



# SEVENTIES SOUL: THE SOUNDTRACK OF TURBULENT TIMES

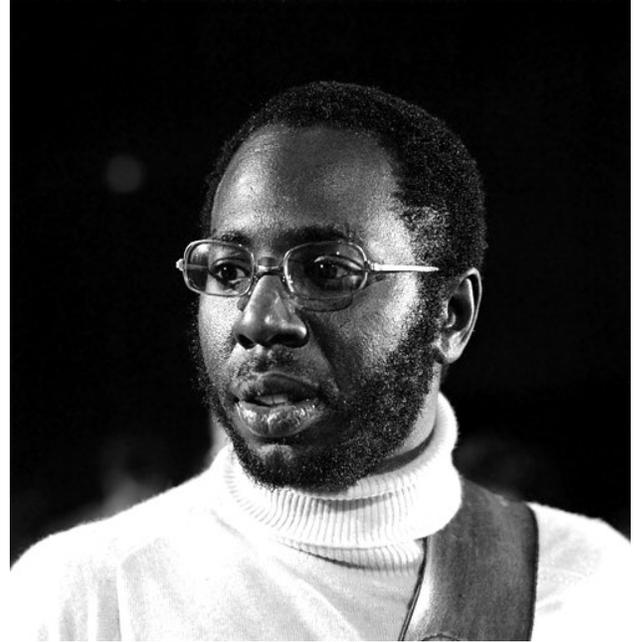
## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did changes in the Soul music of the early 1970s reflect broader shifts in American society during that time?

### OVERVIEW

The early 1970s were an unsettling time in America. The nation was divided about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and Americans were still reeling from the 1968 assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Race riots in cities like Watts, Newark, and Detroit indicated a high level of tension and frustration. During the Civil Rights movement, African Americans had fought hard for equal rights, but in the early 1970s, many of those rights were still unrealized. Not surprisingly, the Soul music of this era, according to Hip Hop pioneer Chuck D, was “darker,” reflecting national tensions.



Motown recording artist Marvin Gaye addressed some of these realities with his album *What's Going On*, speaking directly about Vietnam and the political upheaval of the time. Meanwhile, Curtis Mayfield, who with his group The Impressions had recorded the hopeful Civil Rights-era anthem “People Get Ready,” began producing new songs that captured the raw facts of ghetto life. When Mayfield released the soundtrack album for the movie *Super Fly* in 1972, it seemed to epitomize the direction in which music was moving. The age of Funk was coming. “The groove was so thick you had to get with it,” recalls Chuck D. Though Hip Hop would not enter the picture until the late 1970s, this period of “Social Soul” in the early 1970s was planting the seeds for Hip Hop’s deep groove and social awareness.

In this lesson, students will examine photographs, live recordings, video interviews, and a government report in order to learn about the historical and cultural context of the Soul music recorded in the 1970s.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The impact of historical events in the late 1960s, including the Vietnam War protests, race riots, and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy
- The contributions of musical artists Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield and how their music spoke to social issues of the time
- The findings of the Kerner Report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1968

### 2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Identify connections between artistic expression and its broader social and political context
- Students will determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text and lyrics, including figurative and connotative meanings (CCSS Reading 4)
- Students will evaluate the speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence, specifically in song selections by Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield (Speaking and Listening 3)
- Students will analyze a seminal U.S. document of historical and literary significance and identify key themes, specifically within the 1968 Kerner Report (CCSS Reading: Informational Text 9)

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

**As students enter the classroom, distribute Handout 1: Entry Ticket Prompt, or write the Entry Ticket Prompt on the board.**

**Love and heartbreak may be the most popular themes in songwriting, but many songs focus on other topics. Sometimes songs deal with a specific issue in society. Please take a moment to think about a cause that is important to you and answer the following questions.**

- If you could write a song about one problem in society, what would it be and why?
- What would your song be titled?
- What musical genre would it be written in and why (i.e. Rock, Jazz, Hip Hop, etc.)?

**Ask for three or four students to volunteer their answers. Discuss why music might be a powerful tool to deliver a message (e.g. music is a medium accessible to all, music is a “universal language,” music can unite people around a cause).**

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Distribute Handout 2: Marvin Gaye Lyric Comparison to each student. Explain that they will be comparing two songs by the same artist. Marvin Gaye was a celebrated Motown recording artist who pushed musical boundaries during his career. An extended Marvin Gaye biography is available on our site. Play the students a clip from “How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)” released in 1964, followed by a clip of “What’s Going On” released in 1971.

- After listening, allow the students a few minutes to read through the lyrics and write down any key themes or phrases.
- Ask students to compare and contrast the two songs. Are they similar in any way (e.g. vocals by the same artist, recorded for the same label)? How are they different? Think about their musicality, along with their message and tone.
- Note the dates the songs were released. Can the students identify any historical events that transpired in between the release of these two songs (e.g. a rise in Vietnam War tensions, the Civil Rights movement, Woodstock, etc.)?

2. To explore the historical context of “Social Soul” music in the early 1970s, students will engage in a Gallery Walk. The teacher will set up the classroom with four stations using Handout 3: Gallery Walk Photos.

[Note to teacher: one of the stations includes a video of an interview with Sen. Robert F. Kennedy on the Merv Griffin Show in 1967 (Pt. 2). The teacher can elect to watch the video as a class before the Gallery Walk begins.]

3. Divide students into groups. Each student will receive a copy of Handout 4: Gallery Walk Worksheet. Each group will start at a different station and rotate after a few minutes, visiting all four stations. The student will examine the photographs and descriptive paragraphs provided for each station. Students will take a moment to write down their

reactions. Then, they will discuss in their groups any common themes they see at the different stations.

- Station 1: The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, followed by riots in more than 100 cities throughout America.
- Station 2: Information concerning the number of African-American soldiers deployed in Vietnam, and information about “Project 100,000.”
- Station 3: Photographs of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and a video of Sen. Kennedy on the Merv Griffin Show in 1967 (Pt. 2).
- Station 4: Photographs depicting urban riots and protests in Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, and Washington, D.C. in 1968

4. After the students have visited all four stations, have them return to their seats. Poll the class:

- Are there any historical events that you learned about for the first time today? Are there any events from the late 1960s that surprised you?
- Which photograph has the biggest impact on you and why?
- What common themes could you come up with in your groups? How are these stations related, if at all?

5. To gain a deeper understanding of how these themes reoccur in Soul music, play the full video of Marvin Gaye performing “What’s Going On” for a benefit in 1972 (the song was released the previous year, in 1971).

Explain to the students that when the President of Motown Berry Gordy first heard the track, he did not want to release the song. He generally wanted Motown artists to steer clear of making political statements. But Gaye insisted and prevailed. Gaye’s lyrics to this song were partly inspired by stories from his younger brother, Frankie Gaye. Frankie had returned from a three-year tour of duty in Vietnam and would often share with his

## PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

older brother about the atrocities he had seen there.

After listening to the song, ask:

- What historical events do you think are addressed in “What’s Going On”? Do you see any links with the events described in the Gallery Walk (e.g. African-American soldiers returning from Vietnam)?
- Refer back to the Handout 2: Marvin Gaye Lyric Comparison and have a student volunteer to read aloud the quote from Marvin Gaye. As Marvin Gaye stated, “With the world exploding around me, how am I supposed to keep singing love songs?” What did he mean by this?

6. Pass out Handout 5: “Freddie’s Dead” Lyrics. Play the video from of Mayfield performing “Freddie’s Dead” in 1973.

Explain to the students that they will be listening to a live recording of a song that Mayfield originally released in 1972 for the soundtrack of the film *Super Fly*. The song depicts a character in the movie that meets his untimely death after dealing drugs. Based on the song and the lyrics, ask the students the following:

- Where do you think Freddie lives? From the text of this song, what do you think his life is like?
- Does this song make you think of a particular historical event from the Gallery Walk?
- Consider Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On.” How are these songs similar? How are these songs different? Think about their musicality, along with their message and tone.

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

Chuck D was the founder and leader of the groundbreaking Hip-Hop group Public Enemy. Play a clip from 2008 of Chuck D discussing the influence of Curtis Mayfield and “Freddie’s Dead”. In pairs, have the students discuss the following:

- Describe the impact of “Freddie’s Dead” on African-American communities living in urban America, according to Chuck D.
- As Chuck D states, “It was almost like [Curtis Mayfield] was the soundtrack to our everyday lives.” What do you think he means by this?

Invite pairs to share their Summary Activity answers with the class.

## WRITING PROMPT:

Ask students to consider the subject matter of the different songs they heard in class. Students will select one societal issue that is described in either “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye or “Freddie’s Dead” by Curtis Mayfield. Students will write a research-based essay about their chosen issue, describing what factors contributed to its existence in the 1970s. Is it still an issue today? Why or why not?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. Have students listen to Chuck D's group Public Enemy perform "Fight the Power." This song, released in 1989 by Motown Records, is an example of how "Social Soul" songs of the early 1970s had an impact on later Hip Hop tracks. Similar to "Freddie's Dead," "Fight the Power" was composed as a soundtrack for a film. In this case, it is Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* which explores racial tension and the inequity of urban life in Brooklyn, New York. After listening, discuss the following:
  - Chuck D, the founder of Public Enemy, describes the influence of Curtis Mayfield during the interview you watched earlier. How is "Fight the Power" similar to Mayfield's "Freddie's Dead"?
  - Label three areas of the room with three song titles, "Freddie's Dead," "What's Going On," and "Fight The Power." Ask the students to stand and go to the area of the room for the song that resonates the most with them as a listener. In their groups, students will discuss their song. What do they like about the song in terms of its music, tone, and emotion? How does it convey its message? Groups can share their answers with the class.
2. For an extended writing assignment, distribute Handout 6: Kerner Report to the students. Students will read the Introduction Summary of the report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1968. The handout includes the primary text and the following questions:
  - What does the Kerner Report identify as the cause of civil unrest in American cities?
  - The Kerner Report famously states "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." Think about your own community today. Do any recommendations made in the report still apply today? Why or why not?
  - How does this report relate to what you have learned regarding African-American life in the ghetto during the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Due to the length of the Kerner Report text, teachers may want to assign this writing prompt as homework.

## STANDARDS

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

*College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 for Literature and Informational Text*

Reading 5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Reading 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

*College and Career Readiness Writing Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects*

Writing 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

*College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 6-12*

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

**NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

*Core Music Standard: Responding*

Select: Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

*Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- Senator Robert F. Kennedy – Civil Unrest, Part 2 (1967)
- Chuck D – The Influence of Curtis Mayfield (2008)
- Public Enemy – Fight the Power (1989)
- Curtis Mayfield – Freddie’s Dead (1973)
- Marvin Gaye – What’s Going On?/ Save the Children (1972)
- Marvin Gaye – How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You) (1964)

### FEATURED PEOPLE

- Chuck D.
- Marvin Gaye
- Curtis Mayfield

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Entry Ticket Prompt
- Handout 2: Marvin Gaye Lyric Comparison
- Handout 3: Gallery Walk Photos and Images
- Handout 4: Gallery Walk Worksheet
- Handout 5: “Freddie’s Dead” Lyrics
- Handout 6: Kerner Report