

Walking Democracy: The Power of Creativity During the Great Migration to the March on Washington

Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School

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Excerpt from “[The Birth of American Music](#)” by Wesley Morris for *The New York Times* Project, The 1619 (August 14, 2019). “[The 1619 Project](#)”. *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331.

Tiered Vocabulary

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Musician Miracle Creativity	Fundamental Crucial Seduced Plantation Literacy Exhaustion Expression Integrated	Improvisation Aesthetic Composition Guitar riffs Appropriation Parody

“But there's something even more fundamental, too. My friend Delvin Case, a musician who teaches at Wheaton College, explained in an email that improvisation is one of the most crucial elements in what we think of as black music: “The raising of individual creative / expression is the highest place within the aesthetic world of a song.” Without improvisation, a listener is seduced into the composition of the song itself and not the distorting or deviating elements that noise creates. Particular to Black American music is the architecture to create a means by which singers and musicians can be completely free, free in the only way that would have been possible on a plantation: through art, through music - music no one “composed” (because enslaved people were denied literacy), music born a feeling of play, of exhaustion, of hope.

What you're hearing in black music is a miracle of sound, an experience that can really happen only once. Not just melisma, glissandi, the rasp of a sax, breakbeats or sampling but the mood or inspiration from which those moments arise. The attempt to re-record it seems, if you think about it, like a fool's errand. You're not capturing the arrangement of notes, per se. You're catching the spirit. And the spirit travels from host to host, racially indiscriminate about where it settles, selective only about who can withstand being possessed by it. “