

The Twelve-Bar Blues:

The most important chord progression in American popular music.

The **twelve-bar blues** progression originated in the folk music of the Deep South among African-Americans, but has come to stand over many styles of popular music as a vehicle for composition and improvisation. The twelve bars (or measures) are repeated as many times as necessary, often with improvised melody and lyrics. All chords are either major triads (country, and some rock) or dominant-seventh chords (blues, jazz, rock), and the last four bars create a “turnaround” that prepares for a repeat of the entire progression. There are many variations on the blues involving chord substitutions or slightly different formal lengths, but a common form is shown below. Each block represents one bar of music, and the three colors represent the three chords required to play the progression.

