



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **American Culture in a Musical Setting**

Curriculum Unit 92.04.08  
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The objective of this unit is to point out the significance of similarities and contrasts of three separate cultures of the United States through music. The goals and objectives of this curriculum are geared to the student's need to understand the African, Latino, and the European culture of the past and present world in hopes that they will be better equipped to make decisions about their place in today's society, socially, spiritually and professionally. Students are exposed to a richer account of history, musically supplemented in order to better understand the complex world of today. Students enjoy learning about themselves and others, while getting the benefit of exciting lessons in a non-formal setting. Knowledge of the cultures builds pride in home, school, and the community.

The curriculum unit can be taught to all students in the school during their music enrichment classes. It is composed of several lessons that include the traditional music subject matter, supplemented by new and fresh parameters taken directly from research and resources of the seminar.

This unit appeals to the elementary school age student between first and fifth grade, and is an abounding learning experience for children of all races, religions, and cultures. The students that will benefit the most from the contents and the method of this unit are those who need to learn about the importance of respect for those they live and work with from day to day. This unit is a pride builder, yielding confidence to each by addressing some ideas about the people who inhabit the United States and how they are culturally accepted into society.

Through music, students can be taught to deal with the tensions and contradictions in our present society, and bring about solutions to problems. Learning about culture will open doors for them; at the same time the experience yields a sense of worth.

Students find out about their background and gain the knowledge of important historical facts by studying the origin of the major individual cultures presently existing in the United States. The lessons yield facts about their background which aid them in understanding their ethnic background and those of people they come in contact with on a daily basis. Knowledge of the cultures that help to make up North American society will allow students to develop confidence and help them to grow to their full potential.

After taking into consideration the above, students take a deeper look into the more recent past and work their way up to the present day situation placing emphasis on the more practical aspects that deal with their concerns and needs in the future.

A comparison of the history of the mainstream cultures is made by examining facts about how this country got started. Students discuss the map of Mexico, South America and North America pointing out the travels of the Spaniards, Africans, and other Europeans to the New World. Then we'll follow the history of the establishment of their colonies. Africans from the African west coast are discussed in accordance with the plantations of the Atlantic coast along with the role played by Spain and Portugal in their transportation efforts towards slavery.

Students become aware of an account of the Europeans expedition from the Iberian Peninsula to the New World and their need to put the lowland Indians to work.

Music of the cultures play a great role in characterizing each ethnic group to its fullest extent, giving a sense of the cultural scenario behind each. In order to understand the ways of these people we must look into the special effects that help to make a culture come to life. In this case we start with African music and compare it to Latin dance beats, jazz, spirituals, gospel blues, etc., as well as authentic American Indian dance, while the lessons focus on the values and generalizations of the music and its use of language and openness toward politics. Emphasis may be placed on the popular forms, religion, and its social role, tradition and innovation.

Students will discuss and experiment with Black Dialect to show that the dialect of Black Americans was probably the result of creolized form of English, at one time spoken on southern plantations by Black slaves. This account will give students a brief history of the Black dialects. Pidgin English served the purpose of a *lingua franca* when African slaves produced children, because there was no one African language which those children could use with their peer group. Since the abolishment of slavery the number of blacks who speak standard English has increased greatly. A majority of blacks still speak a "radically nonstandard" English which has been maintained as an identifiable characteristic of their ancestral English.

A comparison of Afro-American, Latin-American, and the European culture will show the significance of language and dialect in society, school, and home by putting emphasis on some rules of the grammar of formal and informal language styles in English. Language change begins with major historical events that affects the development of the human species in general. The planned lesson involves illustrations of examples of language changes and consequently variations, namely Pidgin, and Creole.

Exposure to individual races and their mixtures that help to make up the society in which we live, reveals the contrast between the patterns of race in the Americas and aid students in understanding the differences in the races and where they originated. Emphasis is placed on the American Indian as the back bone of Mesoamerica.

The Conquest of the New World is discussed to help students understand the slave system of the fifteenth century with a closer look into the involvement of other races and their influences on the slave trade. We look at the slave trade of the Indians and Africans by the Spanish and Portuguese: the groups that were transported to Brazil, slave expeditions from the Caribbean Islands and the effect the slave institution had on the Indians. Next we follow the history of the change in slavery in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The need for understanding today's society and how it is supposed to work for everyone involved, how they can make it work for themselves and where they fit into the scheme of the mainstream culture, exposes students to their rights to education, religion, private life, and civil rights and duties in the United States. Students can discuss some of the existing religions in the United States, with mention of Catholics, Protestant, and the Jewish Faith and the implication of the Constitution. Students must also focus attention upon education as a means of advancement in society.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this curriculum unit will help to bridge the gap between the groups in the school as well as in the community at large, and that new information and resources available will make it possible to bring students closer together. Academically speaking, students will have a better opportunity to succeed and build for the future.

## LESSON ONE

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### **American Culture in the United States**

Lesson One is an introduction to the three main cultures that help to make up the United States. Emphasis is placed on Africans, Latinos, and Europeans, and where they originated. This will aid students in understanding the differences in the races before they came to North America.

The lesson opens with a discussion of American Culture in the United States of America. A blackboard and white chalk must be available to write down all the answers (even if it is a silly one). However, an eraser will be needed later on in the lesson.

- I. Locate pull down maps of North America, South America, Africa, and Europe if possible. Supply students with desk copies of similar maps and one small box of crayons.
- II. Have students color code desk copies for future use. Point out North America, South America, Africa, and Europe.  
Have students turn maps face down on the desk. Now split the class into two teams. Have one person from each team approach the map. Take a desk and lay one pencil on top. Explain that the student must grab the pencil first and be ready with the correct answer within 3 seconds and must point it out on the map. Call out the names of countries located earlier on the maps. Students who do not answer in time will cause their team to forfeit a point and cannot answer again until the next round. However, the opposing team automatically is allowed to answer and will receive one point for each correct answer. Incorrect answers do not count. Each student may take only one turn.
- III. Have the students listen Latin American, African, and Amerindian music noting the similarities and distinctness of style. Choose one or two students to demonstrate dance steps that may go along with each.
- IV.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

1. Pull down class maps of North America, South America, Africa, and Europe.
2. Desktop copies of maps mentioned above.
3. Small boxes of crayons (one per student).
4. Audio tape player.
5. Audio tapes of Latin American, African, and Amerindian music.

## LESSON TWO

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### Conquest of the New World part I

Emphasis is placed on the American Indian as the backbone of Mesoamerica. Discuss the Conquest of the New World to help students understand the slave system of the fifteenth century and other races and their influences on slave trade. Place emphasis on the slave trade of the Indians and Africans by the Spanish and Portuguese, first, and then other Europeans, and the effect the slave trade had on the Indians.

- Before the lesson begins, on the blackboard write down these vocabulary words. It would be to I. the advantage of the students if these words are copied out and given to them either one class ahead or in the beginning of class.

Slash-and-burn

Shifting

fire

villages

weeding

agriculture

Mayan

primitive

tribes

planting

harvesting

- II. Have students say the words one time before beginning the discussion. Have them tell what they already know about each one. Reinforce their knowledge with the facts.

When the Europeans came to the New World (North America) American Indians lived in villages, and communities that Europeans called "tribes." Some were hunters; other were agriculturists and lived off the land. They depended upon the labor of women for planting, weeding and harvesting. Men cleared and burned the underbrush which is the process known as "slash-and-burn." "Shifting" or "fire" agriculture is known to have been used by the Mayan. They devoted time to hunting and fishing during the rest of the year.

Racial and cultural mixtures have always happened in history, but after Columbus' enterprise, mixture became a clear consequence of the European profit-making undertaking. The New World was richly endowed with fertile soils, a wide range of climates, and reserves of precious metals. "The Conquest of Mexico" was the capture of native labor (Harris 1964, 11).

Have students take out the maps from lesson one and trace the expedition of the Spanish  
III. along the coasts of Mexico and North and South America and the Caribbean Islands. Discuss as you go.

Europeans found it impossible to put the lowland Indians to work, except under a system of direct slavery. They were put to work on the production of plantation crops to produce agriculture, industrial and mineral products for the benefit of their invaders (Harris 1964, 12).

The Spanish thought the lowland Indians were good for slave labor and justified the forced labor by claiming them as heathens and cannibals. During the last days of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century slave expeditions came to the Caribbean Islands and along the coasts of Mexico and North and South America (Harris 1964, 12).

Bring into class Indian headbands and choose several students to act out the next part. Headbands can be made from construction paper and can even have a feather or two  
IV. attached. Play authentic Indian music in order to give this factual story flavor. Also, use a "Tom-Tom" drum or any other drum you may have available and allow students to take turns drumming. This will add a sense of drama and rhythm.

In the Caribbean the native slavery was doomed because of the cruelty and harshness of it. Added to this, there was a relatively small population (1,000,000±), in comparison with populations on the continent. They died by the thousands while in labor. Many committed suicide, while others disappeared into the forests. The Indians lacked immunity against Europeans and African diseases such as measles, smallpox and respiratory infections. By the end of the seventeenth century, practically the entire Indian population of the Caribbean had been wiped out. As the supply of lowland Indian slaves diminished, the Portuguese and lowland Spanish colonists took Africans for their labor force (Harris 1964, 13).

#### *MATERIALS NEEDED*

1. Blackboard and chalk.
2. Copies of the vocabulary for students to keep.
3. Maps from lesson one.
4. Indian headbands made of construction paper.
5. Tape player.
6. Authentic Indian music on tape.
7. "Tom-Tom" drum or other Indian type rhythm instruments.

## LESSON THREE

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### **African Roots: A Trace of History**

All African Americans can trace their heritage to some part of Africa. As a result of the slave trade blacks were brought to North America and the Caribbean Islands. For example the medieval empire of Mali, rich in history and culture is located in western Africa. At least 10% of African Americans of today's population can trace their roots back to Mali. It is believe that before Christopher Columbus, Mandingoes of the Mali and Songhay Empires, as well as other Africans, crossed the Atlantic to trade with Western Hemisphere natives and established colonies throughout the Americas (Hanks-Butts 1973, 30).

Have students view a video cassette of authentic African music. Approximate viewing time is 22 minutes.

*Music of Africa: OUR MUSICAL HERITAGE SERIES*

Focuses on West African music, with special focus on the music of Ghana. m e chief musical instruments of Africa are rattles, bells, and drums. The sounds of these instruments are blended with the human voice to create a distinctive musical style. The music forms not only pleasing sounds but also develops a narrative form as well. In discovering music, we explore the fundamentals of basic musical categories with emphasis on both the technique and instruments as well as the music itself.

## LESSON FOUR

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### **Conquest of the New World part II**

Lesson Two opened up the discussion on the slave system of the fifteenth century. Lesson three continues the thought with the African slave trade during the middle of the 16th century by the Spanish and Portuguese. Students become aware of the groups that were transported to Brazil in slave expeditions from the Caribbean Islands and Africa.

Let's pick up where lesson two left off. Remember that the Indians of the Caribbean Islands were dying because of the diseases and hard labor from slavery. Because the Indians were not able to keep the plantation going a different type of people was needed to grow the crops. But in the early part of the sixteenth century the cost of transporting slaves across the Atlantic was greater than the profits. This changed toward the middle of the century. The Spanish and Portuguese were aware that Africa held a human treasure. Sugar cane planting had begun in Brazil. With chocolate and the spread of the coffee-drinking habit in Europe, the consumption of sugar had skyrocketed. By the end of the sixteenth century sugar had become the most valuable commodity in international trade (Harris 1964, 13).

The Blacks from Africa became important. They could adapt to slavery conditions on the tropical lowland plantations because of the ability to withstand the intense heat and humidity of the tropics, and specially because of the immunity to disease.

Groups brought over were those such as Yoruba, Dahomey, Ashanti, Ife, Oyro and Congo. Africans had been

pre-adapted by their cultural experience to cope with the demands of regular field labor. Also, the Blacks had probably acquired immunities to certain common European diseases over centuries of indirect contact with North Africa and Europe. They were a safer investment (Harris 1964, 14).

- I. Introduce these African nations to the students by writing the names on the blackboard. Have students repeat the names several times. Call attention to the rhythmic syllables. Now split the class into six groups if possible. Each group need only have a few students to be successful. Give each group the name of a nation. Have students stick to the group they are chosen for. This will give them a realistic sense of belonging. Have them say the names of each nation in turn as they are pointed to on the board.
- After students become familiar with their own nation name play a game. Each nation must say its name in rhythm as it is pointed to on the board. The tempo of the beat is left to the discretion of the pointer. Any group that makes a sound out of turn must sit on the floor Indian style until the game ends and may only join in again when the game starts over. This simple game can be played several times in succession. The names of the nations are listed below.
- II.

YORUBA DAHOMEY ASHANTI IFE OYRO CONGO

- III. Play authentic African music and give each nation approximately 2 to 3 minutes to come up with their own movement. Have each share their creation one at a time.

*MATERIALS NEEDED:*

1. Blackboard and chalk.
2. Authentic African music.
3. Tape player.

## LESSON FIVE

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### **BLACK SLAVERY: Plantation Slavery in the New World**

- I. Write these vocabulary words on the Blackboard.  
Slavery  
domestic  
Pull down maps, locate and discuss islands off the Atlantic coast. Point out Spain and Portugal. Then identify North America and Brazil.
- II.

Spain 16th century Portugal  
servant plantations decades

Slavery was legally recognized in Spain and Portugal. Blacks lived in the newly opened territories on the African west coast, and had traditionally been employed as domestic servants. In the sixteenth century plantations were based on slaves, mainly black, in the islands off the Atlantic coast. As a result, slaves, and also the plantation as a enterprise, were transferred to the New World. A long chain of plantations soon covered the Atlantic coastal areas of the New World from North America south to Brazil.

In the nineteenth century, the English were forbidden to engage in slave trading (1807). Because of this slavery faced eventual doom, but was not extinguished for another two decades in Cuba and for thirty-eight years in Brazil. During the 1850's slavery was abolished in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Slavery began to disappear in Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Central America, and Chile (Morner 1967, 124).

## LESSON SIX

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### **The Meaning of Race and Culture**

This portion of the unit is designed to help students understand the physical classification of the races. They must realize that each race is unique and has its own place in today's world. The term "Race" draws attention to the physical make-up of an individual pertaining to the color of his skin, the shape of his eyes, the texture of his hair, his bone size and bodily proportions.

Here are some terms that are used to describe what is called the pure races in America: Amerindians, Polynesians, Australians, Asiatic, Indians, Europeans, and Africans.

Physical and mental features are ways to define human beings. People come in many shapes, sizes and colors. Apart from twins no two humans are exactly alike. Culture provides the system of rules for the society: the language and other forms of communication, ideas, and beliefs.

*Why People Are Different Colors* is a book by Julian Noyes that concerns itself with facing the controversy of today's world on the topic of race. How many races are there? Scientist do not agree on a number but have subdivided mankind into at least 60 racial populations. Different types of human beings do exist though.

Sharing this story with the students will help them to understand the reason why people are of many different colors and was written in hopes of helping them achieve a genuine sense of brotherhood.

- Discuss the front cover of *Why People Are Different Colors* with the students. Ask several of
- I. them to describe the physical features of themselves. Read the book allowing students to ask questions on the spot. Revamp at the ending to reinforce the main idea.
  - II. Add a song here.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Why  
People  
Are  
Different  
Colors by  
Julian  
Muy (can  
be found  
1. in the  
New  
Haven  
Public  
Library in  
the  
children's  
section).

## LESSON SEVEN

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### A Brief History of the Black Dialect

Black American dialects probably come from a creolized form of English spoken at one time on southern plantations by black slaves which seem to be similar to that which is spoken by blacks in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands (Wilson 1978, 145).

Even though African languages survived for some time, Africans captured and brought to the New World were forced to learn English. They had to establish communication with the groups into which they were thrown. Africans had many languages and not one was predominant over the other which helped to spread the pidgin language as a *lingua franca*. Here's what happened. When the African slaves had their children there was no one African language which those children could use with their peer group. Even though the mothers and fathers spoke African languages and taught them to their kids, the children could only speak English together to communicate because of the wide variation of African lingo. Most times Africans were put together on the plantations with Africans who spoke a different dialect. As a result the children would use a common language, which in many cases was what is called Pidgin English (Wilson 1978, 147).

Each group of Blacks developed a specific language, religion, music, and folklore. For example: West Indians are very British. They were the subjects of the British. New Orleans Blacks are very French because at one time it was a French territory. As a comparison these two groups are both Black, both speak English, but do not speak with the same dialect due to cultural differences. In the United States there is a difference between Blacks from the North and Blacks from the South (Haskins-Butts 1973, 28).

Now this brings us to the racial mixtures that developed because of the slave trade. In New Orleans, groups of slaves were brought to the French territory of Louisiana. They took on the French Language but did not speak it well because the French were prejudiced in thinking that Blacks weren't capable of speaking their language because of its complexity, and would not take the time to teach the Blacks to speak French properly. However, the slaves had a need to communicate so that they could plan a successful escape. And so arose

the Creole. Creole pertains to the partly white, French or Spanish, and partly African and West Indian people.

## LESSON EIGHT

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### **A Look Into a Small Portion of Latino Culture**

Mexico City is the oldest capital in the New World, and is a vibrant thriving metropolis. A long colorful history culminates in a cultural blend of centuries of old customs and sophisticated lifestyles.

On the first glance the visitor senses Mexico City's diverse characteristics such as skyscrapers, colonial churches, and Aztec ruins, the sound of mariachi bands, contemporary nightclub rhythms, and gourmet restaurants, street vendors who peddle tacos.

Students will join the native families for a stroll in Chapultepec Park, see the elegant international boutiques that line the avenues of the Zona Rosa, and traditional Mexican handicrafts on the open market.

Mexico City remains intriguing, and exciting as we get the story of the Aztec capital and see how it came to reach its present state of sophistication.

1. Have students view a video tape of Mexico to get an idea of how it was long ago and how it has developed over the years. *MEXICO CITY by Travelview International*.

This video cassette includes a feature on Mexico City and runs. It is about 40 minutes long.

## LESSON NINE

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### **Music in the Cultures**

There are three types of Black music; folk, popular and classical (jazz).

Folk music: A creation of spiritual feeling. It started on the plantation which was far from theaters, music halls, and other entertainment and was for Whites only anyway.

Popular music: For a long time Black pop was only listened to by the Black community, but then the recording business began to boom around World War II. Black music became a very popular American music. Listeners loved to hear anyone Black or anyone White singing in the Black style.

Jazz: It is called contemporary classical jazz and came from the spiritual and folklore form and is universally known (Haskins-Butt 1973, 61).

It was music and songs that prompted the Black slaves to communication which has made a fine history for them in rhythm and music.

In Mali, special training was required to be a musician. Instruments played were strings, wind and percussion instruments and the voice, of course. By creating their own style of music the slaves acquired a certain individualism and a survival of group activity. Slaves used what they knew to create work songs to deal with the strenuous work in the cotton fields. While working, their hands and feet were busy so they had to adapt the rhythms and music to their voices. That is how the call-response form began. Each man developed a cry which singled him out among the others. These songs helped the slaves join together and to stay strong in the face of overt suppression.

The White slave masters encouraged slave's work songs. They believed that it helped slaves work more efficiently. They were fascinated by the dances and rhythmic songs, but later learned that the beat of the drums was also a source of communication for the slaves. The drum code was well known by all slaves just as Morse Code became common knowledge in the military world.

The drums made from hallowed-out logs or nail kegs had skin stretched tightly over one end. But these drums were outlawed because the White masters feared it as a tool for escape. Slaves adopted a new rhythm because of this. It was done by tapping the heel of the shoe on a wooden floor. What is amazing is that the foot barely leaves the floor but releases the sound of real drums. The slaves retained their drums despite the master's rule.

Slaves had various types of songs for specific times and events. To mention a few: mood songs, taunt songs, and chants. These songs were more successful in helping to deceive the masters because they were felt to be too emotional to be taken seriously.

Religious services were forbidden the slaves. Once again White masters thought it a tool for planning escapes when slaves just wanted to continue to praise just as they had done in Africa to regenerate the soul. Out of Christianity another style of music was created: spirituals.

The spiritual "*Deep River*" was used to announce a meeting at the river:

*" Deep River*  
My home is over Jordan, Yes  
Deep River, Lord  
I want to cross over into camp ground!"

Slaves on the other side would answer back with song to plan the meeting time.

*" Let us break bread together on our knees*  
Let us break bread together on our knees  
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun  
Oh Lord, have mercy on me"

The time was in the morning and on the west side of the river (Haskins-Butts 1973, 69).

Have students make up a call and response song of their own. Divide the class into two  
I. sections. Choose a subject for the song. It may be helpful if the first line is supplied to get them started.

Have students act out the song they just composed. See if they would like to add to it or  
II. change something to fit proper actions. This is one form of folklore and the telling of a story through song.

NOTE: No materials necessary.

## LESSON TEN

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### Festival and Celebrations

The Seminole Nation celebrates *Chalo Nitka* which means “day of the big bass.” The Indian Claims Commission handed down the decision in May 1964 concerning land that was taken from their ancestors. The judgement was handed down in honor of the Seminole Nation of Florida. As a result of three wars from 1816 to 1855, 4,000 Seminoles were shipped to Oklahoma. The Big Cypress Swamp and the Everglades nations never gave in. They didn’t sign a treaty, they simply retreated into the saw grass marshes. The Government wished to rectify their mistake in its dealings with the native and established the Indian Claims Commission that was finally approved five years later.

*Chalo Nitka Festival* is celebrated on the first Saturday in March. Activities include athletic contests, nation dances, and the crowning of a princess.

North Americans have developed organized cultural activities, such as concerts and other musical events. It started in New England where the Worcester Music Festival, in Massachusetts, has been an annual event since 1858. The festival is held in the Memorial Auditorium during the last week in October, and includes five concerts featuring symphonies and choruses.

Community festivals were created to draw publicity for communities, namely in honor of Philadelphia’s English heritage. Two well known festivals are: Mummer’s Parade and Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

The exact date of Mardi Gras is determined by the date of Easter. Celebrations began at Mobile, Alabama and New Orleans, Louisiana. New Orleans is known as the *king* of the Mardi Gras cities. Private masked balls are held in the Municipal Auditorium during what is called *Carnival Season*. Before Easter, Christians are supposed to have their last fling before behaving for forty days of penitence. Parade floats are made of colorful paper and flowers. Spectators wear costumes and masks. Those riding on the floats toss beads of every size and color along with fruit, fresh bread, coins and sweets.

In Puerto Rico emphasis is placed on *San Juan Bautista Festival* around St. John’s Day in June when again Christians are supposed to enjoy themselves, then behave for forty days.

I. Have students bring in colorful beads, costumes, and masks from home ahead of time. Halloween costumes are fine and add flavor to the Mardi Gras setting. Take a few minutes to dress up. Put on a carnival recording, and have a small parade. Allow students to visit other classes, and ask them to join in the fun.

II . *Mardi Gras* or *San Juan Bautista Festival* can be done on a larger scale with some preparation. Chicken wire works best for stuffing crepe paper into the holes to make colorful decorations. Parade around the whole school.

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Audio cassettes may be used from your own personal selections.

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