Lesson Guide

Objectives:
The students will be better able to:

• Describe the experience of segregation under Jim Crow laws.
• Describe the impact of jazz music on race relations in the mid-1900s.
• Obtain information from a variety of primary sources.

Time:

• First Person Narrative: 10 minutes, 35 seconds
• Analysis Questions: 6 minutes

Grade Level: 6th–12th

Vocabulary:
The first-person narratives contain several words that may be unfamiliar to 21st-century readers. Whenever these words are used within narratives or primary sources, the Web page will include definitions for those words. Good historians always have a dictionary nearby when doing research or writing, so students should as well.

Here is the list specific to this activity:

• segregation – the separation or isolation of a race, class, or group (as by restriction to an area or by separate schools)
• streetcar – a passenger vehicle that runs on rails and typically operates on city streets
• sound check – preparation that takes place before a concert, speech, or similar performance to check the speakers, microphone, and stage

Materials:

• Computer with Internet access (with MP3 player and Adobe Reader)
  – Transcript of the audio clips (http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/documents/oral_histories/Levy_Classroom_Transcript.pdf)
• Student Worksheet PDF (print or digital) (http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/documents/oral_histories/Levy_Classroom_Transcript.pdf)
• Printer (recommended)
Preparation:
1. Visit the John Levy page of SmithsonianJazz.org to preview the content.
2. Download and print the transcript for the John Levy recordings. Consider making copies for students.
3. Print the student worksheet to distribute to students.

Standards:

NCHS 5–12 United States History Standards

Era 8, Standard 1B: The student understands how American life changed during the 1930s. (Explain the cultural life of the Depression years in art, literature, and music.)

Era 9, Standard 1B: The student understands how the social changes of the postwar period affected various Americans.

NCHS 5–12 Standards in Historical Thinking

2B: Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage
2C: Identify the central question(s)
2F: Appreciate historical perspectives
4B: Obtain historical data from a variety of sources
4F: Support interpretations with historical evidence

Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies (Grades 6–8)

1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Introduction:
In order to better understand events and people of the past, historians examine many different types of primary sources. Government records, letters, photographs and artifacts are just a few examples of primary sources. First-person narratives are a very valuable type of primary source since they are the words of people who actually lived through the events they speak of. The audio recording used in this lesson is an oral history of an individual who lived through these events.

Historical Context:
Between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the Civil Rights Movement’s achievements in the 1960s, many parts of the South had laws requiring that public places be racial segregated. Legislation known as Jim Crow laws separated people of color from whites in schools, housing, jobs, and public gathering places. Overlapping with this period, from the early 1900s through the 1950s and 1960s, jazz music swelled in popularity. With its roots in African, Caribbean, and Latino musical traditions, jazz sat at the center of America’s cultural crossroads. African American and white Americans often found themselves integrated while listening to or performing jazz music and this shared cultural experience was sometimes a bridge to breaking down racial barriers.

Task:
Students use their listening skills to discover important information from the oral history, then work with several supporting primary sources to answer questions about John Levy and/or his experiences.
Questions:

1. What early experiences helped to develop Levy’s interest in music?

   *Levy’s family was involved in their church and participated in music at the church. In New Orleans there were also parades that took music out onto the street, so Levy developed an interest in the instruments being played in those parades.*

2. Cite one or more example of segregation in Levy’s life. What is the significance of the signs and how do you think Levy and other African Americans would have responded to seeing one of those signs?

   *Levy’s childhood wasn’t extremely affected by segregation because his neighborhood was mixed. He did remember one specific incident where he had to follow Jim Crow laws and that made him feel very hurt and rejected. These signs are ones like Levy might have seen on the streetcar.*

3. From Levy’s recorded words and at least one other source, in what ways did jazz cross racial lines? Cite one instance where Levy’s band pushed against the institution of segregation.

   *From Levy’s interview, he says that many different kinds of people liked jazz music. Although many places were segregated, either de facto or de jure, jazz was something that could be more integrated. In fact, Levy’s bandmate George insisted on not sitting at clubs where the audiences were segregated to show that he thought it was unfair. From looking at the photograph, we know that the band itself also included both white and black musicians.*

Supporting Primary Sources:

See pages 4 through 6 in this guide.

Additional Primary & Secondary Sources:

- An article from PBS discussing early jazz recording and race records ([http://www.pbs.org/jazz/exchange/exchange_race_records.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/exchange/exchange_race_records.htm))
George Shearing Quintet

The band members pose in 1949. John Levy is pictured top left on bass. George Shearing is pictured bottom left on piano.

*Courtesy of Devra Hall Levy*
Restrictive signs were displayed in many public places. They were constant and humiliating reminders with a common message—“stay in your place.”
One of the hottest topics in jazz today concerns racial unity and racial prejudice among musicians.

The general opinion is that there is a great deal of Jim Crow — Crow Jim and other forms of segregation, but for the most part it is diminishing as time goes by and social and musical relationships improve.

A basic problem is that of jazz to race — the extent to which jazz has become the product of one race. The feeling of Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln seems to be that jazz, having been created by the Negro, is a Negro preserve and the white musician in effect is an intruder.

To get at the bottom of the hassle, Downbeat Magazine gathered together three outstanding musicians, two critics and a NAACP official. Participating were George Shearing, Red Mitchell, Gerald Wilson (all musicians); Leonard Feather, John Tynan, critics and James L. Tolbert, attorney-president of the Hollywood-Beverly Hills chapter of the NAACP.

Shearing argued that he usually tells the bigot club owner, “When you grow up, I’ll come and work for you.” Feather contends that there are many areas in which Negro has not made any substantial progress. “How many Negro musicians are there on staff at all the TV stations in Hollywood-Beverly Hills?” he asked. “Not a single one.”

Shearing says he has always been integrated, and the personnel manager is John Levy, a Negro.

“I don’t let promoters or anybody else interfere or try to change the personnel of my group,” he said.

“I’ve been through all this many times, cases where a guy will say, ‘I’d love to use your group, but I’d like to suggest that you…’ You know, the old story.

“There isn’t anyone in this country who has enough money to change me. I hand pick my group and it is going stay that way.”

Shearing added that he usually tells the bigot club owner, “When you grow up, I’ll come and work for you.”

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But discrimination works both ways. As Red Mitchell pointed out, “There was the time a president of a record company told me: ‘I’m sorry, but I don’t want to do an album with you, even though I signed a contract, because I can’t sell white jazz musicians now.'”

All agreed, including Tolbert, that the American Federation of Musicians and the NAACP are organizations which should do everything possible to advance race relations.

Crow-Jim is reverse segregation. Feather feels, that there is effort by white musicians to create a truly interracial scene in every corner of the music business,” he said.

According to Tynan, the h e passe attitude towards Negroes is, existing on television and radio. What do you think the role of jazz musicians is in promoting racial unity in the jazz world today?