

American Popular music

Task 1. Read the text and answer the questions.

At the beginning of the 21st century, and seen from a worldwide perspective, it is the American popular music that had its origins among African Americans at the end of the 19th century that, in all its many forms—ragtime, jazz, swing, jazz-influenced popular song, blues, rock-and-roll and its art legacy as rock and later hip-hop—has become America's greatest contribution to the world's culture, the one indispensable and unavoidable art form of the 20th century.

In broad outlines, the history of American popular music involves the mixture of folk music and protest music of African Americans. As the man who is by now recognized by many as the greatest of all American musicians, Louis Armstrong, once said, "There ain't but two kinds of music in this world. Good music and bad music, and good music you tap your toe to."

Armstrong's own career is a good model of the nature and evolution of American popular music at its best. Beginning in impossibly hard circumstances, he took up the trumpet at a time when it was the military instrument, filled with the marching sounds. Armstrong learned to play a new kind of syncopated ensemble music, decorated with solos. By the time he travelled to Chicago in the mid-1920s, his jazz had become a full-fledged art music, "full of a melancholy and majesty that were new to American music. When he was no longer able to play the trumpet, he became, ironically, a still more celebrated straight "pop" performer, making hits out of Broadway tunes, among them the German-born Kurt Weill's "Mack the Knife" and Jerry Herman's "Hello, Dolly."

Beginning in the 1940s, it was the singers whom jazz had helped spawn. Simply to list their names is to evoke a [social history](#) of the United States since World War II: [Frank Sinatra](#), [Nat King Cole](#), [Mel Tormé](#), [Ella Fitzgerald](#), [Billie Holiday](#), [Doris Day](#), and many others. More than any other single form or sound, it was their voices that created a national soundtrack of longing, fulfillment, and forever-renewed hope that sounded like America to Americans, and then sounded like America to the world.

September 1954 is generally credited as the next watershed in the evolution of American popular music with the appearance of [rock and roll](#). This was a kind of the sudden shout of a new generation. According to Presley's biographer Presley and Sam Phillips, Sun's owner, knew exactly what they were doing when they blended country style, white pop singing, and African American rhythm and blues.

Coined in the 1960s to describe a new form of African American rhythm and blues, [soul music](#) is adored throughout the world. American music in the late 20th and early 21st

centuries drew from all these wells to create new forms, from [hip-hop](#) to [electronic dance music](#) as new generations of musicians joined the conversation and artists as various as [Beyoncé](#), [Brad Paisley](#), [Jack White](#), [Kanye West](#), the [Decemberists](#), [Lady Gaga](#), [Taylor Swift](#), [Jay Z](#), [Justin Timberlake](#), Sufjan Stevens, and [Kendrick Lamar](#) made their marks.

It is, perhaps, necessary for an American to live abroad to grasp how entirely American soul music had become the model and [template](#) for a universal language of emotion by the 20th century. In every sense, American culture has given the world the gift of the blues.

1. According to Louis Armstrong, what two kinds of music exist in the world?
2. What instrument did Louis Armstrong learn to play?
3. What was ironic about Louis Armstrong's career?
4. Why do you think jazz singers can evoke a social history?
5. What did Presley and Sam Phillips do to create rock and roll?
6. What is America's greatest musical contribution to the world's culture?