Listening Guide for *The 1619 Project* Podcast
Episode 3: "The Birth of American Music"

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](). *Episode three explores how Black music in America has historically been a sound of artistic freedom. This episode includes some explicit language.*

Some questions to consider before listening:

1. Wesley Morris, the narrator of this podcast episode, is a film and pop culture critic. Why do we need people to critique pop culture and media? How does criticism help an industry develop?
2. How do you think learning about the music of a people or community can help you to better understand their culture?
3. Do you know what it means for an artist to perform in blackface? Why is blackface harmful and offensive?

Listening Guide

Time Stamp	Main Topic	Questions to consider
0:00-8:54	Intro/Yacht rock/American sound	Do you recognize any of the yacht rock songs played in the segment? Where have you heard them before? What do they make you think of? Wesley Morris uses a lot of metaphor and imagery rooted in Black tradition and culture. List two-three examples from this section. Morris mentions feeling proud that Black music and identity is such a big part of American popular music. Why does seeing our identities represented in art and media make us feel proud?

8:54-15:35	Birth of minstrelsy and blackface	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?
15:35-23:37	Why blackface became so popular	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? Morris mentions that the minstrel performances of the mid-1800s were extremely popular in the Northern states. How does this inform your understanding of race and racism in that region of the country at the time?
23:37-31:32	The antidote to minstrelsy	What famous American stars does Morris mention having performed in blackface? Do you know any others? What questions do you have about their decision to perform in blackface shows? What does Morris argue Black record studios helped to do for American culture? Do you agree? Morris speaks briefly to how different types of Black music can represent freedom in different ways. What music helps you feel empowered and free?

Some questions to consider after listening:

1. How has listening to this episode changed your understanding of the origins of American music and popular culture?
2. Even though we do not have traveling minstrel troupes today, there are still regular debates around cultural appropriation, or the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of elements and customs from a cultural background that is not your own. Why do you think cultural appropriation is offensive to some people?

3. What additional research do you want to do about Black American music after listening to this podcast episode?