



The History of Rock and Roll: Part 10 – Up From the Underground

**VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom**

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 9-12

Roots and Beginnings of Rap and Hip Hop

Lesson 2

Note to Teachers: Parts of the content of these programs may be found, in many communities, to be inappropriate for classroom use because of references, consistent with the era portraying, sexual, political, and violent lyrics and acts. Many sections, however, provide educational content to enhance the music and interdisciplinary curriculum. Please review this program before presenting it to your students and choose sections that enhance your curriculum and are acceptable for use in your classroom.

Objective

Students will discuss the societal roots of music from times of slavery and black spirituals, and compare it to the emergence of Rap and Hip Hop music

National Standard 9 –Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Materials

VHS VCR Player

Television

VH1 Cable in the Classroom program The History of Rock and Roll: Part 10, start at Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks", cut before Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean"; begin again with Beastie Boys' "Sabotage", cut before Public Enemy; begin again with narration about gangsta rap after Steven Tyler's commentary

until end of segment

Web-based lesson materials

Teacher selected recordings of slave songs, work songs, black spirituals, etc. (For examples and resources please access VH1 Music Studio Special, "Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music In America" Episode - "Keep On Pushin" Lesson plan 1: "Roots and Styles of Black Music" @ <http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/supplies/sayitloud/ep1-lesson01.html>)

Procedures

1. As students are entering the classroom, have selected recordings of slave songs, etc. playing in the background. (See <http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/supplies/sayitloud/ep1-lesson01.html> for song examples and resources)
2. When students have settled for class, lead them in a discussion about the music to which they have been listening. What era is it from (1600's and 1700's, era of slavery, etc.)? Who might have been the composer (s) and singer(s) (slaves of the time period)?
3. Guide students in a brief overview of the social conditions that lead to the emergence of slave songs and spiritual. Give a brief overview of the characteristics of the songs that developed. Use the following as needed: (Extensive historical information and further resources are available at www.vh1musicstudio.com – "Specials" "Say It Loud A Celebration of Black Music in America – Click on "Click Here For More Information" or access directly @ "http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/specials/say_it_loud/sayitloud_notes.html":

Early slave music consisted of many human passions derived from oppression. Spirituals, blues, hollers and work songs were some examples which echoed emotional despair as well as jubilation and optimistic yearning for a Utopia – a better place without a master, without auction blocks and without conditions of servitude. These songs, both simple and complicated, had grown out of the duties and the drudgery associated with bondage and had served for work, worship and play. Many such creative influences were vestiges of their own Africa.

No doubt, many of the earliest songs were sad. It is incorrect to assume, however, that all were of this nature, for within a span of some 200 years, slaves knew both sadness and happiness. Revealing the functional categories of African music, many songs collected during Reconstruction reflected individual and collective thoughts of diverse situations of life and emotion. For example, those Africans toiling under burdensome circumstances undoubtedly composed one way while those treated more humanely naturally composed another. Likewise, music used for funerals differed from that used for entertainment. Thus, slave texts referred to a gamut of emotions.

Having been born somewhere between African voyages of the 1600's and American Reconstruction, spirituals were the end products of calls and hollers developed during early colonialism. Their exact origin cannot be established. Yet these anonymous songs have continually served as sources of inspiration for African Americans in their urgent quest for identity, heritage and a homeland.

...Despite the overabundance of Biblical words used in the majority of songs called spirituals, their functions were not purely religious. They were constantly used in the search of freedom, in religious services, to teach,

gossip, scold, signal, or to delight in the telling of tales. Like work songs, calls and hollers, spirituals developed simultaneously in appeasement of the curiosity of the overseers who required a knowledge of the whereabouts or location of slaves. They also relieved the minds and bodies of the enslaved and they served more significantly as a practical means of informing the slaves of their own affairs, i.e., social politics, deliverance, escape or satire.

Excerpted from *Black American Music Past and Present*,
2nd ed., by Hildred Roach

4. Lead students in a discussion of the role that slave songs and spirituals played in the slaves' daily lives. How were they a form of communication, both from slave to slave (communicated information about planned escapes, the Underground Railroad, etc.), and from slave to society (some of the songs were sung by Whites, but did not have the same connotations)? How did they help the slaves to express themselves? In what way were they an emotional and physical release? Ask the students to comment on the positive and/or negative influence that the songs and spirituals may have had.

5. Ask students to suggest other times in history when the music reflected the thoughts, ideals, feelings, etc. of the people. Acceptable answers might include the 60's peace movement, protest songs of suffragists, blacks, and others, rap, hip hop, etc.

6. Inform students that they will be viewing parts of "The History of Rock and Roll" and that at the conclusion of the viewing, they should be able to discuss what some of the "conditions" were that influenced composers.

7. Show HRR: Part 10, start at Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks", cut before Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean"; begin again with Beastie Boys' "Sabotage", cut before Public Enemy; begin again with narration about gangsta rap after Steven Tyler's commentary, play until end of segment

8. Lead students in a discussion about the rise of rap and hip hop. What were the needs felt by the musicians in the black community (to show society through their eyes, to make a statement for themselves, etc.)? What were some of the "conditions" in society that they were making statements about? Are the statements made in "early Rap" and the later West coast "gangsta rap" different? Draw students' attention to a comparison between Ice T's "Escape from the Killing Fields" and the prominent theme in spirituals and slave songs of achieving freedom from bondage and working in the fields.

9. As happened with slave music and spirituals, whites began to take on the style of music that was originally from the black community, but with different meanings. Ask students if white Rap groups such as the Beastie Boys used Rap music for the same reasons, and with the same effect as the black artists. If so, what was the difference between black and white rap artists and black and whites singing black spirituals (their life experience in relation to the black artists)?

10. Ask students to comment on the tone of Rap and Hip Hop music, specifically west coast "gangsta rap". Is it sad, happy, angry, positive, inspirational, etc.? How does it compare to the feelings inspired by spirituals and slave songs of the 16 and 1700's?

11. Guide students in a discussion about the affect of music in general on society. Is it able to develop and sway opinions of listeners, and performers, in a positive or negative way? Ask students to consider how the influence of early black music compared to the influence of today's rap music. What societal issues lead black people to express through early black music and more recently through rap music?



VH1, in partnership with Cable in the Classroom, collaborated with MENC: The National Association for Music Education to develop this series of lessons.