

# Roots of American Music

## 1. Question & Research Task

Chances are you have heard of George Washington, our first president. But what about [George Washington Johnson](#)? [He was born a slave but went on to sell thousands of records](#) after his [manumission](#). He was the first African American to make commercial records. Because his songs embodied some of the racist stereotypes of his time, he was largely forgotten, but his “Laughing Song” was recently added to the National Recording Registry.

You may have heard about Spirituals as one form of music of enslaved people, but music also served other roles for both enslaved and free Black people.

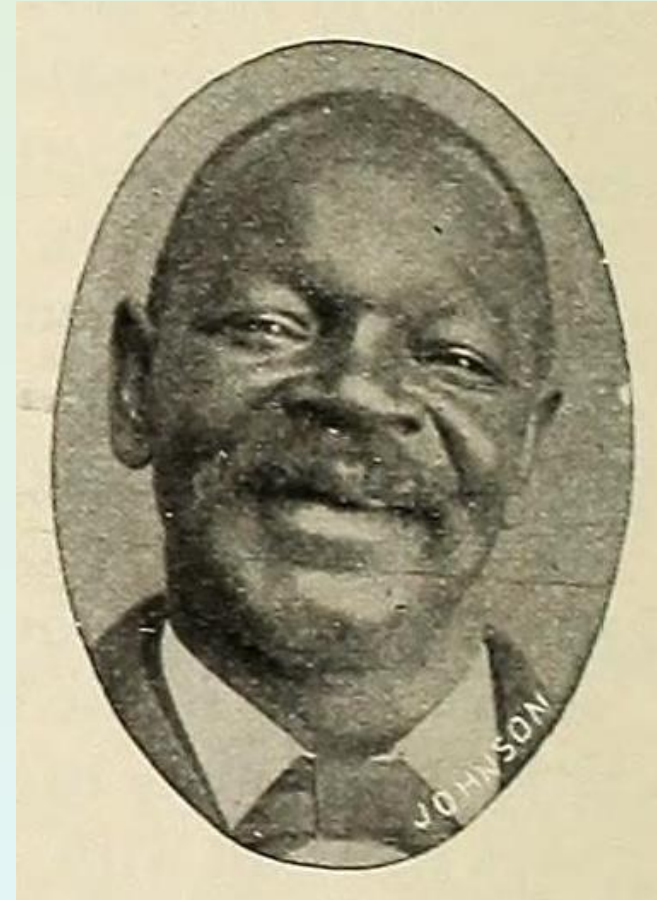


Image Source: [Wikipedia \(public domain\)](#)

In this Slam Dunk, you will conduct brief, focused research to respond to the inquiry question:

**What were the roles of music in the lives of American enslaved and free Black people?**

## 2. Information Sources

Select one or more resources from each category below.  
Take notes on your handout about each resource.

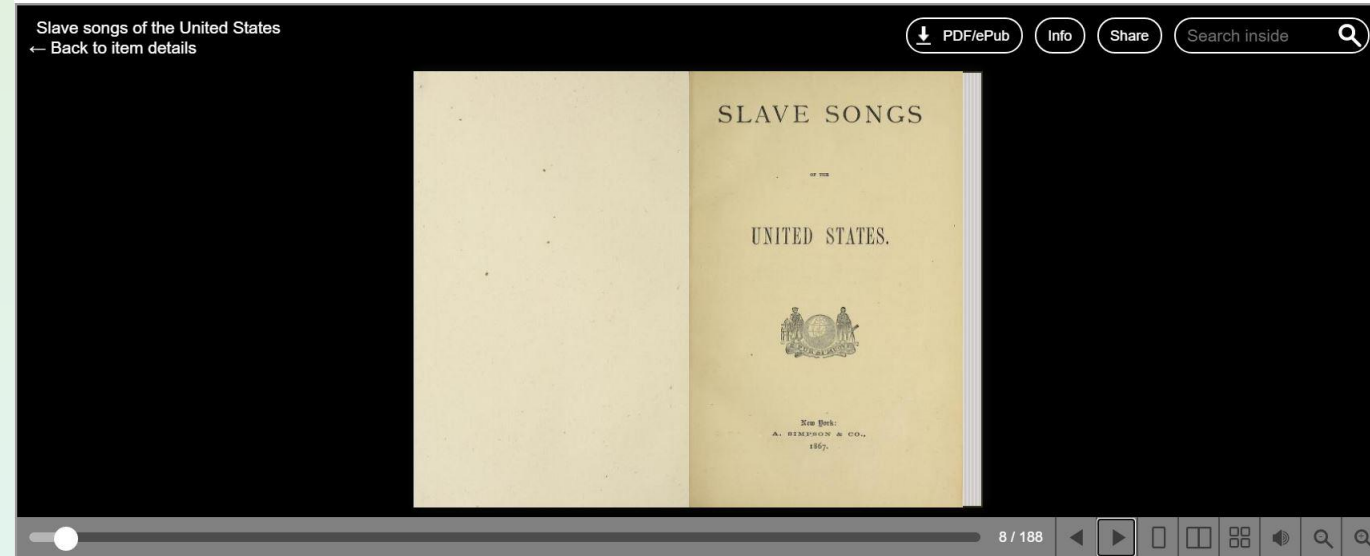
Religious/Spiritual	Work	Recreational	Political Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Look Down that Long, Lonesome Road</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">Do, Lord, Remember Me</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">A Song from Frederick Douglass</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Spirituals</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Example of a Ring Shout</a> of Chesapeake region (go to 13:20 mark)</li><li>• <a href="#">Samson recording</a> (uses religion to express feelings about bondage)</li><li>• <a href="#">Camp Meeting Song Recording</a> (calling people to worship)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">It Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">Hammer, Ring</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">Arwhoolies</a></li><li>• <a href="#">The Legacy on American Music</a> (scroll down to Work Songs)</li><li>• <a href="#">Field Hollers</a> recording</li><li>• <a href="#">“Negro Work Songs and Calls”</a> (contains lyrics to call and response work songs)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Shortenin’ Bread</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">Go to Sleep</a> (lyrics)</li><li>• <a href="#">Use of Drums, Recreational songs</a> (scroll down to Recreational)</li><li>• <a href="#">Free People of Color as Professional Musicians</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Song of the First of Arkansas</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Music as Protest</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Tubman &amp; “Wade in the Water”</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Free Blacks &amp; Haitian Independence</a></li><li>• <a href="#">“Slavery is Hard Foe to Battle”</a> sheet music</li><li>• <a href="#">Song of the Coffle Gang</a></li></ul>

**\*If direct links to BCPS database content are accessed from home or outside the BCPS network, you may need to authenticate first by clicking once on the database icon on the Digital Content page; then come back and select the direct link.**

### 3. Student Activity

Use the information sources on Slide 2 to complete your [organizer](#). You do not need to review all the sources, but you are welcome to review multiple sources.

- Indicate the resource used for each category.
- Provide 3-5 notes about your resource. What are the key features for this role of music?
- Finally, indicate what this source makes you notice and wonder. There are no wrong answers for this section, so feel free to question the sources, draw connections to social studies class, or find parallels to contemporary songs.



Click the image above to launch an ebook about Slave Songs.

Image Source: Smithsonian

## 4. Assessment Activity

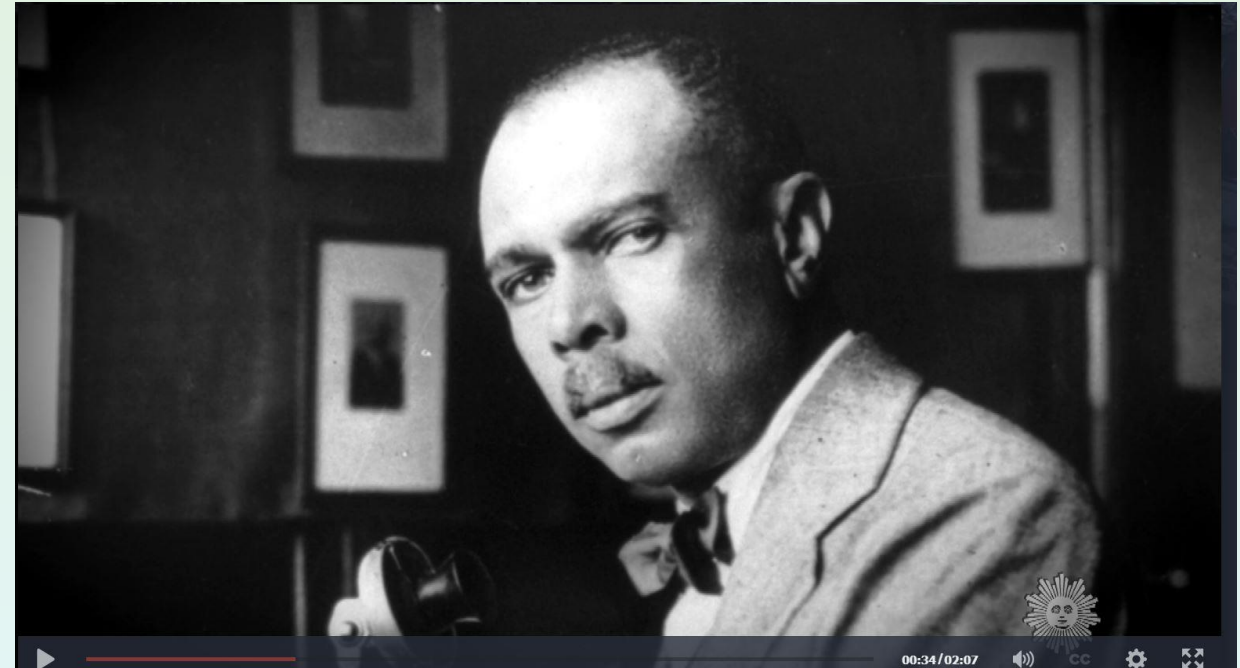
### What were the roles of music in the lives of American enslaved and free Black people?

In 1899 James Weldon Johnson wrote “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” and it was later set to music by John Rosamond Johnson. In 1919, the NAACP called it the “Negro National Anthem” but it is now referred to as the Black National Anthem.

Read and annotate [the lyrics](#). Mark words and phrases that connect to your research.

With which role of music do you feel that this song *most closely* relates? Script a few talking points for yourself and respond in a paragraph or video response as directed by your teacher.

Your teacher may score your response using this [rubric](#).



Click the image above for an overview of the history and significance of the Anthem.

Image Source: CNN

## 5. Enrichment Activities



Dr. Tommy DeFrantz of Duke University discusses African American social dances from the era of slavery and their connections to more modern moves.

Image Source: YouTube

How do we know about the music of slavery and have recordings if recording equipment did not exist then?

During the Great Depression, staff from the Federal Writer's Project collected over [2000 accounts](#) of the last remaining people born into slavery. Some interviews were recorded, and some were transcribed (note that those transcribed are not necessarily impartial). These are online through the Library of Congress. Some of the staff involved in the projects went on to become literary greats, [including Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps and Richards Wright.](#)

[Other artists are rediscovering the music](#) and instruments of enslaved people and are paying tribute through using traditional instruments (like the banjo) and re-recording the songs. Other artists are sure to note the use of racist language, even as language has evolved.



# 6. Teacher Resources

## Learning Standards Alignment

### Content Learning Standards

- 3: Refine and complete artistic work
- 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work
- 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

**Reading: 1.** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**Writing: 7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**AASL Standards Framework for Learners** - Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.

Think: Learners display curiosity and initiative by: I.A.2 Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.

Create: Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: I.B.1 Using evidence to investigate questions. I.B.3 Generating products that illustrate learning.

Share: Learners adapt, communicate, and exchange learning products with others in a cycle that includes: I.C.1 Interacting with content presented by others.

Grow: Learners participate in an ongoing inquiry-based process by: I.D.2 Engaging in sustained inquiry.

**ISTE Standards for Students:** 3. Knowledge Constructor – 3d. Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

### SLIDE NAVIGATION

<u><a href="#">1</a></u>	<u><a href="#">2</a></u>	<u><a href="#">3</a></u>	<u><a href="#">4</a></u>	<u><a href="#">5</a></u>	<u><a href="#">6</a></u>
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## Grades 6-8 General Music Unit4: Roots of American Music

### Objective:

**Time Frame:** One 75-minute class period

### Notes to the teacher:

- Collaborate with your school library media specialist to plan and implement this lesson.
- Have students use learning supports provided in any [BCPS-licensed Digital Content](#) included in this lesson. Refer to [Digital Content Snapshots & Support resources](#) for guidance as needed.
- Consider [using the Schoology Assignment Apps feature](#) to assign Microsoft and Google documents and files for students to access, edit, and submit through Schoology.
- Consider using the assessments feature in Schoology for paragraph submission.
- Ask your librarian for help setting up a Flipgrid as an assessment option.