

## **The Origins of Syncopation in American Popular Music**

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The origins of syncopation in twentieth-century American popular music have been a source of controversy. I offer a new account of this historical process. I distinguish between second-position syncopation, an accent on the second quarter of a half-note or quarter-note unit, and fourth-position syncopation, an accent on the fourth quarter of such a unit. Unlike second-position syncopation, fourth-position syncopation tends to have an anticipatory character. A corpus study of European and American 19th-century songbooks suggest that second-position syncopation may have British roots. By contrast, fourth-position syncopation seems to have had no presence in published 19th-century vocal music, British or American. It first appears in notation in ragtime songs and piano music at the very end of the nineteenth century; it was also used in recordings by African-American singers before it was widely notated.