

# The Caucus on U.S.-Turkey Relations & Turkish Americans

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## Turkey and the US: Who knew?

### The Sultans of Jazz: Desegregation Allies



Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun arrived in the US from Istanbul in 1935 as sons of Turkey's ambassador in Washington. The two brothers would come to play a major role in American popular culture, while being active in the fight against racial segregation. Ahmet founded Atlantic Records, launching the careers of famous artists like Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Miles Davis, the Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin.

- Through the 1940s, the brothers invited jazz artists to perform at Turkey's embassy, including Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.
- Black artists and guests were welcomed to enter through the front door and to sit together with whites, contrary to segregation practices of the time.
- The brothers and their ambassador father became outspoken supporters of desegregation.
- Today, the brothers are remembered as early allies of the Black music scene and the civil rights movement.

#### Fun Fact:

#### James Baldwin and Turkey

Renowned African-American writer, playwright, poet, and activist James Baldwin has a special connection with Turkey.

From 1962 to 1973, Baldwin lived in Istanbul, where he wrote novels "Another Country," "The Fire Next Time," and "No Name in the Street."

Baldwin, a man ahead of his time in his work on race, class, and sexuality, famously said: "Turkey saved my life!"

He remarked that his decade in Istanbul provided him a new perspective on America.