
Louis Armstrong: Role Model for Younger African Americans in 1920s

The '20s were a time of victory, freedom, and the widespread growth of jazz. The first World War had just ended, and it left many Americans feeling free and ready to celebrate. This led to an increase in people attending bars and nightclubs. One of the most famous names in Jazz is Louis Armstrong, who became a big hit in nightclubs such as the Cotton Club. Armstrong was ordered to play "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue" by a New York gangster, Dutch Schultz. His version of "Black and Blue" became one of the most popular versions of that song. Louis Armstrong's version of the song very well portrayed jazz in the 20s because of its use of breaks and riffs. For example, his repetition of the phrase "Black and Blue".

However, his style differed from the upbeat and fast-paced jazz many were used to in the 20s. Louis Armstrong introduced a more blues approach to jazz which caused a shift in the end of the 20s. This can be seen through "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue" as the song have a different style than the jazz many were used to. It uses blue notes, a blues chord progression, call and response, Improvisation, and a repeating lyrical structure. These characteristics differed from traditional jazz and it gained many Americans' interest, however, not just Americans. While Armstrong was in Ghana as an Ambassador for the United States, he played multiple songs for the 100,000 citizens that showed up to his concert. During the concert, many riots broke out resulting in the police using clubs on the audience. Due to sympathy for the people, Armstrong played "Black and Blue". "He related to the sense of struggle among a people who were emerging out of decades of colonialism with optimism but were not yet free, that sense of shared struggle was reciprocated. Among the scenes captured by the film crew was a shot of Nkrumah as Armstrong sang "Black and Blue." The prime minister had tears in his eyes".

Armstrong's version of the song "Black and Blue" was not the only version of the song. One of the first renditions of the song was written by Fats Waller and sung by Edith Wilson. This version of the song was written as a jazz piece. It was an example of underground jazz as utilized two singers and a piano. The original meaning behind this version was the unfair treatment of African Americans. During the time this was written, racism was still at large, and Waller wanted to shed a light on the restricted rights and privileges that African Americans had, compared to other races in the US. Many restaurants, jobs, pools, and even water fountains and bathrooms were racially separated. This unfair advantage led to African Americans getting harder working jobs with more hours and less pay. However, Louis Armstrong took a much different approach to the song in his version. He stripped down the lyrics and added his own

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touches to the instrumentals. He tried to take a more humorous approach to the song because of where he played his music. He played in clubs that most of the time had wealthy whites, and they did not want to hear about how oppressed African Americans were when they were trying to relax and party. "In Hot Chocolates Razaf's lyric was prefaced by a verse in which a dark-skinned woman complains of intra-racial prejudice.

On a record, Armstrong dropped the verse and turned the chorus into a threnody for blacks of every shade. Yet there was nothing lugubrious about the way he sung "Black and Blue", to which he brought a touch of wry that made its closing lines all the more telling: my only sin is in my skin/ what did I do to be so black and blue?" Armstrong's version differed heavily from the original version's motives. However, it was only because Armstrong knew who his audience was and what they wanted to listen to. "I don't want to do nothing that would ask people to look at the song and be depressed and thinking about marching and equal rights."

Although, Armstrong altered the lyrics in "Black and Blue", I still think he was a very effective advocate for racial tolerance and equality. His job is to perform in front of audiences and keep them entertained. Even though he played the blues, he did not want to make his audience depressed and focused on other things because it would be a bad look for him. He was still an advocate for African American rights and cared deeply about the African American community. "..he had become a "greater attraction among the whites rather than my own people, a thing which has always disturbed me..." He still cares for his own race and takes their opinion very seriously compared to the opinion of other races. Even the man who wrote "Black and Blue", Andy Razaf, knew its intentions were not as serious as everyone made them out to be. "Certainly, Razaf's intentions for "Black and Blue" could not have been clearer-despite those few who narrowly cite its opening verse of the song is solely a plaint for dark-skinned blacks. Nor could Razaf's execution has been defter, as he craftily littered the opening verse with humorous, minstrel-like images early in the first chorus- "feel like old ned" "even the mouse ran from my house"- drawing his listeners in before his most telling lines."

Armstrong was also a great influence and role model for younger African Americans, and he probably influenced many young musicians. He could be looked up to as one of the first nationally famous African Americans. He was a symbol of the American dream and starting from nothing and becoming something. I think he used his platform in a great way as well, for example when he was an Ambassador for the US, he was sent to foreign countries to not only improve the public's eye for the US but to also be an example for the changing in racial inequality and tension.

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