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Before this course, I knew nothing about jazz. As the class progressed, I began to learn the history of jazz and many significant jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Charlie Parker. The songs they sang and the music they played were fascinating. When I heard Louis Armstrong sing “What a Wonderful World” with a big smile on his face, which was a sharp contrast to his poor childhood, I was deeply moved. I believe jazz, as a genre of music that came from the African American culture of New Orleans, has the power to touch one’s soul. The jazz musicians that were introduced in class are masters of using that power to influence people’s lives. They are different in their styles, but one thing they have in common is their special connection with jazz as blacks, and they all cherish it. I appreciate their music, their views on jazz and, most importantly, their life experiences.

The artist who has influenced me most is Wynton Marsalis. He is legendary and controversial as well. Nine Grammy Awards, one Pulitzer Prize, and numerous other honors make him an indisputable leading jazz musician today. However, his consistent use of blues and swing earned him much criticism. He is accused of being “a limited trumpeter who pontificates on jazz,” or a conservative who “stifles the innovation” of jazz. The way he clings to the tradition of jazz might be disputable, but his efforts to relate jazz to people’s everyday lives and his contribution to music education can’t be denied. He tries to explain jazz in a simple way and make more people enjoy the genre. In his interviews and books, he refers to jazz as the type of music that allows us to find our own creativity. I learned from his remarks how jazz would help me “celebrate myself” and find my own creativity. On the other hand, his TV and radio series on music education have been enjoyed by millions of children and their parents. A variety of programs provided by Jazz at Lincoln Center also attracts young people from all over the country who are passionate about jazz. Some may argue that Marsalis uses Jazz at Lincoln Center as a stage to advocate his personal understanding of jazz. But the bottom line is that he does make more children love jazz and be eager to learn the music. He also encouraged young people to work hard by using Martin Luther King, Jr., and Duke Ellington as role models who achieved greatness through hard work and

discipline. He is called “an educator consumed with a missionary-like passion.”

What I’ve learned from this course is not only the history of American jazz, but also vivid life stories of great jazz musicians and their diverse viewpoints on the music. In regard to political issues, some of them were silent (Louis Armstrong), some were outspoken (Miles Davis), and Dizzy Gillespie even campaigned for president of the United States. They lived and live in different times and have different backgrounds, but as blacks, they all take pains to succeed. I enjoy their music and admire their contributions to the development of jazz, but above all, I appreciate their constant passion about their life long career – jazz.