

RHYTHM AS REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE AND PLACE

Est. Time: 60 minutes

Subjects: General Music, Social Studies/History

Age Range: All Ages

See the full lesson [here!](#)

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How does “the beat” of popular music reflect the tragic histories of enslaved populations?

In this lesson, you will:

- Explore a basic history of enslaved people brought to the Western Hemisphere against their will between 1650 and 1860
 - Learn how West African cultural ideas were retained and reimagined by these enslaved populations
 - Compare the music of Beyoncé and Santana, and think about how music can reflect the geographic and cultural regions where enslaved ancestors once lived
 - Consider your family’s musical heritage and how it represents your cultural identity
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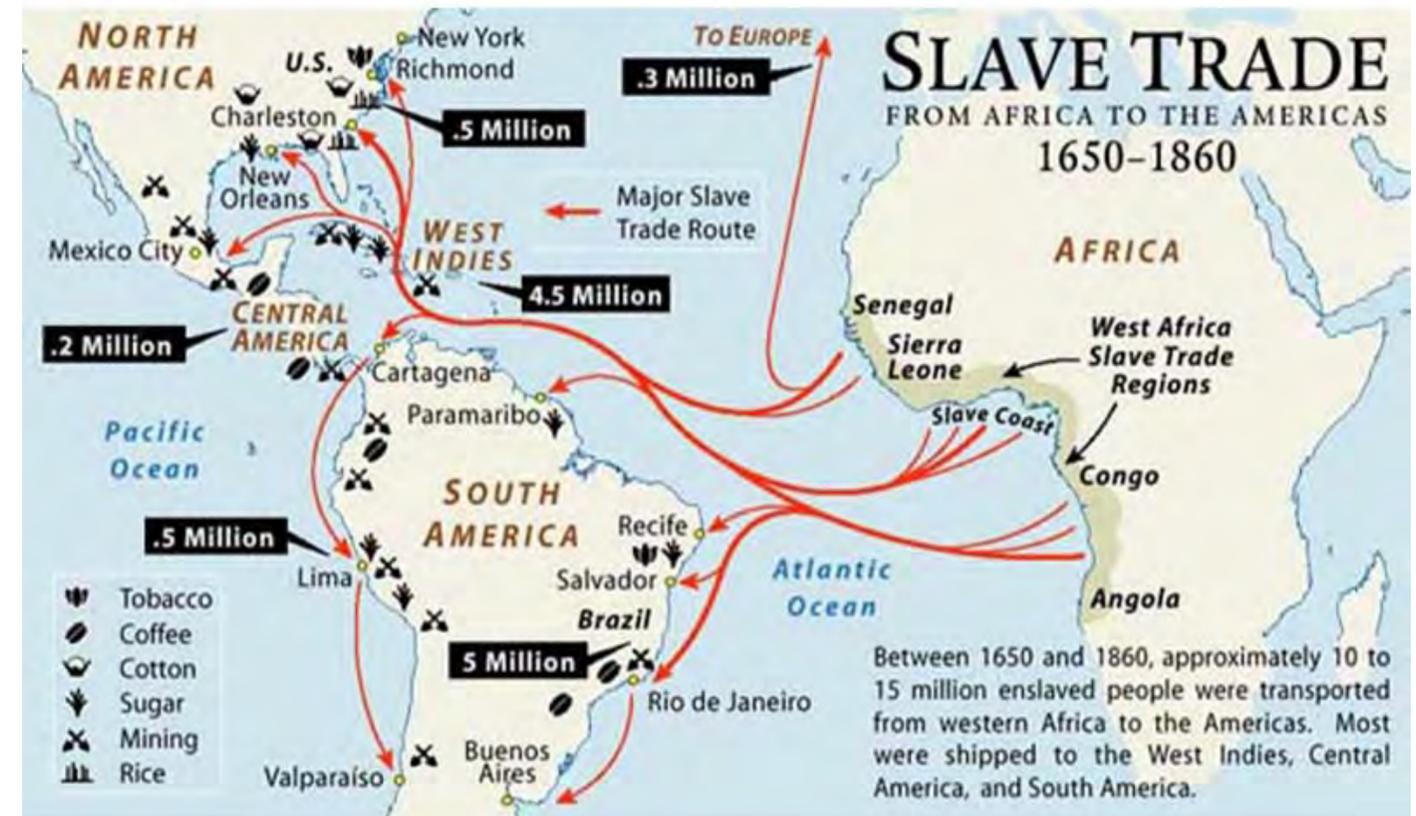
The study of history sometimes looks proudly at the accomplishments and people who have influenced the world we live in today. It is also important to study events that are painful to talk about and even hard to understand.

Between 1650 and 1860, millions of people were forcibly taken from their homes and villages, enslaved, and violently separated from their families and the peaceful lives they loved. These people were forced to work on plantations or in mines without a choice and with no hope for the future.



This map details the practice of enslavement, one of the most tragic and deeply disturbing periods in world history.

Look closely at the number of people who were forced from their lands, where they were taken, and the work that they did in the “New World.”

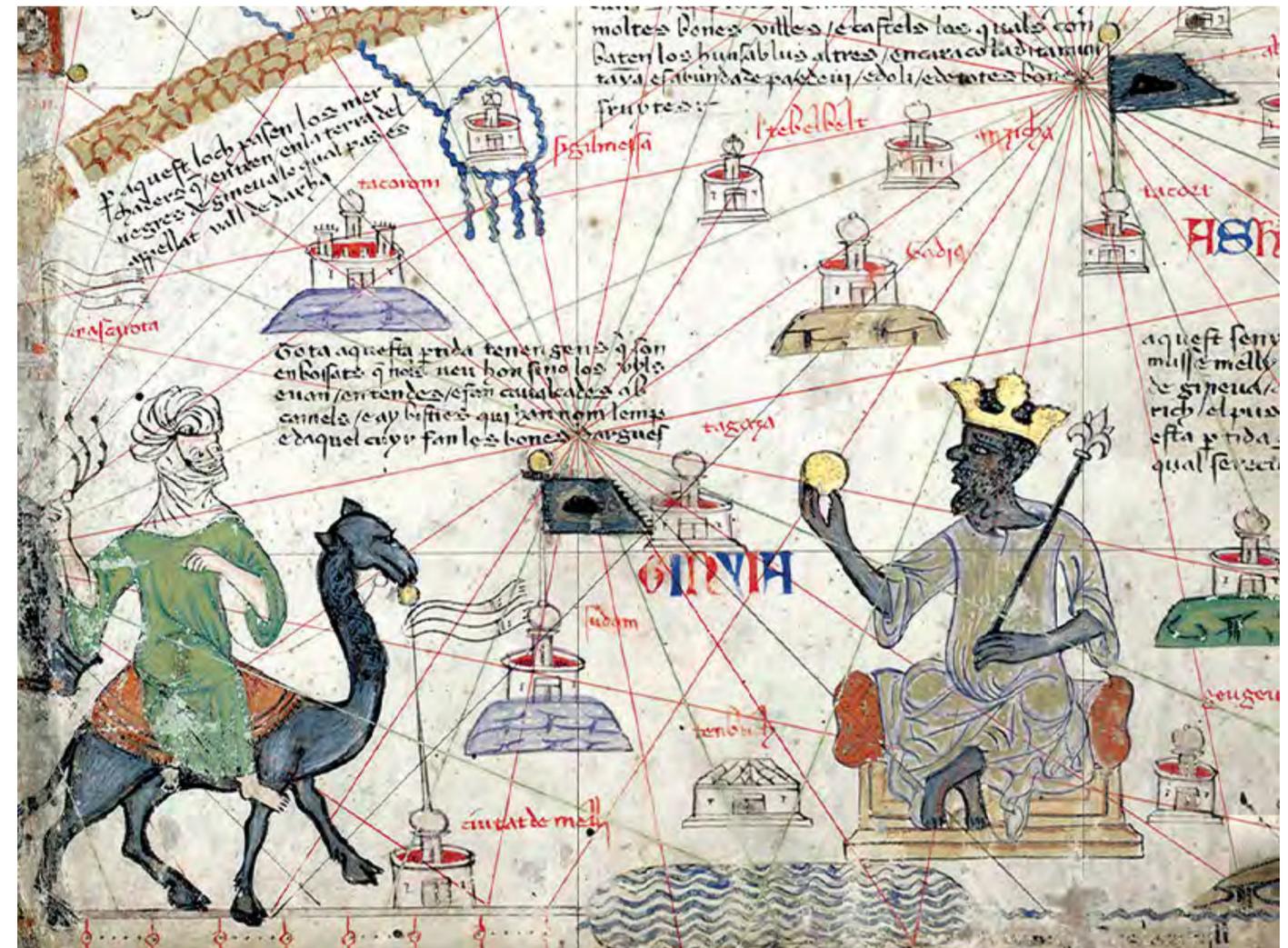




Consider or talk with a friend:

- What were the main locations of the transatlantic slave trade? Where did enslaved people come from, and where did they go?
 - Why do you suppose that enslaved people were taken to the “New World”? What did they do once they reached the “New World”? (Hint: notice the icons spread out across the map and defined in the legend in the lower left corner.)
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The individuals who were captured and forced to travel on the slave ships that crossed the Atlantic came from dozens of kingdoms and ethnic groups throughout West Africa. Each place and each group had its own rich history, which included song and dance traditions in which many types of instruments were used.



What happened to those traditions in the “New World” varied based on geographic location and local government.



In the U.S., nearly all African traditions were viewed as dangerous, “heathen” or “primitive”, and were actively suppressed. Because colonizers were aware of the tradition of “talking drums” in West Africa, in which large drums were used to send messages across long distances, they were fearful and made laws against the performance of African music.





For example, the 1740 Slave Code of South Carolina mandated that, “It is absolutely necessary to the safety of this Province, that all due care be taken to restrain Negroes from using or keeping of drums, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs and purposes.”





The U.S. slave population embraced Christianity, both because it was expected of them and because the many tales of redemption in the Bible offered hope.

Spirituals also provided an outlet for musical expression that was accepted, or at least tolerated, by those in power.

Enslaved people poured African musical ideals into the singing of “spirituals,” a song form that brings European church music together with the call-and-response based vocals and multi-layered rhythms of West African music.

Spirituals allowed enslaved people to express religious beliefs and also to sing about freedom and justice, somewhat safely, by using the words of the Bible.





GOSPEL MUSIC OF THE SOUTHERN U.S.

Watch [this video](#) about the cultural and musical elements of Gospel music in the United States.



Consider or talk with a friend:

- How does lead singer Mavis Staples create rhythm with her voice and vocalizations?
 - How does her group, The Staple Singers, create a “driving beat” without a drummer?
 - How does the use of hand claps, vocalizations, and other musical elements reflect how Gospel music was influenced by the practice of outlawing drumming for enslaved people?
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SINGLE LADIES

Watch [this video](#) on Beyoncé's song "Single Ladies."



Consider or talk with a friend:

- Why might “Single Ladies” sound like a church song? How is it similar to the Gospel song in the previous clip?
 - The-Dream says that while listening to the hand clap sound used in “Single Ladies,” he is, “thinking about the Southern [U.S.]...about church, I can see the paper fans and the wooden benches.” Why do you think the sound of a hand clap conjures so much imagery for him?
 - How does “Single Ladies” evoke the musical traditions developed by enslaved people in the Southern United States?
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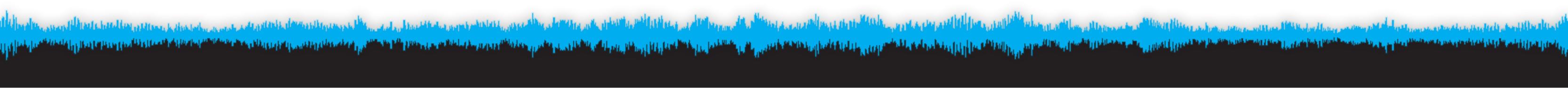
While the performance of traditional music of enslaved people was actively suppressed in the U.S., the colonial governments of Spain, who ruled the islands of the West Indies, tended to tolerate enslaved people maintaining some of the musical and spiritual traditions of their homelands.





This different approach contributed in part to the musical traditions of the West Indies.

Read **this handout** to learn about the development of Afro-Cuban Music.





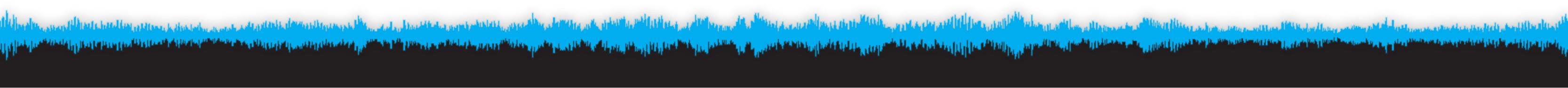
Consider or talk with a friend:

- How did Spanish colonialists differ from British colonialists, and early Americans, in their tolerance of enslaved people performing the traditional music of their homeland?
 - How did these differences affect the development of Afro-Cuban Music?
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Carlos Santana brought his version of Afro-Cuban music to Woodstock in 1969.

Learn more about Carlos Santana by watching [this video](#) and [this video](#).





Consider or talk with a friend:

- How does Carlos Santana's music reflect the cultural traditions of enslaved people from Cuba and other Caribbean Islands?
 - Why do you think Ashley Kahn describes Santana's work as "getting these different languages to talk one language together"?
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Explore the rhythms of Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" and Carlos Santana's "Evil Ways" using the interactive TeachRock Tech Tools.

Investigate these rhythms, and compare and contrast these two songs:

- **Beyoncé's "Single Ladies"**
 - **Carlos Santana's "Evil Ways"**
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Consider or talk with a friend:

- In what ways does music represent the history of enslaved people from different geographic areas?
 - If you moved to a country where people spoke a different language and music sounded completely different, can you think of any types of music that would represent your feelings of home?
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Think about your family's musical heritage. Consider or talk with a friend:

- Do you recall songs that were sung to you as a young child?
 - Are there songs that are played at your family's celebrations?
 - What are the musical traditions of your family, grandparents, neighbors, and family friends?
 - How does this music reflect your cultural identity?
 - Is the music that you listen to with friends or on your own similar or different than the music played at family celebrations?
 - How do your personal musical tastes reflect your family's musical heritage?
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SUMMARY

- Enslaved people were captured, brought to the Western Hemisphere for over 200 years, and forced to work on plantations and in mines against their will
- West African cultural ideas lived on in the music of enslaved people and differed by geographic location
- The music of Beyoncé and Carlos Santana can help us to understand the geographic and cultural regions where enslaved people once lived



BE CREATIVE

Think about a familiar song from your childhood that you sang a capella (without accompaniment by a musical instrument). Transform that song by adding handclaps. How does your new rhythm alter that song? Record your new version of this song and share it with friends and family.



BE CURIOUS

- Learn more about Beyoncé [here](#)
- Learn more about Carlos Santana [here](#)
- Learn more about music making among enslaved people [here](#)



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