TABLE OF

CONTENTS

Introduction . . . 1
Feel the Beat

Chapter One . . . 13
Bob Dylan
The Times They Are A-Changin'

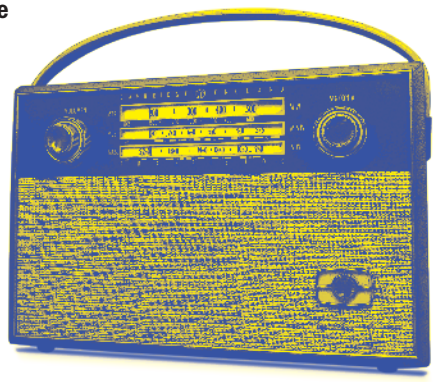
Chapter Two . . . 33
Mavis Staples and
the Staple Singers
The Gospel of the
Civil Rights Movement

Chapter Three . . . 47
Sam Cooke
Change Gonna Come

Chapter Four . . . 63
James Brown
Black and Proud

Chapter Five . . . 79
Nina Simone
How Would It Feel to Be Free?

Sam Cooke



Bob Dylan

Nina Simone

Mavis Staples and the Staple Singers

James Brown

More Musicians for Change

Glossary

Resources

Selected Bibliography

Index

Musician Ella Fitzgerald performing in 1963

INTRODUCTION

FEEL THE BEAT

The music that grew out of the Civil Rights Movement was more than just song. It was a call to action, a calming force, and a way for protestors to communicate their goals and dreams. And it was the sound of people demanding their freedom from a system of racism and mistreatment that had been the law of the land in America for too long.

FAST FACTS

WHAT?

During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans demanded their full rights as citizens of the United States.

WHY?

For hundreds of years, African Americans had been denied their civil rights, including the opportunity to vote, attend good schools, access good jobs, live where they wanted, or receive a fair trial in a court of law.

WHEN?

From the mid-1950s to early 1970s

HOW?

Music united people around the country and sparked feelings of empowerment during marches and protests in support of equal rights.

America was founded on the idea that every citizen should be free and that all people should be treated the same under the law. These freedoms are known as civil rights. They include the right to vote, the right to live where you want, the right to a fair trial if you are accused of a crime, and the right to be paid for the work you do.

Freedom for all is a great idea, but it has never been an easy one to put into practice. Even as the Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 promising life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all men, whole groups of people in America had no civil rights at all—including slaves.

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

1956
The year-long Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott ends with a U.S. Supreme Court decision that requires the buses to integrate.

1957
Nine African American students integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

1960
Four Black college students stage a lunch counter sit-in at a Woolworth Department Store in North Carolina.

It took an anti-slavery movement, a civil war, years of Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights Movement to get to where we are. Today is a time when the Black Lives Matter movement reminds us that the fight for civil rights is not one that ends, but one that continues to adapt to different needs. And music has been a constant backdrop through it all.

WONDER WHY?

How could the founders of the United States believe in freedom and enslave people at the same time?

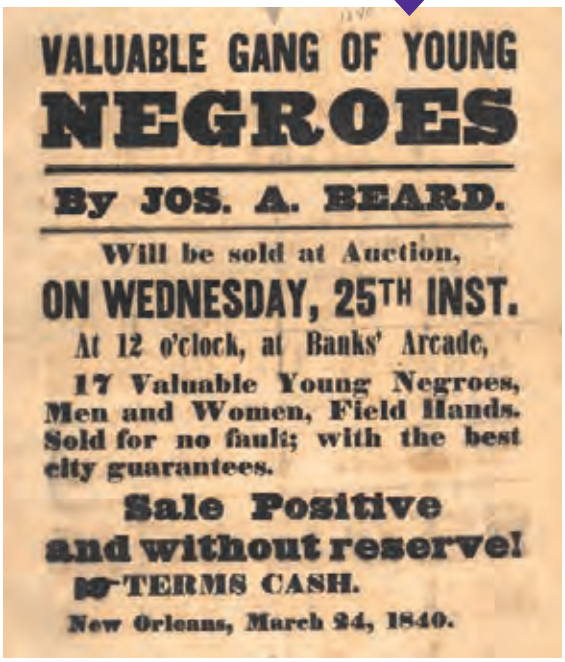
Roots of Racism

Before the Civil War (1861–1865), the Southern states were home to millions of enslaved African Americans. Clearly, the country was not living up to the founding American ideals of freedom and civil rights for all.

Many white Southerners depended on the free labor of slaves. They owned large plantations where they grew crops such as cotton and tobacco with slave labor. Slavery was so important to white Southerners they chose to break away from the United States altogether rather than give up slavery. They wanted to form their own country, where they could make their own laws and keep slavery going.

Throughout his lifetime, Founding Father Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) enslaved more than 500 people. His plantation, Monticello, held about 130 enslaved people at any given time.

A bulletin from 1840 advertises the sale of human beings as slaves in New Orleans, Louisiana.


VALUABLE GANG OF YOUNG
NEGROES
By JOS. A. BEARD.
Will be sold at Auction,
ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH INST.
At 12 o'clock, at Banks' Arcade,
17 Valuable Young Negroes, Men and Women, Field Hands. Sold for no fault; with the best city guarantees.
Sale Positive and without reserve!
☞TERMS CASH.
New Orleans, March 24, 1840.

1961
A Greyhound bus transporting Freedom Riders in Mississippi is firebombed by a mob of white supremacists.

1963
The March on Washington draws more than 225,000 people to Washington, DC.

1968
Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated by a white supremacist in Memphis, Tennessee.

The resulting Civil War lasted four years. When it ended, the question of slavery was settled in favor of the Northern states. Slavery was abolished. Laws were enacted to guarantee civil rights to former slaves. But there was still much work to ensure freedom for all.

After the War

All those changes to American laws after the Civil War might make it seem as though African Americans were free.

Unfortunately, the reality for African Americans after the Civil War did not even come close to this ideal—especially in the South. White Southerners clung to the belief that African Americans were inferior, and they organized their society so that Black people remained in servitude to white people. They created an unjust social order based on white supremacy.

Slaves on a plantation in South Carolina, 1862

Credit: Timothy O'Sullivan

Through a web of customs and laws known as Jim Crow, Southern white supremacists ensured that the South remained a segregated society. They saw to it that white people and Black people lived separate—and unequal—lives.

White people and Black people were made to live in separate neighborhoods. White children and Black children attended separate schools. Water fountains and bathroom facilities were labeled "coloreds" and "whites." The term "colored" was once used for Black people and is now considered offensive. It was a crime for Black people to drink from a white person's water fountain.

THE END OF SLAVERY

Historic changes for African Americans came through war and amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

- **On April 9, 1865, the Civil War ended with the South in defeat.**
- **On December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution. It officially outlawed slavery.**
- **In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution. It guaranteed the rights of citizenship to anyone (Black or white) born in the United States.**
- **In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution. It gave Black men (but not Black women) the right to vote.**

A segregated drinking fountain in North Carolina, 1938

Credit: John Vachon

Jim Crow allowed for the formation of hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). These groups used violence to keep Black people in a state of fear. If Black people attempted to vote, the KKK might throw firebombs into their houses. If a Black man spoke with a white woman, the KKK might even kill him.

> "When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw."
>
> **Nelson Mandela** (1918–2013), political activist and the first Black president of South Africa

Change Gonna Come

Black Americans had been mistreated for so many years, it sometimes seemed as though their situation might never improve. But change did come. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Black Americans began to organize and push for important changes. In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. The NAACP went to court to challenge the laws that prevented Black people from living as equals to white people.

Change came slowly at first. But by the 1950s and 1960s, the NAACP had succeeded in overturning many unjust laws. The most famous of these court cases was *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with the NAACP that segregated public schools were not allowed according to the U.S. Constitution.

Change came in other ways, too, during the Civil Rights Movement. In 1955, for example, the Black residents of Montgomery, Alabama, were fed up with riding segregated buses.

> "The blues is celebration, because when you take sorrow and turn it into music, you transform it."
>
> **Odetta Holmes** (1930–2008), American folk singer

Black passengers had to sit in the back of the bus, and if there weren't enough seats for white passengers, then Black passengers had to give up their seats and stand.

Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), a group called the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed and staged a boycott of the city buses. For nearly a year, the Black men and women of Montgomery refused to ride the city buses. They walked or carpooled until they won a 1956 Supreme Court case that outlawed segregated public transportation.

WONDER WHY?

How would you feel if you had to use the back entrance to a movie theater or if you could be arrested for drinking out of the wrong water fountain? Do you think that would be fair?

Throughout the ’50s and ’60s, Black Americans held protests, demonstrations, and rallies all across the United States.

- In 1962, a man named James Meredith (1933–) defied segregation at the University of Mississippi by becoming the first Black student to enroll in the school.
- In 1963, hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Washington, DC, to rally for jobs and freedom for Black Americans.
- In 1965, thousands marched to the state capital of Alabama to demand their right to vote.

Word Power!

This book is packed with lots of new vocabulary! Try figuring out the meanings of unfamiliar words using the context and roots of the words. There is a glossary in the back to help you and Word Power check-ins for every chapter.

In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. It was the start of the Montgomery bus boycott. In this photograph, Parks is fingerprinted by the police.

The changes that African Americans pushed for never came easy. Time and again, efforts were met with violent resistance from white supremacists. During the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, for example, someone threw a bomb through Martin Luther King Jr.'s living room window. When James Meredith tried to enroll at the University of Mississippi, riots broke out. When Black demonstrators walked through the streets of Birmingham, Alabama, white police officers attacked them with police dogs and sprayed them with fire hoses. The force of the water was so strong it swept people down the sidewalks!

NORTHERN RACISM

Were African Americans better off in the Northern and Western states? Yes, but not by much. Jobs were easier to come by for African Americans outside the South. That's why, between 1916 and 1970, more than 6 million Black Americans left the rural South for cities in the North, West, and Midwest. But the lives of Black Americans anywhere were rarely free of racial discrimination. Most Black children in the North attended second-rate schools. Most Black adults worked at low-paying, menial jobs. When they did do the same work as white people, they were usually paid less. Unfair housing laws made it difficult for most Black Americans to buy a home wherever they wanted. Life was certainly easier for Black Americans beyond the Southern states. But it was a far cry from "liberty and justice for all," as proclaimed in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Some Black activists, including Medgar Evers (1925–1963) and Vernon Dahmer (1908–1966), were even killed. Samuel Leamon Younge Jr. (1944–1966) was a Black college student who was murdered in 1966. A white man shot him for trying to use a whites-only restroom at a gas station in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Mahalia Jackson in May 1964

Cue the Music

It might seem as if music would be the *last* thing on people's minds as they organized for change in American society. Music, however, was actually one of the *first* things on people's minds!

It took enormous courage to participate in civil rights events knowing you might be arrested, beaten, or even killed. Music helped people stay brave in the face of all those dangers.

When Black activists held mass meetings in their churches, they started the meeting by singing gospel songs. The music brought them together as a group and gave them hope.

Black activists joined in song when they marched through the streets of Southern cities. The music helped calm their fears.

CONNECT

Listen to performer Mahalia Jackson sing at the March on Washington, 1963. Why do you think religious hymns were often sung at civil rights protests and marches?

Mahalia Jackson Washington

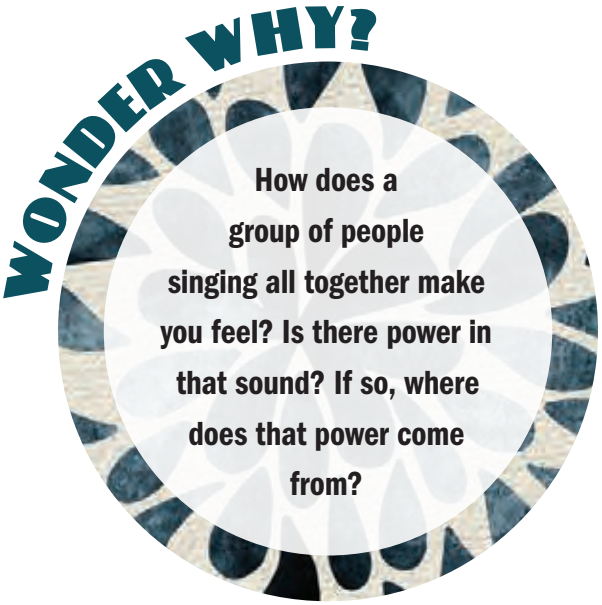
When Black activists were thrown into crowded Southern jail cells, they sang—sometimes, for hours! The music helped pass the time. It distracted them from their troubles. As a bonus, it also annoyed the jailers.

Music also played an important role in spreading the message of racial equality and the need for change in American society. As civil rights protests became more frequent and the violence of white supremacists was revealed to the American public, artists wrote and recorded songs in response to these events. The music of the Civil Rights Movement arose from multiple genres, including gospel, folk, rock, jazz, and soul.

Many of these "protest songs," as they were known, became hit singles, and the music of the movement became part of mainstream popular culture. Music broadcast the message of racial injustice and the need for change through the airwaves.

HIGHLANDER FOLK SCHOOL

Music was such an important part of civil rights events, activists were actually trained to sing the songs of the movement. The Highlander Folk School, located in Knoxville, Tennessee, was a training center for civil rights activists. Instructors at the Highlander Folk School taught activists how to resist violent white supremacists without resorting to violence themselves. Music lessons were included in the curriculum so that everyone involved in a demonstration or protest would be able to join the group in song. Why do you think administrators decided music lessons should be part of the school?



In this book, we'll learn how music brought the Civil Rights Movement right into people's homes. We'll dive into the fascinating biographies of Bob Dylan, Mavis Staples and the Staple Singers, Sam Cooke, James Brown, and Nina Simone, all people who for one reason or another found themselves on the frontlines of a battle for basic human rights. And, of course, we'll listen to the lyrics and melodies that infused a generation with hope and determination.

As you learn about these musicians and the work they did, ask yourself about today's Black Lives Matter movement and which musicians are providing the voice of this particular fight for equality. Ready? Let's go listen to some tunes!

PROJECT

Listen!

Music of the Civil Rights Era arose from several different styles of music, most notably gospel, folk, blues, and jazz. What did these different styles offer? How did they combine to form music that was completely new?

☮ **Listen to the following music samples on YouTube.** As you listen to each song, jot down some notes on your reactions. Use the following questions to guide your thinking.

- Do you like the song? Why or why not?
- How does the song make you feel—happy, sad, encouraged, or something else?
- What can you learn about these songs by listening closely to the lyrics?
- Do any of the songs make you want to get up and dance?
- Is it a song you have heard before?
- Is there one genre (or style) of music that you would like to hear more of? Why or why not?
- Why do you think these songs felt relevant at the time they were popular? How did they make people feel stronger?

Mahalia Jackson was a famous gospel singer. Here she sings "Move On Up a Little Higher."

Jackson move on up

During the 1960s, the trio of Peter, Paul and Mary was one of the biggest acts in folk music. Here they sing "If I Had a Hammer."

Peter, Paul, Mary hammer

B.B. King (1925–2015) was one of the greatest blues musicians of all time. Here he performs "Why I Sing the Blues."

B.B. King blues

Ella Fitzgerald (1917–1996) was one of the greatest jazz singers of all time. Here she sings "Cry Me a River."

Fitzgerald cry me river

TEXT TO WORLD

What songs do you listen to today that reflect the culture you live in?