

I'm Just Wild About Eubie!

EUBIE BLAKE (1883-1983), Ragtime composer and pianist from Baltimore, MD

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will learn about ragtime composer and pianist Eubie Blake. They will do so by viewing an original score written in Eubie Blake's own handwriting, by listening to music recorded in 1932 by him and his band which features Nina Mae McKinney, by watching parts of the Broadway show *Eubie*, and by discussing the effects of racial discrimination on Eubie Blake's career.

Course: High School, Fine Arts General Music Class

Time Frame: 2-3 one hour class periods

Fine Arts: Music. High School General Music ELOs:

- I.A.5. The student will listen to, perform, and describe musical examples representing diverse genres and cultures.
- II.B.1. The student will demonstrate knowledge of the historical, musical, and cultural background of a representative sample of musical works.
- II.D.3. The student will analyze factors that influence relationships between a composer's work and his or her environment.

U.S. History 1877-Present, Core Learning Goals:

1.1.1.b. Political Science

Establishment and impact of legal methods to deny civil rights to African Americans: Jim Crow Laws, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896),

U. S. History Voluntary State Curriculum:

5.0 CONTENT STANDARD: HISTORY- Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs and themes; organize patterns and events; analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland and the United States.

- 1.d. Analyze the practices, policies and legislation used to deny African-Americans' civil rights, including black codes, lynching, the Ku Klux Klan, voting restrictions, Jim Crow Laws and *Plessy v. Ferguson(1896)* (PS, PNW, E)

Objective(s):

- In order to perform rhythmic accompaniment to a recording of Eubie Blake playing his own piano music using syncopation and the rhythm of Stride piano, students will study the time period in which Eubie Blake lived and read written accounts of his works.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Vocabulary	Concept
Rag	<u>A piece of music with syncopated rhythm. The word “rag” originally described the characteristic where the rhythms seem “ragged.”</u>
Ragtime	early 20 th century style of music with syncopated rhythms; an important precursor to jazz.
Polyrhythmic	using two or more rhythms simultaneously.
Cakewalk	a ragtime dance, often mimicking formal European dance styles.
Minstrel Shows	popular 19 th and early 20 th century vaudeville entertainment, featuring white artists in “black-face” make-up, imitating and mocking African-American culture. Minstrel shows were highly racial and controversial.
Syncopation	playing part of a rhythm figure ahead of time so as to stress the unaccented beat in the music.
Stride piano	method of playing chords on the piano in which the left hand plays the bass note on the strong beats of the measure and the chords an octave or more higher on the weak beats. The right hand plays the melody.
Jim Crow Laws	segregation laws enacted between 1876 and 1965 that mandated the division of whites and blacks into “separate but equal” areas in restaurants, theaters, workplaces, etc.
Discrimination	different treatment of people according to gender, race, or other discernible difference.
Segregation	separation of people according to race, as mandated by Jim Crow laws.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

TV Monitor, VCR, DVD Player, and Stereo.

Eubie. Warner Bros. Video, 1981 EMA Productions 34050. VHS

Rhythm instruments. (Rhythm sticks and small wooden instruments are best for this lesson. If you cannot obtain instruments, students can use desks and books, and/or their bodies.)

“Memories of You” Eubie plays his music on piano roll and on piano
2003 Shout Factory ISBN 0-7389-2557-8 CD

Hallelujah which contains the short, “Pie Pie Blackbird” (1932),
Warner Bros. 1929 Vitaphone, subsidiary of Warner Brothers.
ISBN 1-4198-1712-4 DVD

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Truth or Fib Answer Sheet
Teacher Resource Sheet 2: “I’m Just Wild About Harry” Score
Teacher Resource Sheet 3: Rhythm Ensemble for “Harry”
Teacher Resource Sheet 4: Ragtime Graphic Organizer complete
Teacher Resource Sheet 5: Overview of “Pie, Pie Blackbird”
Teacher Resource Sheet 6: Placemat Survey

For the Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Truth or Fib Game
Student Resource Sheet 2: Bio of Eubie Blake
Student Resource Sheet 3: Bio of Eubie Blake (Part II)
Student Resource Sheet 4: Graphic Organizer for Eubie’s Bio
Student Resource Sheet 5: Ragtime (Blank Chart)
Student Resource Sheet 6: Life for Post Civil War African Americans and Musicians

Resources:

Publications:

1. Waldo, Terry (1976). *This is ragtime, with forward by Eubie Blake*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc.
2. Koenig, Karl (2001). MDHS - The Eubie Blake Collection. Retrieved August 5, 2006, from The Maryland Historical Society -- Home of the Star Spangled Banner Web site:
<http://www.mdhs.org/eubieblake/subs/06.html>
3. Burnim & Maulsby, Mellonee V., & Portia K. Maulsby (Ed.). (2006). *African American Music: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group LLC.

4. Kimball & Bolcom, Robert & William (1973). *Reminiscing with Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake*. New York, NY: Viking Press.
5. "Stride Piano." (2006). In *Merriam-Webster Online* [Web]. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Retrieved Aug. 4, 2006,

Historical Background:

James Hubert "Eubie" Blake was born in 1887 in Baltimore, MD, the son of two former slaves. Eubie was the only one of eight children to survive past infancy. Eubie showed musical promise from the age of 4, when his genius was spotted by a music store owner while Eubie was "foolin' around" on an organ in the store. Eubie's parents bought him a \$75 organ by paying 25 cents per week. Considering that Eubie's father made just \$9 per week, the family made an extraordinary commitment to his musical start by investing in such an expensive instrument for a 4-year-old! Already showing interest in the new ragtime music craze that was becoming popular in many cities in the United States during the early 20th century, Eubie Blake wrote his first composition, the "Charleston Rag" at the age of 12. In 1912, Eubie became the piano player for James Reese Europe's "Society Orchestra," one of the most important touring bands in the development of ragtime and later swing music. Europe's band was a major morale booster for the US troops during World War I, but the band's success was curtailed by Jim Europe's murder in 1919. After the war, Eubie Blake teamed up with Noble Sissle to form the "Dixie Duo." Together they created the first-ever Broadway review to feature African Americans – *Shuffle Along*. This important venture showed African Americans in a positive light, as opposed to the negative portrayals of African Americans that were so common in the Minstrel Shows playing in many other New York theaters. *Shuffle Along* introduced two of Eubie Blake's biggest hits – "I'm Just Wild about Harry" and "Love Will Find A Way." As the ragtime craze waned and gave way to other popular music such as big band jazz, and rock and roll, Eubie became a notable historian and spokesperson for the ragtime scene. He appeared on TV shows talking about the history of the music and the role of African Americans in its development. In 1978, a Broadway show called *Eubie!* opened, showcasing Blake's many ragtime compositions. Eubie Blake received many honorary degrees from notable universities, including The University of Maryland and Morgan State University, and he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Ronald Reagan in 1981. Blake married twice; his first wife Avis, a classically-trained pianist, died in 1938 of tuberculosis; his second wife Marion became the manager of his musical and personal affairs.

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Lesson Development:

Motivation: Discuss how jazz is a uniquely African American art form, and how it came out of the influence of ragtime. Students will probably be familiar with Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer." Either play it for them on the piano or play a recording (you can find many examples on iTunes or www.youtube.com). Play "I'm Just Wild about Harry" by Eubie Blake (Track 14 of the "Memories of You" CD). Have students list some similarities and differences between the ragtime of Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" and Eubie Blake's music. Write some of the more notable similarities and differences on the chalkboard or whiteboard. Talk about how ragtime was an early form of jazz played by piano players such as Scott Joplin and Eubie Blake, how Baltimore was once a great hotbed of jazz, and how great local artists such as Eubie Blake contributed to the development of jazz through the style known as ragtime. Read students the historical background of Eubie Blake above.

LESSON ONE:

1. Show four excerpts from the Broadway show *Eubie!* in which all music was composed by Eubie Blake (all times are approximate as VCR machines vary).
 - a. Tap Duet between Gregory and Maurice Hines. 42:07-45:09 - 3 minutes
 - b. "Weary of the Trials and Tribulations" - Gospel/Spiritual Style vocal solo by Terry Burrell. 48:58-51:50 - 3 minutes
 - c. "Hot Feet" - Ragtime solo and dance by Gregory Hines. 1:12:18-1:14:47 – 2:30 minutes
 - d. "I'm Just Wild about Harry" (Eubie) - Full company, begins as a waltz (as the piece was first conceived), then goes into the familiar cut time. 1:18:35-1:22:44 – 4:09 minutes
2. Using **Student Resource Sheets 2 & 3: Bio of Eubie Blake**, have students read about Eubie Blake's early years. Using **Student Resource Sheet 4: Graphic Organizer for Eubie's Bio**, record positive and negative experiences in the two columns. Discuss these experiences as a class.
3. Show an overhead of **Teacher Resource Sheet 2: Page One of Eubie Blake's handwritten score for "I'm Just Wild about Harry."** Using an overhead of **Teacher Resource Sheet 3: Rhythm Ensemble for "I'm Just Wild About Harry,"** have students clap the first rhythm and say the words. Let them choose another four-measure rhythm pattern to work on. Practice, divide the class in half, and have each group play with Track #14 "I'm Just Wild about Harry" of the CD "Memories of You," recorded by Eubie Blake in 1973.

LESSON TWO:

1. Using **Student Resource Sheet 1: Truth or Fib Game**, divide the class into small groups with one sheet per group. Give them five minutes to complete the sheet, and go over correct answers (**Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Truth or Fib**) with the class to see who has the most correct answers.

2. Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 5: Ragtime Blank Chart**. While teacher shares information given on **Teacher Resource Sheet 4: Ragtime Graphic Organizer**, students complete and fill out their graphic organizer.
3. Read **Student Resource Sheet 6: Life for Post-Civil-War African Americans and Musicians**. Highlight information that is new to students.
4. Watch “Pie Pie Blackbird” DVD (11 minutes). Refer to **Teacher Resource Sheet 5: Overview of “Pie, Pie Blackbird.”**
5. Begin a class discussion by asking some questions about the short film: Why was Nina (Nye-nah) dressed as a cook or a fanciful slave? Why were Eubie and his band members dressed as chefs? Watch part of the film again (5 minutes). Divide the class into groups of four for the “Placemat Survey” (made from **Teacher Resource Sheet 5: Overview of “Pie, Pie Blackbird**). Duplicate this sheet in an enlarger to create a “placemat,” one for every four students in your classes, or draw the rectangle and “wings” on a piece of construction paper. Students write their answers to the questions on their own area of the placemat; then they will compare their answers. Students will chose a writer who will record the group answer in the center of the placemat. A spokesperson for each group will share the group answer with the class.
6. Have students learn the final two rhythms (**Teacher Resource Sheet 3: Rhythm Ensemble for “Harry”**) to be played with “I’m Just Wild about Harry” (Track 14 of the “Memories of You” CD).
7. As a culminating activity, divide the class into four groups each playing one of the rhythm patterns along with the recording. Make sure they are playing quietly enough to hear Eubie Blake playing the piano.

Assessment:

Assess students’ class participation by their involvement in the musical and writing activities. Also, have students evaluate themselves with regard to individual and group participation. Then, instruct students to write a reflection on their involvement in the lesson, either in a subsequent lesson or as homework. During a later class, you may revisit **Student Resource Sheet 1: Truth or Fib Game** and give it as a quiz to assess retention and understanding of the material presented.

Closure:

As a class, perform “I’m Just Wild about Harry.” Record the performance as a video, and watch it together as a class. Discuss students self evaluations and reflect on the experience of getting to know about Eubie Blake and performing his music.

Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture and examine the Pennsylvania Avenue exhibit in “The Strength of the Mind” gallery.
 - Introduce students to other Maryland jazz musicians. Compare and contrast their musical contributions to jazz.
- Eubie Blake wrote the music for the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* which introduced a new era to African American theater. Have students locate other Maryland African Americans artists who contributed to black theater. Research and write a report about the play *Shuffle Along*. Contact the Reginald F. Lewis Museum Resource Center to obtain resource information.
- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum’s gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Pioneers and Trailblazers*. Discover African American pioneers and leaders who contributed to Maryland’s history in labor, the arts, education, politics and community activism.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
- Encourage students to add a ragtime recording to their CD collection, download some ragtime from iTunes, or borrow a ragtime CD from the public
- Have students create their own “Truth or Fib” game using an artist they enjoy listening to, and present that to the class in a subsequent lesson.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

Truth or Fib Game - Answer Sheet

We are beginning a lesson on the famous ragtime composer and pianist, Eubie Blake. If you know anything about Eubie Blake, you might be able to determine which statement is false and which two statements are true. If you do not know about Eubie Blake, use your reasoning ability to guess which statement is false or the fib.

Your teacher will assign you to a group. Meet with your group and choose the FALSE statement within each of the six numbers listed below. Which group will identify the most correct answers? Sign your name at the bottom.

With each number, there are two true statements and one false.
Write an "F" for fib in front of the false statement.

- 1 ___ Eubie Blake was an American.
 ___ Eubie Blake was from Baltimore.
 F Eubie Blake was from New York.

- 2 F Ragtime is a style of music from California.
 ___ Ragtime is a style of music created by African Americans.
 ___ Ragtime is an early form of jazz.

- 3 F Eubie's mother was proud of his Ragtime music.
 ___ Eubie's mother allowed him to take music lessons.
 ___ Eubie's mother did not allow him to play Ragtime.

- 4 ___ Eubie wrote music for a Broadway show.
 ___ Eubie wrote music that was published.
 F Eubie wrote a ragtime opera called "Treemonisha."

- 5 ___ Eubie had a musical partner, Noble Sissle. They wrote and performed music together for many years.
 F Eubie never married.
 ___ Eubie had his own band.

- 6 ___ Ragtime was most popular during the late 1880's to early 1900's.
 F Ragtime did not regain its popularity after the 1920's.
 ___ A 1970's movie called *The Sting* featured ragtime music.

Teacher Resource Sheet 2.
Score for “I’m Just Wild About Harry”

For resource,

Open hyperlink(s) below

Sissle, Noble, Blake, Eubie. I'm just wild about Harry. New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1921.

Indiana University (Sam DeVincent Collection of American Sheet Music)

<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/metsnav/inharmony/navigate.do?oid=http://fedora.dlib.indiana.edu/fedora/get/iudl:334373/METADATA&pn=1&size=screen>

University of Mississippi – Libraries Digital Collection (Sheldon Harris Collection)

http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/ui/custom/default/collection/coll_sharris/resources/docs/MUM00682_211.pdf

Teacher Resource Sheet 3

Rhythm Ensemble for “Harry”

The Refrain imitates the stride piano technique used by ragtime players such as Eubie Blake.

Stride piano technique: left hand part consisting of large skips, a style of jazz piano playing in which the right hand plays the melody while the left hand alternates between a single note and a chord played an octave or more higher.

For resource,

Open Hyperlink below

University of Mississippi – Libraries Digital Collection (Sheldon Harris Collection)
http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/ui/custom/default/collection/coll_sharris/resources/docs/MUM00682_211.pdf

Teacher Resource Sheet 4

Ragtime

Composers combine elements of music from two continents to create a unique African American genre.

Waldo, Terry (1976). *This Is Ragtime, with forward by Eubie Blake*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc.

<http://webdrive.jhsph.edu/eschaaf/storm/image...>

Quicktime and a TIFF(Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture

Discuss which two continents were involved in creating ragtime and how elements differed in the two cultures.

1. How was the music passed on to others?
2. What was the most important element in each?
3. What was the role of the audience?
4. What was the origin of the forms or melody pattern?

Ragtime	
African Music	European Art Music
1. Aural - not written down	1. Written in standard music notation
2. Polyrhythmic - little emphasis on melody and/or harmony	2. Emphasis on concordant melody and harmony - not much emphasis on complex rhythm
3. Audience participates in performance	3. Performer and audience are separate
4. Folk style and forms	4. "Classical" instrumental style and forms

Teacher Resource Sheet 5

Overview of "Pie, Pie Blackbird"

"Pie, Pie, Blackbird" Short Film

1932, Vitaphone (a subsidiary of Warner Brothers)

This short is a publicity vehicle for the ragtime of Eubie Blake, even though it is a spoof of how white Americans perceived black Americans in the early 1930s.

Time: 10:37

Musical Short starring Eubie Blake and his band, featuring Nina (Ny-nah) Mae McKinney and the Nicholas Brothers.

The short begins with Nina in a kitchen dressed as a fanciful cook/servant/slave, picking up a large pie. The two young Nicholas Brothers come in. Nina tells them the pie is a blackbird pie:

1. She sings, "Only A Blackbird Can Make a Sweet Pie."
The pie opens up and inside is Eubie Blake and his band dressed as chefs.
2. They perform "Memories of You," Eubie Blake's great hit song, with a short excerpt of "Hungarian Dance #2" written by Franz Liszt and played by Eubie Blake on the piano.
3. While Nina, the cook, and the two boys watch this miniature performance inside the pie, Nina appears as a glamorous lady sitting on the piano singing "Everything I've Got Belongs to You" which was composed by Eubie Blake.
4. Eubie and the band perform "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead (You Rascal You)" also composed by Eubie Blake. He sings this number to the members of his band.
5. The two Nicholas Brothers come out dressed as chefs and dance to "China Boy" composed by Phil Boutelje. The brothers dance so fast that the floor begins to smoke and burst into flames with the band and dancers turning into moving skeletons, still playing and dancing to the music.

Performers and Songs performed on the short are from the following website:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0023338/>

**Teacher Resource Sheet 6
Placemat Survey**

Student

Student

Student

After you have watched “Pie Pie Blackbird,” answer these questions in your own portion of the “placemat”. Then discuss and write a group answer in the center.

Why was Nina dressed as a cook or fancy servant or slave?

Why were Eubie and his band members dressed as chefs?

Explain your answers.

Student

Student Resource Sheet 1

Truth or Fib Game

We are beginning a lesson on the famous ragtime composer and pianist, Eubie Blake. After learning about Eubie Blake, you should be able to determine which statement is the fib and which two statements in each group are true.

Your teacher will assign you to a group. Meet with your group and choose the FALSE statement within each of the six numbers listed below and sign your names at the bottom of your group sheet.

With each number, there are two true statements and one false. Write an "F" for fib in front of the false statement.

- 1 ___ Eubie Blake was an American.
 ___ Eubie Blake was from Baltimore.
 ___ Eubie Blake was from New York.

- 2 ___ Ragtime is a style of music from California.
 ___ Ragtime is a style of music created by African Americans.
 ___ Ragtime is an early form of jazz.

- 3 ___ Eubie's mother was proud of his Ragtime music.
 ___ Eubie's mother allowed him to take music lessons.
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- 4 ___ Eubie wrote music for a Broadway show.
 ___ Eubie wrote music that was published.
 ___ Eubie wrote a Ragtime opera called "Treemonisha."

- 5 ___ Eubie had a musical partner, Noble Sissle. They wrote and performed music together for many years.
 ___ Eubie never married.
 ___ Eubie had his own band.

- 6 ___ Ragtime was most popular during the late 1880's to early 1900's.
 ___ Ragtime did not regain its popularity after the 1920's.
 ___ A 1970's movie called *The Sting* featured ragtime music.

Student Resource Sheet 2

Bio of Eubie Blake

(Early) LIFE OF EUBIE BLAKE □ □ □ By Dr. Karl Koenig □ □ □ for the Maryland Historical Society
<http://archive.mdhs.org/eubieblake/subs/06.html>

Every major American city has its famous musical sons. Memphis has W. C. Handy; New Orleans has Louis Armstrong; and Baltimore has Eubie Blake. Eubie Blake's story is one that stretches from Aggie Shelton's Bordello in Baltimore in 1898 to the White House in Washington, D.C. in 1978. □ □ From a humble beginning Blake rose to become a man who redirected the course of American culture. His reputation was achieved not just through his music, but also by his artistic effort, his determination, and his incredible talent. He was one of a small group of African American performing artists who paved the way for African Americans to demand, and win, acceptance and equality on the American entertainment scene. Blake succeeded at securing respect in an industry that was plagued by racially stereotyped roles, and he deserves credit for pioneering equal pay with the white artists of the era.

On February 12, 1883, Emily Blake gave birth to a son, James Hubert Blake, at the home she shared with her husband John Blake at 319 Forest Street in Baltimore, Maryland. Freed slaves, John and Emily had taken the last name of their old owner when they achieved their freedom. (...) He insisted that his son get a good education, especially that he learn to read. He used to tell Eubie, "Everything I ever know I learned from reading." When his father came home from work he would sit with the boy and make him read the *Baltimore Sun*. It was important to John that Eubie keep up with what was going on in the world. (...)

John also strongly opposed racism but told his son of his experiences as a slave. He insisted there were good and bad white people, just as there were good and bad African Americans. (...) While Eubie's mother objected to John's telling his son about slavery, he continued to do so, saying, "I want him to know about it, Emily. Everybody, especially every colored child, needs to know." In his later years Eubie still remembered the philosophical merits of his father's words. They encouraged him to control his own rage at the inequity and injustices of American society during the twentieth century. His father's guidance stamped Eubie's personality for life. (...)

Eubie's musical experience began when he was just four or five years old. While out shopping with his mother, the boy wandered off on his own. He went into a music store, climbed on the bench of an organ, and started "foolin'" around. When his mother found him, the manager of the store told her, "The child is a genius! It would be criminal to deprive him of the chance to make use of such a sublime, God-given talent." Impressed by the manager's estimation of their son, the Blakes soon had a \$75 dollar pump organ in their house. When he was seven, Eubie received some music lessons from a next-door neighbor, Mrs. Margaret Marshall, an organist at a Methodist church. (...) Despite his

mother's best efforts, the sounds from nearby pool halls and houses of ill repute exposed Eubie to a syncopated style of music, known as ragtime. Eubie quickly became a convert to the sounds of ragtime, influenced especially by the playing of Jack the Bear Wilson and the aging Jesse Pickett. Interestingly, Eubie said the first time he even heard the word ragtime was when his mother caught him playing "the devil's music," and ordered, "Take that ragtime out of my house!"

At the young age of fifteen, and without his mother's knowledge, Eubie began playing piano at Aggie Shelton's bordello (...) Eubie made a lot of tips from Aggie's customers. He later recalled, "The more tunes you'd know, the more money you'd make." (...) It was the money that saved the teenaged Eubie from his mother's rage when she found out what he was doing. It was now up to his father to placate Eubie's mother. "Now, Emily," John remarked, "this boy is doing nothing wrong. He's gonna have to work, and this is good work with good pay. You just better leave him alone to do his work as he sees it." (...)

It was during this time period (1899) that Eubie completed his composition, "Charleston Rag," a work that established a foundation for the Eastern "Stride" style of piano playing. Eubie later explained that he did not write it down (with notes) in 1899, but that was when he composed it. "I didn't learn how to write [music] until 1915." (...)

Eubie saw many touring Negro shows that passed through Baltimore. In 1901, the Dr. Frazier Caravan (Medicine Show) arrived in town. Eubie became a member of the troupe, playing in the band, singing, and showing his talent for buck dancing. (...)

In 1905 Eubie traveled again to New York and performed for a time at Edmund's Cafe on 28th Street, but soon returned to Baltimore, where for most of 1905 he worked at the Middle Section Assembly Club. (...)

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Student Resource Sheet 3

Bio of Eubie Blake (Part II)

In July of 1910 Eubie married Avis Lee (...) Eubie's career from the end of 1910 to May of 1915 was a succession of good jobs playing piano at various locations. (...) (Koenig, 2001)

During these years, Eubie never imagined that events were about to unfold which would lead to a legendary entertainment partnership between him and a man named Noble Sissle. It was May 16, 1915 that he and Sissle met for the first time. Joe Porter's band was to play at Riverview Park in Baltimore with Eubie on piano. Singer Noble Sissle was coming from out of town to attend the engagement but was late. When Sissle finally arrived, long after the band had left without him, Eubie began talking with him, mentioning that he needed a lyricist. Thus was born a long and fruitful partnership.

The partners achieved immediate success with their first song together, "It's All Your Fault." Sophie Tucker heard it, liked it, and incorporated it into her act at the Maryland Theater in Baltimore. It was an instant hit. (...)

Eubie and Sissle were in Chicago about 1916 playing at an Erlanger Theater while Al Jolson was playing at another local theater. This is when Al Jolson began putting on cork to appear in blackface. When Jolson left town, Eddie Cantor arrived and began using cork, too. At that time, white audiences enjoyed seeing African American men sing, as long as the singers were really white men wearing cork. Sissle & Blake were the first African American act in history to succeed in show business, often playing for white audiences, without cork. Before this, the white public would never take seriously African American entertainers claiming to have the same creativity and emotional capacities as whites. The precedent of Sissle and Blake prepared the way for the artists of color who followed them. Thus, the duo represented a giant step forward in American culture and provided a major achievement for American theater. (...)

In 1921, the project matured into the historic *Shuffle Along*, perhaps the most influential and important African American musical in the history of theater. The show ran for 504 performances and spawned three *Shuffle Along* road companies, which broke color barriers in theaters all across the country. (...) Single-handedly, *Shuffle Along* made black shows voguish, or at least, acceptable. (...) The hit of course was "I'm Just Wild About Harry."

In the summer of 1927 Sissle entered the duo's dressing room and sat down. He stared at the floor and said to Blake, "I'm going to the American Legion convention in Paris." Blake asked him, "When you coming back?" When Sissle did not answer, Blake said, "Well, I guess this is the end of Sissle and Blake." Sissle's eyes remained on the floor, then he got up and left. That was the end of Sissle and Blake. Sissle went to Paris and became a successful bandleader. Blake spent the rest of the year writing floorshows with lyricist Henry Creamer and composing a number of great popular songs. (...)

In 1930 Lew Leslie approached Blake to work on one of his shows, which Leslie called *Blackbirds*. (...)It was during this time that Eubie wrote "You're Lucky to Me" and "Memories of You." (...)

The 1930s began on an up note for Eubie, with the success of *Blackbirds* and of a song for which he had written the melody, "Loving You the Way I Do," the Broadway hit of the year. Unfortunately, the rest of the 1930s were not as favorable for Eubie. (...)

In 1938, tragedy struck as Avis, Eubie's wife, developed tuberculosis and moved into a sanitarium. Avis died at the age of 58. (...)After her death, every mention of Avis saddened Eubie. He said, "I didn't know what to do. I didn't have any reason to do anything. No kids, nobody." (...)

The coming of World War II drastically altered the direction of Eubie's life. He was invited to lead an entertainment unit to play for the soldiers under the auspices of the USO. He was now sixty years old and threw himself into the project, writing and performing for camps from Savannah to Seattle. He loved it. He had been too old for World War I and much more so for World War II, but the show had plenty of girls and very appreciative audiences. Eubie would never be too old for that (Koenig, 2001).

(Eubie's Biography continues with another wonderful marriage and success in his career, yet the excerpt will end here)

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<http://www.mdhs.org/>

Student Resource Sheet 4

Graphic Organizer

As you read the biography of Eubie Blake's early life, list the positives and negatives of his life and career in the provided areas below.

Think about how Eubie met his "negatives" head on. What did he do when faced with difficult situations such as racial discrimination and the failure of many to appreciate ragtime, his favorite style of music?

Eubie Blake's Life
The early years

Positives

Negatives

Student Resource Sheet 4

Ragtime

Composers combine elements of music from two continents to create a unique African American genre.

Waldo, Terry (1976). *This is ragtime, with forward by Eubie Blake*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc.

<http://webdrive.jhsph.edu/eschaaf/storm/image...>

Quicktime and a TIFF(Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture

Discuss which two continents were involved in creating ragtime and how elements differed in the two cultures.

1. How was the music passed on to others?
2. What was the most important element in each?
3. What was the role of the audience?
4. What was the origin of the forms or melody pattern?

Ragtime	
African Music	European Art Music
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Student Resource Sheet 6

Life for Post Civil War African Americans and Musicians

From “This Is Ragtime” by Terry Waldo with forward by Eubie Blake

The racist segregation laws of the South were given federal legitimacy in 1896 with the Supreme Court decision on the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. The court upheld a state law separating races on the railroads, and by extension, elsewhere. (This and other similar laws were called Jim Crow laws, named after a character from early minstrel shows who was played at times by black or white performers to imitate the dance and mannerisms of an old black stable hand) This (legislation) signaled the opening of a broad attack on blacks on many fronts. Whites, threatened by the Negroes’ increasing ambition and integration into hitherto exclusively white realms, enacted various pieces of legislation to institutionalize what had formerly been only segregationist customs. As long as the Negro “knew his place” and remained subservient, there was little friction. But since the Civil War there had been a movement toward more education and better jobs for blacks. Many were making it on their own, and a significant number were becoming involved in the political process. The resistance to these black advancements took many forms. Politically, Negroes were legally deprived of their voting rights; socially, they were separated from the whites in most public places. (...)

In the South conditions became worse than they had been in the thirty-five years since the Civil War. (...) White supremacy became increasingly more oppressive. (...)

The most immediate effect of this intense racial attack on black musicians was the necessity to adhere to the racial stereotypes that were insisted upon by the brainwashed public. The mass mind needed to be reassured that its relegation of Negroes to a secondary spot in the system was really justified. (...) There were literally thousands of songs written based on nothing but minstrel-show images of the black man as lazy, dishonest, cowardly, immoral, vicious, gluttonous, and stupid. (...)

The cakewalk was a vigorous and exciting dance, and as a musical form, like ragtime, transcended the racial stereotypes that surrounded it. The dance itself is said to have originated as early as 1840 with slaves who dressed up in “high fashion” and mimicked the formal dances of their masters.. Their caricatures were picked up by white performers and used in the grand finale of the minstrel shows. (...)

It was in 1896 that ragtime made its official debut on the commercial entertainment scene. (...) However, it was in 1899 that the first ragtime “chart-buster” appeared --- Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag.” (...)

Joplin and many other black ragtime artists were in a very difficult position at that time. They were part of an increasingly aware, often highly trained, group of serious musicians facing audiences who harbored the conscious or unconscious demand for their music to reflect their own racial prejudices. (...)

Eubie Blake explained the problem:

“Back then we could read and write music, but no one wanted to believe that we could. We’d all get the latest music from all the new shows and memorize the parts. People would come in and ask for a tune, say a Victor Herbert song like “The Merry Widow.” ... I’d say, “Anybody ever heard of that?” Then after a bit one of us would

say, “I think I’ve heard that,” and he’d lean over and pretend he was singing it for the rest of the fellows, and we’d all play it then. Of course we’d learned it from the music. The customer would say something like, “Oh, those colored boys! Aren’t they something; they can’t read a note, but they can play naturally so well!”

We used to take our songs into the publishers and smile and talk in dialect and pretend we didn’t know anything. They’d always have somebody else doing the arranging. They didn’t want to think we could do our own writing.” (...)

Much of the black music of the times could be characterized as feigning happiness while masking underlying misery. (...)