December 24th, 1950, Leonard Feather's *Jazz Music USA* aired for the first time. It began with the lone scream of a saxophone sliding into a smooth New Orleans style fading into the background as a deep voice spoke, "Greeting and modulations friends... this is Leonard Feather inviting you to the ringside table at Jazz Club USA…[where] you will hear jazz as it is being played in the nightclubs and theaters throughout the United States…"[30] The set started with a recording of "The Mad Boogie" performed by Count Basie and the Benny Goodman Orchestra. In addition to broadcasting, the state department sponsored a series of jazz tours across Europe, Asia, and Africa. The tours featured Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong, and Benny Goodman and lasted until 1978. The image of black Americans in leadership roles, directing mixed race and mixed gendered bands challenged Soviet assumptions about the realities of life under American capitalism. Many black performers saw their involvement as an alternative to existing facets of American cultural imperialism rather than becoming an extension of it.[31]

The arrival of Dizzy Gillespie's production of George Gershwin's play *Porgy and Bess* to Yugoslavia and Moscow in 1956 was a huge turning point for the tour, as it was the first show

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[29] Starr, *Red & Hot,* 207.

[30] Jazz Time with Jarvis X. "Jazz Club U.S.A. (1950) (Episode 1)." YouTube Video, 30:23, December 13, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo0EfJ8PjmY.

[31] John Lowney, "'Cultural Exchange' in Cold War Jazz and the Political Aesthetics of Langston Hughes's Long Poems," in *Jazz Internationalism: Literary Afro-Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Black Music*, (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 117.

played in the Soviet Sphere. The leader of Yugoslavia, Marshall Tito, was reportedly excited about the tour's display of cultural autonomy. The black female trombone player had reportedly generated a large amount of excitement for the crowds.[32] The show itself received mixed responses and was still largely rooted in American classical music, given its origins from George Gershwin. An *Izvestia* review of the Moscow concert did not even mention Gillespie's name. The author instead attributed the accurate depiction of the black spirit to Gershwin's extensive studies of black folk music. This could have been due to Gillespie's minor popularity in the Soviet sphere as he had only become a household name in the U.S. that decade. It is more likely that the reviewer expected the kind of opera he had been exposed to the USSR and it offended his tastes.[33] The reviewer did acknowledge that what he witnessed was certainly original but did not seem impressed by the presence of a mixed-race ensemble conducted by a black bandleader. Though it is more likely that this was yet another portrayal of blacks solely as entertainers, a trope that Soviets had seen in imported films.

The following year, Sputnik launched and became the focal point of Soviet propaganda. The desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas reached VOA's airwaves. The U.S. emphasized the victory against the Arkansas state government to counter international image of white supremacy. Despite this effort, it did not necessarily appear as a large step in the jazz community. Duke Ellington responded: "...when you think of the lost time and effort President Eisenhower spent trying to settle the Little Rock situation, in fact, the time being lost all over the South as well as places in the North over the school desegregation ordered by the Supreme Court in 1954, you'll get the idea of how and why the Russians may be having breakfast on the moon by the time you read this. It seems to me that the problem of America's inability so

[32] Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 31.
[33] B. Zagursky, "'Porgy and Bess': Performances in U.S.S.R. by American Everyman Opera Company." *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, 1956, No. 2, Vol. 8.

far to go ahead of or at least keep abreast of Russia in the race for space can be traced directly to this racial problem."[34]

Ellington was not alone. Louis Armstrong cancelled his upcoming state sponsored tour due to the politicized nature of the Little Rock crisis. Despite these issues, Ellington remained a staple on VOA jazz programming.[35]

Outside of controlled broadcasts, jazz was a rebellion against existing realities and not an advertisement. Like Ellington, Gillespie continued to be used for VOA programming. He began interviews with Willis Conover on *Voice of America* by greeting European, Asian and African audiences. He discussed the rate at which jazz had progressed in the U.S. and what it was like to be considered a jazz legend working alongside his heroes, Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker.[36] He talked about how bored he and his fellow musicians had become playing just the standards. He moved for greater improvisation, a frustration all too familiar with Soviet state musicians. By creating a venue where black artists could discuss their artistic process and the figures they idolize openly, VOA was able to create an image of independence and luxury for black Americans. In 1954, Gillespie played a concert in Athens to a group of students who had been protesting U.S. support for Greece's far-right government. The students were enthralled and reportedly carried him on their shoulders after the show was over. In an interview recalling the concert, he apologized for America's racist policies and said that he had no intention of following the state department's briefing.[37] To these students, Gillespie was an example of someone who could survive and express his struggle through inequality**.** Gillespie believed that the international appeal

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[34] Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy,* 63.
[35] Jazz Time with Jarvis X. "Jazz Club U.S.A. (12/30/1950) (Episode 2)." Youtube Video, 29:59, December 20, 2017.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftwKXR-kXFQ&t=665s
[36] Iap9999. "Willis Conover Interviews Dizzy Gillespie (excerpt)." Youtube Video, 3:40, September 4, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ftabQ5Z5pM.
[37] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 35.

of jazz was "for its musical message, not its sociological implications."[38]

Failures to control the message of the tours would limit the effectiveness of VOA broadcasts. Conover interviewed Billie Holiday in 1956. She discussed her love for Bessie Smith, her anxieties about performing with a microphone, and her artistic process. This interview asserted not only her autonomy as a black woman in the U.S. but revealed the respect she believed she had earned from her community.[39] She completely ignored the criticism she faced in the American press for her sordid past. Conover asked what it was like to work with Benny Goodman. She talked about him attending her concerts in Harlem. The intention of bringing up her work and friendship with Goodman was to contradict that American life was racially segregated. These manufactured images ignored U.S. racist housing policies and segregation practices.

Duke Ellington described the reality of life in American cities as places of perpetual fear in which black men would have to know their place in restaurants, nightclubs and theaters as people of color simply that did not belong.[40] The biggest hurdle that the U.S. would have to jump to deflect these accusations of rampant white supremacy would be to make the truth sound like a lie. Despite these efforts, it did not help that every moment of progress made possible by the Civil Rights movement could easily be portrayed in Soviet propaganda with police suppression as the centerpiece.

Conclusion

Jazz continued to garner popularity abroad. Many Soviet youths of the post-war generation grew up listening to VOA broadcasts. According to CIA reports, the Soviets had been attempting to block the signals of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe Broadcasts. To Soviet youths, jazz music granted a sense of

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[38] David M. Carletta, "'Those White Guys Are Working For Me': Dizzy Gillespie, Jazz, and the Cultural Politics of the Cold War During the Eisenhower Administration," *International Social Science Review* 82, no. 3/4 (2007): 123.

[39] Asmendio. "Billie Holiday on 'Voice of America Jazz Hour' 1956," YouTube Video, 10:01, May 01, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbFSeSReoTY.

[40] Barry Ulanov, "Ellington Writes of Race," *Metronome*, 1946.

individuality and self-expression. While the music of Leonid Utesov and Gershwin was played quite openly during times of censorship, broadcasts of western artists presented a more exotic, dangerous rebellion.[41] These rebels referred to as the *stilyagi* grew up outside of the pressures of Stalinism and did not identify with the state like their parents' generation had. They were commonly portrayed in Soviet propaganda as dressing like clowns, getting bad grades, but being pretty good dancers.[42] Contrary to what they had been told about these luxuries of western consumerism these pleasures were not solely for the wealthy. Key influencers of the movement like Aleksei Kozlov and Vasilii Aksenov both came from modest backgrounds.[43]

Jazz Hour commonly featured European emigres such as Polish pianist and violinist Michal Urbaniak. Urbaniak used electronic instruments including a synthesizer and a vocoder which emphasized not only the innovation of American industry but the freedom of expression it allowed. In between songs, Willis Conover discussed the many different elements that combined to create Jazz music. This asserted the music as extending beyond a purely American or black art form. A similar sentiment was promoted by the Soviet press. Despite its foreign influences, the media claimed that the jazz that had evolved in the Soviet sphere was uniquely Soviet.[44] This should be interpreted as an attempt to diminish the rebellion of the youth by keeping them in line with the ideology of the state.

In one of his many iconic inter-song bumps, Willis Conover declared that, "jazz parallels the freedom we have in America, something that not every country has."[45] This an ironic statement because of the grotesque racism of the United States but it is also a truth, as the concept and sentiment of freedom permitted by the ever-evolving culture of the free market. While the notion of jazz

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[41] Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 213.
[42] Sergei Shvetsov, "Biographia odnovo molodovo cheloveka," 1957, Krokodil, issue 3, 8, http://www.coldwarjazz.org/stilyagi.
[43] Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation,* 220.
[44] Valsily Aksenov, "A Long-Awaited Gift For An Unexpected Anniversary" *Current Digest of the Russian Press*, June 26, 1974, 26-27.
[45] VOA News. "Willis Conover Jazz Hour Clip," Youtube Video, 00:27, March 8, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZVpHOSqJpE.

and the slowly awakening giant of rock music shifted from being associated as a black art form, the notions of spiritual rebellion that were associated with ragtime and jazz in the early twentieth century had not disappeared. They had strengthened through the 1960s and 70s into becoming intertwined with a non-homogenous, individualistic identity.

Jazz music and culture rose in popularity abroad marketed as individualistic expression. *Jazz Hour* and *Jazz Music USA* helped cultivate a rich, diverse international audience for jazz. With a wider audience came greater innovation and the rise of free group improvisation. Eric Porter has attributes the growth of free jazz from a rejection of conventions.[46] To use jazz music as a showcase of harmony under the status quo would be to entirely ignore its subject matter. The image of the U.S. as a hotbed for racism has not vanished. To this day Russian outlets still use police violence, Alt-Right groups, and the Black Lives Matter movement to sell the image of impending revolution of the United States.[47] While the State Department's use of jazz had little impact on changing the international image of American race relations, it was an effective catalyst for spreading consumerist culture.

[46] Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (University of California Press, 2002), 197.
[47] "Black Lives Matter uses issue of police violence to achieve bigger agenda" Russia Today, Sep 23, 2016, 15:07, https://on.rt.com/7q3i.