

A Facing History and Ourselves Publication

# THE SOUNDS OF CHANGE

An Educator's Guide to Visiting the Stax Museum of American Soul Music



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Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. For more information about Facing History and Ourselves, please visit our website at [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org).

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For additional resources, visit Facing History’s [The Sounds of Change](#) website.

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## **Facing History and Ourselves**

Facing History and Ourselves is a global nonprofit organization founded in 1976 by educators who wanted to develop a more effective and rewarding way to engage students. We're guided by the belief that the lifeblood of democracy is the ability of every rising generation to be active, responsible decision makers who've learned to value compassion as much as reason.

By integrating the study of history and literature with ethical decision making, innovative teaching strategies, and extraordinary resources, professional development opportunities, and coaching, our program enables secondary school teachers to promote students' historical understanding, critical thinking, and social and emotional learning, and to facilitate transformative dialogue in their classrooms.

From the failure of democracy in Germany and the events leading to the Holocaust, to struggles for civil rights from the United States to South Africa, we trust students to wrestle with complex moments in human history, and work to help them understand the range of human behavior. We encourage students to reflect on the choices they confront in their own lives, and to consider how they can make a difference today.

## **The Stax Museum of American Soul Music**

The mission of the Stax Museum of American Soul Music is to present, preserve, promote and interpret the art, history, culture and heritage of American Soul music, specifically the Memphis Sound and its influences internationally.

Located at the original site of Stax Records in Memphis Tennessee, the museum offers a fun and interactive experience that includes an award-winning documentary film, video displays of interviews and classic performances, and exhibits of musical instruments, costumes, records, and photographs that tell the story of a great musical genre born in the USA. Preserved here is the legacy of musical giants such as Otis Redding, the Staple Singers, Booker T. and the MGs, Al Green, Aretha Franklin, Ike and Tina Turner, and many others.

The Stax Museum of American Soul Music is a program of the nonprofit, Soulsville Foundation, which also operates the Stax Music Academy (an after-school and summer music program for middle and high school students) and The Soulsville Charter School (a college preparatory school serving approximately six hundred children in grades 6 through 12).

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## Overview

This series of lessons can be taught before or after visiting the Stax Museum of American Soul Music. We look closely at several classic soul songs, placing them in the context of the civil rights movement. The stories of the artists, the music, and the lyrics provide a window into the ways that music can both inspire and reflect social change. And the stories touch on familiar Facing History and Ourselves themes: society and the individual, membership in democracy, the legacies of the past, and those moments when people choose to change their worlds.

Whether taught as part of a unit or used independently, each lesson explores the following questions:

- What can individuals and groups do to shape their identities?
- How do notions of group membership (We and They) shape the way we see the world and the way the world sees us?
- What is the role music can play in shaping the way we see ourselves and others?
- What role can music play as an agent of change?
- What can we learn about the past by focusing on music? And, most specifically, what can we learn about the civil rights era from the story and music of Stax Records?

Each lesson plan follows a similar format, framed with essential and guiding questions and connections to the Common Core State Standards. The lessons themselves begin with a warm-up activity that serves as an entry point for discussion of key topics and themes. Students then begin to analyze the songs, looking closely at the lyrics, before complementing their analysis with informational text and documentary footage that give a sense of the time and place where the music was written, recorded, and performed, offering a deeper understanding of its message. The text-dependent questions that accompany both the lyrics and the historical documents are based on the Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading and Literacy in Social Studies. In addition to measuring student understanding of the material covered, the questions will prepare students for Common Core State Standards-aligned assessments.

## Stax and the Origins of Soul Music

This introduction provides background on the history of Stax Records and can help provide context for the lessons that follow. Each educator will decide what portions of this background information he or she will share with students.

### What Is Soul Music?

In *African American Music: An Introduction*, Dr. Portia Maultsby writes about Soul music and the context in which it thrived:

Soul is a form of urban Black popular music, derived from rhythm and blues of the 1950s, that crystallized in the late 1960s and peaked in the mid-1970s. Its distinctive sound is characterized by the incorporation of the rhythms, musical and formal structures, and vocal stylings of Black gospel music. These elements gradually dominated or replaced the blues, jazz, and pop elements associated with the 1950s rhythm and blues styles. The lyrics of soul maintained the topics of romance and social relationships and expanded topical coverage to include social and political commentary inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Thus soul music is defined by both its lyric content and musical features.

Early soul styles paralleled the broad popularity of the prevailing Black gospel music and coincided with the beginning of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement. Music was central to this movement: spirituals, gospel music, and rhythm and blues provided the core repertoire, which singers transformed into freedom songs during sit-ins, marches, and freedom rides. The result was the further blurring of the sacred-secular boundaries within these political contexts.<sup>1</sup>

As Soul Music began to find an audience,

... Soul singers ascended as community icons, promoting concepts of Black solidarity, Black pride, and Black empowerment. Radio stations initially banned these recordings because of their overtly political messages. Nevertheless, soul became the most popular and influential form of Black musical expression in post-World War II America.....<sup>2</sup>

As a sign of Soul music's growing popularity, budding mainstream acceptance, and eventual appropriation "in 1969, *Billboard* changed the name of its "Rhythm and Blues" charts to "Soul."<sup>3</sup>

### A Brief History of Stax Records

In 1961, when Satellite Records had been around for four years, it was rechristened Stax Records, a name created from the first two letters of the surnames of co-owning siblings Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton. The siblings, who were white, established themselves in the abandoned Capitol Movie Theatre building in a predominantly black neighborhood of South Memphis, Tennessee. The location of the studio was significant because many of the label's first stars had grown up in the surrounding area, later known as Soulsville, USA.

Stewart and Axton had begun with country, rockabilly, and pop music. It wasn't until they bought the Capitol building and met local disc jockey and singer/songwriter Rufus Thomas, a well-known figure in the black community, that soul music became a prime interest. Thomas and his daughter, singer Carla Thomas, became the first artists to record at the new studio, transforming Stax Records into an R&B label. In his book *Soulsville USA: The Story of Stax Records*, Rob Bowman quotes Stewart saying, "Prior to that I had no knowledge of what black music was about. Never heard black music and never even had an inkling of what it was all about. It was like a blind man who suddenly gained his sight. You don't want to go back, you don't even look back. It just never occurred to me."<sup>4</sup>



**Stax Records resided in Memphis, Tennessee in a building that was once the Capitol Movie Theatre. It is now the Stax Museum of American Soul Music.**

Courtesy of API Photography

While Stewart searched for talent and oversaw recording sessions, Axton was running the Satellite Record Shop, installed where the candy counter had stood at the front of the movie theater. Unlike other shops, at Satellite customers were encouraged to browse, to make themselves at home. “One of the hipper local hangouts,” notes Bowman, “the store also served as a conduit for talent recruitment, a number of future session musicians, songwriters, and vocalists making their initial contact with the company via the store.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, it was “a vehicle for staying current with the listening tastes of Memphis black youth, providing a ready-made test market for just-cut Stax releases. It was not uncommon for Axton to take songs that had just been recorded and play them in the record shop for the local populace; many were changed, and some were not released depending on their reaction.”<sup>16</sup>



**Al Bell and Jim Stewart sit with members of The Staple Singers at Stax Records.**

Courtesy of Stax Museum of American Soul Music

Throughout the course of its fifteen-year existence, Stax Records recorded and promoted many famous soul artists, including Booker T. and the MGs, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, the Staple Singers, Isaac Hayes, and the Bar-Kays. Perhaps even more noteworthy than the talented list of artists was the company's interracial identity. When promotions director Al Bell joined Stewart and Axton as a co-owner (he eventually took over as the exclusive owner), Stax Records became a rare example of an equal partnership between white and black. Bell described the experience:



I was amazed to sit in the same room with this white guy [Jim Stewart] who had been a country fiddle player. . . . We had separate water fountains in Memphis and throughout the South. And if we wanted to go to a restaurant, we had to go to the back door—but to sit in that office with this white man, sharing the same telephone, sharing the same thoughts, and being treated like an equal human being—was really a phenomenon during that period of time. The spirit that came from Jim and his sister Estelle Axton allowed all of us, black and white, to come off the streets, where you had segregation and the negative attitude, and come into the doors of Stax, where you had freedom, you had harmony, you had people working together. It grew into what became really an oasis for all of us.<sup>7</sup>



**An interracial group of musicians stand under the Stax Records Marquee.**

Courtesy of Don Nix

Stewart echoed his partner's sentiment: "If we've done nothing more, we've shown the world that people of different colors, origins, and convictions can be as one, working together towards the same goal. Because we've learned how to live and work together at Stax Records, we've reaped many material benefits. But, most of all, we've acquired peace of mind. When hate and resentment break out all over the nation, we pull our blinds and display a sign that reads 'Look What We've Done—TOGETHER.'"<sup>8</sup> Axton added, "We never saw color, we saw talent. That was what was so great about being over there."<sup>9</sup>

Long-time session saxophone player Floyd Newman describes the interracial collaboration that became the norm at Stax:

We never had racial problems. None. [There's] something about music, sports, that never gets in between that. If you're a good athlete, you're accepted. If you're a good musician, you're accepted. You're accepted for what you know, and how you play, and what you do. You don't see any conversations like that going on between those situations, and it was good because if you're less stressful, you play better. That's just a part of it because you're relaxed. And at Stax, we were relaxed. And I mean *relaxed*. [We] did more laughing, I believe, than we played. We just had a fantastic relationship working at Stax. Musicians, we were together.<sup>10</sup>



**This integrated recording session included: Steve Cropper, guitar; Duck Dunn, bass; Tom Dowd, Atlantic Recording Media; David Porter, staff writer; Julius Green, of the Mad Lads; Andrew Love, tenor sax; Floyd Newman, baritone sax; Wayne Jackson, trumpet; and Isaac Hayes, piano, organ and staff writer.**

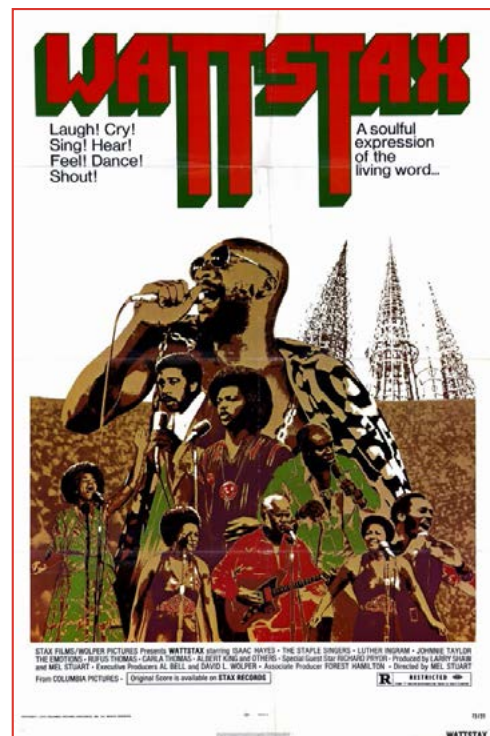
Courtesy of API Photography

At the same time, the company never stood completely apart from the world. Stax musicians were recording in Los Angeles when the Watts Riots broke out in 1965, and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated just miles from the Stax studios in April of 1968.

Responses to the violence, particularly in Watts, highlighted a divide in strategy and disposition. Some black activists argued that the events in Watts were not riots, but “justified” rebellions, while others, including many of Dr. King’s supporters, continued to stress the importance of non-violent civil

disobedience as essential to social change. Tensions came to a head when King came to Memphis in the spring of 1968 to lead a march organized by longtime non-violent activist, Rev. James Lawson. The protest turned violent and critics argued that it was impossible to organize a non-violent march in Memphis. Lawson and King sought to prove critics wrong and King returned to the city to try again. He never got the chance: King was assassinated. Riots in Memphis and across the country followed King's murder; Stax was not immune to the increasing tension. However, Newman recalls, "It didn't destroy us. It didn't separate us. We were together. We could take care of that."<sup>11</sup>

As the company grew, it offered hope to the community. "Black people were really proud of Stax," said songwriter Homer Banks, "because Memphis had a heartbeat when Stax was happening. Black people saw something visual that was a real success right in their community."<sup>12</sup> Executives and artists joined in the struggle for racial equality, and they produced a number of songs meant to counter stereotypes and injustice with positive images. Such efforts climaxed with Wattstax, a concert the company organized in conjunction with the Watts Summer Festival, an annual festival that had been



**A poster for the movie about the 1972 Wattstax music festival that was held in Los Angeles**



**The Stax Museum of American Soul Music today**

© Albert Vecerka/Esto

organized in response to the 1965 riots. Held in Los Angeles, California and compared by many to Woodstock, this concert proved a swan song for Stax.

Despite the popularity of its artists, several factors including mounting financial troubles and the tense racial climate led the now Black owned Stax Records into involuntary bankruptcy in 1975. A year later the studios officially shut their doors. The building in South Memphis stood empty until 1989, when it was demolished. But the tremendous efforts of the Soulsville Foundation have preserved the company's rich legacy and the history of Soulsville, USA. In addition to rebuilding the studios and creating the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the foundation opened the Stax Music Academy in 2003 and the Soulsville Charter School in 2008, both devoted to serving at-risk youths. Since the Soulsville Charter School opened its doors in 2008, every graduate from both schools has been accepted to college. ■

# LESSON 1: "SOUL MAN" AND IDENTITY

## "SOUL MAN"

was written by Isaac Hayes and David Porter and performed by Sam & Dave (1967)

### Introduction

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the song "Soul Man," which was written by Isaac Hayes and David Porter and originally performed and popularized by Sam & Dave. The upbeat melody and lyrics may be familiar to many students, but they may not know that the song was inspired by a tragic moment in US history: the Detroit Riots of 1967. At a time when the American media often linked the black urban working class to crime and violence, Hayes and Porter celebrated a proud, hard working "Soul Man."

**Facing History Theme(s):** Identity; Individual and Society

### Essential Questions

- How do we shape our own identities?
- How do stereotypes influence the way we see ourselves and others?
- What can individuals and groups do to counter negative images, ideas, and stereotypes?

### Guiding Questions

- What sorts of responses can an individual have to injustice? Can making or listening to music be one of these responses? How so?
- Why was it important for Hayes and Porter to define a "soul man" or a "soul brother" in a positive way

### Objectives

- Students will use the song's lyrics as a primary text for analysis.
- Students will briefly explore the influence of the media coverage of the 1967 Detroit Riots as well as the implications of the Kerner Commission Report, and consider to what extent the song "Soul Man" was a response to the times.
- Students will consider the choices made by the artists responsible for "Soul Man" and reflect on their own connections to the text.

### Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading (R), Writing (W), and Speaking and Listening (SL)

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)—Citing Textual Evidence
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)—Theme/Central Idea
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)—Plot & Character/Process
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#)—Text Structure

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)—Point of View/Purpose in a Text(s)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#)—Comparing Different Media
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)—Collaborative Discussion
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)—Interpreting Information in Diverse Media

### Outcomes/Assessment

Students will create a visual representation of the singer, as well as themselves.

### Media/Resource List

- [Handout 1](#): “Soul Man” Lyrics
- [Handout 2](#): “Soul Man” Historical Background
- [Handout 3](#) (Image): “Soul Brother in Shop Window” from the 1967 Detroit Riots
- [Handout 4](#): Stickman Template
- Text-Dependent Questions for “Soul Man” (Lyrics and Historical Background), see Appendix.
- Film Clip: “[Soul Man](#)” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “Two Societies,” from *Eyes on the Prize* volume 4, episode 8 [32:12–40:13]. This video may be borrowed from the Facing History and Ourselves Resource Library.
- Film Clip: “[The Origin and Meaning of ‘Soul Man’](#)” from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*. Be sure to preview this clip as some language may not be appropriate for your students.
- Description of [Kerner Commission Report](#)

## Learning Activities:

### Warm-up

1. One way to begin the lesson is by having students think about their own identities and perceptions. What influences the way students see themselves? How do they think others see them? What shapes how they think about others? Encourage students to spend some time writing down some answers to these questions. Alternatively, you can ask students to create an [identity chart](#) mapping the many factors that shape who we are as individuals and as members of groups.
2. Ask students to share their ideas with partners, small groups, or the whole class. If working in smaller groups, remind students that they have choices about sharing these personal details with the whole class.

### Analyzing the Lyrics

3. Some teachers prefer that students respond to the lyrics before they've learned about the song's background. After that, teachers fill in some detail, permitting students to offer quite different reactions to the song.
4. Distribute copies of the lyrics to "Soul Man" ([Handout 1](#)) for students to follow as they watch the [film clip](#).
5. As they watch, students may annotate the lyrics by marking any lines that they connect with. At the conclusion of the song, have students share memorable lines first with a partner, then with the whole class. Are there words and phrases that students do not understand? Confusion will probably fade as students learn more about the context in which the song was written.
6. Engage in a close reading of the lyrics. You may choose to have students respond to those questions—individually, in pairs, or in small groups. (In the appendix we have provided a series of text-dependent questions to guide readers and assess basic comprehension).
7. Discuss the point of view of the song. Who is the narrator? Describe his character. Who is he addressing?
8. Work with the class to create an identity chart for the narrator of the song. You may find it useful to refer to an [example](#) from the Facing History and Ourselves website. Using textual evidence, including lyrics, have students consider words and phrases that describe the narrator. We will return to the chart at the end of the next section to add more detail.

### Historical Context/Deeper Understandings

9. Share with your students some information about the era when the song was written, using the Historical Background resource ([Handout 2](#)) and the photograph ([Handout 3](#)). Have them answer the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 1](#). To understand the song in its time, it is important to understand that "Soul Man" was written during the civil rights movement when tensions over injustice too often found expression in large-scale rioting and violence.
10. To provide additional background, watch the excerpt from [Eyes on the Prize](#) and *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*. It describes the racial tensions during the sixties in America and the Detroit Riots of 1967. The second clip entitled "[The Origin and Meaning of 'Soul Man'](#)" from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story* focuses on "Soul Man" and the different artists who contributed to it. Before watching this second clip, ask your students to listen carefully to the different inspirations and interpretations of "Soul Man" in the excerpt. *Educator's note: Although it is not the focus of this lesson, the entire hour-long Eyes on the Prize episode, entitled "Two Societies," provides useful insights into the riots that scarred a number of US cities in the mid-1960s.*

11. Now that students know more about the song and the period when it was written, have them begin to form an interpretation of the song's message in writing. Consider both the content of the song and its audience. Whom were the artists addressing? What message did they want to convey? You might have students discuss their thoughts in small groups. To assess their responses, consider how students use evidence from the lyrics, film clips, and the background text.
12. As you review the students' interpretations of the song, you may want to consider the following questions: How did the background knowledge influence their understanding of the narrator? What did the songwriters think a "soul man" was? Consider the choices made by Isaac Hayes and David Porter. What were the different ways that they could have responded to the news from Detroit? How did they choose to respond? How did those choices shape the way people responded to the song?
13. Ask students to return to the identity chart they created for the song's narrator. Are there any changes they want to make, now that they've learned a bit about the men who wrote the song and the events that inspired them?

### Outcomes

14. Some educators find that students presented with a figure like our stickman template ([Handout 4](#)) promptly sketch a portrait of a character known only from words. See what they make of the song's narrator. Does he get a big heart to represent the lyric "good lovin'"? Dirty shoes to represent the lyric "dusty road"? Some may enjoy creating a collage with words and images from magazines or the Internet. As students present their work, ask how "Soul Man" countered negative images of black men.
15. Do students believe the song has a timeless message? Does the music still resonate with them? Which images still feel relevant today? Which feel dated? If they were to write a song with a similar purpose today, what words, images, and ideas would they include? Compare the way that different forms of media can counter stereotypes. For example, what can a song do that cannot be done with a newspaper article or a documentary film?
16. To conclude, you may wish to return to the essential questions at the beginning of the lesson and discuss them based on what we have learned. In particular, have students consider how to react when they feel they are being stereotyped or judged unfairly. What kinds of responses can help break down barriers? What kinds of responses seem to further misunderstandings?

## HANDOUT 1 “Soul Man” Lyrics



*Written by Isaac Hayes and David Porter*

Comin' to you on a dusty road  
Good lovin', I got a truck load  
And when you get it, you got something  
So don't worry, 'cause I'm coming

I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man  
I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man, I've got it all

Got what I got the hard way  
And I'll make it better each and every day  
So honey, don't you fret  
'Cause you ain't seen nothing yet

I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man, play it, Steve  
I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man

I was brought up on a side street, listen now  
I learned how to love before I could eat  
I was educated at Woodstock<sup>13</sup>  
When I start lovin', oh, I can't stop

I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man  
I'm a soul man, I'm a soul man

Well, grab the rope and I'll pull you in  
Give you hope and be your only boyfriend  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

I'm talkin' about a soul man  
I'm a soul man, and you're a soul man  
I'm a soul man, oh no, soul man  
I'm a soul man, and you're a soul man

Lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., EMI Music Publishing, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group. Reproduced with permission.



## HANDOUT 2 “Soul Man” Historical Background

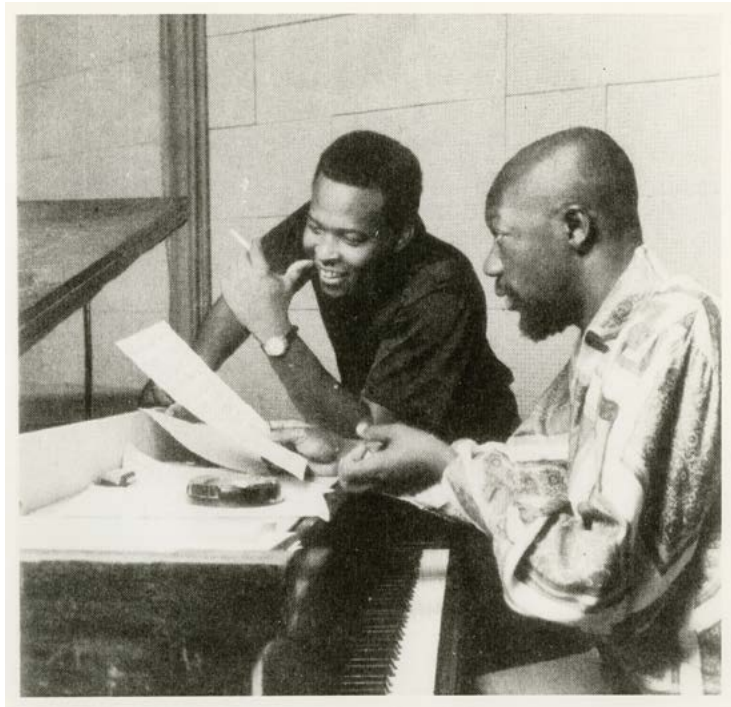
“Soul Man,” written by creative duo Isaac Hayes and David Porter, soared into the popular music charts even as it expressed, at a difficult time, the pride of many black Americans. The song appeared at a crucial moment in the civil rights struggle. City after city was beset by rioting: New York and Philadelphia in 1964, Los Angeles in 1965, and Detroit in 1967—the year the song was written, recorded, and released.

All four cities had large black ghettos, but of the four it was Detroit, with a population 40% black, whose elected officials had long been criticized for failing to deal with increasing racial tensions. But many successful blacks lived in slums because landlords and realtors in other parts of the city shunned them and economic changes in factories contributed to high unemployment leaving many feeling unsettled. For Detroit’s black citizens, militancy held a growing appeal. At the same time, a predominantly white police force had a reputation for racist violence. These factors came to a head in July 1967, when a police tactical squad entered a club serving alcohol after hours known as a “blind pig.” The event was a reception for black Vietnam War veterans, and when officers tried to make arrests, they met resistance. The confrontation escalated, and residents of neighboring streets began to riot, setting fire to stores known for their discriminatory practices and soon to white owned businesses as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

According to the PBS documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, “Estimates for the number of injured was as high as six hundred people, four thousand residents had been arrested, five thousand people were homeless, and 682 buildings were damaged. Property loss from fires ran over \$45 million.”<sup>15</sup>

In the film *Eyes on the Prize*, Ron Scott, a citizen of Detroit, explained what he believed led to the violence: “Inside of most black people, there was a time bomb. There was a pot that was about to overflow, and there was rage that was about to come out. And the rebellion just provided an opportunity for that. I mean, why else would people get upset about the cops raiding the blind pig? They’d done that numerous times before. But people just got tired. People just got tired of it. And it just exploded.”<sup>16</sup>

After the riots, President Lyndon Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to investigate the root causes of the riots. In their report, the authors explained, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal. What white Americans have never fully understood—but



**Isaac Hayes and David Porter work together at Stax Records.**

Courtesy of API Photography

what the Negro can never forget—is that . . . white institutions created [the ghetto], white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” The commission recommended that federal funds be allocated to economic empowerment, but the rising cost of the Vietnam War rendered that a political impossibility.<sup>17</sup>

Washington had offered a diagnosis but would struggle to administer a cure. A pair of songwriters took a different approach. Hayes described the inspiration for “Soul Man”: “I remember in Detroit, I saw the news flash where they were burning [the neighborhoods]. Where the buildings weren’t burnt, people would write ‘soul’ on the buildings. The big thing was ‘soul brother.’ So I said, ‘Why not do something called “Soul Man” and kind of tell a story about one’s struggle to rise above his present conditions.’ It’s almost a tune [where it’s] kind of like boasting I’m a soul man—a pride thing. ‘Soul Man’ came out of that whole black identification.”<sup>18</sup>

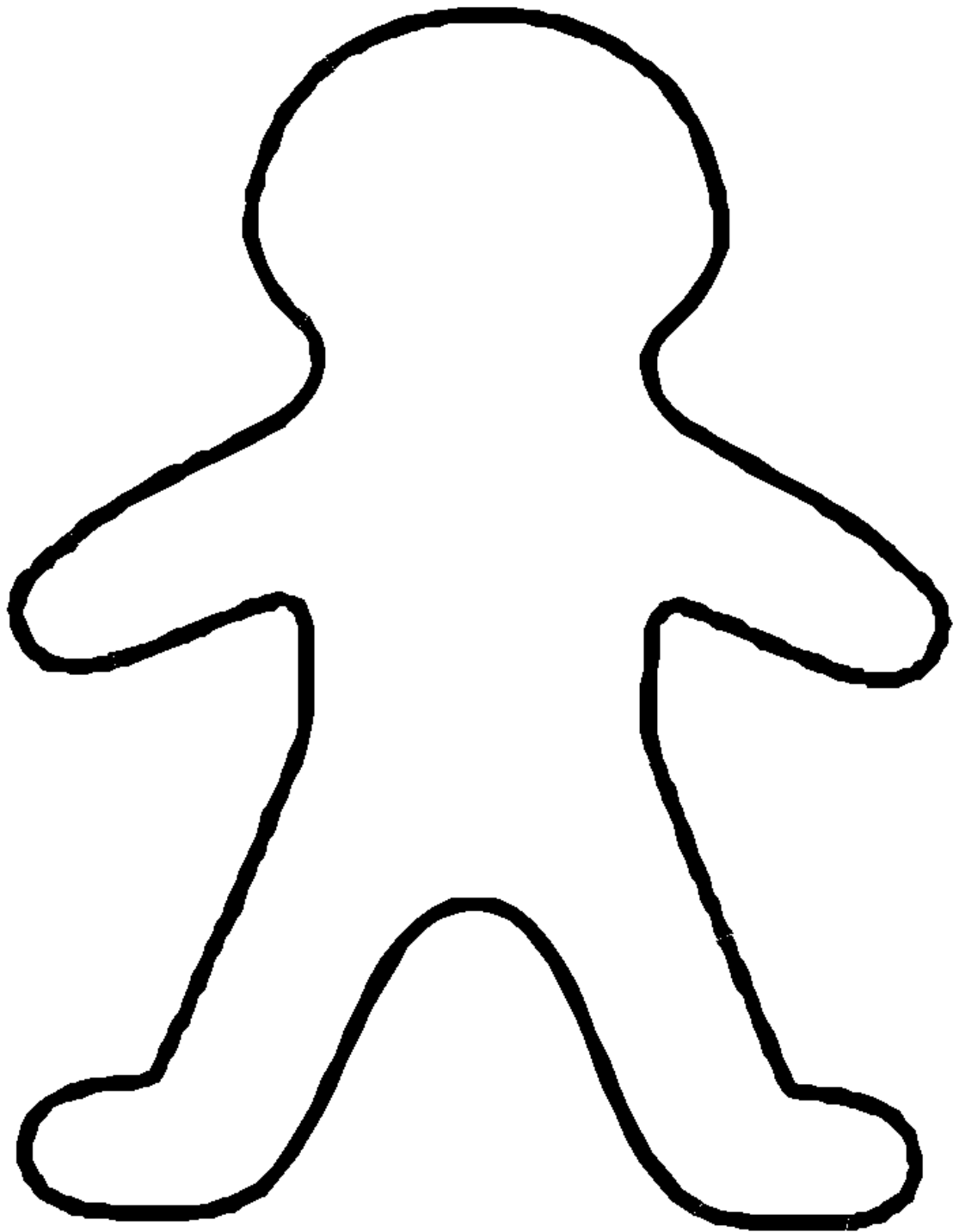
In the aftermath of the riots Hayes and Porter made a deliberate decision to counter negative images of black men by focusing on an ordinary person trying to create a better life for himself. The song was a breakthrough hit. “Soul Man” went on to become one of the most popular Stax songs of all time, reaching number two on the Billboard Hot 100 in the fall of 1967 and number one on the Billboard R&B chart for seven weeks in a row in October and November of 1967. It won the GRAMMY® Award for Best Rhythm & Blues Group Performance, Vocal or Instrumental. In *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, Rob Bowman writes, “‘Soul Man’ was an important record, keying in to the then-newly emergent black consciousness that was perhaps best summed up by the phrase ‘black is beautiful.’ In 1967 the song became an anthem for black America.”<sup>19</sup>

## HANDOUT 3 “Soul Brother in Shop Window” from the 1967 Detroit Riots



African American store owners protecting their store in the aftermath of the Detroit riots of 1967. Credit: Lee Balterman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

**HANDOUT 4** Stickman Template



# LESSON 2: BREAKING THE RACIAL BARRIERS

## "GREEN ONIONS"

was written and performed by Booker T. and the MGs (1962).

### Introduction

In this lesson, students will be introduced to Booker T. and the MGs, who were both an independent act and the Stax house band, session musicians who worked in the recording studio with many of the label's stars. Despite performing in an era when much of the South, including Memphis, was segregated, Booker T. and the MGs was a racially integrated band. Students will learn how the group members' passion for music overcame the societal pressures seeking to force them apart.

**Facing History Theme:** Membership (We and They)

### Essential Questions

- What does it mean to belong to a group? How does a person know when he or she belongs?
- How does group membership shape the way we see the world and the way the world sees us?
- What are the conditions that make integration possible, and what gets in the way?

### Guiding Questions

- What societal pressures did the members of Booker T. and the MGs have to confront?
- What were some specific challenges the band faced?
- How did the band persevere despite the racial tensions of the time?

### Objectives

- Students will consider the importance of group collaboration.
- Students will understand the significance of an integrated group during the civil rights era.
- Students will understand Gordon Allport's conditions for intergroup cooperation.
- Students will write from another perspective in order to relate to others.

### Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading (R), Writing (W), and Speaking and Listening (SL)

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)—Citing Textual Evidence
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)—Theme/Central Idea
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)—Word Meaning
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)—Point of View/Purpose in a Text(s)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)—Collaborative Discussion
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)—Interpreting Information in Diverse Media
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3](#)—Writing Narratives

## Outcomes/Assessment

Students will write from the perspective of one of the group's members, using the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy.

## Media/Resource List

- [Handout 1](#): “Green Onions” Historical Background
- [Handout 2](#): Gordon Allport’s Contact Hypothesis
- Text-Dependent Questions for “Green Onions” (Historical Background), see Appendix.
- Film Clip: “[Green Onions](#),” as performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[Musicians Booker T. and the MGs](#)” from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*.

## Learning Activities

### Warm-up

To begin a lesson on the power of group membership, particularly the power to define who may belong, ask students to think about a time when they or someone they know participated in a group despite the expectations of or pressures from peers, parents, or society. What challenges did the situation present? What were the benefits? We recommend taking time to reflect on those questions in a journal before opening up to a discussion. You might consider a [think-pair-share](#) strategy.

### Analyzing the Music

1. Watch the film clip of "[Green Onions](#)," as performed by the Stax Music Academy. Ask students their initial reactions. What does it remind you of? What stands out?
2. Ask students to identify as many instruments as possible, by both sound and sight. How do the different instruments in the song play off each other? Listen for both solos and times when everyone is playing together. What effect would isolating just one instrument have on the song? What would this song sound like it were performed by just one person? Would it be the same song?

### Historical Context

3. After students have had a chance to focus on the music, deepen the discussion by showing the film clip "[Musicians Booker T. and the MGs](#)." In this clip students will be introduced to the band. Have the students listen to discussions of what held them together. What words do they use to describe their relationships? How do they talk about race and what it meant to be an integrated group in a time of segregation? What, if anything, is surprising?
4. To give students a deeper understanding of the context in which the band wrote "Green Onions," distribute the Historical Background handout ([Handout 1](#)). You may find it helpful to use the [chunking strategy](#) with this particular resource. If you feel your class needs more guidance, you might ask students to answer the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 2](#).
5. Psychologist Gordon Allport studied prejudice and how to resist it. One of his most important ideas, the contact hypothesis, suggests that bringing people from different groups together can help reduce prejudice if certain conditions are met. Present those conditions to your students ([Handout 2](#)). Which of these conditions was met when Booker T. and the MGs got together? Which issues may have presented challenges? Consider other efforts launched at that time that aimed to bring groups together (e.g., school integration, integration of the armed forces). Which of Allport's conditions was met in those situations?

### Outcomes

6. After listening to the band describe what it meant to be an integrated group in a time of segregation, tease out the conditions that helped the band form a successful collaboration. Does that list of conditions look like Allport's? What are the important features of a successful group? What is necessary to make all members feel they belong? Have you ever felt like you were making a positive contribution to a group? Have you ever felt that positive collaboration was impossible? What got in the way? How did you respond? How do you wish you'd responded?
7. Inform students that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis not far from the Stax Records studios. Out of respect, Stax closed for several days, but tensions were still high when the artists returned to work. Ask students to reread then summarize the paragraphs in which

Steve Cropper describes being harassed outside of the Stax studios. Consider having students use the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy, writing from the perspective of Cropper or another band member. They might consider what could have been done before, during, or after one of the tense moments to defuse the situation. Ask students to share their writing with one another.



## HANDOUT 1 “Green Onions” Historical Background



### Booker T. and the MGs

Courtesy of Dunn Family

The first hit of their own that Booker T. and the MGs recorded was “Green Onions.” The curious title came, according to guitarist Steve Cropper, from the band’s desire to name the song after “something that was as funky as possible.” The band played on the double meaning of the word funky, as both a song with a strong rhythm and as something that smelled badly. Indeed, as anyone who has heard “Green Onions” knows, it is built around a fantastic groove, and yes, the vegetable green onions, from which the song was given its name, can have a really strong odor.

More than just a funky soul band, Booker T. and the MGs was the background band for many classic Stax recordings and they were an integrated group at a time when opposition to desegregation kindled violent conflicts throughout the South. Stax co-owner Al Bell described the unique business environment at Stax that made it possible for a white man to play with three black men in the South during the 60s:

I was amazed to sit in the same room with this white guy [Stax co-owner Jim Stewart] who had been a country fiddle player. . . . We had separate water fountains in Memphis and throughout the South. And if we wanted to go to a restaurant, we had to go to the back door—but to sit in that office with this white man, sharing the same telephone, sharing the same thoughts, and being treated like an equal human being—was really a phenomenon during that period of time. The spirit that came from Jim and his sister Estelle Axton allowed all of us, black and white, to come off the streets, where you had segregation and the

negative attitude, and come into the doors of Stax, where you had freedom, you had harmony, you had people working together. It grew into what became really an oasis for all of us.<sup>20</sup>

This was especially significant in the racially segregated city of Memphis. When thirteen black 1st-graders were allowed to attend formerly all-white schools—nearly a decade after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that said public schools must integrate—many white families took their children out of those schools. In 1968, black sanitation workers went on strike because they endured worse working conditions than their white counterparts.

Steinberg described the contrast between the Stax studios and the outside world: “We integrated Stax and didn’t think no more about it than the man on the moon. We couldn’t go and play on the same bandstand together in Memphis! But we’d get together inside the studio and do everything we want to.”<sup>21</sup>

When bassist Donald “Duck” Dunn replaced Steinberg in 1965, notes Rob Bowman in *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, “they became literally half-white and half-black.” He explains, “While such collaborations were not uncommon in the studio, they were still relatively rare for a publicly performing band, and hence, ultimately political.”<sup>22</sup>

While on tour, band members were not always allowed to dine together or stay at the same hotel. In *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion*, author and documentary director Robert Gordon describes an incident that took place at an Alabama truck stop:

When the four were told to go outside to the rear window to place their order, they left instead; Duck lingered, and went back in alone. He ordered forty hamburgers, staying at the counter to see them go on the grill, to see the buns laid out and dressed, and even the bags come out to hold the order. But when the counter help looked up to deliver the food and settle the bill, Duck had vanished, the MGs on their way to a place where they could all eat together.<sup>23</sup>

Solidarity came first for the band, whether that meant accepting routine inconveniences or unexpected danger. In 1965, the group performed in Los Angeles as part of the Stax Revue and lingered for a recording gig. This was when riots broke out in the predominantly black Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. According to the Civil Rights Digital Library, this event was the “largest and costliest urban rebellion of the civil rights era.”<sup>24</sup>

The violence erupted when a black driver was arrested by a white California Highway Patrolman, causing tensions to flare between angry onlookers and law enforcement officials. Six days of rioting laid waste to whole neighborhoods, claiming the lives of thirty-four people, causing more than \$40 million in damages, and leading to more than one thousand injuries and nearly four thousand arrests. As people and businesses were targeted with violence, fear seized those caught in the vicinity of rioters.<sup>25</sup>

It was in the minutes after Booker T. Jones wound up a recording session with Al Jackson and Steve Cropper that he first heard about the violence—and found himself in a peculiar position. He had telephoned his sister for a ride, only to be told she couldn’t pick him up. He soon learned the reason why.

So I walk outside the studio and there are National Guardsmen on the corner. It happened so quickly and it was so devastating. We ended up feeling very protective [of Cropper and the other white guys at the session]. I remember the feeling of having to get these guys out of there with us somehow.<sup>26</sup>

While they were able to leave safely, three years later another wave of inner-city violence shook Stax severely. After Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, tensions in the predominantly

black neighborhood surrounding Stax heated up. The riots that followed included arson attacks on a number of white-owned businesses, but neither the Stax studios nor the Satellite Record Shop was touched. The toll from King's murder took a different form:

"It had a tremendous impact," attests Jim Stewart:

It kind of put a wedge, or at least opened up that suspicious element, [within] the company. Although we tried to bond together and continue to work together, from that point on it changed considerably. There wasn't that happy feeling of creating together. There was something missing. You couldn't quite put your finger on it, but you knew things had changed and there's no way you could go back. Everybody started withdrawing, pulling back from that openness and close relationship that we felt we had. . . . While we were in the studio I don't think that was ever affected, but once we were through, everybody went their separate ways. There wasn't that mixing and melting together like we had before.<sup>27</sup>

"It heightened internally the racial sensitivity amongst those of us at Stax," affirmed Al Bell. "Up to that point in time I don't think we focused in on that much. Dr. King's death had a tremendous impact at Stax. We were there in the middle of the black community and here we were an integrated organization existing in a city where integration was an issue. Dr. King's death caused [some] African-American people in the community to react negatively toward the white people that worked for Stax Records. Immediately after [King's] death we had to protect some of the white people who worked at Stax."<sup>28</sup>

"There were pressures outside the studio," confirmed Cropper, "in terms of gang-related situations in the neighborhood. Feelings were heating up. People were being influenced by what they were seeing in the news and reading in the paper. They had made the decision that they were gonna stand up to this and crusade behind it. I think just the fact that the public thought that Stax was a solely white-owned company had a lot to do with the feelings in the neighborhood."<sup>29</sup>

The company building stood right across the street from Jones's Big D grocery store, where many Stax employees parked their cars. After the riots, Cropper and "Duck" Dunn found that they were being routinely hassled by a couple of street-corner toughs. "They got on me one day," related Cropper, "and accused me of slapping this little kid who used to run errands for me. It never happened. They made the stupid story up just trying to harass me and get money out of me. They all of a sudden made it a black and white thing, and we had been everybody's friend there for years. They stuck a knife in my back and made all kinds of threats. Somehow I talked them out of it."<sup>30</sup>

Saxophonist Floyd Newman, a regular session player with the MGs, shrugged off talk of tensions invading the studio. He explained that the anger so many saw in the neighborhood and across the country "didn't destroy us. It didn't separate us. We were together. We could take care of that [because] nobody stressed about, wasn't [anybody] thinkin' about [any] black, white, green, purple. None of that. We just had a fantastic relationship working at Stax. Musicians, we were together."<sup>31</sup> The band continued to play together until 1970, when Booker T. left the band.

## HANDOUT 2 Gordon Allport's Contact Hypothesis

In criminology, psychology, and sociology, the contact hypothesis has been described as one of the best ways to improve relations among groups that are experiencing conflict. Gordon W. Allport is often credited with the development of the contact hypothesis, also known as Intergroup Contact Theory. The premise of Allport's theory states that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. If one has the opportunity to communicate with others, they are able to understand and appreciate different points of views involving their way of life. As a result of new appreciation and understanding, prejudice should diminish. Issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are commonly occurring issues between rival groups. Allport's proposal was that properly managed contact between the groups should reduce these problems and lead to better interactions.

Contact fails to cure conflict when contact situations create anxiety for those who take part. Contact situations need to be long enough to allow this anxiety to decrease and for the members of the conflicting groups to feel comfortable with one another. Additionally if the members of the two groups use this contact situation to trade insults, argue with each other, resort to physical violence, and discriminate against each other, then contact should not be expected to reduce conflict between groups. To obtain beneficial effects, the situation must include positive contact. Some of the criteria are as follows:

- **Equal status.** Both groups must engage equally in the relationship. Members of the group should have similar backgrounds, qualities, and characteristics. Differences in academic backgrounds, wealth, skill, or experiences should be minimized if these qualities will influence perceptions of prestige and rank in the group.
- **Common goals.** Both groups must work on a problem/task and share this as a common goal, sometimes called a superordinate goal, a goal that can only be attained if the members of two or more groups work together by pooling their efforts and resources.
- **Intergroup cooperation.** Both groups must work together for their common goals without competition. Groups need to work together in the pursuit of common goals.
- **Support of authorities, law, or customs.** Both groups must acknowledge some authority that supports the contact and interactions between the groups. The contact should encourage friendly, helpful, egalitarian attitudes and condemn ingroup-outgroup comparisons.
- **Personal interaction.** The contact situation needs to involve informal, personal interaction with outgroup members. Members of the conflicting groups need to mingle with one another. Without this criterion they learn very little about each other and cross-group friendships do not occur.<sup>32</sup>

# LESSON 3: RESPECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

**"RESPECT"** was written and performed by Otis Redding (1965).

**"RESPECT YOURSELF"** was written by Luther Ingram and Mack Rice and performed by the Staple Singers (1971).

## Introduction

This lesson opens a dialogue between two Stax recordings on a shared theme: Otis Redding's "Respect" and the Staple Singers' "Respect Yourself." One song focuses on the human need to be respected by others, while the other song emphasizes respect for oneself.

**Facing History Theme:** Respect

## Essential Questions

- What is respect?
- If you feel respected (or disrespected), how does that impact the way you see yourself and others?
- How does feeling respected or disrespected influence the choices you make?

## Guiding Question

- How do Otis Redding's "Respect" (1965) and the Staple Singers' "Respect Yourself" (1971) represent changing attitudes and ideas in the civil rights movement?

## Objectives

- Students will use the song's lyrics as a primary text for analysis.
- Students will compare and contrast the lyrics and music of two songs about respect.
- Students will make text-to-world connections between the songs, the civil rights movement, and current events.

## Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading (R), Writing (W), and Speaking and Listening (SL)

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)—Citing Textual Evidence
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)—Theme/Central Idea
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)—Plot & Character/Process
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)—Word Meaning
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)—Point of View/Purpose in a Text(s)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9](#)—Compare and Contrast Themes and Topics in Two or More Texts
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)—Collaborative Discussion

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)—Interpreting Information in Diverse Media
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2](#)—Write Informative/Explanatory Texts

### Outcomes/Assessment

Students will write a brief essay exploring how the songs “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” responded to and represented changing ideas in the civil rights movement.

### Media/Resource List

- [Handout 1](#): “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Lyrics
- [Handout 2](#): “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Historical Background
- Text-Dependent Questions for “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” (Lyrics and Historical Background), see Appendix.
- Film Clip: “[Respect Yourself](#),” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[Respect](#),” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’](#),” from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*.

## Learning Activities

### Warm-up

1. Begin by writing the word “RESPECT” in large letters on the chalkboard or a big piece of paper. Provide each student with one sticky note, and ask everybody to write the name of one person whom they respect. When they are finished, have them affix their notes near the word RESPECT. Once the board is covered in sticky notes, read the names and ask a few students why they respect those persons. Bridge to a discussion of the idea of respect. How do people earn respect? How do people show respect toward one another?
2. Psychologist James Gilligan, author of *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, sees a strong relationship between feeling disrespected and using violence. He writes, “I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed.”<sup>33</sup> To continue the conversation you might ask students, How does feeling disrespected affect how you think, feel, and act? What does Gilligan’s comment suggest about the relationship between respect and self-esteem?

### Analyzing the Lyrics

3. Distribute the song lyrics ([Handout 1](#)). Students will learn more about the Staple Singers in the next lesson; for now inform them that the group was another well-known Stax Records act. Students can follow along with the lyrics as they watch both film clips (“[Respect](#)” and “[Respect Yourself](#)”).
4. Have students respond to the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 3](#). This can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

### Historical Context/Deeper Understandings

5. Both songs address the issue of respect, but in very different ways. Some music scholars identify “Respect” as a metaphor about broader social issues, whereas “Respect Yourself” was a more psychological work. To explore Redding’s metaphor, watch the film clip “[Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’](#).” This clip will introduce students to the singer/songwriter and his motivation for writing “Respect.” Students may wish to take notes while viewing the clip.
6. You can provide further context by sharing the Historical Background handout ([Handout 2](#)). It contains some information about the inspiration for the Staple Singers’ “Respect Yourself.” This is another moment for asking students to respond to the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 3](#).
7. After considering the additional information about the song, students should reread the lyrics. Does anyone now have a new interpretation of the song?

### Outcomes

8. One way to assess student understanding of the relationship between music and its social context is to have them write an informative/explanatory essay, describing how these two songs represent changing ideas about the notion of respect within the civil rights movement. Where appropriate, be sure to incorporate evidence from the lyrics of both songs, the Historical Background handout and the video clip “Record Producer Al Bell discusses Otis Redding’s ‘Respect’.” If you feel students need additional context, you may refer them to [the Facing History and Ourselves study guide](#) for the television documentary *Eyes on the Prize*. The guide includes a number of readings that speak to the themes in this lesson.

9. You may also wish to return to the essential questions of this lesson by revisiting the James Gilligan quotation from the introduction. He observed, “I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed.” Why might feelings of respect be so important? Have students illustrate the ways that the two songs address his concern.



## HANDOUT 1 “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Lyrics

### “Respect” by Otis Redding

What you want  
Honey you've got it  
And what you need  
Baby you've got it

All I'm asking  
Is for a little respect when I come home

Do me wrong  
Honey if you wanna  
You can do me wrong  
Honey while I am gone

But all I'm asking for  
Is for a little respect when I come home

Hey little girl, you're so sweeter than honey  
And I am about to just give you all my money

But all I'm asking, hey  
Is a little respect when I come home

Hey little girl, you're sweeter than honey  
And I am about to give you all of my money

But all I want you to do just give it, give it  
Respect when I come home

Respect is what I want  
Respect is what I need  
Respect is what I want  
Respect is what I need

Got to, got to have it  
Got to, got to have it  
You got to, got to have it  
Got to, got to have it

Give it, give it  
Give it, give it  
Give it, give it  
Give it, give it  
Give it

Give it to me baby, everything I need  
Give it to me baby, everything I want  
Give it to me

### “Respect Yourself” by the Staple Singers

If you disrespect anybody  
That you run into  
How in the world do you think  
Anybody's s'posed to respect you?

If you don't give a heck 'bout the man  
With the Bible in his hand  
Just get out the way  
And let the gentleman do his thing

You the kind of gentleman  
That want everything your way  
Take the sheet off your face, boy  
It's a brand new day

Respect yourself, respect yourself  
If you don't respect yourself  
Ain't nobody gonna give a good cahoot, na na na na  
Respect yourself, respect yourself

If you're walking 'round  
Thinkin' that the world  
Owes you something  
'Cause you're here

You goin' out  
The world backwards  
Like you did  
When you first come here

Keep talkin' 'bout the president  
Won't stop air pollution  
Put your hand on your mouth  
When you cough, that'll help the solution

Oh, you cuss around women  
And you don't even know their names  
And you dumb enough to think  
That'll make you a big ol' man

Respect yourself, respect yourself  
If you don't respect yourself  
Ain't nobody gonna give a good cahoot, na na na na  
Respect yourself, respect yourself  
Respect yourself, respect yourself

RESPECT: Lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group. Reproduced with permission.

RESPECTYOURSELF: Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group. Reproduced with permission.

## HANDOUT 2 “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” Historical Background

On its surface, Otis Redding’s “Respect” tells the story of a man who feels he deserves the respect of his woman. He works hard all day to provide for her, and he believes she owes him *respect*.

Redding drew on his own experiences when he wrote the song, as he was no stranger to hard work. Prior to becoming the “King of Soul” and an international star, Redding worked a variety of jobs to help support his family. In fact, he was working as the driver for musician and showman Johnny Jenkins when he first arrived at Stax Records. Once in the door, Redding pestered Booker T. and the MGs drummer, Al Jackson Jr., to give him a chance to perform. Jackson caved in: “The big tall guy that was driving Johnny, he’s been bugging me to death, wanting me to hear him sing. . . . Would you take some time and get this guy off my back and listen to him?”<sup>34</sup> Redding’s persistence earned him the opportunity to sing for an audience; he blew them away with his soulful singing and earned the respect he knew he deserved.

The song “Respect” may feel intimate, but some see a broader message. Stax recording artist William Bell explained, “These were, like, during the sixties—all of the black power movements, marches, and all of these things were coming along. Otis wrote ‘Respect’ for that. . . . and he put it in the sense of a love relationship, but it was about life really.”<sup>35</sup>

In *Respect Yourself*, author Robert Gordon, who also directed the eponymous documentary, adds, “It was that ‘tear’ in Otis’s voice, the crying and the ache that it evoked, that made him a transcendent vocalist. His songs were about love, but the sense of longing he conveyed was deeper than the love between a man and woman; Otis touched the heart of desire. He sang about love but summoned the poignancy of his times, of people used and being used and wanting an embrace instead of a fist. Black, white—no matter the listener’s race, only the listener’s empathy. Those seeking comfort found it in Otis Redding’s songs.”<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, those who preached nonviolent paths to racial equality spoke often of the importance of touching people’s hearts. They won the sympathy of their fellow Americans by preserving their dignity in the face of ugly and dehumanizing intimidation. Just think of those civil rights activists, white and black, who quietly sat down at white-only lunch counters, marched with brave determination, and prayed while mobs of citizens and public officials attacked them with fists and batons or of Rosa Parks respectfully refusing to move from her place on that bus.

The respect they sought ranged from social customs to voting rights. In fact, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed nine days before “Respect” was released as a single.<sup>37</sup> Called by some scholars “the single most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever passed by Congress,” it sought to end



**Otis Redding**

Courtesy of Stax Museum of American Soul Music

voter disenfranchisement, particularly of black citizens, and forbade the various measures, such as literacy tests and redistricting, designed to bar men and women from the polls. The law, as noted at the website of the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, “contained special enforcement provisions targeted at those areas of the country where Congress believed the potential for discrimination to be the greatest.”<sup>37</sup> Memphis was one “those areas of the country.”

Music scholar Dr. Portia Maulsby explores the connection between civil rights and the more personal narrative in the song “Respect”:

The themes of unity and respect advocated by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements also applied to personal relationships. Many soul singers, for example, offered advice for establishing rewarding relationships. Otis Redding suggested “Try a Little Tenderness” (1966) and, along with Aretha Franklin, demanded “Respect” (1965 and 1967, respectively). Al Green, in “Let’s Stay Together” (1971), and Aretha Franklin, in “I Can’t See Myself Leaving You” (1969), encouraged committed relationships. In Michael Haralambos’s view, soul “expresses faith in love, hope for love, and the joy and happiness in love,” rather than failed relationships, a theme frequently found in the blues.<sup>38</sup>

While Otis Redding’s “Respect” referred to respect *between* individuals and groups, the Staple Singers’ “Respect Yourself” focused on respect *within* an individual. Written in 1971, the ideas “Respect Yourself” echoed ideas expressed by activists calling for self-respect, self-reliance and black pride as a way counter belief that the pace of social change and the drive for equal opportunities were moving too slow.. Indeed, scholar Rob Bowman explains the inspiration for the song: “‘Respect Yourself’ resulted from a discussion [between songwriters Mack Rice and Luther Ingram]. At one point Ingram stated emphatically something along the lines of ‘black folk need to learn to respect themselves.’ Rice took the idea, and quickly cut a demo of the song with the help of Tommy Tate in Studio C. Bettye Crutcher heard the demo and suggested the song would be perfect for the Staple Singers.”<sup>39</sup>

# LESSON 4: MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE

"IF YOU'RE READY (COME GO WITH ME)" was written by Raymond Jackson, Carl Hampton, and Homer Banks, and performed by the Staple Singers (1973).

## Introduction

In this final lesson, students will begin to contemplate the role of music as an agent of social change. A gospel act that crossed over into mainstream soul music, the Staple Singers always conveyed a message in their music. After they study "If You're Ready (Come Go with Me)," students will be asked how music can inspire social change.

**Facing History Themes:** Legacy; Choosing to Participate

## Essential Questions

- How does music impact the way people think and act?
- How can music encourage people to participate in their community, their nation, and the world?
- What role can music play in a movement for social change?

## Guiding Questions

- What type of society were the Staple Singers envisioning?
- How did the Staple Singers view the purpose of their music?
- Are there contemporary examples of music ameliorating a social issue?

## Objectives

- Students will use the song's lyrics as a primary text for analysis.
- Students will understand the historical significance of the 1972 Wattstax music festival.
- Students will understand how protest music (aka message music) can work.
- Students will write their own lyrics about a social issue.

## Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading (R), Writing (W), and Speaking and Listening (SL)

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)—Citing Textual Evidence
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)—Theme/Central Idea
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)—Plot & Character/Process
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)—Word Meaning
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#)—Text Structure
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#)—Comparing Different Media

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)—Collaborative Discussion
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)—Interpreting Information in Diverse Media

### Outcomes/Assessment

Students will create a campaign for change about an issue that is personally relevant.

### Media/Resource List

- [Handout 1](#): “If You’re Ready (Come Go with Me)” Lyrics
- [Handout 2](#): The Staple Singers (Historical Background)
- Text-Dependent Questions (Lyrics and Historical Background for the Staple Singers), see Appendix.
- Film Clip: “[If You’re Ready \(Come Go with Me\)](#),” as Performed by the Stax Music Academy
- Film Clip: “[The Staple Singers](#)” from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*.
- Film Clip: “[“The Zenith of Soul Music,’ Wattstax, August 1972”](#) from *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*.

## Learning Activities

### Warm-up

You can begin by having students identify a song that is personally meaningful to them. You may choose to model this by sharing a song that is meaningful to you. Explain why the song resonates with you, using details from the music, the lyrics, and the era when it was written. As students share their choices, encourage them to also explain why the music they selected is meaningful, asking them to focus on the lyrics. Have them analyze the song's message either orally or in writing.

### Analyzing the Lyrics

1. Distribute the lyrics for “If You’re Ready (Come Go with Me)” ([Handout 1](#)). Ask students to answer the [text-dependent questions for Lesson 4](#) individually, in pairs, or in small groups.
2. Watch the film clip “[If You’re Ready \(Come Go with Me\)](#),” and ask students what the song's message is. Describe the roles that both the lyrics and the music play in communicating the message.
3. Discuss the differences between conveying a message through a song and through other forms of media such as a speech or a movie. Stax owner Jim Stewart said, “Music can bring people together, emotionally as well as socially. You begin to see inside of each other’s minds and understand where we came from.” What is it about music that helps to build community among seemingly different groups?

### Historical Context/Deeper Understandings

4. Distribute the Historical Background handout ([Handout 2](#)) about the Staple Singers. Watch the film clip “[The Staple Singers](#).” This introduces the Staple Singers, who became known for their message music. Begin thinking about the potential of music to inspire social change by watching the “[The Zenith of Soul Music, Wattstax, August 1972](#)” film clip which documents the 1972 music festival of that name. Based on evidence in the reading and the film excerpt, what messages were artists and organizers trying to communicate at Wattstax? What did they want to demonstrate to the nation and the world? How did they hope to demonstrate it? Based on what you have seen and read, evaluate the success of the event? What did Wattstax accomplish?

### Outcomes

5. To move from the past to the present, have students name examples of today's music that reflects social issues. What message does the music attempt to communicate? Support your opinion with evidence from the song. Who is the intended audience? How well did the artists communicate their messages?
6. Ask students to identify issues that are meaningful to them by brainstorming with partners or in small groups. Examples might include bullying, discrimination, neighborhood safety, drug use, and threats to the environment. Once students have selected a topic, have them write lyrics for a song about it. It may help if you ask students to consider their audience. What kind of language and imagery might appeal to different sorts of listeners?

## HANDOUT 1 “If You’re Ready (Come Go with Me)” Lyrics



*Written by Raymond Jackson, Carl Hampton, and Homer Banks*

If you're ready  
If you're ready now  
If you're ready, yeah  
Come on, go with me

No hatred  
(Come, go with me)  
Will be tolerated  
(Come, go with me)

Peace and love  
(Come, go with me)  
Will grow between the races  
(Come, go with me)

Love is the only transportation  
To where there's total communication  
If you  
(Come, go with me)  
Get ready now  
(Come, go with me)

Feel you're able?  
(Come, go with me)  
Take me by my hand, y'all  
(Come, go with me)

No disaster  
(Come, go with me)  
Will ever enter there  
(Come, go with me)

No war  
(Come, go with me)  
Uh-uh, will ever be declared  
(Come, go with me)

No economical exploitation  
No political domination

If you  
(Come, go with me)  
Get ready now, yeah  
(Come, go with me)

Think you're able?  
(Come, go with me)  
Come on, go with me  
(Come, go with me)

[Unknown], genocide  
(Come, go with me)  
Lord, better get ready now  
(Come, go with me)

Troublemaker  
(Come, go with me)  
You, you better get ready now  
(Come, go with me)

Liar  
(Come, go with me)  
Oh, I'm waitin' on ya  
(Come, go with me)

Backstabber now  
(Come, go with me)  
Come and go with me  
(Come, go with me)

Don't bother me  
(Come, go with me)  
Quit your system troublin', yeah  
(Come, go with me)

Yeah, [Unknown] and terrorists  
(Come, go with me)  
Yeah, come on, y'all, come on, y'all  
(Come, go with me)

Yeah, if you wanna be free here, all right  
(Come, go with me)  
Come on, go with me  
(Come, go with me)

(Come, go with me)  
Come on, go with me  
(Come, go with me)

See, I'm just movin' on  
(Come, go with me)  
Yeah, I'm just movin' on  
(Come, go with me)



Groovin' on  
(Come, go with me)  
I can't help it but move on  
(Come, go with me)

(Come, go with me)  
I got to move, y'all  
(Come, go with me)

Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group. Reproduced with permission.



## HANDOUT 2 The Staple Singers Historical Background



**The Staple Singers achieved their popularity during the height of the civil rights movement.**

Courtesy of Stax Museum of American Soul Music

Music has long been used by movements seeking social change. In the fifties and sixties, this was particularly true, as successful black and white musicians openly addressed the

issues of the day. During the sixties, popular white singers such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez lent both their names and their musical talents to the civil rights movement. In fact, music long assisted those working to win civil rights for African Americans. Freedom songs, often adapted from the music of the black church, played an essential role bolstering courage, inspiring participation, and fostering a sense of community. Andrew Young, former executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, remembered how music helped build bridges between civil rights workers and members of the communities they hoped to organize:

They often brought in singing groups to movement friendly churches as a first step in their efforts. . . . They knew how little chance they stood of gaining people's trust if they presented themselves as straight out organizers: people were too afraid to respond to that approach. So they organized gospel groups and hit the road.<sup>40</sup>

The Staple Singers belonged to that tradition. Beginning as a gospel group, they became soul superstars at the height of the civil rights movement. As Rob Bowman notes in *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, "They attempted to broaden their audience by augmenting their religious repertoire with 'message' songs."<sup>41</sup> Musically and politically, the Staple Singers fit right in at Stax Records, that model of racial

harmony in a time of societal upheaval. Co-owner Jim Stewart argued, “If we've done nothing more, we've shown the world that people of different colors, origins, and convictions can be as one, working together towards the same goal. Because we've learned how to live and work together at Stax Records, we've reaped many material benefits. But, most of all, we've acquired peace of mind. When hate and resentment break out all over the nation, we pull our blinds and display a sign that reads ‘Look What We've Done—TOGETHER.’”<sup>42</sup>

Co-owner Al Bell went further: “Dr. King was preaching what we were about inside Stax, where you judge a person by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. And looking forward to the day when, as he said, his little black child and the little white child could walk down the streets together, hand in hand. Well, we were living that inside of Stax Records.”<sup>43</sup>

The “‘protest’ material against a ‘folk rock’-oriented beat” that the Staples Singers performed also owed much to King.<sup>44</sup> According to lead singer Mavis Staples,

The songwriters knew we were doing protest songs. We had made a transition back there in the sixties with Dr. King. We visited Dr. King's church in Montgomery before the movement actually got started. When we heard Dr. King preach, we went back to the motel and had a meeting. Pops [Mavis's father, who played guitar and shared lead vocal duties with his youngest daughter] said, “Now if he can preach it, we can sing it. That could be our way of helping towards this movement.” We put a beat behind the song. We were mainly focusing on the young adults to hear what we were doing. You know if they hear a beat, that would make them listen to the words. So we started singing protest songs. All those guys were writing what we actually wanted them to write. Pops would tell them to just read the headlines and whatever they saw in the morning paper that needed to be heard or known about, [they would] write us a song from that.<sup>45</sup>

Inspired by “Pops” Staples, songwriters Raymond Jackson, Carl Hampton, and Homer Banks penned “If You're Ready (Come Go with Me)” in 1973. Similar in sound to the group's 1972 hit “I'll Take You There,” the song lists specific obstacles to justice. Recorded after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., both songs build on the “dream” King articulated throughout his career.

Seven years after the Watts Riots, Stax executives outlined a grand concert that would bridge music and activism.

[The Initial plan] was to feature three acts performing in Will Rogers Park at the Watts Summer Festival site. Over time, this developed into an all-day concert to be staged at the Los Angeles Coliseum on the final day of the Watts Summer Festival featuring virtually every current Stax artist. The artists would give their performances free of charge, Schlitz beer would sponsor the event and thereby offset some of the production costs, and Stax would pick up all other incurred costs. Admission was held to a one-dollar, tax-deductible contribution per person so that virtually anyone in the community could afford to buy a ticket. Even so, several thousand tickets were distributed absolutely free of charge.<sup>46</sup>

Some scholars suggest that Wattstax reflected the newfound emphasis on black empowerment, moving beyond legal recognition of equality to a focus on self-determination. A company press release outlines the goals of the festival:

Any strong record label could do something like this to support their community. We hope that WATTSTAX '72 will be a model for other companies to put forth similar events. This sort of all-star benefit is not so humanitarian as to be entirely without profit. And, it's a rare opportunity that lets you do something corporately valuable without being guilty of exploitation.

Sure, Stax could have just given the Watts Festival \$100,000. But, this way we have a prototype for something that can be done by many other record companies in many other cities, and it involves the community rather than being a handout. A successful all-star concert like this also focuses pride in a community image.<sup>47</sup>



**The Staple Singers perform at the Wattstax music festival.**

Courtesy of the Stax Museum of American Soul Music

The Staple Singers were just one of many Stax artists that participated.

Singer Carla Thomas remembered

being in Los Angeles during the Watts Riots and said she was “happy to be back and be a part of the rebuilding, instead of tearing something down.” Saxophonist Floyd Newman noted that what started as just “another gig” for Stax musicians became a “worldwide thing.”<sup>48</sup> One writer declared, “The event marked the first all Black entertainment event of its size and scope ever to be completely Black controlled!”<sup>49</sup> In the end more than 112,000 people attended, making it the second largest gathering of African-Americans in the United States at the time, second only to the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Equality.<sup>51</sup>

On the national stage, Stax and its founders were recognized by California senator Alan Cranston in a commendation read in the Senate chamber on Friday, October 13, 1972.

Mr. President, a major American business has made a notable contribution to the people supporting it, a contribution worthy of recognition.

The Stax Organization, a leading black business in America, and the dedication of its leaders to the basic principles of American citizenship deserve our commendation.

Primarily involved in the production and distribution of musical records, for which they have been known as the “Memphis Sound,” the Stax Organization, headed by a dynamic man named Al Bell, recognizes that its success depends upon the public. With this in mind, Al Bell and his associates recently began a program of giving back to the people some of the benefits the company has received from them.

A most significant example of this kind of corporate responsibility was displayed on August 20, 1972, in Los Angeles when Stax, a Memphis-based company, organized “Wattstax ’72,” a massive 6-hour musical spectacular that brought some 100,000 black citizens together at the Los Angeles Coliseum. The entire event was a gift from Stax to the community. . . .

The entire proceeds from the event have been distributed to the Watts summer festival, to enable them to carry out a yearlong program of community support, the sickle cell anemia program, the Martin Luther King Hospital, and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee.

I commend the Stax Organization and those associated with them in this project. They are, indeed, inspirational examples of good citizenship to all Americans of every race, creed, and national origin.<sup>12</sup>

# APPENDIX

## LESSON 1: Text-Dependent Questions for “Soul Man” (Lyrics)

1. Is there a rhyme scheme? If so, what is it?
2. What is the effect of the repetition of the lyric “I’m a soul man” on the song as a whole?
3. What do you know about the narrator’s social and economic status from the lyrics? What else do you know about him?

## LESSON 1: Text-Dependent Questions for “Soul Man” (Historical Background)

1. Who wrote the song “Soul Man”?
  
2. According to Isaac Hayes, what event prompted the writing of the song?
  
- 3.
  
4. Look at [Handout 3](#) and compare it to what you have read in the Historical Background. What part of the text best matches what you see in the image?
  
5. How does the media image of Detroit in 1967 contrast with the spirit of the song?
  
6. Which of the following is the best summary of the second paragraph?
  - a. A variety of economic, social, and racial tensions led to the Detroit riots of 1967.
  - b. “Soul Man” was written during the civil rights movement.
  - c. The Vietnam War worsened conditions for African Americans.
  - d. The Kerner Commission stated that the United States was becoming two separate societies based on race.

## **LESSON 2: Text-Dependent Questions for “Green Onions” (Historical Background)**

- 1.** How did the song “Green Onions” get its name?
- 2.** How did the song’s title play on the double meaning of the word “funky”?
- 3.** How did the environment at Stax differ from other parts of Memphis?
- 4.** At the end of the video, Booker T. uses the word “family.” Whom does he include in his family?



## LESSON 3: Text-Dependent Questions for “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” (Lyrics)

### “Respect” by Otis Redding

1. Whose respect does the singer want?

### “Respect Yourself” by the Staple Singers

2. What is the main idea of both the first and fourth stanzas?
3. What lines demonstrate the narrator’s belief that people in all walks of life have the power to make a difference?

### Comparison

4. Which verse of each song best shows the narrator's point of view?
5. Which verse of each song reflects the two narrators' differing points of view?
6. How are the tempos different? The rhythm? How do these affect the songs' tones and messages?
7. Compare and contrast the type of respect described in each song. How are they similar? How are they different?

### **LESSON 3: Text-Dependent Questions for “Respect” and “Respect Yourself” (Historical Background)**

- 1.** How does the information presented in paragraphs four through six of the historical background shed light on the lyrics of “Respect”? Did these lyrics reflect the civil rights struggle? How so?
- 2.** What does the word “disenfranchisement” mean in the sixth paragraph of the handout?
- 3.** What line best describes how the civil rights movement changed from the release of Redding’s “Respect” to the release of the Staple Singers’ “Respect Yourself”?



## LESSON 4: Text-Dependent Questions for the Staple Singers (Historical Background)

1. What does the word “augmenting” mean in the context of the second paragraph?
2. Jim Stewart is quoted in the third paragraph. Which of his statements best expresses the idea that at Stax Records people of different races worked fruitfully together?
3. In the sixth paragraph singer Mavis Staples remembers that her father said, “Now if *he* can preach it, we can sing it. That could be our way of helping towards this movement.” Who is the “he” to whom “Pops” Staples refers? What “movement” is he talking about helping?
4. What did Wattstax commemorate? Why was Wattstax so culturally significant?
5. Based on the reading, how did music help civil rights activists gain the trust of people who were reluctant to follow community organizers?

## Endnotes

1. Portia K. Maultsby, "Soul," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 271.
2. Maultsby, "Soul," in *African American Music: An Introduction*.
3. Ibid, 273.
4. Rob Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 9–10.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 11.
7. Robert Gordon, *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), xiv.
8. Arnold Shaw, *The World of Soul* (Paperback Library, 1971) p. 182.
9. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 20.
10. Floyd Newman, in discussion with the author, August 2013.
11. Ibid.
12. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 291.
13. Woodstock High School is located just outside of Memphis and not the famous music festival help in upstate New York.
14. Facing History and Ourselves, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954–1985* (Blackside Production, 2006), 130.
15. Ibid.
16. "Riots in Detroit," *American Experience: Eyes on the Prize*, accessed July 19, 2013, [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/13\\_detroit.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/13_detroit.html)
17. "The Kerner Commission Report (1968)," *American Experience: Eyes on the Prize*, accessed July 31, 2013, [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/milestones/m10\\_kerner.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/milestones/m10_kerner.html).
18. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 128.
19. Ibid.
20. Gordon, *Respect Yourself*, xiv.
21. Ibid., 67.
22. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 74.
23. Gordon, *Respect Yourself*, 69.
24. "Watts Riots," Civil Rights Digital Library, accessed July 20, 2013, [http://crdl.usg.edu/events/watts\\_riots/?Welcome](http://crdl.usg.edu/events/watts_riots/?Welcome).
25. Ibid.
26. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 77.
27. Ibid, 77.
28. Ibid., 146.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 147.
31. Floyd Newman, in discussion with the author, August 2013.
32. "Contact Hypothesis," accessed June 9, 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contact\\_hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contact_hypothesis).
33. Quoted in *This Is About Vision: Interviews with Southwestern Writers*, ed. John F. Crawford and Annie O. Eysturoy (University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 189.
34. Gordon, *Respect Yourself*, xiv.
35. *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*, DVD, directed by Robert Gordon (Boston: PBS, 2007).
36. Gordon, *Respect Yourself*, 96.
37. "The Voting Rights Act of 1965," website for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, accessed August 1, 2013, [http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/intro/intro\\_b.php](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/intro/intro_b.php).
38. Portia K. Maultsby, "Soul," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 279.
39. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 236.
40. Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 150-51.
41. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 156.
42. Gordon, *Respect Yourself*, 220.
43. Ibid., 180.
44. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 156.
45. Ibid., 157.
46. Ibid., 268.
47. Ibid.
48. Floyd Newman, in discussion with the author, August 2013.
49. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 270.
50. Levon Williams of the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, personal correspondence with the author, March 2014.
51. Ibid., 271.