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Unexpected Activism: A Study of Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus as Activists Using James  
Scott's Theory of Public Versus Hidden Transcripts

Melanie Reiff

What is activism? Webster's Dictionary defines activism as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue." Does this mean that activism is only a "vigorous act"? Does one have to be considered forceful to be called an activist? Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X are recognized as two of the leading activists of the 20th century. Both had causes which they were supporting and both were fighting to achieve their goals. King and X are acknowledged as activists because of their outspoken work for Civil Rights. But do activists have to be outspoken for their causes, or can they use different media to make a difference? In this paper, I will explore the roles of Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus as activists. Because of their impact on the jazz community, Armstrong and Mingus had the ability to influence the political climate in which they lived. Even though they did not exemplify the Webster definition of "vigorous" activism, Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus were activists because of their pursuit of freedom and justice through their music and performance.

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott outlines his theory of public versus hidden transcripts. Public transcripts are the dominant expected discourse between the dominant class and the subordinates to maintain order. In this instance, "the public performance of the subordinate will...be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful" (Scott, 2). This discourse is what is viewed in public and often does not reflect the true feelings of either class. This is particularly true of the subordinate who puts on a performance in order to appease the

dominant and uphold the expected discourse, maintaining expected stereotypes. For example, in relationships between slaves and their masters, both parties stayed within the expected discourse in which a slave master would take a position of power and control while the slave would generally take a position of deference and inferiority. While these might not have been true representations of their feelings, these masks were worn in order to maintain an order in society by preserving expected race relations. Even though the “mask” of the public transcript seems to be accepting the dominant discourse at face value, it can be seen as a form of activism because the subordinate is persevering despite adversity. The public transcript allows for the subordinate to protect his own welfare but continue to strive for a better solution.

Contrastingly, the hidden transcript is what takes place offstage and often contradicts a public transcript. This is where the subordinates can express a different viewpoint. While hidden transcripts might not always present the true feelings, a hidden transcript is “produced for a different audience and is under different constraints of power than the public than the hidden transcript” (Scott 5). A hidden transcript can be something said to a fellow subordinate outside of the dominant view, or it can be something as simple as a gesture or motion to convey a message that the dominant actor would not understand. An example of a hidden transcript is the body of slave songs that often alluded to ideas of escape and freedom through the cover of a religious context. While a master would have heard the religious context of the song, fellow slaves would have heard the hidden message of hope for freedom. These hidden transcripts “represent discourse...that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power” (Scott 27). The conversations outside of the public sphere create this discrepancy between the expected discourse and the actual discourse, demonstrating the true feelings of the subordinate class. A hidden transcript allows the subordinate to subtly protest and

resist oppression by a dominant actor. In this sense, a hidden transcript can be seen as activism because a subordinate can use subtle forms of resistance to invoke change.

Yet when these pressures of maintaining public and hidden transcripts come to a head, the views expressed in the hidden transcript can be brought to the public by outspoken statements or actions. While Scott says this is rare, there are times when “subservience evaporates and is replaced by open defiance,” causing a tense moment in power relations (Scott 6). These outbursts often portray the opinions of many members of the subordinate class and speak a “social truth to power” (Scott 6). This tests the accepted discourse and allows the subordinate actors to put pressures on the dominant ideal.

In my paper, I will explain how Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus both operated in James Scott’s realm of public and hidden transcripts and used this model as a form of activism. Both public and hidden transcripts can translate to activism because both transcripts allow actors to invoke change. Being public figures, they both had the opportunity to convey a message through their actions and performance. While they had different approaches to this model, both musicians used their position in the public eye to challenge typical race relations. Armstrong operated within the realm of the public and hidden transcripts for much of his career. He appeals to the dominant white perceptions of an African American entertainer through his joking manner but contrasts this opinion through hidden gestures throughout his performance. Only at the end of his career did he directly challenge the accepted discourse of subordination by making clear statements against segregation. Contrastingly, Mingus did not adhere to the hidden transcript of society. He consistently spoke out against prejudice. His opinions on politics were represented in his music and his public statements on the bandstand. Because of the political statements

expressed in their performances through public and hidden transcripts, Armstrong and Mingus can be considered activists.

Louis Armstrong was born in New Orleans on August 4, 1901, despite the fact that he claimed in his autobiography that his birth was July 4, 1900. Growing up in Storyville, the red light district of New Orleans, Armstrong was faced with Jim Crow laws and prejudice beginning almost at his birth. Armstrong moved around frequently in his childhood and was sent to the Colored Waifs' Home for Boys in 1912 after shooting off a pistol in the street on New Year's Eve (Armstrong 45). During the time he spent at the Waifs' Home, Armstrong was introduced to band music and had his first chance to play the cornet. He quickly became the leader of the band as the band director noticed his talent and affinity for music.

Despite the hardships of his childhood, the pleasure-seeking nature of New Orleans made Armstrong a happy-go-lucky child with a good sense of humor. In his autobiography, Armstrong acknowledges the challenges he faced as a child but often tells these stories in an off-hand manner. In one instance, Armstrong mentions his first experience with Jim Crow laws when he sat down in the front of a street car in New Orleans and was quickly dragged to the back. While Armstrong tells the story of the negative experience with Jim Crow, he does not pessimistically dwell on the experience (Armstrong 20). Instead, he focuses on the times where he and the other African Americans of the community would sit up front because they outnumbered the white people in the car. This and many other anecdotes are told with a joking demeanor, almost as if one could see the musician smiling and laughing as he recounted his tales, despite the negative experiences. The contradictory nature of his childhood depicted in *Satchmo* provides a backdrop for understanding the nature of his adult personality. Throughout most of his life, Armstrong dealt with adversity with a smile.

After his stay at the Colored Waifs' Home, Armstrong became even more involved with music, performing in honky-tonks and other places throughout New Orleans. In the 1920's Armstrong's fame developed as he worked with various jazz groups on riverboats, in Chicago, and in New York. His reputation grew as he played with the band because of his knack for rapid playing and impressive high notes. By the end of the 1920's, Armstrong was established as a mature musician. His biographer, James Lincoln Collier, regards Armstrong as "not merely the leading man in jazz, but its hero" because of his prominence and skill in his field(Collier, 199). While many white audiences thought of African Americans as inferior and not as smart, sophisticated, or civilized as they were, Louis Armstrong was able to be on equal footing with white performers from a performance aspect. Collier states, "Louis Armstrong was one black who was not only better, but the best. Whites themselves said he was the best trumpet player...for millions of blacks across the United States, it was profoundly important that a black man should be better at something than whites" (Collier, 199). While this might be an overstatement of Armstrong's influence, Collier explains succinctly the impact that Armstrong had on the jazz community.

As his fame grew in the 1930's through big band performances, Armstrong's management frequently changed until he began working, in the late 1930's, with Joe Glaser, his manager for the rest of his career. Despite his place as a prominent African American jazz musician, Armstrong always was under white management so that he could continue playing big gigs for white audiences. Many theaters, movie companies, and record companies were owned by white businessmen who would not negotiate with an African American agent, so an African American musician needed white management to be acknowledged in the music industry (Collier 220). Therefore, it was imperative for Louis Armstrong to have a white manager who

understood the ins and outs of the industry. After World War II, Armstrong's fame continued to grow as he became known as a singer as well as a trumpeter, specifically because of his style of scat singing and vocal improvisation. His gritty tone became an example for singers of the time and was imitated by many. In 1947, Glaser created a six piece group for Armstrong entitled the All Stars, which became a group that Armstrong was associated with for the rest of his career (Collier 250). During this time period, Armstrong began filming movies along side stars such as Bing Crosby. In 1952, *Downbeat* magazine proclaimed him the most influential musician of all time, placing him above Duke Ellington and Bach. Until his death in 1971, Armstrong continued performing and making movies, solidifying his place as a jazz legend.

Armstrong's happy-go-lucky personality and joking demeanor helped him secure a place as a star in mainstream American music. However, Armstrong was often criticized by members of the jazz community for this "Uncle Tom persona" since it seemed that he was buying in to the racial stereotypes of the time and adhering to the accepted public transcript. His happy-go-lucky, minstrel persona initially made Armstrong a role model for African American audiences because of the success and recognition that he gained. This style of performance was akin to the humor of the day in African American communities of the South. But in later years, this "mugging" and "Tomming" was viewed as an offensive embarrassment to younger generations of jazz musicians. Musicians like Dizzy Gillespie and other beboppers felt that Louis Armstrong was outdated and an embarrassment because of the character that he took. His biggest criticism came after Armstrong dressed up as the King of the Zulus in a Mardi Gras parade in 1949. Many of his supporters and fans were outraged by this costume, saying that it was self-abasement to dress in the grass-skirt and black-face of the character. While this look could have been very offensive, Armstrong saw it as an honor to take on this role in the parade because of the

importance of the Mardi Gras tradition in New Orleans (Collier 227). Armstrong's Uncle Tom persona was a necessary part of his performance in order to be a successful performer at the time.

To become a success in the music industry in his early career, Armstrong needed to adhere to the public transcript of appeasement. When Armstrong's career began, racism was still rampant and the Civil Rights movement had not yet taken hold. It was safer for Armstrong to follow this doctrine of appeasement in order to protect himself and his career. He appealed to white producers who liked the "smiling, uncomplaining black man trying to integrate himself" (Collier 240). While his laughing minstrel character was perpetuated through his on stage performance, Armstrong was not insincere in his portrayal of this character. He was a truly happy person who wanted to entertain his audience. As Billie Holiday once said, "Yeah Pops Toms, but he Toms from the heart" (Collier 241). This public transcript of appeasement was not a stretch for Armstrong since it was in his nature to be charismatic and pleasing. He had a lovable and charming demeanor in all of his performances. Because of this attitude, Armstrong was never appeared fazed by the blatant racism he faced. While later jazz musicians like Gillespie thought Armstrong's character was disrespectful and self-abasing because he appeared to buy into the joker persona, Armstrong's minstrel character was his way of fighting racism. Gillespie ultimately admitted that his interpretation of Armstrong's "Tomming" character was wrong:

If anybody asked me about a certain public image of him, handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism, I never hesitated to say I didn't like it. I didn't want the white man to expect me to allow the same things Louis did. Hell, I had my own way of "Tomming"... Later on, I began to recognize what I had considered Pop's grinning in the face of racism as his absolute refusal to let anything, even anger about racism, steal the joy from his life and erase his fantastic smile. Coming from a younger generation, I misjudged him (Gillespie 157).

Gillespie and the other beboppers who had grown up after Armstrong did not understand the pressures of Louis Armstrong's society. The minstrel persona was a form of activism for Armstrong because even though he appeared to be taking a deferential position to white authority, Armstrong's intent was just the opposite. Armstrong used this pleasant demeanor to challenge the expected role of an African American minstrel by continuing to perform and becoming a prominent figure of society. He did not adhere to the accepted white view that African Americans should be kept in their place. By becoming a musical icon, Armstrong rose above this idea of deference. In doing so, Armstrong was mocking the expectations of white society which saw African Americans as lower class figures who knew their position. Instead, Armstrong achieved greatness, proving he was on the same level as his white oppressors.

Armstrong also used this minstrel persona to challenge the dominant class. In one instance in 1931, Armstrong and his band were arrested by the Memphis Police Force after being seen on the bus with his manager's white wife. After being bailed out by his manager, Armstrong and his band performed on the radio and dedicated a song to the Memphis Police Force; he chose to dedicate "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal." After the song, the police force allegedly was thrilled and thanked Armstrong for dedicating a song to them, despite the unflattering title (Hersch 389). Armstrong was able to use his minstrel humor to resist the blatant racist actions of the Memphis police force. While still in the public eye, Armstrong showed some form of resistance through the humor in his music.

Armstrong's performances in his movies often included hidden transcripts which communicated subtle forms of resistance. Through his Uncle Tom character, Armstrong seemingly contributed to expected race relations, yet he constantly added little gestures that made it difficult to consider Armstrong completely unaware of the political atmosphere of his

time period (Hersch 387). As early as his second full length feature, *Pennies from Heaven*, Armstrong combats the stereotype that the black minstrel character is of inferior intelligence and is lazy. Armstrong's character, Henry, is a typical lower class character who is looked down upon by the upper class. In many scenes where Armstrong's character is being stereotyped as lazy, Armstrong often makes facial expressions that add humor to the situation. These expressions include obvious eye rolling, bulging eyes to show shock at circumstances throughout the movie, and grinning and laughing in the face of prejudice.

Krin Gabbard explains that Armstrong's mugging and facial gestures combat the cliched characters. Gabbard argues Armstrong's portrayal of Henry was in the context of the style of humor of the day that an African American audience would have understood (Gabbard 215). His eye rolling and mugging poked fun at the circumstances in which he was placed and made subtle references to the ridiculous prejudice of the ruling class. Because his audience would have understood these gestures, this signifying was a form of a hidden transcript and was a way of overcoming adversity. Unbeknownst to the majority of viewers, he subtly communicated to a different audience through his gesture. The general white audience would have missed the subtleties in his sense of humor that were more prominent in African American comedy of the time. Because of this, Armstrong could communicate a message of perseverance and strength without changing the attributes of his character. Armstrong's reactions and sense of humor gave a voice to the oppressed while still performing for a dominant audience.

In *High Society*, Armstrong once again plays a marginal character on the outskirts of the main story. However, in this instance Armstrong is a character with insight and critiques the ridiculous happenings of the white upper class people who he spends the movie observing. In the opening song, the "High Society Calypso," Armstrong pokes fun at the predicament

presented in the movie, the love triangle. He sings an upbeat tune about the “high society” and laughingly presents the main problem, “[Dexter’s] chick is gonna marry a square.” He then continues to tell “Brother Dexter, just trust your Satch/ to stop that weddin’ and kill the match/ I’ll toot my trumpet and start some fun/ and play in a way she’ll come back to you, son.” While poking fun at the troubles and woes of the high society, Armstrong presents that it is his character who will solve the problems of Bing Crosby’s Dexter. Throughout the movie, Armstrong comments on the situation through asides to the audience. Armstrong is not portrayed as the lazy and ignorant minstrel character. At one point, when it is clear that Dexter and Grace Kelley’s Tracy should be together despite the other two suitors, Armstrong says, “my boy’s in third - what we need is a little change of pace music.” He proceeds to play a stunning and romantic solo, drawing Dexter and Tracy together. He is in a position in which he is more knowledgeable than the socialites. Though he still keeps his humor and joking demeanor, he is portrayed as a smart character who will solve the conflict of the movie. It is his music that helps bring the couple together, and through his commentary, it is clear that it was in his plan all along. This is a hidden transcript because Armstrong is communicating as the knowledgeable character even though Armstrong’s character is a lower class than the rest of the characters. He is put at the same level as them through his performance and is considered as an equal. When introducing Armstrong, Crosby calls him “the greatest of them all” and proceeds to have a conversation with Armstrong in their performance. They are musical equals, going back and forth in an interesting interplay in which they both make bold statements. Despite his race, Armstrong’s character is musically equal to Crosby.

Armstrong dealt with racist stereotypes throughout his music as well as his movies. As a solo performer, Armstrong’s virtuosity allowed him to break out of the polyphony of the New

Orleans Jazz style and crossover to become one of the first modern pop stars. Armstrong's impressive technique and creativity moved him out of the background and solidified his place as a solo performer. He was acknowledged by a wider music community because of this skill and commanded huge audiences throughout his career. Charles Hersch notes that Armstrong's ability to appeal to larger audiences outside of the New Orleans Jazz aesthetic allowed him to achieve fame that "allowed him to break some racial barriers, in effect leaving behind the safety net of the group solidarity that characterized segregated New Orleans and becoming the first African American pop star" (Hersch 383). Because of Armstrong's fame, he was able to assert his individuality as an activist, creating a unique place for African Americans in a white-dominated society. He contributed to changing opinions on racism, proving that he was a successful African American man.

As Armstrong crossed over into "Tin Pan Alley," Armstrong did not fully assimilate into the popularized genre and instead created his own individual style. Armstrong made use of African American styles and techniques in his performance, signifying a tie to his heritage. These subtle changes allowed Armstrong to assert his individuality while still fitting into the commercial style. In his article "Poisoning Their Coffee," Hersch addresses the black dialect and use of vocal timbres in Armstrong's singing that add blues devices to his performance. Hersch makes note of Armstrong's changes in style through his 1929 recording of "When You're Smiling," comments on Armstrong alteration of the rhythm at the ends of words and the melody itself to evoke this aesthetic and to convey his message. For example, the first three notes of the melody begin with the phrase "when you're smiling," which are three notes ascending in pitch. Armstrong alters this phrase by singing "Oh when you're" at the same pitch and then descends to "smiling." He changes the rhythm on the word "smiling" from two long notes on the different

syllables to a short-long pattern continued throughout the piece. Armstrong does not sing the written “when you’re smiling” but, instead, changes it to “when you smiling,” evoking a black dialect (Hersch 388). Armstrong begins the piece with vocal scatting, akin to the sound of a trumpet. His trumpet solo at the end of the piece emulates the sound of his voice when he sings the lyrics. Armstrong’s stylistic consistency creates a common thread between the instrumental and vocal parts of the song, solidifying his own unique style throughout the piece. Hersch’s analysis of Armstrong’s stylization presents a compelling argument about Armstrong’s blending of styles. He incorporates aspects of both the Tin Pan Alley style and elements from New Orleans Jazz into his performance. The application of these techniques was rarely seen in vocal performance before Armstrong. Subsequent renditions of the piece by performers like Frank Sinatra and Judy Garland do not include the same stylistic changes. Both Garland and Sinatra sing the piece as written with the correct rhythms on the word “smiling” and stick to the initial melodic feature of the first phrase. Armstrong’s bold originality incorporates blues techniques into the popular style. The percussive nuances of his singing and playing helped transform the style of music and created and defined a style emulated by generations of jazz musicians. This combination of styles allowed Armstrong to assert his pride in his African American heritage and show the importance of his culture in main-stream American music.

In his songs that have clear racist lyrics, Armstrong gives a passionate performance to combat the lazy personality portrayed by the lyrics. Hersch refers to Armstrong’s signature song, “When It’s Sleepy Time Down South,” as an example of this paradox. In a 1942 film short of the song, Armstrong and the other musicians are dressed as field hands or slaves. The lyrics of the song depict racist images such as the “darkies crooning songs soft and low.” Yet his solo interludes of the piece contradict the lazy slaves depicted throughout the film (Hersch 388).

Through this performance, Armstrong communicates another hidden transcript. Armstrong contradicts the lyrics depicting the shiftless nature of the slaves by strong solos that are forceful and poignant. The activity and intensity in his performance is in direct contrast to the lazy stereotype because Armstrong shows his determination and strength. This addition communicates a desire for the African American community to persevere. Armstrong will not buy into the lazy stereotype and does not let that depiction stand. Instead, he is industrious and untiring throughout his performance. His determined solos stand up to adversity and prejudice by showing his skill and talent.

Politically, this is significant because Armstrong's assertion of his own individuality allows him to combat the deferential stereotype associated with African Americans, particularly in the South. With Jim Crow laws, segregation forced many African Americans to be unassuming in order to ease racial tensions. Any outright statement against segregation would be dangerous for the lives of African Americans in the south. Growing up in New Orleans, Armstrong became accustomed to the system of gestures and avoidance in order to maintain societal norms. However, through his success in performance, Armstrong was able to break out of the deferential manner and assert his pride in his heritage. His originality and changes to pieces like "When You're Smiling" established Armstrong as one of a kind, not an imitator of a white style of performance. Armstrong's innovative virtuosity and steadfast performances allowed him to assert his pride in his background and to transcend racial boundaries and prejudices, thus creating a place in popular music for African Americans. Despite not acting in a "vigorous" manner, Armstrong's assertion of his pride in his background that contributed to his rise to fame is a form of activism. Armstrong's unwillingness to be looked on as lazy in his performance serves to combat that stereotype. His confidence in himself despite obstacles

created a general appeal and solidified his place as a star. Armstrong's activism can be seen in his ability subtly to negotiate the stereotypical norms of submission and indolence to become a star, thus creating a path for African American jazz musicians to follow.

During the 1950's Armstrong brought the hidden transcript of resistance into his public performance and became more vocal about the racial injustices in America and the effect of prejudice on jazz music. Armstrong was appointed Goodwill Ambassador to Third World and communist countries during the Cold War to promote freedom abroad. Felix Belair, Jr. notes that Armstrong was an effective ambassador and large groups of potential audience members would be turned away from his sold-out shows. However, the position of Goodwill Ambassador often was in conflict with the racism that was still present domestically. Armstrong reacted very vocally to the continued racism at home. After Governor Faubus blocked school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, Armstrong spoke out against the United States government. He is recorded in an interview having said "the way they are treating my people the government can go to hell...it's getting almost so bad, a colored man hasn't got any country" (Collier 317). As a result of the blocking of school desegregation in Arkansas, Armstrong canceled his tour to Russia, believing that it was contradictory to promote freedom abroad when his people still did not have true freedom domestically. He also called President Eisenhower a "two-faced man with no guts" (Walser 247). This public outburst caused outrage in the music community. His manager apologized for the outburst, but Armstrong denied the apology as it was his right to speak out. Because of the changing political atmosphere of the country, it became easier for Armstrong to be outspoken on segregation and social injustices. Armstrong no longer had to adhere to the necessary discourse of his earlier career. The increasing place of African Americans in the community and the Civil Rights Movement made it possible for Armstrong to

become outspoken. In an interview with Albert M. Colegrove of the *San Francisco News* in 1958, Armstrong criticized the now segregated jazz scene of New Orleans. Armstrong noted that jazz was not segregated when he started in New Orleans, but African American and white musicians were no longer allowed to play together. Armstrong commented:

Since 1954, in New Orleans, they don't want white and Negro musicians playing together. The people who made those laws don't know anything about music. Because in music, it doesn't make any difference. I don't run into much trouble with segregation, 'cause I don't go where I'm not wanted. And - please don't take this out, I'm going to tell this straight - I don't go to New Orleans no more (Colegrove 13).

As more African American musicians and activists were speaking up against racism, Armstrong began to assert his true feelings about the injustices in society. Armstrong broke out of the deferential role that he had taken earlier in his career to fit within white society. He brought his true feelings out of the hidden transcript. This move was controversial but brought Armstrong into a more political position (Walser 247). By being vocal about his beliefs, Armstrong forced people to question the attitudes prevalent in American society.

Despite these later outbursts against political injustices, Armstrong continued to peacefully use music to transcend barriers throughout most of his career. He believed that the emotional power of music could go beyond nationality. In a performance in Lebanon in 1961 when asked why he was traveling on to Israel, Armstrong responded, "You see that horn? That horn ain't prejudiced. A note's a note in any language" (Hersch 380). Armstrong held this same mentality in his domestic performances as well. He prided himself on his ability to bring people together through music. At a 1948 concert in Miami, Armstrong was overcome with emotion after seeing a desegregated audience. He said, "I walked on stage and saw something I thought I'd never see. I saw thousands of people, colored and white on the main floor...Just all together, naturally...When you see things like that. You know you're going forward" (Hersch 380).

Armstrong used music to transcend barriers imposed on him by segregated society and was fully aware of music's political impact and his role as a political performer. Armstrong once described performing for white audiences as such:

But while they're listening to our music, they don't think about trouble. What's more they're watching Negro and white musicians play side by side. And we bring contentment and pleasure. I always say, 'Look at the nice taste we leave.' It's bound to mean something. That's what music is for (Hersch 380).

Armstrong was able to use his position as a public figure to transcend racial barriers by being a successful African American public figure. He was able to attract white attention far before athletes and activists, and his lovable persona provided entertainment to all people, regardless of their race. Armstrong was not a political revolutionary or activist in the same way as the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, but he was able to make a significant difference through his performance. Lester Bowie described Armstrong as such:

The true revolutionary is one that's not apparent. I mean the revolutionary that's waving a gun out in the streets is never effective; the police just arrest him. But the police don't ever know about the guy that smiles and drops a little poison in their coffee. Well, Louis, in that sense, was that sort of revolutionary, a true revolutionary (Hersch 371).

Armstrong paved the way for generations of African American performers to come by his good-natured personality and talent. Armstrong solidified his place as an activist through both subtle musical gestures and outspoken statements. By adhering to the public transcript in his happy-go-lucky persona, Armstrong created a place for African Americans in mainstream music. In that position, he communicated to a wide audience through the use of hidden transcripts. His subtle musical and physical gestures added humor and intelligence to his performances. This was a form of activism because he challenged preconceived notions of African Americans in American society. His hard-work and perseverance allowed him to break the shiftless and lazy stereotype often associated with the minstrel character. Armstrong's success as a musician

allowed him to cross boundaries created by racial stereotypes and make him a prominent feature in American society.

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Charles Mingus was born on a military base in Arizona in 1922 to a biracial father and white mother. His father did not promote pride in their African American heritage. Early in his life, Mingus was faced with racist attitudes and often was unsure of where he belonged because of his mixed race heritage (Priestly 3). Despite being exposed to only church and classical music at home, Mingus developed an early love of jazz. Once in high school, Mingus began to compose, incorporating elements of jazz and classical music. He moved to California and began composing film scores. At age 29, Mingus moved to New York and began working with Nat Hentoff, jazz critic and political writer. In 1952, he co-founded his first record label with Max Roach entitled Debut Records in order to run his own career outside of the control of the mainstream record labels, which he claimed mistreated African American musicians.

Mingus formed the Jazz Composers workshop in 1954, which would help propel his career as a serious jazz musician. In the workshop, Mingus demanded that his musicians explore and develop their creativity as individual performers. During the 1950's Mingus was extremely productive as a bandleader, recording ten albums by 1956 and was a major influence in the early free jazz era. For the rest of his career, Mingus continued to be innovative in his composing, consistently pushing boundaries and trying new musical ideas. In 1979 Mingus was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and passed away later that year.

Like Armstrong, Charles Mingus conveyed political messages through his music and statements in his performance. However, Mingus did not conform to the expected public transcript of deference and subservience to the dominant population. Instead, Mingus presented

political messages in his music as an act of clear protest. He was vocal about racial injustices throughout his career, often focusing on the clear prejudices of the music industry and using political titles for many of his pieces and directly challenging the accepted norms about segregation through his music and critique of music industry practices. Mingus even criticized Armstrong for his adherence to the stereotypical portrayal of African American performers. Mingus pushed the boundaries of jazz music with his innovative compositional process and challenged racial stereotypes through his outspoken critiques. Because of his position as a composer, Mingus was able to incorporate politics into his music differently than Armstrong. He could make explicit statements through his music while still acting within the realm of a hidden transcript, yet he was not confined by the accepted public transcript of the time. With the changing attitudes due to the growing Civil Rights Movement, Mingus had the ability to be more outspoken than Armstrong in his resistance to discrimination. Mingus was an activist because of his ability to communicate an agenda of resistance and protest to his audience through allegories in his compositions, musical statements, and outspoken critiques.

Mingus's music was primarily in the hard bop aesthetic, a post bebop style that incorporated influences from rhythm and blues, gospel music, and blues. As Mingus developed in this style, his approach to his workshop evolved as well. In the Jazz Workshop, Mingus focused on jazz as the individual expression of each musician. He took each musician's own style and personality into consideration when writing music in order to allow musicians to have more individuality while still maintaining his own compositional approach (Porter 125). Hard bop focused on collective improvisation in which all members of the ensemble had an important and necessary role. Each musician had a freedom within the collective framework to explore his own individuality. Mingus's music suggested a need for freedom for the whole community

through a collective empowerment, possibly mirroring a quest for freedom within society. Scott Saul states that this “collective empowerment was indispensable to the advance of individual rights and that such freedom needed to be staked out through sometimes messy public struggle” (Saul 392). In this way, the Jazz Workshop provided commentary for the politics of the time. By advocating freedom for the individual performers within the framework of jazz, Mingus suggested a need for freedom in the society. However, for Mingus, freedom is achieved by a necessary, collective struggle. All of the musicians work together to achieve freedom. It is an unorganized process because of the collective inclusivity. Saul continues to say that that musical freedom for Mingus followed this idea of a collective struggle for freedom, saying:

Mingusian freedom was a democratic event, not a hoped-for ideal; it was messy and participatory not rationalized or private. For these reasons, its modus operandi was close to the Civil Rights Movement’s strategy of provocation through non-violence: both Mingus and the Movement tested principles in the heat of group conflict (Saul 388).

Each member of the group had an ability to explore freedom as a part of the whole, thus mirroring democracy in society. While there is a necessary struggle because of the number of voices in the polyphony, it is a non-violent process. There is an ebb and flow as each member of the ensemble expresses his own ideas. This is a statement of freedom because it parallels the Civil Rights Movement. The musicians pushed for individual freedom, much like African Americans were pushing for freedom in the Civil Rights Movement. In both cases, it was not an easy quest for freedom and there was a necessary, non-violent struggle to achieve their goals. Mingus subtly supported this idea through his music by using music as a platform to address the need for freedom.

This idea of collective freedom can be seen through Mingus’s Jazz Workshop recordings. All of the members of the ensemble are important and they all work together to collectively, each giving support to the others. Mingus’s music depicts this by breaking down the hierarchy of

instruments and structure. For example, in his “Folk Forms 1,” Mingus presents a polyphonic texture in which all the musicians have a chance to solo. Each solo has three sections: a traditional solo with accompaniment, duets with other instruments, finally followed by a section of collective improvisation, a truly polyphonic section in which all voices are heard (Hersch 109). The musicians work together and trade ideas creating a coherent structure through their musical empathy. According to Hersch, it is a musical group without second class citizens and is an “anticipation of a movement of African Americans to come forward and be heard” (Hersch 106). Mingus looked for musical freedom within his ensemble that mirrored the quest for freedom within America. Hersch considers Mingus’s a direct parallel to the goals of the Civil Rights Movement because of its intense and soulful spirituality and cultural power.

Because Mingus was vocal about his political beliefs, which manifest in his music, Mingus can be considered an activist. While both Saul and Hersch make generalizations and assumptions regarding the intent of Mingus’s free jazz, they both present an interesting argument concerning the nature of Mingus’s compositional process and its relation to his political beliefs. If Mingus did in fact intend to parallel the Civil Rights Movement’s quest for equality and freedom, he made a striking political statement through this comparison. Where earlier forms of jazz would have one lead solo at a time and the rest offering support, free jazz allowed for an equality among the musicians. The polyphony present in “Folk Forms 1” represented the collective energy needed to achieve equality. By allowing for this equality and individuality in performance, Mingus could create a more democratic atmosphere in his music. Through the inclusion of a democratic ideal within his music, Mingus could address the ills of society. This can be seen as a form of activism because Mingus confronted prejudice and segregation within his music by advocating an equality among all of his musicians. Mingus addressed the quest for

freedom of equality through a hidden transcript that directly challenged the public transcript that promoted inequality. By modeling the freedom in his music on the ideas of the Civil Rights Movement, Mingus was able to protest discrimination and fight for liberty. The assertion of his political position through his music, explained by Saul's and Hersch's theories on the freedom within Mingus's music, allowed Mingus publicly to fight the racial injustices in American society.

In addition to advocating a necessary freedom for the whole community, Mingus's compositions often included a critique of the stereotypes and prejudices in American society. In many of his pieces, Mingus included an allegorical explanation for the work, often criticizing race relations in America. Whether his compositions included titles that were blatantly critical or specific musical exchanges that represented a broader political message, Mingus used music as a platform to express his beliefs on racism. Through this, Mingus changed the way politics could be incorporated in music to promote a message. His use of the subtleties in his composition as a form of activism allowed Mingus to communicate within a hidden transcript in order to combat the discrimination of the accepted public transcript.

Mingus often used political events as inspiration for his works. His "Work Song" was written after the July 1955 lynching of a 14-year old boy in Mississippi. This piece depicted the pain and struggle after such an event. This piece was similar to Mingus's "Haitian Fight Song" as both pieces were written in G minor and depicted a struggle for freedom. Mingus often said that "Haitian Fight Song" could also be called "Afro-American Fight Song" because Mingus believed that there was not much difference between revolutionary Haiti of the 1790's and the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. In "Haitian Fight Song," Mingus presents a "contemporary folk feeling" which reinvents the roots of the music so it can address the conflict

of the present and suggest a vision of a future beyond the civil rights movement and the crisis it represented (Saul, 1). The percussive beginning of the piece produces a tense atmosphere which will be the basis of the later struggle. As more voices enter, the polyphony develops into conflicting lines, creating a sense of struggle. Through this struggle, various solos emerge as the central focus, each making a strong statement against the conflicting polyphony. In the first saxophone solo, the shrill tone creates a sense of urgency and protest. Throughout the piece, the musicians are “screaming for freedom” through these shrill cries in the horns. At the end of the piece, the scream in the horns climax in a final protest against the confines of the previous struggle. Mingus uses “Haitian Fight Song” to make a statement for protest in order to achieve freedom. In both pieces, the music is tense, depicting a clear sense of conflict. The musicians fight through this tension and push for both musical and political freedom through the conflict in the piece.

One of Mingus’s landmark pieces is “Pithecanthropus Erectus,” a musical tone poem that dramatizes the rise and fall of man and sets up a political allegory concerning domination in American society. In the liner notes of the album *The Best of Mingus*, Mingus describes the programmatic elements of the piece:

It depicts musically my conception of the modern counterpart of the first man to stand erect - how proud he was, considering himself the first to ascend from all fours, pounding his chest and preaching his superiority over all the mammals still in a prone position. Overcome with self esteem, he goes out to rule the world, if not the universe, but both his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation or those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempting to stand on a false security, deny him not only the right of being a man, but finally destroy him completely (Liner Notes, *The Best of Mingus*).

Through “Pithecanthropus Erectus,” Mingus makes an explicit political statement. The tone poem represents a slave revolt as the more numerous but weaker public rises up over the smaller but powerful upper class. It is about domination and conflict and dramatizes the struggle

between the two respective groups. As the composer, Mingus set up a framework of chords and basic musical ideas for which the musicians to use as a basis for their performances throughout the piece. In the first section, voices enter one by one, in a slow vamp, ultimately competing for attention. This musical struggle is an attempt at full scale polyphony as the competing, individual voices fight to become the main focus. There is a conflict within the music because of the contrasting instrumental lines. This creates a sense of tension as man rises up against his competitors. The inner sections feature conversing and cooperation in a polyphonic manner surrounding individual solos (Hersch 107). Each individual voice carries a different, but important, line, combining to work together. All voices are important as they rise together in revolt. There is a continuous climb in volume and intensity as the musicians prepare for the climax of the piece and the final moments of conflict. In the final movement, the saxophones screech wildly in protest as the pianist plays tone clusters, creating a more chaotic aesthetic. The drums are steady and forceful as if to drive home a statement of protest. In the final seconds of the piece, the musicians freely play conflicting lines creating a sense of total chaos and anarchy, representing an unorganized rebellion. The masses rise against the elites and chaos ensues (Hersch 107). While not explicitly an allegory of the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement, “Pithecanthropus Erectus” can be seen as such. The various musicians work together in a collective struggle to achieve their goal, the climax of the piece. This parallels the necessary struggle of the Civil Rights Movement to achieve its goals and rise out of oppression. By giving the piece a political connotation in his liner notes, Mingus set up a framework for the piece to be looked at as a statement about the current struggles of the time. While they were no longer slaves, activists in the Civil Rights Movement continued to struggle to achieve freedom. The

Movement did not have a chaotic mass uprising as depicted in the tone poem, but Mingus depicted the need to rise up against discrimination and fight repression.

Many of Mingus's other pieces also carry political implications. In "The Clown," Mingus is allegory of a clown trapped in a tasteless culture as a critique of the American outlook on African American society. According to Mingus, the "mass appetite for kitsch threatened to crush the singular spirit of the creative artist" (Saul 153). The music industry asked African American artists to sacrifice integrity for commercial appeal that played into stereotypes by promoting artists like Armstrong who took on the "Uncle Tom" character. In "The Clown," Mingus critiques this culture that the music industry has created for African American artists and fights against it. In his vocal piece "Eclipse," Mingus writes an allegory about an interracial love affair through cosmic allusions. The piece is a spiritual allegory of the moon and sun becoming one representing the still prevalent taboo on interracial love. Musically, their forbidden love is depicted through a shift in the tonal center at pivotal moments in the lyrics. The tritone is also used heavily throughout the piece (Saul 186). In "Eclipse," Mingus used both classical and jazz elements to represent the diminishing segregation between the two cultures. "Eclipse" represents a struggle that Mingus faced throughout his life. Being of a biracial family, Mingus faced prejudices from both African American and white communities. Because of this background, Mingus did not view interracial relationships as something to be feared. "Eclipse" allowed Mingus to address this taboo and relate it to something beautiful and natural.

Mingus used allegories to make political statements in his music. The subtleties of the of Mingus's compositions allowed him to operate within a hidden transcript to convey his message to his audience. By using allegories, Mingus critiqued the racial stereotypes in society. "Pithecanthropus Erectus," "Eclipse," and "The Clown" all depict a struggle against racist

situations. Musically, Mingus presented a conflict that was analogous to that of American society. By depicting this conflict in his music, Mingus addressed the problems he faced. In “Pithecanthropus Erectus,” Mingus offers a solution to the domination of the superior culture through the massive uprising of the last movement and shows the beauty of interracial love in “Eclipse.” By offering solutions to the issues presented in the music, Mingus provided answers to conflict and sees hope for a better future. Mingus had an attitude of overcoming adversity and promoted equality through his music. Because of this promotion of equality and justice, Mingus was an activist. He was able to directly challenge commonly held perspectives on race and race relationships through his music, forcing listeners to reconsider their own opinions on the matter.

Mingus’s “Fables of Faubus” written in 1957 to criticize Governor Orval E. Faubus after the blocking of school desegregation is an example of Mingus’s use of music to convey an extremely political message. In the original performance of the piece, Mingus asked his musicians to “tell me someone who’s ridiculous.” Drummer Dannie Richmond responded “Governor Faubus!” to which Mingus replied “why is he so sick and ridiculous?” Richmond continued by adding “because he won’t permit integrated schools - so he’s a fool.” This back and forth between the two stuck and evolved in Mingus’s lyrics of the piece. The lyrics to the piece are as follows:

Oh, Lord, don't let 'em shoot us!  
Oh, Lord, don't let 'em stab us!  
Oh, Lord, don't let 'em tar and feather us!  
Oh, Lord, no more swastikas!  
Oh, Lord, no more Ku Klux Klan!

Name me someone who's ridiculous, Dannie.  
Governor Faubus!  
Why is he so sick and ridiculous?  
He won't permit integrated schools.

Then he's a fool! Boo! Nazi Fascist supremists!

Boo! Ku Klux Klan (with your Jim Crow plan)

Name me a handful that's ridiculous, Dannie Richmond.

Faubus, Rockefeller, Eisenhower

Why are they so sick and ridiculous?

Two, four, six, eight:

They brainwash and teach you hate.

H-E-L-L-O, Hello.

(Charles Mingus)

The lyrics are violent and pointedly political. Because lyrics were not often included in Mingus' compositions, it is clear that he wanted to make a statement against the prejudices in society through this piece with the incorporation of lyrics. In the last few lines, Mingus took a segregationist chant ("Two, four, six, eight: We don't want to integrate") and reversed it, proving that he refused to take segregation seriously. The piece itself is rhythmically unstable and parodies the formalities of segregation by "sacrificing its own internal formalities" throughout the music (Saul 204). The glides of the horns in the start of the piece automatically create a frivolous atmosphere. The repetition of the main motive is light as it ambles along. In comparison with some of Mingus's other pieces, there is a definite lighter aesthetic. The keyboard solo in the middle goes back and forth between scales and a bouncy motive. While many sections of the piece are light and bouncy, there is a juxtaposition of serious jazz elements in the solos and a jaunty air in some of the group sections. Mingus's own solo has a more bluesy and minor aesthetic, possibly representing the negative effects of segregation. Yet when his solo is over, there is a return to the opening bouncy motive and the piece ends with an energetic rise to the final note. The contradiction between these two ideas presents a criticism of Governor Faubus by refusing to take him seriously. The opening motive is light and delirious, almost as if it pokes fun at segregation. By not taking segregation and prejudice seriously, he is acting

against it. Mingus refuses to stay within a framework of Jim Crow laws and hatred and makes a very passionate statement against segregation. Through this piece, Mingus used composition to make a statement about political injustices.

“Fables of Faubus” allowed Mingus directly to challenge discrimination as opposed to using an hidden transcript to present his message, as he did in his other pieces. Mingus stepped away from the use of musical allegories to convey a message and used his lyrics to confront racism. By directly challenging the accepted public transcript of racism and discrimination in the South, Mingus took a stand against prejudice, and thus asserted his activism. Mingus vocally critiqued the government and addressed ills of our society.

While not acknowledged as an activist, Mingus made great strides in confronting segregation and prejudice. His direct allegorical references and outspoken attacks brought a transcript of resistance to the public. Whether through thoughtful lyrics that outspokenly attack racism or through subtle allegory and metaphors, Mingus makes a clear statement combatting the racist attitudes in the United States. Mingus once said that “I can’t play [“Haitian Fight Song”] right unless I’m thinking about prejudice and hate and persecution, and how unfair it is. And it usually ends with my feeling: ‘I told them! I hope somebody heard me’” (Hersch 104). He chose to directly combat discrimination through outright statements through his music because it was a platform for him to express his feelings. “Fables of Faubus” is a prime example of Mingus’s use of music directly to fight racist notions. He forcefully addressed discrimination and made an adamant statement by using music to critique American politics and attempt evoke a change in racist sentiment, making Mingus an activist.

Mingus was known for his angry personality on the bandstand, which often was characterized by outbursts against the audience and criticisms of the racist policies of the music

industry. Mingus did not like the club atmosphere in which the audience did not pay full attention to the performers. He often chastised his audience for not giving him respect and criticized their faddish attraction to jazz. Much of Mingus's anger was directed at the music industry, and he often criticized the pressure on musicians to sell out to appease the industry and attract large audiences. Mingus defended the right of musicians not to sell out and settle for smaller audiences, saying:

I think they're afraid, when you know you could turn around tomorrow, change your clothes, change your hair-do, start Uncle Tomming and singing, give up your career and your love of music, and become a clown of some sort. They know, if you're that strong a man to stick to your guns and believe in music the way you believe in it, they're afraid of you the same as they're afraid of Martin Luther King (Priestly 93).

In this, Mingus defended the right for musicians to pave their own paths. He asserted that if a musician was strong in his position, he had more influence and prominence than a musician who sold out to big business. Mingus was very critical of Louis Armstrong for his appeal to the more commercialized audiences and industry. Through the 1970's, Mingus was still referring to Armstrong as an Uncle Tom. Mingus believed that African Americans in the industry could become isolated from other African Americans by buying into this "white aesthetic" and the industry. He hoped that one day "it will no longer be necessary for a musician to jump up and down on a drum or to dance on a bandstand to receive recognition of his talent" (Porter 107). Mingus never liked the minstrel persona and refused to mold to those industry expectations. By sticking to his own personality, he asserted his pride in his heritage and promoted a sense of African American pride in those who worked with him. His critique of the music industry was a political statement against the stereotypes that were still so commonly held in the United States.

Mingus also critiqued music industry practices and their promotion of commercialized jazz. When *Time* magazine omitted African American musicians from a cover article relating the

popularity of jazz and featuring Dave Brubeck, Mingus openly criticized the magazine for promoting commercialized jazz music. The publication associated “blackness” in music with immorality and argued that through the “whiter” aesthetic, jazz was moving away from an unhealthy past. Mingus responded by identifying jazz music as having a distinct tradition with African American innovators. Therefore, this undesired “blackness” was essential to the performance of jazz. Mingus claimed that musicians, such as Brubeck, did not swing because they did not have this tie to African American heritage (Porter 109). Dannie Richmond once noted Mingus’s discontent with these practices, saying “and then, with a lot of white musicians coming on the scene and getting credit for certain things, I do know for a fact that he was bitter about that” (Priestly 175). Mingus was clearly upset about the industry’s promotion of white musicians over African American musicians. By placing such value on the place of African Americans in the creation of jazz, Mingus asserted pride in his heritage. Mingus advocated that the promotion of the commercialized aesthetic disenfranchised the creators of the genre.

Through his outspoken statements against music industry practices, Mingus challenged the expected social order of African American deference to white authority. He brought his criticisms out of a hidden transcript that was subtly expressed through his music and into a public eye through these critiques. By openly criticizing these accepted practices and attitudes in the music industry, Mingus called attention to the racial injustices that were present in the way the music industry associated with African American musicians.

Toward the end of his life, Mingus was very critical of and angry at America. In the documentary, *Mingus*, Mingus criticized America for racist attitudes by changing the lyrics to “My Country ‘Tis Of Thee” and The Pledge of Allegiance. Mingus’s self styled pledge of allegiance is as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the flag, the white flag. I pledge allegiance to the flag of America. When they say black or Negro it means you're not an American. I pledge allegiance to your flag - not that I want to, but for the hell of it. Yeah, I pledge allegiance to the United States of America. I pledge allegiance to seeing that someday they will live up to their own promises to the victims that they call citizens. Not just the black ghettos, but the white ghettos, the Japanese ghettos, the Chinese ghettos, all the ghettos in the world. Oh, I pledge allegiance. I could pledge a whole lot of allegiance (Saul 326).

Mingus angrily reacted to the political climate and the prejudices in America. He believed that he was being treated as a lesser person because of his race by the music industry and society and spoke out against the discrimination. He wanted change.

Despite being so vocal about the injustices in his society, Mingus was never a separatist; he was a romantic and was idealistic in his visions for a better future. Because of his personality and outspoken outbursts, Mingus appealed to the Black Power movement. Mingus sympathized with the movement but was ambivalent to the ideas of separatism and was never affiliated with the Black Power movement. Eric Porter believes that despite having political titles of songs and making political statements on the bandstand (some of Mingus's theatrical displays on the bandstand stopped just short of the violent protest of some Black Power advocates), Mingus was uncomfortable with the growing political association of African American music during the 1960's. Mingus believed that identifying his music as jazz was limiting, just as labeling a person to a race was limiting.

First I'm of the black people, but in this country, I want to be accepted as an American now with all of the rights- or forget it and I'll show Kruschev just how to guide his missiles due South. ... I can write good music with a beat or without so I want to be called a musician - not a Negro musician or a white musician. I want my rights as the music's musician. I don't want my music to sell like hotcakes. I want it to sell like good music - not stopped by a word, "jazz." (E. Porter 146).

While Mingus was not entirely comfortable with the militant separatist movements, he continued to make political statements about racial injustices in America. He never joined a specific cause,

but Mingus was political in his own right because of the statements he made and the beliefs that he held. Mingus believed that the music he played was American music and it represented the culture of his country. He said, “African music belongs in Africa. American music, which is what we play, belongs with the people who have a feeling of freedom and like to play together without discrimination” (E. Porter 125). Mingus believed in the universality of American music and hoped for a brighter future in America when discrimination and hate would no longer be an issue. He believed that this ideal was possible and held a vision for desegregation. In an interview with Brian Priestly, Mingus thanked Priestly for the interview because he wanted to address the public and give hope for opportunity:

I got something I want to say that might help somebody free their kids enough to let them have equal education, instead of just limiting them to the black scene as is, from the past. I say that we're completely right to do anything, we have a right to do it. Give us a chance to be a doctor or a lawyer or something else we want to be. Or king or queen or president, you know. 'Least give them the education for it. Don't limit him to make him think he has to stay the way that it looks like he can make a living being a rock singer only, or just a jazz musician. Give him the whole field (Priestly 193).

Mingus had an idealistic vision for the future of African American children. He used his public position to express his hope for the future, a future beyond racism. Mingus could be political through statements, whether angry through performance or idealistic and hopeful through an interview. Charles Mingus showed activism through his performance and statements.

Mingus, like Armstrong, used his music subtly to confront discrimination in American society. However, Mingus differed from Armstrong because he never operated within the accepted public transcript. The musical gestures in his music directly challenged ideas of segregation and prejudice. By outspokenly criticizing the American government and the music industry, Mingus did not play into expected stereotypes and race relations. He brought out dissenting ideas through his performance or outspoken editorializing. Because his career started

20 years later than Armstrong's, Mingus had the ability to be outspoken from the beginning. He took a course of political activism that was correct for his time as Armstrong's was correct for his. Armstrong had to play within the public transcript to establish his place in the music industry, but Mingus could bring to light the hidden transcript as a way to combat the injustices in society.

As musicians like Mingus became more outspoken, it became easier for Armstrong to assert his own opinion as well. Being a musician in the 1920's, Armstrong did not have the ability to speak out against white racism if he wanted to keep his job, but later musicians grew up in a time of different beliefs about the prejudice of American society. Yet, after the influence of these younger jazz musicians and Civil Rights Activists, Louis Armstrong was in a position in which he could make political statements. He had established his place as an American icon, not just an African American icon, and was able to assert his own quest for individual freedom. Musicians like Mingus helped pave the way for Armstrong just as Armstrong paved the way for them. By bringing the hidden transcript of dissatisfaction with American society to the public through his performance, Mingus helped establish a place for outspoken criticism. In their own way, both musicians were activists, confronting prejudice and stereotypes.

Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus can be considered activists through their performances and music. Both musicians had a different way of communicating their political agendas, whether it be deferential "mugging," outspoken rants, or musical interpretations. Their public roles as entertainers put Armstrong and Mingus in the perfect position to help the Civil Rights effort. Even though neither of the musicians participated in a "vigorous act," they each continued to promote change in racist thought in America through their music. Both Armstrong and Mingus changed an aspect of the jazz industry and the way African Americans were viewed

in that society. Armstrong paved the way for African American performers by showing that he was just as talented as his white counterparts. By changing the way African American performers were viewed, Armstrong was an activist. Armstrong pioneered His position in society created a place for African American performers as equals to white performers. Charles Mingus also caused changes in the jazz community. By pioneering the styles of Free Jazz and Hard Bop, Mingus helped created a way for musicians to use their compositions as a platform to confront racism and discrimination in the United States. He called attention to the injustices of music industry practices and advocated for the equality of all musicians. Armstrong and Mingus were activists because of their ability to promote change in attitudes in the jazz industry and the United States. Their acts of protest through subtle musical or performance elements and outspoken statements made the musicians important in the fight against racism.

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