



## Background Reading for What Does It Mean to Be An American?

Vote Worthy, a series of podcasts relating to elections and voting, includes a musical interlude featuring an excerpt from Madeleine Peyroux’s original song, “What Does It Mean to Be American?” Podcasts often include music to enhance the listening experience. Tom Martin, producer and host of the Vote Worthy podcasts, says that many of his productions tend to be ‘talk heavy’ and that “contextual music can serve to hold the listener's attention while also advancing the story.”

Martin first heard Peyroux’s song on one of his Spotify playlists, and it immediately struck him as a perfect fit for the Vote Worthy series. As he explains, “We were producing Vote Worthy at a moment when the question she raises with the song could not have been more timely. I did a search, found her manager, got in touch and requested permission to use the song for our production, explaining our non-profit status and the context. Their response was an immediate thumbs up — that they were pleased that the song would be used in such a way.”

Madeleine Peyroux has a unique perspective on what it means to be American. A native of Athens, Georgia, she spent her childhood in New York and California, often listening to the music of her parents, especially jazz and blues. When she was 13, her parents divorced and Madeline moved with her mother to Paris. She began performing with street musicians in Paris when she was 15 and later toured Europe with a vintage jazz group. Her mainstream success began in 1996 with the release of her debut album, Dreamland. In 2004 her album Careless Love sold half a million copies.

“What Does It Mean to Be American?” is one of her many original songs. After its release Peyroux began creating what she calls “monthly birthday card” videos featuring montages of Americans that she considers to be her personal heroes. As she explained with the release of the first one in January 2021: “I have been trying to create a list of my personal heroes for many years. To celebrate the spirit of 2021 and my recent single release, I thought I might share by posting a monthly birthday card based on that list. So, Happy January Birthday to some of my American Heroes! Love, Madeleine”

The videos are posted on her Facebook page and on YouTube. Here are YouTube links to the January-March 2021 heroes videos:

[January](#)    [February](#)    [March](#)

[Peyroux’s LinkTree page](#) includes links to more information about her and a full video of the song “What Does It Mean to Be American?” The [full song](#) is also available on YouTube.