African Americans in the 21st Century

In the last half of the 20th century, black Americans progressed socially, economically, and politically. The civil rights movement opened doors for millions of African Americans to enter the fields of education, business, sports, entertainment, politics, and the arts. Yet many black Americans remain impoverished and still struggle to get through the doors of opportunity.

Many African Americans left the South after WWI and WWII and found higher paying industrial jobs in the North and West, forming the backbone of the new black middle class. Vibrant black communities, especially those located near wartime manufacturing plants, created businesses, night clubs and music halls, churches, and newspapers. African-American soldiers returning from WWII used the G.I. Bill to purchase houses, obtain job training, and pay for their college education [Link: Wikipedia, "G. I. Bill of Rights," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GI_Bill].

Civil rights reforms also increased the educational and financial opportunities available for the emerging black middle class. As schools and colleges across the country desegregated in the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans of all ages entered better schools to prepare for careers in law, medicine, and business that had previously been closed to them. To increase the number of African Americans in education and government employment, federal and state governments in the 1960s began a policy known as affirmative action. Many corporations also implemented affirmative action programs to boost the number of black employees in private sector jobs.

Integration and affirmative action worked well together. Only about 80,000 black students attended institutions of higher education in 1950, but this number rose to nearly one million a decade later. By 1976, the percentage of African-American students at the nation’s colleges and universities peaked at 9.3 percent. Beginning in the 1990s, voters, presidents, and corporations elevated African Americans to highly visible public positions: U.S. Senators Carol Moseley Braun and Barack Obama, Surgeon Generals Joycelyn Elders and David Satcher, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, and businessmen Ken Chenault and Stan O’Neal, among the first black chief executive officers to lead major U.S. companies. [Link: PBS, African American World: Reference Room, “Affirmative Action,” http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/reference/articles/affirmative_action.html].

Although centuries of slavery and segregation had prevented the growth of a black middle class, some white Americans soon grew impatient with affirmative action programs, claiming they unfairly favored one group over another and amounted to “reverse discrimination.” Allan Bakke, a white student who hoped to become a doctor, sued the University of California, Davis medical school because its affirmative action guidelines (he claimed) denied him a spot in the first-year class after less-qualified black applicants were admitted. In the first of many rulings on the issue, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978 ordered Bakke’s admission and outlawed the use of “quotas” in affirmative action programs [Link: “Oyez: U.S. Supreme Court Multimedia,” Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978), http://www.oyez.org/oyez/resource/case/324/].

Since that time, states have scaled back or eliminated many of these programs. Special measures to help African Americans, Native Americans and other historically disadvantaged groups continue to generate controversy. Following the lead of President Richard Nixon, who was elected in
1968, many Americans felt the civil rights movement had achieved its main objectives and they withheld support for additional programs to expand social and economic opportunities for needy black Americans [Link: Barnard College, “The Pros and Cons of the Elimination of Affirmative Action in American Higher Education,” http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/students/his3464y/iyobe/higher7.htm].

African-American musicians in the last few decades have created music that appeals to a broad cross-section of the listening public. “Because of the mass communications media, African-American culture had been marketed throughout the world, and African Americans had consumed aspects of the cultures of other groups. White Americans and people in other nations had become more African-American in their cultural outlook, while African Americans had become more like other Americans.”** African-American artists branched out beyond so-called “black music,” excelling in opera, classical, and many other musical forms. They also took many existing songs and sang them in new, innovative, and popular ways [Link: History Matters, “American Popular Song: A Brief History,” http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Songs/amsong.html].

Because millions of African Americans progressed in the 30-year period following the end of WWII, it was easy to forget that millions more had not. By the early 1970s, “most black families remained poor, with African-American income substantially below white income.”* Economic changes after 1990 eliminated most of the high-paying manufacturing and industrial jobs that black Southerners of a previous generation had migrated to find. As African Americans enter the 21st century, they have freedom, but their struggle for equality still continues.


Questions to consider:
1. What is the “middle class?”
2. What is “affirmative action?” What were these special programs designed to do? Can you give an example of an affirmative action program?
3. How did affirmative action and integration combine to increase educational and financial opportunities for African Americans?
Jazz in America Student Handout–Lesson Plan VIII–Biographies

Today's jazz musicians stand upon the shoulders of those who came before them. Building upon the traditional sounds of "old school" jazz, swing, cool jazz, hot jazz, and jazz-rock, today's jazz artists continue to create new and innovative musical styles. "Tomorrow's" jazz will depend on where those innovations lead. Jazz has also gained mainstream acceptance, with separate jazz departments and degrees at most major universities, as well as foundation and government support for jazz education and performance. While being part of the accepted "mainstream" may seem at odds with jazz's innovative history, educational and cultural institutions play an important role in keeping jazz traditions alive and sharing them with subsequent generations.

Today's Jazz

Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz
http://www.monkinstitute.org
The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz was established in 1986 in memory of Thelonious Monk, the legendary jazz pianist and composer. The Institute offers the most promising young musicians college-level training by America's jazz masters and presents public school-based jazz education programs for people around the world. The Institute produces an annual international jazz competition for aspiring jazz musicians, administers an intensive graduate-level college program at the University of Southern California for the world's most talented young musicians, offers an Internet-based National Jazz Curriculum for 5th, 8th, and 11th grade public school students, and presents master classes, workshops, and assembly programs across the United States and overseas. All of the Institute's education programs are offered free of charge to the participating students and schools.

Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC)
http://www.jazzatlincolncenter.org
Lincoln Center in New York began a series of summer "Classical Jazz" concerts in 1986. By 1991, Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) became an official organization within Lincoln Center. JALC lives out its motto: "We don't just play jazz – we celebrate it, we love it, we share it." JALC has its own repertory ensemble, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and offers a series of concerts and educational programs.

Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra
http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/sjmo/sjmo_start.asp
Formed in 1992, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (SJMO) is the orchestra-in-residence at the National Museum of American History. Its mission is "to explore, present, promote, and perpetuate the historical legacy of jazz." The U.S. Congress established the orchestra to honor the important role of jazz in American history. Jazz exhibits are a regular part of the museum's program and the museum maintains a jazz Web site with interactive learning content.

Terence Blanchard, jazz trumpeter and film composer (b. 1962)
Biography: http://www.terenceblanchard.com

Randy Brecker, jazz trumpeter, flugelhorn player, composer, and bandleader (b. 1945)
Biography: http://www.jazztrumpetsolos.com/Randy_Brecker_Biography.asp

Herbie Hancock, jazz pianist and composer (b. 1940)
Biography: http://www.herbiehancock.com

Roy Hargrove, jazz saxophonist (b. 1969)
Biography: http://www.royhargrove.com

Alvin "Al" Jarreau, jazz singer (b. 1940)
Biography: http://www.aljarreau.com/about/officialbio/
Questions to consider:

1. What do jazz musicians today have in common?
2. In what ways do jazz artists today differ from earlier jazz greats?
3. How does jazz education in the classroom differ from the "street learning" of previous generations?
4. Can jazz education be “put in a bottle” and taught to anyone willing to learn? What do you think and why?