

"The Birth of American Music"



A GUIDE TO LISTENING WITH CHILDREN

1619 is a New York Times audio series hosted by journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, who created The 1619 Project initiative for The New York Times Magazine. You can find more information about the podcast along with transcripts for listening at [nytimes.com/1619podcast](https://www.nytimes.com/1619podcast). Episode three explores how Black music in America has historically been a sound of artistic freedom. This episode includes some explicit language.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE LISTENING

- Wesley Morris, the narrator of this podcast episode, is a film & pop culture critic. Why do we need people to critique pop culture & media? How does criticism help an industry develop?
- Do you know what it means for an artist to perform in blackface? Why is blackface harmful & offensive?

INTRODUCTION/AN AMERICAN SOUND

0:00-8:54

- Do you recognize any of the yacht rock songs played in the segment? What do they make you think of?
- Morris mentions feeling proud that Black music & identity is such a big part of American popular music. Why does seeing our identities represented in art & media make us feel proud?

BIRTH OF MINSTRELSY & BLACKFACE

8:54-15:35

- Have you ever seen a recording of a minstrel show? How did it make you feel to watch?
- If we accept Morris' argument that the birth of blackface minstrel shows was the birth of American pop culture, what questions does that bring up about how American pop culture developed over time?

BLACKFACE GROWS IN POPULARITY

15:35-23:37

- Do you recognize any of the minstrel songs played on the recording? Where have you heard them before? Did you know they were from minstrel shows?
- How does this section inform your understanding of race & racism in the Northern states during the mid-1800?

THE ANTIDOTE TO MINSTRELSY

22:51-33:52

- What famous stars does Morris mention having performed in blackface? What questions do you have about their decision to perform in blackface shows?
- Morris speaks briefly to how different types of Black music can represent freedom. What music helps you feel empowered & free?

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AFTER LISTENING

- Even though we do not have traveling minstrel troupes today, there are still debates around cultural appropriation, or the unacknowledged & inappropriate use of elements and customs from a cultural background that is not your own. Why do you think cultural appropriation can be offensive?

AFTER LISTENING ACTIVITY

Choose a Black artist referenced in the podcast & research their life & music. What are the themes in their work? What does the music make you feel? Has any of their work been sampled by modern artists?