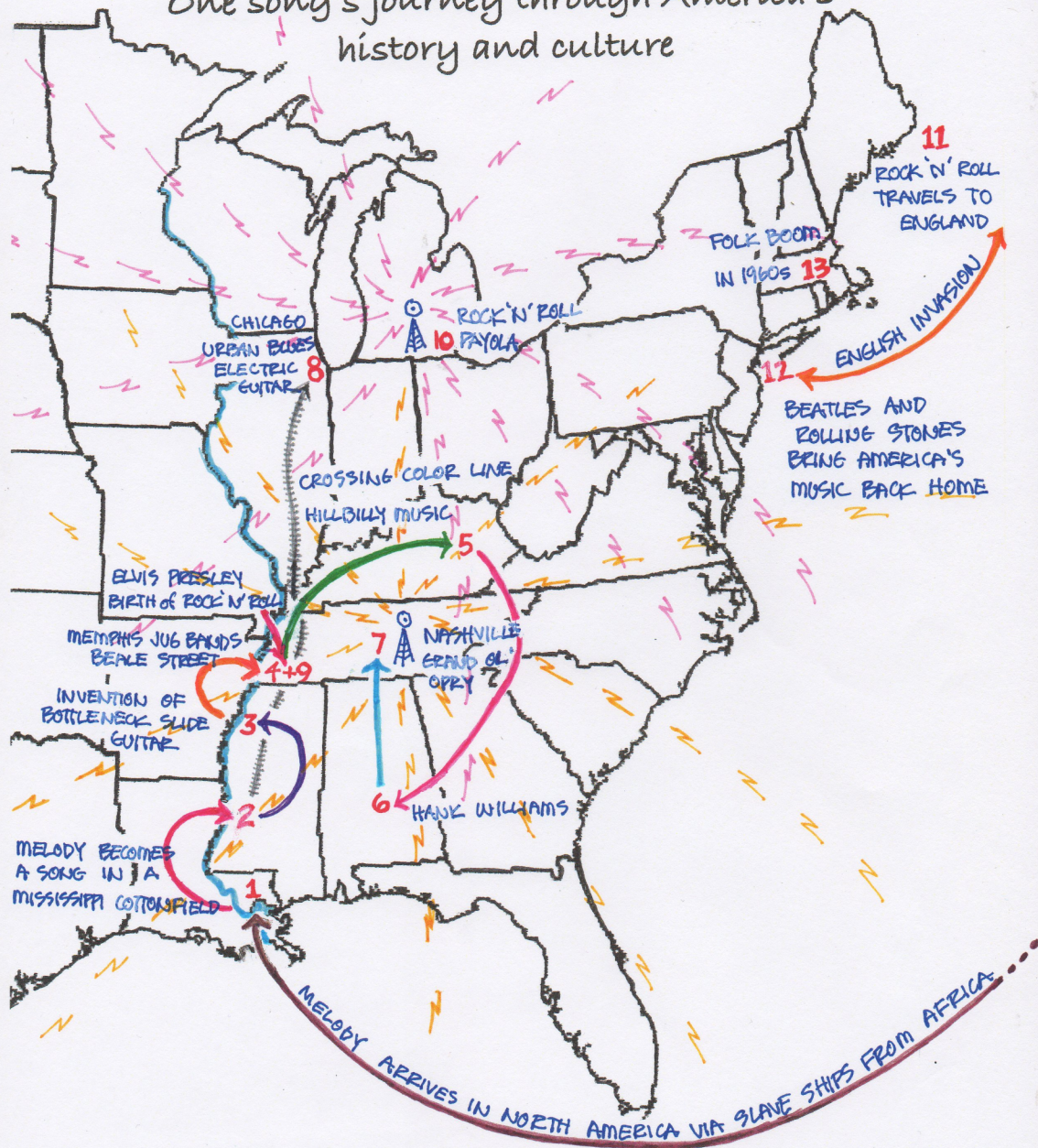


DOWN THE DIRT ROAD BLUES

One song's journey through America's history and culture



DOWN THE DIRT ROAD BLUES MAP GUIDE

The story of the song “*Down the Dirt Road Blues*” traverses a lot of geography. This map is designed to help students envision the song’s wanderings.

- 1) Pre-Civil War (1850s) Across the bottom of the map a swooping arrow brings the melody from Africa in the mind of a man on a slave ship. The man enters the US through the Port of New Orleans, and he then is sold to a plantation in the Mississippi Delta. On a cottonfield in the Delta the melody becomes a song of a man who is walking back to his home after a grueling day of work in the sun.
- 2) Post-Civil War (1880s – late 1920s) The song takes shape as it moves from plantation to plantation in the Delta when musicians get together on Sundays for “jams.” Eventually, Charley Patton hears the song and puts it into his repertoire, as he travels the Mississippi Delta, making a living as a musician.
- 3) Early 1930s Son House is one of several Blues players who develop the slide style of playing by using open tuning on the guitar and a bottleneck on the fretboard.
- 4) 1930s This is the heyday of Beale Street as an exciting music center of Memphis. Jug bands perform up-tempo music that soon draws white audiences to the black city center, thus nudging racial integration. The reputation of Beale Street draws people visiting the city, like a tobacco farmer from Kentucky, who has come to sell his wares.
- 5) 1930s The song is taken back by the Kentucky farmer, who plays it in his “mountain” style and spreads the melody to the white culture.
- 6) 1940s Hank Williams hears the song as a boy and carries it with him to Nashville as a young man, giving it his own style, later branded “honky-tonk.”
- 7) Hank Williams performs on the Grand Ole Opry, a radio station that reaches a vast geographic area and promotes Hank to super-star status through the airwaves.
- 8) 1940-1950s Muddy Waters moves up to Chicago from the Mississippi Delta in the early 1940s and is enamored with the big city. By the 1950s he is a major player in the Chicago area, with his electrified versions of songs from rural Mississippi.
- 9) 1950s Blues has become big business in the recording world. However, racial sensibilities remain segregated in the U.S. White parents don’t want their children listening to black musicians. The recording industry is looking hard for a

white man who sounds like a black artist to mollify this market. They find him in Elvis Presley of Memphis.

- 10) Late 1950s Payola radio scandals turn the tide of popular music and its availability on the radio. Rock 'n' roll and blues sink from the public eye.
- 11) 1960s American rock 'n' roll finds an audience in Europe through traveling shows and American servicemen bringing their music overseas.
- 12) The English Invasion by The Beatles, followed closely by the Rolling Stones, brings American music back to her shores.
- 13) The Folk Boom of the early 1960s brings the focus onto American traditional songs, giving people like Bob Dylan a forum for their own music.
- 14) Spencer Bohren, a Wyoming teenager hears Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones play different versions of the song "Down the Dirt Road Blues" recorded by Charley Patton in 1928.