

Music Speaks Louder Than Words:

Max Roach and Racial Injustice

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Group Website

Student-composed Words: 1200

Process Paper Words: 488

After hearing the theme for National History Day 2021 was communication in history, we immediately knew such a broad theme would bring a variety of different ways to approach our project. Since both of us are musicians and particularly like jazz, we quickly knew we wanted to pick a topic that conveyed the relationship between jazz and racial injustice in America. As far as a time period, we settled on the 1950s-60s, when jazz was just starting to peak. Narrowing it down from there proved to be more difficult, as there were many great musicians and activists during this time. However, since both of us play rhythm instruments (drums and bass), we found Max Roach to be an extraordinary option and someone whose role in activism is less well-known than others.

We started our research by gathering an abundance of facts and sources so we would have a solid basis of background knowledge. Additionally, we wanted to ensure that we knew the context of the times, and how the great events of the Civil Rights Movement affected Roach's career. Next, we began focusing our research on how Max Roach chose to communicate the racial prejudice of the era and the struggle of African Americans through his music. We were very excited to discover his "We Insist!" album, which directly addressed racism and discrimination through jazz, and was one of the first records to do so. After listening to the album and the rich meaning held in the lyrics and style of music, we found ways to incorporate it into our project.

We knew pretty early on that we wanted to do a website for this year's project, not only because we both had experience in web-design, but also because it would be easier to work on remotely. We thought the interactive elements to this format, such as highlighting quotes, sound clips, and photos alongside our own information, would convey our ideas and overall message in the best way possible. In order to give the

memory of Max Roach justice, we wanted to create a project that is both visually appealing and memorable, but also clearly showed our thesis in a direct and cohesive way.

The topic of Max Roach is a clear-cut example of communication throughout history, though perhaps in a less traditional form: music. Music, especially a culturally rich and ever-changing genre like jazz, has been used in various forms to communicate the importance of maintaining black history. It's as relevant now as it was throughout the civil rights movement, and in a way, music can reveal the subtleties and nuances of conflict that words cannot. Max Roach, by utilizing jazz as his tool for activism, was able to remind many Americans of the injustices faced by African-Americans on a daily basis. He broke barriers not only in jazz but in activism itself, discovering a new way to bring people together in the fight for racial equality.